

Orienta4YEL

Supporting educational and social inclusion of youth early leavers and youth at risk of early leaving through mechanisms of orientation and tutorial action

(604501-EPP-1-2018-1-ES-EPPKA3-IPI-SOC-IN)

SUMMARY REPORT

Qualitative Analysis

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Document information

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Abstract (for dissemination)	The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of the qualitative data collected between June and November 2019 by the Orienta4YEL partners. The document identifies the risk factors and strategies to prevent early leaving, as well as to re-engage into the educational system highlighting the similarities and differences between the countries analysed.

WP2. Monitoring Early Leaving Summary Report. Qualitative analysis

Introduction

Orienta4YEL -Supporting educational and social inclusion of youth early leavers and youth at risk of early leaving through mechanisms of orientation and tutorial action- aims to develop, implement and evaluate innovative methods and practices to reduce the risk of early school leaving among children and young people aged 12 to 21.

During Phase I of the project, our objective is monitoring early leaving, identifying the critical factors and causes of it. Besides, to understand the situation in the five European countries involved in the project (Spain, Portugal, Germany, Romania, and the UK), identifying similarities and differences between countries.

After conducting a literature review for identifying critical factors of early leaving, we used a mixt-research approach to explore the views of young people, educators, and trainers. We used quantitative and qualitative techniques to collect data in 10 institutions of each country. The data gathered will help inform an intervention plan for addressing Early Leaving in Europe.

In this document, we present a summary of the qualitative data collected between June and November 2019 by the Orienta4YEL partners. We identify the risk factors and strategies to prevent early leaving, as well as to re-engage into the educational system. We highlight the similarities and differences between the countries analysed.

Procedure

The partners of Orienta4YEL developed five data collection tools to identify risk factors and support mechanisms for early school leaving. The data collection tools are two questionnaires, one for young people and the other for teachers/trainers; one individual interview for members of school leadership teams and administration; and, two focus groups, one for teachers/trainers and the other for young people representatives. Every partner translated the final version of data collection tools to their official language.

The focus groups and individual interviews have the same structure. All of them include questions referred to: risks to early leaving, strategies to prevent early leaving, re-engagement strategies and final reflections.

In order to develop the data collection process, each partner should identify about 10 institutions in their territory, according to these criteria:

- Works with young people (aged 12-21) at risk of early leaving. That is, a) do not finish lower secondary education (compulsory secondary education); b) are at risk of not finishing lower secondary education (compulsory secondary education); c) finish lower secondary education

(compulsory secondary education) but do not make the transition to upper secondary education; d) make the transition to upper secondary education and are at risk of early leaving.

- Having education and training in: a) compulsory secondary education stage, b) baccalaureate, c) initial/basic VET programmes (level 1), or d) intermediate VET programmes (level 2).
- Effective leadership. Management of this young people group through training and the intervention in their institutions/organizations of specific intervention plans for aiming this proposal.

The data collecting process was adapted in some countries for different reasons:

- The UK. In some institutions, the team members did not have the chance to interview all the profiles of interest: members of the school leadership team and administration, teachers/trainers and/or young people.
- Portugal. Some institutions referred to some objections to participate in the project: the lack of time to participate in the study and some schools demanded, as a sine qua non condition, the authorization from the Ministry of Education. For those reasons, 7 schools and not 10 are those which participated in this phase.
- Spain. In some institutions, the school leadership team did not have time to develop an individual interview. In these cases, one member of the school leadership team joined the focus group with teachers/trainers. Likewise, between one and three focus group with young people were implemented across the educational institutions of the sample, according to the criteria of educational level—due to young people’s profile, some institutions thought that it was better to make different focus groups—. In the 10 institutions of the sample, data were collected implementing eight interviews to school leadership teams and 24 focus groups (14 with young people and 10 with teachers/trainers).
- Germany. In some cases, school leadership teams were not available for interviews but in these circumstances, it was possible to have deputy headmasters in the focus groups. Some institutions had data privacy concerns about recruiting pupils for focus groups. Others wanted to avoid stigmatizing the pupils.

Table 1 summarizes the number of members of the school leadership team, teachers/trainers and students that participated in this phase of the study grouped by country and institution. This table only compiles the number of participants on the qualitative data collection.

Table 1. Number of school leadership teams, teachers/trainers and students involved.

Country	Institution ID	Number of members of the school leadership team and administration <i>Interview/focus group</i>	Number of Teachers/trainers <i>Focus Group</i>	Number of Students <i>Focus Group</i>
The UK	In1	2	2	8
	In2	5	3	4
	In3	1	3	11
	In4	1	1	-
	In5	2	2	3
	In6	1	2	9
	In7	2	-	4
	In8	1	6	-
	In9	2	3	-
	In10	1	1	-
	In11	9	-	-
Subtotal		27	23	39
Portugal	In1	1	3	4
	In2	1	4	8
	In3	1	6	15
	In4	1	4	11
	In5	1	8	10
	In6	1	11	15
	In7	1	6	5
Subtotal		7	42	68
Germany	In1	1	4	25
	In2	1	3	4
	In3	-	2	-
	In4	-	2	5
	In5	1	3	4
	In6	1	6	-
	In7	2	5	8
	In8	1	7	22
	In9	-	4	11
	In10	2	-	-
	In11	1	-	-
Subtotal		10	36	79

Country	Institution ID	Number of members of the school leadership team and administration Interview/focus group	Number of Teachers/trainers Focus Group	Number of Students Focus Group
Spain	In1	1	6	8
	In2	8	16	24
	In3	2	2	8
	In4	3	9	12
	In5	4	8	14
	In6	1	8	7
	In7	2	8	8
	In8	2	3	7
	In9	3	8	17
	In10	1	5	12
Subtotal		27	73	117
Romania	In1	1	6	10
	In2	1	6	9
	In3	1	7	9
	In4	1	6	12
	In5	1	8	14
	In6	1	7	10
	In7	1	8	10
	In8	1	8	9
	In9	1	7	8
Subtotal		9	63	91
TOTAL		80	237	394

Table 2 shows a brief contextualization of research in each country:

Table 2. Research context.

Country	Research context
The Uk	<p>Geographical context The research was carried out in the Windy County –in the South West England.</p> <p>Settings profile</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three state -funded co-educational secondary schools serving children aged 11-18. Each school serves a community of socio-economic deprivation (two schools are in a rural area; one school serves a large town). Two specialist schools serving children with Special Educational Needs and Social Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties (one school is independent; one school is state maintained).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Two Vocational Education and Training (VET) settings (one is a small community farm offering alternative provision; one is the largest provider of VET in the county). ▪ One provider of educational support for children in care ▪ Two providers of youth project fixed term programmes supporting young people who are currently Not in Education or Training (i.e. EL). ▪ One local authority heads of services who contribute to supporting EL young people/EL issues. <p>Participants profile</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Young people aged 12-16 at risk of early leaving. ▪ School leaders (senior managers), Vocational Education and Training Leaders (curriculum/programme leads, and alternative provision leads). ▪ Tutors and support workers (progression coaches, officer for YP in care) ▪ Pastoral leads/careers and inclusion leads, local authority service leads and leaders of fixed term programmes for early leaving.
<p>Portugal</p>	<p>Geographical context</p> <p>The research was carried out in the Leiria region, in the territorial sub-region NUII and NUT III (Leiria, Batalha, Marinha Grande, Pombal, and Porto de Mós).</p> <p>Settings profile</p> <p>Seven schools offering Education and Training Courses/Professional Courses: two professional schools and five secondary schools, two of which belong to the public network.</p> <p>Participants profile</p> <p>In each school, members of the school leadership team and administration, head teachers or course coordinators and, class representatives.</p>
<p>Germany</p>	<p>Geographical context</p> <p>The research was carried out in the federal state of Bremen and the surrounding geographical area.</p> <p>Settings profile</p> <p>Relevant institutions like schools, both general and vocational, educational institutions and representatives of the education policy.</p> <p>Participants profile</p> <p>Teachers in general education and vocational schools (Secondary Education), educators/trainers in educational institutions and pedagogues and social pedagogues (some employed at schools, others in educational institutions and some were working in specialized organizations which support schools (teachers, parents or pupils on demand)).</p> <p>The young people involved were aged 14 to 18 years.</p>
<p>Spain</p>	<p>Geographical context</p> <p>The research was carried out in the autonomous region of Catalonia, especially on the surrounding geographical area of Barcelona (Sta. Coloma, Terrassa, Sant Adrià del Besós, Hospitalet de Llobregat, El Prat del Llobregat, Martorell and Sant Vicenç dels Horts).</p> <p>Settings profile</p> <p>10 high complexity Institutes and/or secondary schools where are implemented ESO studies (Compulsory Secondary Education), VET studies –PFI programmes (Basic VET programmes, level 1), CFGM (VET level 2)–, and Baccaureate. All the Institutes are public educational institutions.</p> <p>Participants profile</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Young people aged 12-18, who are involved in 1st-4th ESO, PFI (Basic VET), CFGM (VET level 2), and 1st. Baccaureate. ▪ Teachers in general education (Compulsory Secondary Education), post-secondary education (Baccaureate) and VET (level 1 and 2). Most of them are characterized for being tutors.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members of the guidance department (counsellors) characterized for being pedagogues and psychopedagogues. Members of the school leadership team characterized for being the head and/or the associate head.
Romania	<p>Geographical context The research was carried out in Bucharest, the capital city, and the surrounding geographical area.</p> <p>Settings profile 9 general and vocational secondary schools and high schools. All the Institutes are public educational institutions.</p> <p>Participants profile</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people aged 12-20 at risk of early leaving. Members of the guidance department (counsellors) characterized for being pedagogues and psychopedagogues. School leaders (senior managers). Teachers in general education and vocational schools.

Most of the interviews were digitally recorded, but in some cases, the interviewers did not agree, therefore these interviews are documented by a summative abstract. The content analysis of interviews and focus groups were conducted using the previous categories and codes defined. Some codes emerged from the analysis conducted (see Table 3).

Table 3. Categories and codes.

CATEGORIES	CODES
Risks to early leaving	Personal challenges Family circumstances Social relations Institutional factors Structural factors
Strategies to prevent early leaving	For institutional issues For social issues For family issues For personal issues For structural factors
Re-engagement strategies to address early leaving	Second chance training programmes Shared schooling units
Other reflections	Social significance of early leaving

The data was organised for analysis using NVivo pre 12 in the UK, MaxQDA2018 in Portugal, Romania and Spain, and MaxQDA12 for Mac in Germany. For the comparative analysis between countries, exposed in this summary report, we made a review of the individual reports elaborated by the partner of each country.

Results

We present the results grouped in four main themes: understanding the risks to early leaving, strategies to prevent early leaving, re-engagement strategies to address early leaving, and other reflections.

1. Understanding the risks to Early leaving

The factors identified by the participants can be grouped into five categories: personal challenges, family circumstances, social relations, institutional factors, and structural factors. In each country, participants identify risks related to all these broad categories of risk factors.

We identify that the most relevant group of factors varies between countries. In the UK, structural factors are the most significant, followed by personal challenges and institutional factors. In Portugal, participants consider family issues as the factor that most contributes to the risk of early leaving, followed by personal challenges. In Germany, family and personal reasons come first, followed by the institutional, social relations and supplementary factors. In an 'attack of self-criticism', interviewed teachers also admitted that teachers falling short of social and personal relationships must also be considered risk factors for early leaving. In Spain, personal and family issues contribute the most to the risk of early leaving, followed by institutional and social ones. In Romania, there is a convergence of opinion on the most relevant factors identified by those interviewed. Therefore, personal challenges were selected as the ones which were closely linked to early leaving, followed closely by family reasons and institutional factors.

1.1. Personal challenges

Participants of all the profiles and countries specify some personal challenges that students must confront. We identify that some risk factors have been highlighted by participants of all the participating countries:

- Lack of interest and motivation for the school

I think the main thing is demotivation. [...] They don't see the interest of being in school, they do not recognize the benefit and therefore, they come here to fulfil compulsory education without any motivation. *[Portugal_E1_Teacher]*

I think on leaving because I don't like the Institute. *[Spain_E7_Student]*

You have to endure 6 hours with 6 teachers. It isn't cool. *[Spain_E2_Student]*

I honestly do not like going to school. I think I can use my time better than listening for 7 to 8 hours at schools. The school is not engaging us - the students, in different activities. We just have to listen and write. *[Romania_E6_Student]*

High school is a waste of my time, but I need the certificate because if I want to go abroad and work legally, I need a qualification. *[Romania_E2_Student]*

In Spain, this lack of interest and motivation is related to disruptive behaviours that, as we shall see this is a factor that also impacts on disengagement.

Disruptive behaviours related to mental absenteeism, those who are in the classroom without being absent, totally disinterested and unmotivated by what they are teaching-learning. *[Spain_E3_Tutores]*

- Low self-esteem or self-confidence that determine the negative academic self-perception of most of these young people

Low self-esteem also counts a lot. They are children who have very low self-esteem that they do not know, so in order not to deal with the difficulty they give up, it is much easier, and they have no one to say no. *[Portugal_E2_Student]*

[...] they did not see themselves capable of studying. They thought they were not worth studying and they did not want to strive. [...] In second of ESO, I thought on leaving because I thought I was incapable to study. *[Spain_E5_Bac-Students]*

A low self-perception / self-esteem of their abilities influenced by others' perception of them in relation to their ability to study. [...] Unfortunately, they have been told a lot that they are silly "I'm silly and I'm not going to learn it, I'm silly, I'm silly," and from that loop they do not exit. *[Spain_E3_Teacher]*

There are many cases where we have to deal with the student's low self-esteem. Because we are a high school where students entered with very low grades (at the national evaluation for entering high school), children always compare themselves with others. *[Romania_E9_Teacher]*

I always hear students saying that they are not good enough and that they are not capable of entering a university. This way of thinking has a lot of influence on their motivation. *[Romania_E5_Teacher]*

In Germany, Spain and Romania, low levels of motivation and self-esteem are perceived as important risk factors if these are combined with unfavourable family contexts. Both factors combined increase significantly the risk of early leaving.

[...] there is a general lack of motivation to go to school, often because the atmosphere they live at home does not accompany them to go to class. *[Spain_E2_School leadership team]*

They are often children who live in situations of risk of social exclusion, with very marginal families and live in family settings where they have no expectations and the child has neither motivation nor expectation. *[Spain_E3_School leadership team]*

I am not interested in the stuff the teachers talk about and I doubt that I need this for anything in my life, not even for a job, because I will not get on. [Germany_E3_Student]

I see this very often: wonderful children, who are eager to learn, are demotivated by their family circumstances. This often happens when one or both parents go to work abroad and the child feels abandoned or when the parents remarry and the child feels the need to rebel and refuses to come to classes or study. *[Romania_E1_School counsellor]*

- Low education achievement

Low level of mastery of key competencies of the students that influences in young people's demotivation and disinterest. *[Spain_E3_Teacher]*

Low grades have a major impact on the student's motivation. For some students, this motivates them to try more and succeed but for others it is the exact opposite – it demotivates them. *[Romania_E2_Teacher]*

In Spain, many times, this low education achievement is related to young people's immigrant/foreign national condition.

There are profiles of newly arrived pupils, from very diverse countries, and with previous difficulties [...]. Some of them have not been previously schooled. *[Spain_E4_Teacher]*

[...] Latin American students are who identify higher rates of early leaving; surely, because they have a lower level, they accessed later to school [...]. *[Spain_E1_School leadership team]*

- Disengagement. This is usually a progressive and cumulative process which is triggered by various problems that can be related to the school, socioeconomic or family background, personal difficulties young people face, etc

Those who are most at risk are usually absentees. Abandonment can be hidden, because they can come to the institute without being. *[Spain_E2_Teacher]*

Abandonment is understood as those students who don't go the Institute, or students who despite having physical attendance at the Institute, they are disengaged due to lack of interest and motivation. In this sense, it is possible to identify both physical and mental abandonment. Physical abandonment linked to absenteeism and non-attendance at the educational centre. Mental abandonment linked to those who are in class, but who are not. *[Spain_E3_Teacher]*

In Spain, as it said before, disruptive behaviour is a factor that also impacts on disengagement.

A problem to consider is the discipline. Often, the student does not come, he is expelled and that reinforces his behaviour of abandonment. [...] This behaviour causes the group's rejection, families' complaints, teachers' prejudices, or other factors that make the student feel more isolated [...] until s/he leaves the institute. *[Spain_E1_School leadership team]*

[...] if you put a child who misbehaves in a class, it influences. [...] if all those who misbehave are together in a class, nobody will want to go to that class. *[Spain_E5_Student]*

- Irregular school transition

A transition from primary to high school that is worked badly increases the risk of early leaving. *[Spain_E1_Teacher]*

I found it really hard to get used to high school after I finished secondary school. The teachers are really strict here and they ask of us a lot, study-wise. [...] Maybe it is also because I previously studied in a small rural village and now I study in a big city. *[Romania_E3_Student]*

Also, other factors had been identified by the participants of the different countries. Table 4 shows the matches between countries.

Table 4. Risks factors for personal challenges across countries.

Personal challenges	The UK	Portugal	Germany	Spain	Romania
Lack of interest and motivation for the school	●	●	●	●	●
Low self-esteem or self-confidence	●	●	●	●	●
Low education achievement	●	●	●	●	●
Negative academic self-perception	●	●	●	●	●
Disengagement	●	●	●	●	●
Irregular school transition	●	●	●	●	●
Personal experience of mental health issues: stress, anxiety, etc.	●	●	●		●
Low expectations	●	●		●	●
The existence of a negative perception of their own performance	●	●		●	●
Special education needs/low learning capabilities	●		● ¹	●	
Emotion management issues: desensitisation	●				
Personal experience of childhood abuse or neglect	●		●		
Substance dependence (psychotropic and narcotic substances)		●	●		
Early pregnancies and/or the existence of dependent children		●		● ²	● ²
The lack of life goals		●		●	●
The need for financial independence or the need to contribute to the family income, that motivates them to work		●		●	
Failure experiences and poor school performance over different school levels			●	●	●

¹Germany: in the past, there were special schools (especially for mentally handicapped and practically talented young people). In recent years, as part of an "inclusion policy", these pupils have been attending regular schooling. However, too few resources and too few qualified personnel (additional teachers with special training) were and are available.

² Spain and Romania: the risk is higher for gipsy students.

All the participants' profile (members of the school leadership team and administration, teachers/trainers, and students) referred to this category of risk factor, but:

- In general, adults across the different settings analysed in the UK were more concerned about the impact of personal challenges. Especially, for tutors/support workers, and pastoral and career's leads of the UK, the personal challenges is the most significant category.
- In Portugal and Spain, all the participants' profiles referred to the lack of motivation and interest.
- In Germany, Spain and Romania, teachers and pedagogues, of all investigated types of schools and educational institutions, agree that the personal risk factors are particularly important because they interact with all other risk factors.

1.2. Family circumstances

All the participants in the different countries specify some family circumstances that increase the risk of early school leaving.

Someone who has many family problems, I deduce [...] that, this person will want to leave home to get away a lot [...]. If she is at school, she will not be able to get money for it, she will not be able to get money to get more freedom, in quotes, and want to get away from problems. Then, on top of that, they come to school with many things in their minds and cannot study, which will result in bad grades, which will result in maybe a bad study. So, I think it is a little difficult to combine family problems with school. *[Portugal_E2_Student]*

Relatives do not always provide the necessary support so that students are kept in the Institute. In some cases, due to lack of knowledge, resources, ability to manage the own family..., others due to lack of attention. *[Spain_E2_School leadership team]*

[...] how many students, in our Institute, are currently living in a family room [not a flat], four or five brothers living together in the same room. This does not guarantee the conditions to study. Or they live on an unheated floor. There is no hot water, so they do not shower every day. Or they must take care of their little siblings. We work with computers, if they do not have Wi-Fi... *[Spain_E5_School leadership team]*

The socio-cultural environment of the students' origin is one of the most important variables in the student's success or failure in school/profession. [...] The attitude of the family towards the school is very important. There are also cases where parents are encouraged to violate the norms of school values through their attitude to school. *[Romania_E7_School manager]*

The disorganization of the family life, the divorce, the conflictive and immoral family climate, the divergence of the educational methods and the lack of authority of the parents, the cold, indifferent or, on the contrary, tyrannical attitude, are some other aspects that lead to early leaving. *[Romania_E9_School manager]*

If we are talking in terms of family support in the educational act, it is imperative for the family to guide the child through the school system, to help face the difficulties encountered by the student during the school year, etc. *[Romania_E2_Teacher]*

It is important to notice that this group of factors were assessed very high in Germany, Spain and Romania but are considered less relevant in the UK. Even so, all countries identify risks factors related to family circumstances:

- Parental values: low family aspirations, parental expectations for young people

In many cases, it is linked to the learning and expectations of young people because they are often children who live in situations of risk of social exclusion, with very marginal families. They live in family settings where they have no expectations and their own children have neither motivation nor expectation. *[Spain_E3_School leadership team]*

Students are also encouraged by the attitude of parents for whom learning is no longer a priority, nor the guarantee of getting a job. *[Romania_E1_School counsellor]*

- Low family support: lack of attention, educational support and affection

If we don't have the support of our family members, parents and all this, obviously, like, we have a bad grade so let's say, our parents don't support us, they don't give us anything, of course, we want to give up. *[Portugal_E7_Student]*

There is inattention of young people by families. They are "street children" who do not have the necessary family support. *[Spain_E2_School leadership team]*

To me these children [from families not supporting them] are grossly neglected, physically and psychologically. They often appear unwashed, in ragged clothes, without breakfast, without homework for class, because they are preparing their school day on their own. The first time of the day they see their parents is in the afternoon after school. [Germany_E6_Teacher]

[...] the lack of family support, lack of communication. If there is no home support to encourage finishing ESO [Compulsory Secondary Education] and graduating ... it is very difficult to move on. *[Spain_E5_Student]*

The emigration of the labour force is increasingly affecting the pupils, who either follow their parents, or are left in the care of relatives or close acquaintances who are superficially dealing with the school situation of the children. *[Romania_E1_School counsellor]*

- Lack of education or low parental educational achievement that, in some, cases link with parental distrust of school or authorities.

We also have caregivers who can't read, can't read, I was shocked, but this, we still have this at our school and we have a lot of people with 4th grade, 6th grade, so there's no position or understanding by the family about the importance that school can bring to their lives. *[Portugal_E5_Teacher]*

There are families that do not value studies. There are few parents with higher education, so the value that students give to their studies can be related to their parent's perception. *[Spain_E7_Teacher]*

I agree, for example, with what they said that parents do not warn them [student] that they should study, the importance of studying. I think that's because the parents have done the same. The parents left [...] and then, how their children do the same [leaving studies], some might say no matter. *[Spain_E8_Student]*

I have talked to many parents through my 23 years of teaching at this school and more and more of them do not see the value of learning. [...] Their children have many role models that have succeeded in life and have not finished high school. I think it is a phenomenon these past 10 years and it is concerning for us, as educational institutions. We should be able to collaborate with parents, but they are not so engaged in their children's school life. *[Romania_E4_Teacher]*

- Low socio-economic level/economic problems: living in an underprivileged context, dependence on government subsidies. In some cases, is related with having to support their family.

There are cases where families themselves do not recognize the advantage [...] of their children studying, for example. If they go to work, there is more income at home. *[Portugal_E5_Member of school leadership team]*

There are families who expect students to meet at age 16 so they can go to work. In this sense, the Institute cannot do anything to retain them. *[Spain_E4_Teacher]*

We are an Institute in a low socioeconomic level neighbourhood, or very low level. This implies... for us, a very serious risk factor because there is a very high number of families that have little interest in the educational follow-up of their children, not only in the secondary school stage, which affects us, but also from the primary school. *[Spain_E5_School leadership team]*

I have noticed in some cases that school dropout increases in winter, in the absence of subsistence and because of lack of food or clothing required. I do not refer to all of my pupils. *[Romania_E8_Teacher]*

Young people whose parents do not work represent a vulnerable group, because most often the family is facing financial problems, and this situation leads to less chances of being able to support the child during his educational process. *[Romania_E3_Teacher]*

The participants of the different countries also identified other factors (see Table 5):

Table 5. Risks factors for family circumstances across countries.

Family circumstances	The UK	Portugal	Germany	Spain	Romania
Parental values: low family aspirations, parental expectations for young people	●	●	●	●	●
Low family support: lack of attention, educational support and affection	●	●	● ¹	●	●
Lack of education or low parental educational achievement	●	●	●	● ²	● ²
Low socio-economic level/economic problems: living in a underprivileged context, dependence on government subsidies	●	●	●	●	●
Parental distrust of school or authorities	●	●		● ³	●
Having to support the family: caring for a family member, working to support the family	●	●		●	
Chaotic home lives	●	●		●	
Parenting difficulty	●				
Experience of alcohol/substance addiction in a family member	●	●	●		
Raised in a workless family	●		●		
Broken families		●		●	
Dysfunctional families		●		●	●
Mental health problems in a family member			●		
Lack of positive role models			●		●
Origin (immigrant condition) / Culture				●	

¹ Germany: It is considered an important risk factor, but the lack of educational support, usually linked to a lack or low parental education, is easier to grip through compensatory measures in the school and outside the school.

² Spain: In some cases, can be a supportive factor. Firstly, some parents that left the school or not continued in post-compulsory education, want that their children achieve higher educational levels. Secondly, some students do not want to follow the same path that their parents, because see that they have difficulties to find a good job, their parents regret their choices, etc.

³ Spain and Romania: A factor that mainly affects gipsy students.

Taking into account the participants' profile, we observe differences between countries:

- In the UK, family circumstances are not the lead factor for any participant group. Comparing groups, school leaders consider more than VET leaders that family circumstances are a risk factor.
- In Portugal, family issues are one of the most focal points by all members of the schools' leadership teams and administration and for vocational courses teachers too. The family role in the teaching-learning process of their children influences the tendency of students to leave school.
- In Germany, mental health problems and addictions of family members, especially of parents, are the risk factors that are regarded as very important by all interview participants. They consider that these factors have a strong influence on the personality development of young people. Examples were reported where due to alcohol addiction of the parents the young people suffered from malnutrition were emotionally dilapidated (i.e. no emotional support at all) and striking in their social behaviour.
- In Spain, family issues is a cause of concern for members of the school leadership team. They identify this factor as one of the key risk factors of early leaving, specially by the lack of family support. This is a critical point. Likewise, most of them think that the lack of family support is due to critical socioeconomic situations, the family structure and conditions and the origin and culture, the gipsy families represent the most critical family group.
- In Romania, the risk of early leaving numbers is closely linked to family circumstances such as low family aspirations, or low parental educational achievement, economic problems, and lack of positive role models. Almost all interview participants have stressed the need to tackle this issue, as more and more of their pupils struggle with parental problems that prevent them from having a normal and fulfilling school life.

1.3. Social relations

We observe that social relationship is seen as supplementary group factors that reinforce other risk factors in most of the countries, especially in the UK, Portugal, Germany, Spain and Romania. The only two factors pointed out in all the countries are:

- The existence of a difficult relationship in schools, especially with teachers.

It is true if we do not have teachers' support, we may want to give up, if the teachers make us, in quotes, feel stupid, it is true that in this case there isn't much desire to continue studying. As long as we have the teachers' support, we try to do our best even from friends, family, it helps a lot. *[Portugal_E7_Student]*

I do not have the confidence in the teaching staff to go to this one when I have any problems. They do not do anything to generate it either. Teachers have prejudices and they judge you, before to do nothing, and this creates distrust. *[Spain_E2_Student]*

The teachers do not give us enough support. Teachers want you to do the work and you be a good student. If you are not a good student, they set you aside. So, to be separated, I prefer to be out of school and not go there. *[Spain_E4_Student]*

I would like to feel that our teachers are like our friends. There have been some cases when I needed their help, but they were not willing to help me because they said they did not have time. Just wished that they were more engaged in our lives. *[Romania_E3_Student]*

I saw that some teachers do not treat us as good as they treat our colleagues from the best class in our school. Maybe it is because we are not as smart as they are, but it is quite visible and their attitude is different towards us. *[Romania_E8_Student]*

- The peer pressure/external influence.

If they all think the same way, they will never change their thinking. If they all are not motivated, if the whole group of friends is not motivated, the school does not matter, they will not change, they will not change their minds. *[Portugal_E1_Teacher]*

The neighbourhood generates spaces where children are drinking or smoking and spending hours and hours, and there is not wrong in the eyes of the community. For example, our primary school students are until early in the morning on the street. The neighbourhood and surroundings support they make it. Independently of the age. They come to school feel sleeping and when we ask them, they answer that they went to sleep very late. *[Spain_E3_School leadership team]*

I actually have some examples of students who have been skipping classes to go smoking or to have fun in the park. It happened in my former class, in this high school, when a group who didn't like studying used to skip classes a lot. And they influenced other students as well. *[Romania_E8_Student]*

Is interesting to notice that in Germany participants give to relationship at work a greater weight as a risk factor for early leaving in vocational education and training. In the lower secondary level, like other countries, pointed out the importance of building a sense of trust between teachers and pupils.

Table 6 summarizes the risks factors identified in this category:

Table 6. Social relations as a risk factor. Comparison between countries.

Social relations	The UK	Portugal	Germany	Spain	Romania
Difficult relationship in school: difficult relationships with teachers	●	●	●	●	●
Peer pressure/external influence: peer pressure to take drugs/alcohol/smoke, skipping school	●	●	●	●	●
Difficult relationship with peers: bullying, poor friendship management skills, not having friends	●	●		●	●
Difficult relationship at work (VET studies)	●		●		

Social relations	The UK	Portugal	Germany	Spain	Romania
Peer group expectations: low peer group expectations for the future	●			●	●
Poor relationship with an adult, tutor/mentor/learning support advisor	●				
Isolation	●			●	
Pressure to achieve: low value of entry-level jobs	●				
Expectations from professionals	●				
Feeling different or singled out	●				
Internet risks: social media pressure, gaming online, grooming vulnerability	●			●	

Taking into account the participants' profile, we observe differences between countries:

- In the UK, young people in school and EL projects were particularly cognizant of the social relationship issues.
- In Portugal, the members of the school leadership team, administration and teachers involved in the study do not explicitly highlight social issues as a key element in understanding the risks of early school leaving. Only refer to the negative influences of the support networks. Students' emphasizes as risks factors the difficult relationship with peers and teachers.
- In Germany, apart from the risk of early leaving if difficult relationships in schools are present, teachers highlight the difficult relationship at work as a risk factor. If relations at the workplace with superiors (trainers, master artisans) are difficult, for example, due to misconduct of the trainee (e.g., inadequate behaviour, inadequate communication) or inappropriate behaviour of the superiors (lack of appreciation and respect), then a risk situation can arise which ultimately might end in early leaving. It was noted, however, that this is most likely to happen when superiors are insensitive and have no sense of problems or remedial action. Better relations between companies and vocational schools would be needed.
- In Spain, the social issues as risk factors are identified by the members of the school leadership team and teachers/educators. These are closely related to family factors. The most critical ones are on the one hand, the lack of social support and, on the other hand, the lack of social models. The first one impacts negatively on the family perception and confidence on the educational institution. The second one is conditioned by the immediate social context, which is determined by the families.
- In Romania, members of school leadership team and teachers highlight elements related peer pressure/external influence (peer pressure to take drugs/alcohol/smoke, skipping school) and low peer group expectations, on the one hand, and students referred to the difficult relationships with teachers and difficult relationship with peers, on the other hand.

1.4. Institutional factors

In the category of institutional factors, there is not a match in the risk factors identified in the countries analysed, as we can see in Table 7. Even so, we observe, some coincidences between some countries:

- The school management of pupil behaviour and lack of professional/personal/academic guidance are identified as a risk factor in the UK, Portugal, Spain and Romania.
- The school or education environment is identified as a risk factor in the UK, Portugal, Spain and Germany.
- The role/impact of exclusion of teaching lessons and absenteeism, and the syllabus and their development –specially related to teaching strategies and/or methodologies– are identified as a risk factor in Portugal, Germany and Spain.

They spend many hours in classrooms and the philosophy of vocational education was not that, it was much more practical. They come in at half-past eight and often leave at half-past six. They are closed a whole day. *[Portugal_E7_Teacher]*

We don't like teaching strategies. Classroom methodology is boring, and this is a cause that makes some of our classmates don't go to class. *[Spain_E1_Student]*

It is necessary to focus on programs and strategies that allow to adjust what is done in the classroom to those young people who do not feel comfortable with the usual methodology, and for that reason they don't attendance. *[Spain_E7_School leadership team]*

In the case of Germany it was stated that it is very important to analyse the reasons of absenteeism, because, recently a considerable number of students did not attend classes, thus a case of absenteeism, but the reason for being absent was taking part in 'Fridays for Future' demonstrations. The majority of these 'school avoiding' pupils cannot be expected to end up early leaving school. Also, a very widespread reason for pupils' absenteeism is to take care of younger siblings.

Although only two countries identify the lack of trust and support of the institution, we want to highlight it because they are correlated with other personal factors:

Here we have a psychologist at school [...] people go there, talk [...] vent with the person and everything that comes out of there will be told to parents [...] in the middle of it, it all gets shuffled and they don't want to talk to anyone, they prefer to keep everything to themselves. *[Portugal_E1_Student]*

Table 7. Institutional factors as a risk factor. Comparison between countries.

Institutional factors	The UK	Portugal	Germany	Spain	Romania
School management of pupil behaviour: school environment that can't accommodate EL behaviour, school exclusion, the impact of disruptive students	●	●		●	●
Lack of professional/personal/academic guidance	●	●		●	●
School or education environment: classroom environment, large class size, infrastructure maintenance, lack of resources, classroom too overwhelming, not feeling safe in school, building too warm or cold	●	●	●	●	
Institutional rigidity: school rules, strict daily routines, schools not inclusive	●		●	●	●
Limited teacher resources or time	●			●	●
Key transitions risky: being on the wrong path for their abilities/interests, lack of signposting to FE training pathways, post-16 transition, risk of summer gap between transitions	●			●	
Transport	●				
School/teachers' expectations	●			●	●
Lack of school identification mechanisms for EL risk	●			●	
School segregation: working on the corridors	●				
The role/impact of exclusion of teaching lessons and absenteeism		●	●	●	
Syllabus and their development: too theoretical, a lot of content, inadequate teaching methods, difficulties to respond to the heterogeneity of learners, not adjusted to the real labour market		●	●	●	
Workload		●		●	●
Lack of trust and support of the institution		●		●	
Inadequate cooperation behaviour between schools and companies (VET courses)			●		●
Do not meet the expectations of students (VET courses)			●	●	

Taking into account the participants' profile, we observe differences between countries:

- In the UK, young people in school and early leaving projects were particularly cognizant of the institutional risk factors.
- In Portugal. On one hand, members of school leadership team and teachers highlight elements related to their implementation of the curricula and regulations imposed by the Ministry of education. On the other hand, students referred to the teachers' performance as well as directives of the regulating entities of the professional courses.
- In Germany, participants referred to resource, structural and qualification problems. In the case of vocational training, it was pointed out that often the studies and the conditions in companies do not meet the expectations of the trainees (work content, payment and appreciation to them).
- In Spain, participants referred to methodologies, the lack of resources (especially human resources) for attending the early leaving risk situations and students at risk of early leaving, and the educational stage, where different early leaving reasons are identified between compulsory secondary education, baccalaureate and VET.
- In Romania, the institutional issues as risk factors were identified by the members of the school leadership team and teachers. The workload was one of the most analysed issues, as schools are forced to struggle through the bureaucratic processes on a daily basis, besides the teaching classes.¹

1.5. Structural factors

Structural factors are outside the control of stakeholders, but it is considered to provide an important framing for understanding the issue of early leaving as first and foremost reflective of young people's wider disadvantages as well as perceived challenges presented by the national education system. The partners from UK, Spain and Portugal explores specifically the existence of structural factors (see Table 8).

Table 8. Structural factors identified in the UK, Spain and Portugal

Structural factors (The UK)	Structural factors (Spain)	Structural factors (Portugal)
Educational Policy: exam pressure and performance targets, raising compulsory ET to 18. performance pressure on teachers, change in the grading system, qualifications needed to facilitate employability, low government priority	Educational system: the structure of the educational system and the lack of real alternatives that offers to young people who are at risk of early leaving or who are early leavers. <i>The current Spanish and Catalan educational system do</i>	Educational Policy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The compulsory need of being at school until the age of 18 years old; <p><i>I don't know if our education system is prepared for this '18-year-old schooling'</i></p>

¹ In recent years, there have been many discussions at Ministry level on reducing the number of documents (required by the school, the school inspectorate or the ministry) the teacher is burdened with and instead focusing more on the preparation of the class.

Structural factors (The UK)	Structural factors (Spain)	Structural factors (Portugal)
	<p><i>not offer alternative to early leavers or young people at risk of early leaving</i> [Spain_E1_School leadership team].</p> <p><i>The structure of the educational system in ESO. The fact of being forced to remain in the formal / regulated system until the age of 16, puts the trajectories of many young people, who do not want to be there because they do not find meaning to what they are doing at risk.</i> [Spain_E3_Teacher]</p>	<p><i>because then these kids in the classroom also become disturbing, disinterested.</i> [Portugal_E5_School leadership team]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The excessive number of students per class <p><i>The state gradually forces classes to open with 24 students. These people have never taken demography classes and do not make a slight notion of quantity. [...] to open a class of 18 students in a course that could give them a future and job if they have only 18 students, does not open. That is one of the things that could change.</i> [Portugal_E6_Teacher]</p>
<p>Lack of Funding or Time: School funding crisis, financial constraints on EL projects, how DfE use funds with schools, lack of and cuts to youth services, services cut at 18 years old, support services cut</p>	<p>Educational Administration: Lack of support, or wrong support, by the Educational Administration and the “imposition” of a model of educational institutions (<i>Institute-School</i>) that leads an Institute to become an <i>Institute-ghetto</i>.</p> <p><i>Some of the methodological strategies proposed by the Education Department are not right neither for the type of students we have, nor for the characteristics of the groups (number and heterogeneity).</i> [Spain_E4_Teacher]</p> <p><i>The educational system is generalist for everyone, it is equally and clearly, there are neighbourhoods that are not equal. [...] [Educational Administration] does not plan for educational centres and neighbourhoods that need a lot more resources.</i> [Spain_E5_School leadership team]</p>	<p>The curricula:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is not adjusted to the real labour market needs; <i>There is a lack of structure, a structural policy that articulates ministries, the world of work with the world of education.</i> [Portugal_E7_Teacher] • Do not contemplate all contents and subjects needed to do the mandatory exams to access higher education; <i>In professional courses, there is a lack of subjects for us to enter in higher education, to take exams. And they don't care about it when they have and correct the tests. [...] And to be studying for three years in a subject you don't have, obviously it's not a guaranteed future</i> [Portugal_E6_Student] • Is perceived as having an excessive workload; <i>The kids didn't need to have so many hours of Portuguese, English, [...] maybe reduce</i>

Structural factors (The UK)	Structural factors (Spain)	Structural factors (Portugal)
		<p><i>and include a practical component so they can accomplish other things [Portugal_E6_School leadership team]</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is unattractive and unappealing. <i>A school more interesting for students, modernizing the school, the curriculum [Portugal_E6_Teacher]</i>
<p>Accessibility to education: rurality and transport issues</p>	<p>Access to options pathways for ESO: the difficulties for accessing to programmes that become an alternative to ESO before the age of 16.</p> <p><i>There is difficulty in making possible to access young people aged 16 to 17 years old to the Adult School. They cannot go until the age of 18, and this makes it difficult for students who drop out to be able to "return" to obtain the GESO (GCSE). Especially since this is an alternative to PFI. [Spain_E4_Teacher]</i></p>	<p>Lack of training offer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the lack of a training offer connected with young people's interests; <i>They are kids that don't identify themselves with the educational system and school and they are anxious to have 18 years old to go to the labour market. [Portugal_E3_School leadership team]</i> • the lack of real educational alternatives to young people who are at risk of early leaving or who are early leavers (ex. courses for adults) <i>We have been looking for learning courses, more practical courses, in some cases even financed, also as the professional courses, and it raises a problem, which is the mandatory number of people to open a course. [Portugal_E7_Teacher]</i>
<p>Requirement for post-16 maths and literacy</p>	<p>Lack of training offer (factor close related to the above one and the transition from school to VET): the lack of a training offer that connect with young people's interests, poor training offer in VET studies (PFI - level 1- and CFGM -level 2-).</p> <p><i>The lack of a training offer after compulsory secondary education also means that there is an abandonment when young people end this stage, or at the age of 16. Not always the</i></p>	

Structural factors (The UK)	Structural factors (Spain)	Structural factors (Portugal)
	<p><i>training offer is linked to what young people want, but there are cases where the interests of young people are not linked to market needs. [...] One of the main difficulties is the lack of a training offer link to young people's interests. [Spain_E2_School leadership team]</i></p> <p><i>The training offer of PFI and CFGM is regrettable. [Spain_E5_School leadership team]</i></p> <p><i>The PFI offer [...] needs for more branches of other professionalism. [Spain_E5_Teacher]</i></p>	
Transition from school to VET: unclear VET pathways, transition destination not sorted on leaving school, flawed referral process, options pathways for GCSEs		
Alternative provision in the region: lack of continuity, limited availability, not affordable for schools, not having a Pupil Referral Unit in the county		
Neoliberal emphasis on measuring outcomes		
Mechanisms to track EL: unable to track due to relocation, disjointed approach to tracking EL, being outside of or disengaged with the system, home-schooled not tracked, no requirement for schools to inform LA about post 16 leavers, no requirement for LA to track EL post 18 unless with EHCP		
Early identification mechanisms		
Children's basic needs not being met: structural and financial barriers stacked against young people		

2. Strategies to prevent Early Leaving

The strategies to prevent early leaving identified by the participants can be grouped into four categories: prevention strategies for institutional issues, prevention strategies for social issues, prevention strategies for family issues, and prevention strategies for personal issues to early leaving. We included a fifth category, as the UK also identify strategies to confront structural risk factors, indicating if other countries referred to them too.

For the participants identifying the most relevant prevention strategies is difficult, but we distinguish some interesting reflexions in each country. In the UK, in terms of stakeholder discussion of the most effective support strategies for tackling the issue of early leaving, attention was disproportionately focused upon institutional factors. The second most significant category that support strategies tackle was that of personal challenges. Support strategies that targeted social relationships and structural factors were fairly evenly matched. Prevention strategies to confront family circumstances are the less mentioned.

In Portugal, Spain and Romania², they highlight the need for curriculum adaptations, reducing workloads and making them more practical and meaningful. The implementation of individual plans, the involvement of the families in the process, and the construction of self-confidence atmosphere, are other relevant strategies.

In Germany, the attempt to identify the group of dominant strategies to prevent early leaving is difficult, because during the interviews a huge variety of strategies were identified. Even so, measures that address institutional problems have proven successful. Also, the development of trust relationships between teachers and young people is considered to be decisive.

2.1. Prevention strategies for institutional issues to Early Leaving

The interviews and focus groups conducted with different actors in different countries allow us to have an overview of different prevention strategies for institutional issues that contribute to increase the risk of early leaving (see table 9).

² In Romania, in the last 3 years, there has been a massive project which implies the curricular qualification / training of 55,000 teachers from primary and secondary education for a methodological approach focused on key competences, in accordance with the new curriculum and adapting the learning activities to the specific needs of each student, including those at risk of school dropout. Specifically, the project aims to: make the most of the hours available to the teacher (25%) for the benefit of each student's progress; design 'Second Chance' type programs according to the new curricular framework, assumption by the school / teachers of complementary roles to that of teacher in the classroom, with emphasis on counseling, social mediation, facilitating learning in non-formal and informal educational contexts, etc.

Table 9. Prevention strategies for institutional issues to early leaving. Comparison between countries.

Prevention strategies for institutional issues	The UK	Portugal	Germany	Spain	Romania
Non-rigid school environment: flexibility, time out of class when needed, reduced timetables, rubber boundaries, choice about homework, a break between lessons, individual plans/curriculum adaptations	●	●		●	●
Careers' opportunities: work placements, work skills, workplace training in the first years of vocational education	●	●		●	●
Student guidance at transitional moments: a warm handover (taking young people to post transition setting), university visits, strategic advertising of post-school pathways, taster days at follow-on settings	●			●	●
Information sharing and networking: links with other public services, information sharing between schools, links with local businesses or role models, information sharing between schools and LA, networking across agencies	●			●	
Improving classroom environment: increasing staff to student ratio, small class sizes, elective seating plan, comfortable chairs, ear defenders	●			●	●
Increasing quality of educational provision: positive or fun activities, time outside and in nature, motivational teachers, a broad creative curriculum	●		●		
Individualised support when needed	●		●	●	●
Quality mentoring: building trust, continuity and commitment of mentor, pointing out to YP their interests and talents, therapeutic listening, advocating for the child, boundary setting and apologising when wrong	●				●
Positive behaviour management system: effective bullying strategy, effective family liaison in tackling bullying, patience with YP, consistent routines, managed moves	●			●	●
Inclusive school culture: a caring ethos, school as a safe space	●			●	
Teaching-learning methodologies: active learning, implement didactics adapted to heterogeneity		●	●	●	
The support of a specialized team with special pedagogical and psychological competences inside or outside of institutions		●	● ¹	●	●

Prevention strategies for institutional issues	The UK	Portugal	Germany	Spain	Romania
Tracking absences, faults and failure: contact with parents and other external services		●		●	●
Promotion and diversification of activities		●		●	
The promotion of meetings with companies, specialists or success stories		●			●
Protocols to identify risks of early leaving			●	●	●

¹ Germany: By regional centres for consultation and support (RCCS in German language 'ReBUZ') a multi-professional support and assistance structure is institutionalized. The RCCS ('ReBUZ') is an initiative launched and financed by the Bremen Federal State's Senator for Youth and Education. All over the federal state of Bremen, there are four regional RCCS in operation. Taken together, they cover all general education schools in Bremen.

Besides the RCCS centres there is another programme implemented which is working in a similar manner, but which focuses particularly on vocation schools. The so-called Stay tuned! initiative (in German 'Bleib dran!') is a programme supported by the Centre for Labour and Politics (University of Bremen), the Chamber of Labour and the Senator for Youth and Education in Bremen. The program offers advice and mediation in case of problems (such as the risk of Early Leaving school and training) or conflict situations -both at work and in vocational schools. The program provides support and continuous guidance, coaching and monitoring on the topics of early leaving, communication, conflict resolution. Usually all actors involved are integrated into the processes (pupils/apprentices, teachers, trainers and family). If necessary, contacts to other institutions such as family counsellors and social workers are arranged. Stay tuned! organises individual learning support and runs a mentoring program.

There are different strategies in different countries implemented successfully, especially the creation of non-rigid school environment, making personal adaptations, for example, time out of class when needed, reduced timetables, etc.

2.2. Prevention strategies for social issues to Early Leaving

The direct and regular contact with students is considered one of the most decisive factors. The construction of bonds of trust and mutual respect between trainers/teachers and trainees is the most important starting point. For that reason, the improvement of the communication and relationship between adults (headmaster, teachers, trainers and other education professional) as the base for the acceptance of the advice and guidance, as well as the effectiveness of all the other institutional and personal strategies.

If that teacher picks on me I don't feel like going to his class and I'm going to miss school and I think it influences us a lot to drop out of school. [*Portugal_E2_Student*]

The figure of TIS (*Social Inclusion Technician*) helps us a lot. She is daily at the door and controls those who arrive late, those who do not come, make a call to families, control the faults. This is a person dedicated to absenteeism. She even went to look for students in the houses, to talk to them. [*Spain_E4_School leadership team*]

Table 10. Prevention strategies to confront social issues to early leaving. Comparison between countries.

Prevention strategies to confront social issues	The UK	Portugal	Germany	Spain	Romania
The direct and regular contact with students: the development of trust relationships between teachers and young people					
Student perceptions that they are supported: students feeling cared about by teachers, feeling cared about by the head teacher, high teacher expectations, keeping promises	●	●	●	●	●
Having friends: friendship management strategies, conflict resolution, pro-schooling friendship culture	●	●	●		
Positive adult/tutor/mentor relationship	●			●	●
Encouraging and developing positive key adult relationships	●			●	●
Staff knowing pupils well: teacher intuition and responsiveness, consistent taxi driver	●			●	
Integrate young person into the community: community ownership or involvement, build YP's ability to meet and engage with adults outside of school, raising community expectations.	●				
Relationships education: Teaching social boundaries, building teamwork skills, teaching empathy, modelling appropriate relationships, teaching social justice.	●				●
Expectations from professionals	●				
Building support networks: focusing on social needs	●			●	
Peer mentoring	●			●	●
To know success paths which occurred with their peers		●		●	●
The sharing of experiences and appreciation of the school by individuals from the community and companies		●		●	●
Participation of digital influencers in the school to reinforce the importance of school and learning		●			●

In Portugal, members of the school leadership team and administration did not identify prevention strategies for social aspects. By contrast, in Germany preventive strategies in the field of social relations are considered particularly important and effective by social pedagogues working in schools. In Spain, the collaboration between different social agents is key. In Romania, emphasis is placed upon the students' identification of role models from their own group age by peer mentoring or by discovering other examples of success with their older peers.

2.3. Prevention strategies for family issues to Early Leaving

In this section, one major strategy for family issues is identified to confront some of the familiar factors: negative parental values, lack of educational support and parental distrust of school or authorities. This is: greater participation and involvement of the family in school.

Then we also have, for example, the intervention with parents to the 'parents school', which is a project that we are moving towards, bringing more and more parents to school because when parents are involved it is already different from that when there is one that 'is already 18 years old, I no longer impose so much', the course is different. *[Portugal_E5_Member of school leadership team]*

I think it would be cool, like here at this school one day a week parents come to have lunch with their kids or something. *[Portugal_E1_Student]*

The participation and involvement of the families has generated bonding and has made things change. *[Spain_E3_School leadership team]*

We try to involve the parents as much as possible in our activities because it is important for them to feel part of the process of learning. They need to realise that they are very important in their child's learning progress. *[Romania_E9_School manager]*

Specifically, Germany, Spanish and Romanian interviewees confirmed the outstanding importance of the family sphere as a starting point for prevention strategies against early leaving. Family problems are almost always linked to educational and personal risks and thus also to the prevention strategies to be taken.

In Spain, although some institutions have implemented prevention strategies addressed to families such as learning communities or parents' school, the problem is the involvement of the families. In this kind of initiatives, those who participate are the families that are already interested in their children's education or there are more mothers than fathers are. However, it seems that these are shyly positive experiences.

At parent's school, there are more mothers' attendance. There is not a very large group, because the experience started last year, but they were going on, [...] they were asking to come in more times. There was created good bonding and they were already beginning to spread the initiative to other parents. *[Spain_E4_School leadership team]*

Also, in Germany, Spain and Romania is widely agreed that school avoidance (absenteeism) must be combated through strategies that start in the family context or at least include in the strategies. School avoidance (even on an hourly basis) is seen as a serious warning signal and requires appropriate

measures to be taken as soon as it occurs for the first time. For this reason, when a pupil does not appear at school, the social pedagogues at the schools contact the parents at their home promptly (usually on the same day, often on the same morning). If parents are cooperative in this situation, joint strategies can be developed and implemented that can prevent early leaving. Under these conditions, measures can be implemented that include both, parents and pupils, although as some interviewees have said *“the intervention with the families cannot be forgotten, although it is the most difficult thing to do”* [Spain_E1_ School leadership team]

Table 11 summarizes the prevention strategies to confront family issues to early leaving:

Table 11. Prevention strategies to confront family issues to early leaving. Comparison between countries.

Prevention strategies to confront family issues	The UK	Portugal	Germany	Spain	Romania
School-family engagement/participation: showing care to parents, boundary-setting the same between school and home, sharing child’s achievements between school and home, home-visits, communication over child welfare, bedtime-routines, class-visits	●	●	●	●	●
Alternative learning arrangements	●			●	
Family counselling		●	●	●	●
Parental support in learning at home, parenting classes, parent coaching, parent school	●	●		●	●
Not judging parents	●				
Financial support for basic needs	●			●	
Family support worker	●		●		
Cultural capital opportunities	●				
Homework club in school	●				●
Supporting young carers with their family members	●				
Include families in the strategies implemented to school avoidance		●	●	●	●
Integrative strategies with other external services			●	●	

2.4. Prevention strategies for personal issues to Early Leaving

As in the prevention strategies related to social issues, the support of adults, in helping students to building self-confidence and self-esteem, is the most important aspect addressed to prevention strategies for personal issues. This reinforcement of students’ self-confidence and self-esteem is also supported by the need of an individualized attention.

Kids here need a lot of affection, a lot of attention, a lot of talk. We have to first, create a close relationship with respect. *[Portugal_E3_Teacher]*

Teachers should have good expectations of their students. Students’ background should not be the focus of teachers’ attention. The focus should be students’ motivations. It is necessary teachers give confidence to the students. *[Spain_E4_Student]*

There were teachers who made things easy for us. They helped us when we didn't understand something [...]. They told us "you can, you will pass, you can". They told us from the heart, not like other teachers. *[Spain_E5_Student]*

The educator’s expectations are very important to the student. Even if they do not explicitly say that they do not think the child can perform better, the attitude gives a lot. It is highly important to value each child and consider them worthy of educating. I have seen that my colleagues have tried over the years to treat all students the same. Because this has a direct impact on the self-esteem and motivation for learning and growing as learner. *[Romania_E6_School manager]*

In Spain, the security and confidence environment in the Institutes is one of the key prevention strategies related to personal issues.

This security environment dignifies them. To the most extreme and risky cases of students, the fact of being in a security environment, where they can show themselves in a different way and show that they are capable of... I believe it dignifies them and makes them feel good although when they leave this environment, they continue to be what others tell them what they are. *[Spain_E3_School leadership team]*

Table 12 summarizes prevention strategies to confront personal issues to early leaving:

Table 12. Prevention strategies to confront personal issues to early leaving. Comparison between countries.

Prevention strategies to confront personal issues	The UK	Portugal	Germany	Spain	Romania
Supporting young peoples’ emotional wellbeing and welfare: advocating for young people, resolving problems quickly, individual recognition	●			●	●
Building self-confidence and self-esteem	●	●	●	●	●
YP autonomy and ownership: Being trusted, supporting child towards independence, student voice platform, too dependent on school support.	●				

Prevention strategies to confront personal issues	The UK	Portugal	Germany	Spain	Romania
Building resilience	●			●	●
Raising aspirations	●			●	●
Early identification mechanisms	●				
Targeted support mechanisms	●		●		
Meeting individual needs: providing transport, problem-solving on the spot, providing for material necessities	●				
Building students' sense of a positive learner identity: celebrate YP success	●		●	●	
Careers' advice	●			●	●
Motivational strategies		●		●	●

2.5. Prevention strategies for structural factors that affect Early Leaving

Spain and the UK identify strategies to confront structural risk factors but, in the analysis of other countries, they referred to some of these strategies too.

Table 13. Prevention strategies to confront structural factors. Comparison between countries.

Prevention strategies to confront structural factors	The UK	Portugal	Germany	Spain	Romania
Local authority support: virtual school, multiple LA teams dealing with and collaborating on EL, LA SEND team: SEND support changed from 18 to 25 years old, LA employment & skills team, LA school inclusion team, LA care team	●				
Mechanisms to track EL: More regional tracking support, linked to referral processes for getting Early Leavers support, information sharing between LAs, need for links between LA EL trackers and military services	●				
Investment into alternative provision: networking between local EL providers, regional directory of support services, more financial support for alternative providers, alternative provision 18-25	●				
One-on-one support or caseworkers: Nationally funded EL personal advisors	●				

Prevention strategies to confront structural factors	The UK	Portugal	Germany	Spain	Romania
Referral processes	●				
Government focus of Vocational Education and Training: training progression pathways	●		●		
Changes to the curriculum: Statutory work experience, forest school, remove post-16 maths and English as compulsory, curriculum related to employment, remove the religious component of teaching	●	●		●	
Employer engagement: supporting transition into the workplace, give employers more flexibility to employ Early Leavers	●				
Funding for support mechanisms	●			●	●
Support for the whole family unit: funding moved to parents of children with SEND	●		●	●	
Scholarship system				●	●

In Germany, participants express that the most important overarching prevention strategy for family problems it is the need of an agency that coordinates all measures. This demand is made, because the different social, educational, medical and psychological support activities are actually financed by different Senatorial authorities (i.e. federal ministries), which normally operate independently of each other. It was the majority opinion of the interviewees that this separation of services and support measures must be overcome and be brought together and coordinated in the sense of integrative support for young people at risk and their families.

In Spain, participants express the need of considering the scholarship system. On the one hand, they highlight the problem of receiving the scholarship before ending the program *“Students receive scholarships to stay within the educational system. The scholarship is paid before the end of the course, and this causes some of them leave the studies once they receive the money”*. [Spain_E2_School leadership team]. On the other hand, they highlight the need of receiving an allowance in the amount of one minimum salary while students are attending the program *“It could be well to provide a scholarship / salary to students in these situations”*. [Spain_E4_Teacher]. *“[...] when you are older, and come back to study after leaving, you should have the opportunity to study but doing paid internships”*. [Spain_E5_Student].

In Romania, the scholarship system is seen as a good way of helping those who come from disadvantaged families, as well as the institutionalized ones. As long as they come to classes, they receive a sum of money and they are more motivated to come to school; parents also see this as a form

of help from the government. Another state funded program is the ‘Warm meal’ program³ is the pilot program seen by the government as the solution for reducing school early leaving. In 2016, 50 schools were chosen from underprivileged areas that should have benefited from the state money to offer children a meal a day. Until 2019, only 13 of them have benefited from such a support mechanism.

3. Re-engagement strategies to address Early Leaving

According to many teachers and students, who have participated in the study, it is difficult for young people to re-enter school after early school leaving, particularly after they start making money and begin working so they highlight that when a student re-enters the system, it is necessary to encourage them and offer extra support.

In the Spanish context, there are second chance programmes, which are the main option for all those who did not finish their compulsory studies, focused on students’ re-engagement, especially on VET pathways. These programmes are implemented before the age of 18 and until the age of 21. Complementary to this kind of programmes, but not before the age of 18, are the Adult schools. Both alternatives offer the opportunity to the students of having the GCSE to access formal education again.

Table 14. Re-engagement strategies to address early leaving.

Re-engagement strategies or compensatory factors	The UK	Portugal	Germany	Spain	Romania
(Re)engagement Programs or Initiatives/Second chance measures	● ¹	● ²	●	● ³	●
Signposting advice & Information to Early Leavers on options: helping students to find an adequate pathway	●	●		●	
Support to find employment or training: including CV support	●			●	●
Short courses to re-engage or different option of training	●	●			●
Links with other partners & services	●		●	●	●
Re-integration measures back into education and training: supporting friendship skills, future aspirations, confidence, resilience, pastoral support, supporting pathways	●			●	
Developing soft skills	●		●	●	●
Direct and personalized support strategies for alumni: dialogue, school support		●		●	●
Curriculum adaptation: reduce school workload, modify the schedule,		●	●	●	

³ In reality, only schools that have specially designed spaces where they can cook food or those who opt for contracts with catering companies can offer children a warm meal. Also, some of the reasons for the program’s failure can be considered the lack of implication of the local authorities and the lack of staff in schools.

Re-engagement strategies or compensatory factors	The UK	Portugal	Germany	Spain	Romania
Examples of successful pathways		●		●	●
Contact with the world of work		●	●	●	●
Change of group class		●		●	
Offer different types of training		●	●	●	●

¹The UK: Examples of (re)engagement programs are Breezy project and troubles families programme (national).

² Portugal: participants referred to evening courses and Qualifica Centers.

³ Spain: The main example of (re)engagement programs are the Basic VET programmes (FPB; named, PFI in Catalonia).

4. Other reflections

Early leaving is considered a serious social problem. Specifically, German, Spanish and Romanian participants consider the number of early leavers unacceptably high. Participants argue that education and training are life chances of finding a good job and thrive in life. They think that education increase prospects for the future and promote social integration, which is the basis for social participation.

Early leaving is an important issue for our educational system because deprives citizens of essential tools to develop socially. *[Spain_E1_ School leadership team]*

It is important for people who do not have basic skills. It is difficult that they can be socially included. Not only it is an important fact for the educational system but also by the effects that early leaving has to the social level, to the society. *[Spain_E2_ School leadership team]*

Conclusions

As the main results of the interviews and focus group carried out in each country, we state:

- 1) The different categories of risks are interconnected. Personal and familial factors correlate with institutional ones. Social relationship is considered a supplementary group of factors that could reinforce the personal factors. The structural factors are less commented by the participants, probably because they do not have the chance to address them actively, i.e. most of the structural factors represent framework conditions that are imposed on the actors (teachers, social workers etc.) – both in terms of the possibility of exerting influence and the scope of their own measures.
- 2) For the participants, it is difficult to establish which is the most effective measure for preventing early leaving but, in all the countries, it is highlighted the personal support. Measures that enable trainers and teachers to promote individual learning support and personal development are regarded as particularly important. Findings also highlight the importance of

adult/tutor/mentor figure as a key conduit to supporting young people and their sense of being. Results also point to key changes needed in the educational environment including the need for flexibility as well as an inclusive caring schooling culture and a positive behaviour management system. Beyond the school, the respective local authority services were also seen to play a central role in supporting young people and schools and educational settings.

- 3) Some members of the school leadership team and administration, as well as teachers/trainers of different countries express the need to start the implementation of preventive strategies as early as possible. This aspect has two implications: in the one hand, the need of detecting the risk of early leaving as early as possible, to try to address the situation and, on the other hand, the need of establishing tutorial and orientation actions –preferably in primary schools.
- 4) Integrated prevention strategies are to be developed. All relevant actors from the school, family, company or/and environment, and the youngster need to work together to confront the causes of the early leaving.
- 5) It is interesting to review the strategies to prevent early leaving in relation to the discussion of risk factors mentioned above. Support strategies to prevent early leaving try to address factors that are more amenable to the control and instigation of participants: institutional and personal factors. This is especially interesting for the UK context, because the group of factors considered most significant are the structural ones, but in the case of strategies, participants involved in the study consider most effective the strategies that try to confront institutional factors and personal challenges.
- 6) Re-engagement strategies are mainly focusing on second chance measures that are characterized by a high VET orientation. This leads to think that VET pathways are the best ones for connecting interests and motivations of young people who are at risk of early leaving or who are early leavers.