

Study on Access to Education and Training, Basic Skills and
Early School Leavers (Ref. DG EAC 38/04)

Lot 3: Early School Leavers

Final Report

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A report submitted by GHK

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1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of the Study on Early School Leavers undertaken by GHK on behalf of the European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture (DGEAC). The work was undertaken between December 2004 and September 2005.

As indicated in the Terms of References, the purpose of this report was to contribute to the DG EAC programme Education and Training 2010 through supporting the statistical and analytical work in the area of early school leavers. This contribution has been focused on an indicator-based analysis and the measurement of the progress towards the common benchmarks adopted for early school leavers, which is by 2010, an EU average rate of no more than 10% early school leavers.

1.1 Specific objectives of the report

This report provides evidence on trends with respect to early school leavers and the achievements of European Education and Training systems in reducing the numbers of early school leavers. The study has collected and analysed available data related to the following questions:

- 1) What are the socio-economic characteristics of young people at risk?
- 2) How do early school leavers perform on the labour market?
- 3) Is there scope for early school leavers to return to education and training in later life?

The study further explores the strengths and weaknesses of the indicator of Early School Leavers used by the EU and investigates the consequences of the use of this specific indicator for analysing success of European Education and Training systems.

In addition, the report provides recommendations for the establishment of new indicators as well as methodologies for the collection of data in those areas where the analysis of available data is not satisfactory enough in order to answer the politically important questions.

1.2 The scope of the Terms of References

The overall result to be achieved was a better understanding of early school leavers based on a detailed analysis of past and current trends in early school leaving in Europe and in four¹ non-European OECD countries (more specifically USA, Australia, Canada and Japan).

The following results are presented in the report:

¹ In the Terms of Reference only USA and Japan were mentioned but it was suggested by the team in the proposal and agreed with the client during the inception meeting that, where possible, reference should be made to the situation in Australia and Canada as well.

- An analytical framework, which identifies the relevant dimensions for studying early school leaving as well as the formulation of hypotheses to be tested in four main key study areas related to the key questions stated in the Terms of References
- The presentation of available national and international statistics as well as methodological notes on early school leavers for the EU25, the four candidate countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey), the two countries of the EEA (Norway and Iceland) and four non-European OECD countries (USA, Australia, Canada and Japan).
- The presentation of contextual information on aspects such as legislation related to education policies as well as initiatives and measures which may have an impact on early school leaving².
- Comparative analysis of trends (starting from 1995 up to 2004, where possible) in early school leaving in the EU25, the four candidate countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey), the two countries of the EEA (Norway and Iceland) and four non-European OECD countries (USA, Australia, Canada and Japan). This trend analysis is presented per country, cross-national (with discussion of the reasons for the disparities) as well as by socio-economic and demographic groups.
- Where available data did not allow for detailed analysis or relevant data was not available, methodological proposals are made for new or modified data collection activities. Furthermore, a discussion on the relevance of the EU indicator on Early School Leavers is presented and it is compared with the definitions and measurements used in other non-EU countries.

1.3 Factors that constrained the study

The study has been constrained by data issues. Although there is a wealth of information available on early school leavers, the usefulness of it has not always been high due to the following:

- The wide variety of definitions and indicators on early school leavers used throughout the literature which make comparisons difficult. An overview of definitions of early school leavers is presented in Annex L and the issues related to definitions are discussed in Section 10.
- The lack of available relevant data and in depth studies on early school leavers in many countries included in this study. Other methodological obstacles are discussed in Annex A.
- A wide variety of education systems in the countries studied. The education systems at the level of secondary education have been mapped with the aim of comparing aspects of education systems and their potential influence on early school leaving. This mapping is presented in Annex E.
- The lack of recent studies and especially longitudinal studies and updates on previous research have made it difficult to relate some of the recent findings from data analysis to contextual information such as for example specific policy initiatives and programmes related to combating early school leaving

² The process of compiling national and international statistics and contextual information is described in Annex A

- While access to the EU Labour Force Survey (LFS) data allowed for useful analyses, there were limitations, including: a lack of comparability of data overtime as a result of survey coding; the small size of early school leaver population for some Member States which limits more in-depth analyses; and, the lack of socio-economic data.

Additionally, delays in setting up and clarifying formal protocols and procedures for requesting and collecting both quantitative data sets and qualitative contextual information occurred. In particular, the request to Eurydice National Contact Points for current contextual information experienced delays. As a result difficulties were experienced in contacting a number of institutions during the summer holidays which as a consequence meant that some of the information needed was not received. Where possible, the information has been retrieved from other sources but this was not possible for every country and every subject considered within this study.

A list of “open-ended” questions is presented in section 10 to draw attention to the issues that still need to be further investigated with regard to early school leaving.

1.4 Meetings and deliverables of the study

In line with the Terms of Reference, the following activities were carried out during the study period:

Meetings	Deliverables
Kick-off meeting (19 January 2005)	Proposal (18 October 2004)
Inception meeting (13 February 2005)	Inception report (9 February 2005) and final inception report (accepted on 10 March 2005)
Interim meeting (22 June 2005)	Draft interim report (15 June 2005) and final interim report (accepted on 8 July 2005)
Final meeting (8 September 2005)	Draft final report (30 August 2005) and final report (to be delivered by the end of September)

1.5 Organisation of the report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2** includes the executive summary.
- **Section 3** presents the analytical framework, identifying the key study areas, and range of hypotheses to be investigated and tested to address the key study questions. This framework forms the basis for structuring the subsequent analysis.
- **Section 4** presents the actual rate of early school leavers in the study countries for 2004. Additionally, the trends of the rate of early school leavers within these countries are presented.
- **Section 5** discusses the results obtained through the analysis of data and contextual information with regard to the key study question “Are European Education and Training systems achieving success in bringing the number of early school leavers down and which specific factors related to education policies and aspects of school systems are contributing to that potential success?”

- **Section 6** presents the findings that emerged, mainly from the literature review on the socio-economic characteristics of early school leavers. Where possible data analyses are presented which investigate the key question “What are the socio-economic characteristics of young people at risk?”
- **Section 7** discusses the findings from the analysis with regard to the labour market performance of early school leavers as compared with non-early school leavers. More specifically their chances to find employment as well as the conditions under which they work are examined.
- **Section 8** investigates the scope for early school leavers to return to education and training later in life. A distinction is made between attending second chance education, with the aim of obtaining an upper secondary qualification and following education and training, more linked to specific employment and as part of lifelong learning.
- **Section 9** presents an overview of the conclusions with regard to the validity of the hypotheses in each key study area based on the findings presented in the previous sections.
- **Section 10** focuses on the question as to whether the methodologies and data currently available are sufficient to study the phenomenon of early school leaving. Proposals for new and modified data collection activities are made. Furthermore, in relation to the usefulness of current data, the Section discusses whether the EU indicator covers the variety of concepts and definitions used of an “early school leaver” in all the different countries. Also, it compares the different ways in which early school leaving can be analysed and the consequences this has on the results of performance of individual countries. Additionally, a list of potential issues for further investigation is provided.

The supporting annexes are organised as follows:

- **Annex A** gives an overview of what the **collection of data and contextual information** for this study involved. Moreover, it assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the particular sources used.
- **Annex B Data inventory** is the complete list of indicators that were reviewed during the course of the study, mainly from the UOE (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation Institute for Statistics– OECD - Eurostat) collection, and to a limited extent, national sources.
- **Annex C EU LFS Dataset Extraction** gives the list of variables selected from the EU LFS specifically for this study. The variables are mapped against the key study areas to which they pertain, and are indicated with the specific categorisations of responses that were requested.
- **Annex D** lists the bibliographical references used for this study
- **Annex E** provides for an overview per study country on the structure of national secondary education and the different stages it consists of.
- **Annex F** gives a list by study country of the initiatives and measures targeted at bringing the number of early school leavers down.
- **Annex G** gives additional explanations on the limitations of the analysis on parental structure presented in section 6.

- **Annex H** presents the employment rate per educational level attained for every country for the year 2004.
- **Annex I** presents the employment status according to gender per country for 2004.
- **Annex J** shows the employment characteristics for three different age groups according to the early school leavers population compared with the non early school leavers population for every country in 1995 (EU 15) and 2004 (EU25).
- **Annex K** maps the second chance education provision in every country with additional explanation on the characteristics of each system.
- **Annex L** gives an overview of the concepts and definitions regarding early school leavers for each country studied with specific reference where possible to the indicators applying these definitions.
- **Annex M** presents a few examples of national statistics on early school leavers used and national targets set in the area of early school leavers

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of the Study on Early School Leavers (ESL) undertaken by GHK on behalf of the European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture (DGEAC). The work was undertaken between December 2004 and September 2005.

The purpose of this report was to contribute to the DG EAC programme Education and Training 2010 through supporting the statistical and analytical work in the area of ESL. This contribution has been focused on an indicator-based analysis and the measurement of the progress towards the common benchmark adopted for ESL. The target is that by 2010, the EU average rate of ESF should be no more than 10%.

This report provides evidence on trends with respect to early school leavers and the achievements of European education and training systems in reducing the numbers of ESL. The study has collected and analysed available data related to the following questions:

- What are the socio-economic characteristics of young people at risk?
- How do early school leavers perform on the labour market?
- Is there scope for early school leavers to return to education and training in later life?

The overall purpose was to achieve a better understanding of ESL based on a detailed analysis of past and current trends in early school leaving in Europe and in four non-European, OECD countries (USA, Australia, Canada and Japan).

An analytical framework was developed that identified all factors likely to influence ESL and a number of hypotheses that have been tested through statistical and desk research of the literature or combinations of these methods.

Current rates of early school leaving

Based on the common EUROSTAT definition of Early School Leaving and the latest available data the EU countries can be grouped as follows:

Countries already achieving the EU Benchmark 2010 with an early school leaving rate of less than 10%.	Norway, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Denmark, Croatia, Sweden, Finland, Austria, Lithuania
Countries having an early school leaving rate which is higher than the EU Benchmark 2010 but less than the current EU25 average of 15.9%	Belgium, Hungary, Germany, Ireland, Estonia, France, Netherlands, Greece, Latvia
Countries having an early school leaving rate which is higher than the EU25 Average but less than the current EU15 Average of 18%.	United Kingdom, Luxembourg
Countries having an early school leaving rate which is higher than the EU15 Average but less than 25%	Bulgaria; Romania; Italy; Cyprus
Countries having rates of early school leaving greater than 25%	Malta; Portugal; Spain; Iceland

Using OECD data the non European countries compare as follows: Turkey has a very high rate of Early School Leaving whilst the USA and Canada are below the average for all the countries examined.

Trends in Early School Leaving

The EU countries can be grouped as follows:

- Improving rate of Early School Leaving: Poland, Austria, Greece, Malta, Italy, Luxembourg, Ireland, Latvia, Belgium and Lithuania.
- Worsening rate of Early School Leaving: Czech Republic, Romania, Cyprus and Spain
- Stable rate of Early School Leaving: United Kingdom, Iceland, Germany, France and the Netherlands.
- Unstable rate of Early School Leaving: Norway, Portugal, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Slovakia, Hungary Estonia and Bulgaria.

Only limited trend data are available from the non European countries studied. With regard to the USA however, the data presented clearly shows a steady decrease from 1999 to 2002 with regard to status dropout rate.

The influence of aspects of education and training provision on Early School Leaving

The hypothesis that *An increase in the length of compulsory education will decrease the number of ESL* is supported by a statistically significant correlation between the length of compulsory education and the rate of ESL in the EU25 over the last ten years. Also, changes in the length of compulsory education were one factor that led to lower ESL rates in Poland. However, the length of compulsory education together with other aspects of national education systems affects the number of ESL. Since Italy has only recently raised the compulsory school leaving age till 18 years old, there is scope for further investigating the influence this will have on the rate of ESL.

The hypothesis that *High pupil- teacher ratio and large class size will increase the occurrence of early school leaving* was not supported by the bivariate correlation analysis undertaken. However, national averages were used for the pupil teacher and class size variables and the effects at individual school were therefore not taken into account. According to the literature smaller classes for disadvantaged pupils may have a positive influence on early school leaving. The hypothesis should be investigated in more depth with regard to the specific pupil-teacher ratios and class sizes applied to classes including students at risk.

The analyses undertaken provided no support for the hypothesis that *Countries having a high total expenditure on education per student have a lower rate of early school leaving*. The literature suggests that it is not necessarily the countries that spend the most on education whose students obtain the best results or that educate their students for the longest period. Further investigation of the influence of public and private expenditure on early school leaving would benefit from analyses of the amount of spending at the individual school level as well as the quality factors such as increasing the expenditure for particular disadvantaged groups by providing more teachers and having smaller classes.

The hypothesis that *Students attending comprehensive compulsory education systems are less likely to leave school earlier than students attending more differentiated (parallel) compulsory education systems* was not supported by the analysis undertaken in this study and the literature did not reveal empirical evidence to confirm this hypothesis. According to the literature the use of a comprehensive compulsory education system together with other aspects such as high quality of teaching might decrease the occurrence of early school leaving. This seems to be particularly the case in the Scandinavian countries.

The hypothesis that *Offering a wider variety of post-compulsory educational programmes reduces the number ESL* was not confirmed by statistical analyses since data were lacking. However, the literature suggests that offering a variety of courses after compulsory education might decrease the risk of early school leaving because it motivates students and offers students with difficulties the option of following other pathways than those traditionally expected.

Although the preferred choice of a majority of national policies is to widen the scope of education towards vocational education, it is important that these vocational directions end in a qualification that is sufficient for entering the labour market. In some countries, the occurrence of early school leaving is higher in vocational directions. Therefore attention should be paid to counselling with the aim of finding out what the best option is for a specific person rather than just redirecting “weaker” students to these vocational directions. Alternating class room education with more practice oriented courses is considered beneficial.

The hypothesis that *The repetition of classes increases the chances of a young person leaving school early* was not confirmed by the data analysis. However, the literature suggests that students who have to repeat one or more classes lose motivation and eventually leave school early, particularly minority students. The hypothesis could be further investigated on the basis of longitudinal surveys in countries such as Italy and Belgium, where repeating classes occurs regularly.

The hypothesis that *The availability of support and guidance mechanisms in school and specifically targeted at young people at risk will decrease the rate of early school leaving* could not be confirmed by the data analysis since it was difficult to measure the impact of the recent initiatives. However, an evaluation in the UK on the Education Maintenance Allowance and other evaluations in the USA show that specifically targeted initiatives might positively influence school retention.

The EU countries would benefit by exchanging good practice in this area. The advantage of the approach is that the measures and initiatives are targeted and transferable since the individual ESL characteristics appear common to all countries. The responsibility for implementation of such measures lies mostly at regional and local levels.

There was support for the hypothesis that *A high level of employment opportunities for low-educated people increases the rate of early school leaving*. There was an association between the employment rate for ESL aged 18-24 years old and the rate of early school leaving. Southern countries which have a relatively high employment rate for ESL also have high ESL. However, the opposite relationship is evident for several New Member States.

In many countries there is a significant association between attending pre-school and performing well age 15. The available evidence suggests that the provision of early child education and care may be associated with even higher returns than traditional schooling.

The influence of socio-economic characteristics and background on Early Schooling Leaving

The hypothesis that *Young people with a criminal history or deviant behaviour are more likely to leave school early* is supported by national and international surveys and research projects.

Similarly, the hypothesis that *Young people affected by a physical or mental/psychological illness are more likely to be absent from school and in the longer run leave the school system early* is supported by evidence from national and international surveys and research projects.

The hypothesis that *Teenage pregnancy increases the risk for girls to leave school early* is supported by evidence from the UK and USA in particular. In the UK for example teenage childbearing decreases the probability of post-16 (ie post compulsory) schooling by 18%. The risk factor of teenage pregnancy is less of a problem in the other countries studied.

The hypothesis that *Previous academic failure and lack of commitment to school constitute risk factors for early school leaving* is supported by the literature review. It seems that, together with the repetition of classes, poor previous performance lowers motivation and leads to dropping out

The hypothesis that *Young people being brought up in a less advantageous socioeconomic environment area more likely to leave school early* is strongly supported by the literature. A disadvantageous socio-economic background negatively influences the decision to stay at school and socio-economic characteristics are a

significant predictor of Early School Leaving. Poor socio economic backgrounds also play a role in influencing pupils to take “weaker” directions in secondary education directions.

It is argued that some countries national education systems, reinforce the negative consequences of socio-economic background whereas countries such as the Scandinavian ones seem to compensate for these negative aspects.

The hypothesis that *Young people receiving no parental support or having to cope with problematic family circumstances are more likely to disengage early from school.* is supported by the literature review. Young people who face family conflict, lack of any meaningful family support, weak family ties and changes in family situation (such as separation) are more likely to leave school early.

The hypothesis that *Young people from foreign backgrounds are more likely to leave school early than nationals* is supported by a majority of the international studies. However there is evidence of the opposite tendency. The link between ethnicity and staying in school is influenced by factors such as not speaking the language, socio-economic background and cultural issues.

The Labour Market Performance of ESL

The hypothesis that *Early school leavers perform less well in the labour market than the working population having completed upper secondary education or higher* is confirmed in the majority of the countries studies. At a European level unemployment rates decline with increasing levels of qualifications. For a number of countries however, depending upon the age group considered, the hypothesis was not supported. For example in some Southern European countries there are fewer employment benefits attached to achieving higher qualification levels. Unemployment rates in some Southern Europe are higher for those with upper secondary level qualifications than for the lowest qualified leavers and little lower for tertiary level graduates.

Two groups of countries emerged. Firstly, those for which the employment rates for people who have only obtained lower secondary education or lower are below the overall employment rate for almost all age groups (Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Hungary, Norway Poland, Slovakia and UK). Secondly the other countries where employment rates for those with low qualifications are mostly close to or higher than the overall employment rate. In all the study countries, female ESL have lower employment rates than their male counterparts.

The EU employment rate of people with lower qualifications is lower than almost all the other countries studied (for example the USA, Australia and Canada). Moreover, the gap between the employment rates between people with upper secondary education and people with lower secondary education in the EU is more pronounced than in the USA or Japan.

The hypothesis that *Early school leavers have a higher chance of having precarious work conditions* is supported. In general ESL tend to have lower earnings. The countries having the highest disparity between the earnings of the lowest educated and the higher educated are: the Czech Republic, Italy, Portugal and to a lesser extent the UK and the USA.

A higher proportion of the oldest generation of ESL in 1995 had a permanent contract than the younger generation of ESL, but the opposite was found in 2004 (except for Denmark, Ireland, Italy and Austria where the percentage of ESL with a permanent job reduced). A slightly higher proportion of ESL compared to non school leavers were reported to be self employed especially in the Southern countries and some New Member States

The hypothesis that *Availability and easy access to 'second chance' education will positively influence the participation of early school leavers in education later in life* is partly confirmed for countries that offer some form of organised second chance education. Even more beneficial to ESL is the opportunity to gain specific certificates. For example, the GED certificate in the USA is seen as an important route for accessing college courses or university by previous ESL. In Spain the government has introduced important changes in second chance provision through vocational training which have had a significant impact on reducing the number of students without higher secondary level qualifications.

In the UK ESL are given a second chance to participate in further education through the 'Access to Higher Education (HE)' courses which are designed to help students with no or insufficient qualifications to have the opportunity to benefit from Higher Education; students are subsequently widely accepted onto HE courses

For many ESL the second chance schools provide basic skills training which may help young people to develop learning habits and motivate them for learning in the future; either in formal education or through work based learning.

Second chance schools need to be formally recognised so that qualifications will be accepted by further education establishments and employers.

The hypothesis that *Early school leavers are less likely to return to education and training in later life than those who have completed upper secondary education or more* is supported by analyses of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) data and the literature review. Students who complete upper secondary education are more likely to participate in Lifelong learning (LLL) than ESL. Studies as well as analyses based on the LFS data confirm this for all the study countries. In Australia and the USA only 10% of high school dropouts had participated in post secondary education and training. ESL may gain access to education and training through employment. A majority of those with at most lower secondary qualifications reported general interest and continuing vocational training as reasons for pursuing education.

Variations in concepts of early school leaving

"Early school leaving can be understood as young people leaving school before the legal school leaving age and/or leaving school with limited or no formal qualifications"

There is a range of definitions and concepts of Early School Leaving. Each of the following criteria is relevant:

- Failure to complete upper secondary education (or high school) and not attending further education or training.
- Failure to complete compulsory schooling (i.e. prolonged or complete non attendance).

- Failure to gain qualifications or school leaving certificates.
- Failure to participate in education or training by those of school leaving age
- Failure to gain qualifications required for participation in further education
- Failure to gain qualifications required for access to a wide range of labour market opportunities to sustain life chances

The measurement of (the rate of) ESL is sensitive to the economic, social and cultural values and contexts of a society, such as the length of compulsory education, types of qualifications awarded and labour market conditions. Variations of measurement also occur as a consequence of the specific purpose of data collection.

Weaknesses of the current EUROSTAT early school leaving indicator

The current EUROSTAT definition of early school leaving provides a basis for comparisons between EU countries. However, there are weaknesses of the definition, including: technical measurement issues; concerns over accuracy, representativeness and comparability and the relevance of the definition for policy purposes. Given these weaknesses it is recommended that a number of separate indicators are developed and used.

Proposals for new indicators and data collection

The underlying concept of Early School Leaving could be considered as the ‘failure’ of schools. Governments and to a lesser extent families invest in schools and the education of pupils for economic, social and cultural objectives. All EU countries provide compulsory education and in recent years the variations in the period of compulsory education have reduced between EU Member States. The costs of the ‘failure’ of schools are high both for the pupil that fails and for society more generally.

The five aspects of Early School Leaving when considering it as a ‘failure’ of schools concept are: truancy, those expelled or suspended, those failing to obtain ‘minimum qualifications’, school leavers failing to enter further training within a period of time, school leavers failing to enter ‘official labour market’ within a period of time. These proposed new indicators are elaborated in Section 10 of the report.

The application of indicators and statistics on Early School Leaving

It is recommended that the various definitions and aspects of Early School Leaving could be used as follows:

Measuring progress of the Lisbon Strategy

Schools’ performance is clearly critical to the Lisbon Strategy but labour market participation is probably the most appropriate relevant indicator. Indeed after a period of years where policies have been put in place to prolong participation in education and training there is now a potential need to increase labour market participation amongst school leavers. Labour market participation and unemployment by age group are relevant indicators.

Identifying factors that influence schools performance and failure

There is scope for comparisons of inputs (resources: human and costs, years of compulsory education) and outputs (each of the five aspects of early School Leaving identified above). Research to improve the understanding of factors influencing Early School Leaving would be most efficient through longitudinal cohort studies, similar to those carried out by the USA and Australia. There is however, not necessarily a benefit in such studies at the EU level. The role of the EU in this work should therefore be to facilitate interchange and learning and comparisons with other countries.

Identifying the effectiveness of interventions to reduce early school leaving

There are interesting interventions that could be examined. A variety of methods and techniques for the measurement of inputs, outputs and subsequent performance are available, such as the detailed tracking of beneficiaries of these interventions, which can help with the understanding the impact that they have.

Scope for further investigation into the early school leaving phenomenon*Assessing the disadvantage of ESL with regard to EU student and labour mobility*

It is appropriate that the Commission should focus its research effort on issues where Commission competence is strong. Mobility has the potential to increase the professional and personal competence of the labour force, has a positive impact on learning, including language skills, and contributes to understanding other cultures which is an asset in an increasingly global economy.

The intra EU mobility of those with relatively low qualifications is likely to be particularly low. Those identified as ESL (by whatever definition) characteristically have low or no vocational qualifications. It is likely therefore that early school leavers could be especially disadvantaged with respect to the opportunities to enter higher education or the labour market in countries other than their own. Initiatives at the EU level that could reduce this disadvantage might include bringing closer the systems for crediting the results of schooling. There would be merit in examining through research, both the scale of this potential problem and the differences in practice between Member States.

Informing peer reviews of policies with regard anti-ESL measures

There would be mutual benefit from holding further peer reviews of anti-ESF measures that have led to reductions in the number of ESL. The scope for exchange of good practices on measures and practices to combat Early School Leaving within the Open Method of Coordination, should be explored.

Undertaking more in-depth comparative studies

More specific comparative studies could investigate those factors identified in the study which have not been covered by the analysis. In particular, the influence of the socio-economic background of ESL including the economic standing of the family, parental background, and ethnicity could help to further inform the dynamics of Early School Leaving and how to better tackle it. Concerning the performance of ESL in the labour market, there is scope for supplementing the investigation of employment participation rates with studies of income levels achieved.

Investigation of this type could utilise the Statistics on Income and Living Conditions Survey (EU-SILC) which began in 2004. The survey provides relevant socio economic data for the study of ESL. In addition, the EU-SILC could be used as a vehicle to specify more particular data collection which would help address gaps in the data availability for the study of ESL. This could be done through the additional collection of education related data through the core survey, or through the addition of a special module carried out longitudinally.

Identifying the costs involved in “school failure”

There is scope for investigating the costs of Early School Leaving to the individual and society in order to inform debates over the priority that should be given to anti-early school leaving measures. The indicators for measuring the “school failure” aspects of Early School Leaving could serve as a starting point.

Examining the effects of transition within national school systems

Further research on the effects of different transition models on Early School Leaving would be of interest. Variations include: the presence of a single structure (comprising primary and lower secondary education); marked differences between compulsory and post-compulsory programmes; and, the age at which compulsory education ends. The influence of these factors on Early School Leaving could be explored.

Examining the effects of the end-of-secondary school examination

There is a variety of practice in how national education systems award certificates at the end of upper secondary education. Certificates may be awarded solely on the basis of continuous assessment during the final years, through external examination (such as for example the French baccalauréat) or through a combination of internal final year exams and an assessment of the results achieved during the final year. In the USA and Japan (JFSAT), the end-of-secondary school examinations are external. Questions that might be investigated include: How can satisfactory completion of upper secondary education be certified whilst not discouraging too many candidates? How best to use examination results to monitor school system performance? How best to raise the standards of performance while increasing the number of successful candidates?

Assessing the implications of demographic changes for education expenditure

The number of school-age children is declining. Decreasing student numbers might be expected to free resources which could be used for investment in other areas of education. In practice, there may be an increase in expenditure per student, at least in the short and medium term. If so, an important issue for education policy-makers is how to ensure that increased spending per student leads to quality improvements. Also in systems where lower- and upper-secondary education are integrated, the fall in the number of lower-secondary pupils may encourage an increase upper-secondary provision. The key factor for future investment in education is quality. Policies that lead to quality improvements could have potentially large economic benefits.

3 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

3.1 Introduction

During the study an analytical framework was developed for the purpose of responding to the key study questions.

The analytical framework is made up of four key study areas which relate to the following questions:

1. Which European Education and Training systems are achieving possible success in reducing the number of early school leavers?
2. What are the socio-economic characteristics of young people at risk?
3. How do early school leavers perform on the labour market?
4. Is there scope for early school leavers to return to education and training in later life?

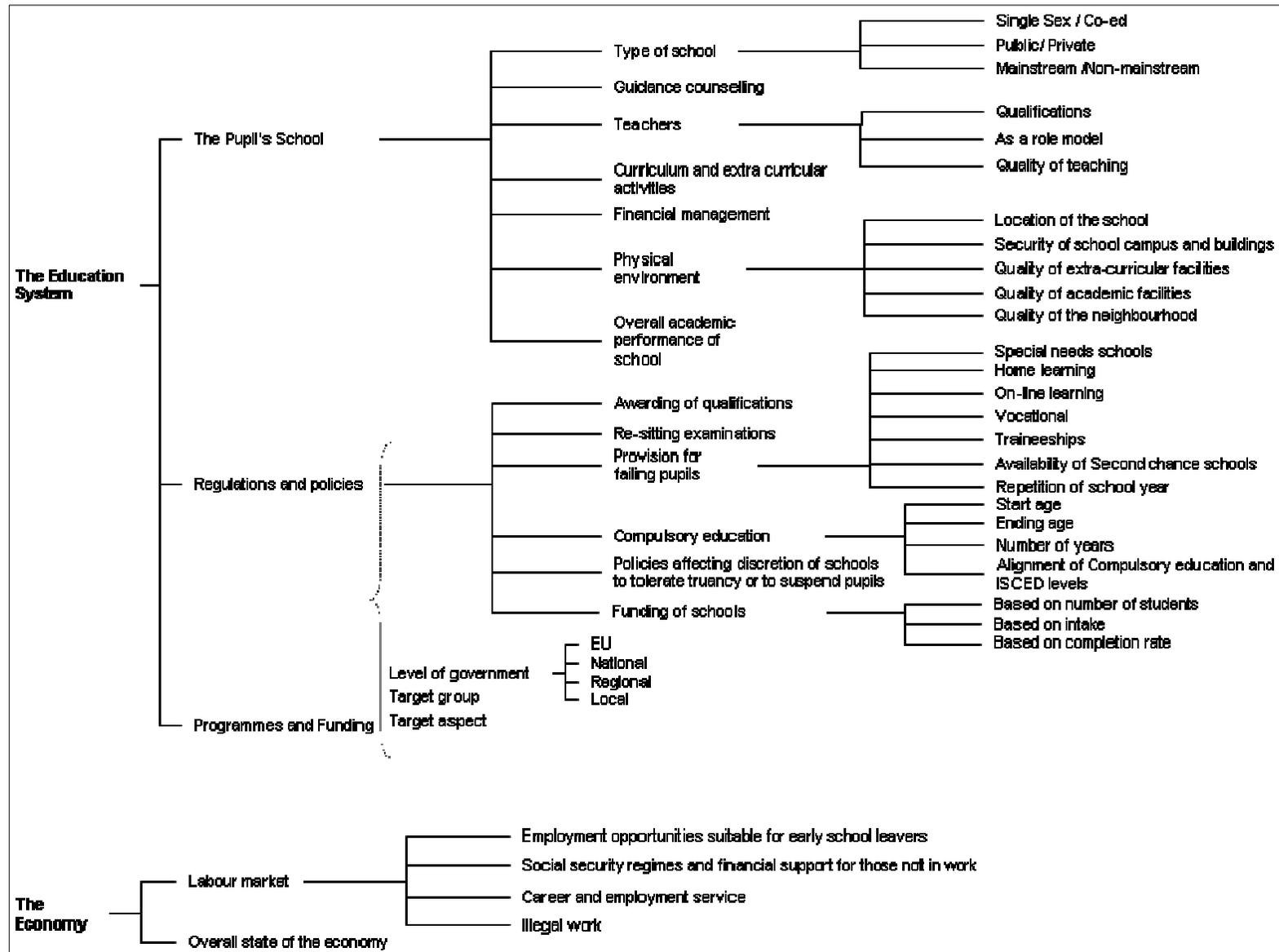
3.2 Key Study Areas

The main aim of this study is to provide a robust understanding of the issues around early school leaving on which decisions about policy initiatives and programmes to reduce their number can be based. Additionally, it aims to provide a deeper insight into the socio-economic profile of early school leavers, their labour market performance and their possible return to education and training in later life. Making informed policy decisions and designing targeted initiatives and measures to address early school leaving requires an understanding and recognition of all the factors that could affect and influence the key study questions at hand.

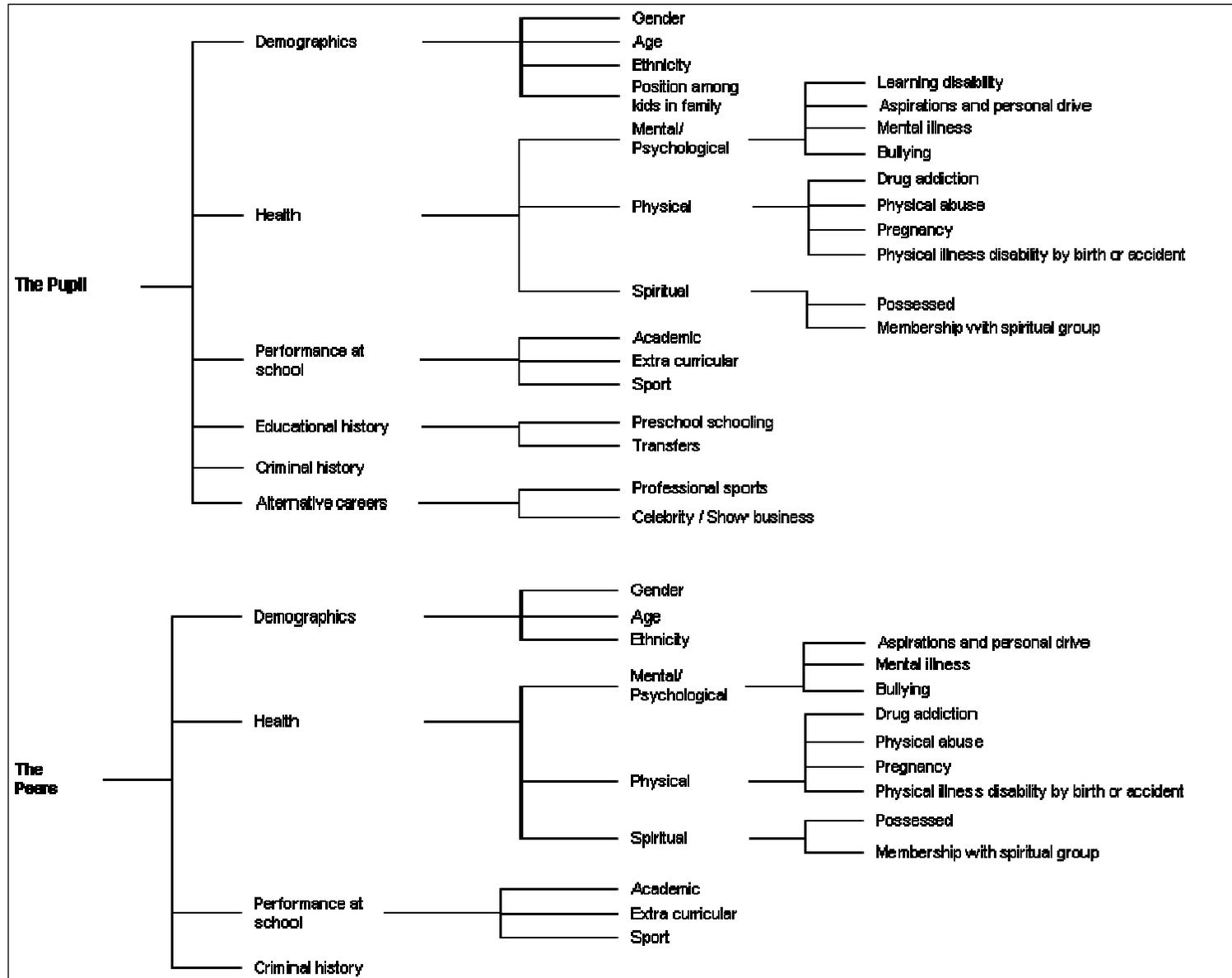
The *All Factors Framework* (broken down in charts 3.2a to 3.2e) presented below aims to breakdown the interrelated and interconnected issues related to early school leaving, according to the four key study areas. The purpose of the framework is to exhaustively lay out all those factors which can influence early school leaving. This will ensure that as far as possible, these factors are considered in the analyses covered by this study, and where this is not possible, recommendations are made about future methodological tools and approaches which could do so in order to have a better and more complete understanding of the phenomenon of early school leaving.

Each chart begins at the highest, most general level pertaining to the key study area. This is then split down into increasing level of detail (as indicated by the lines) in order to assist in the analysis as more specific issues can be identified.

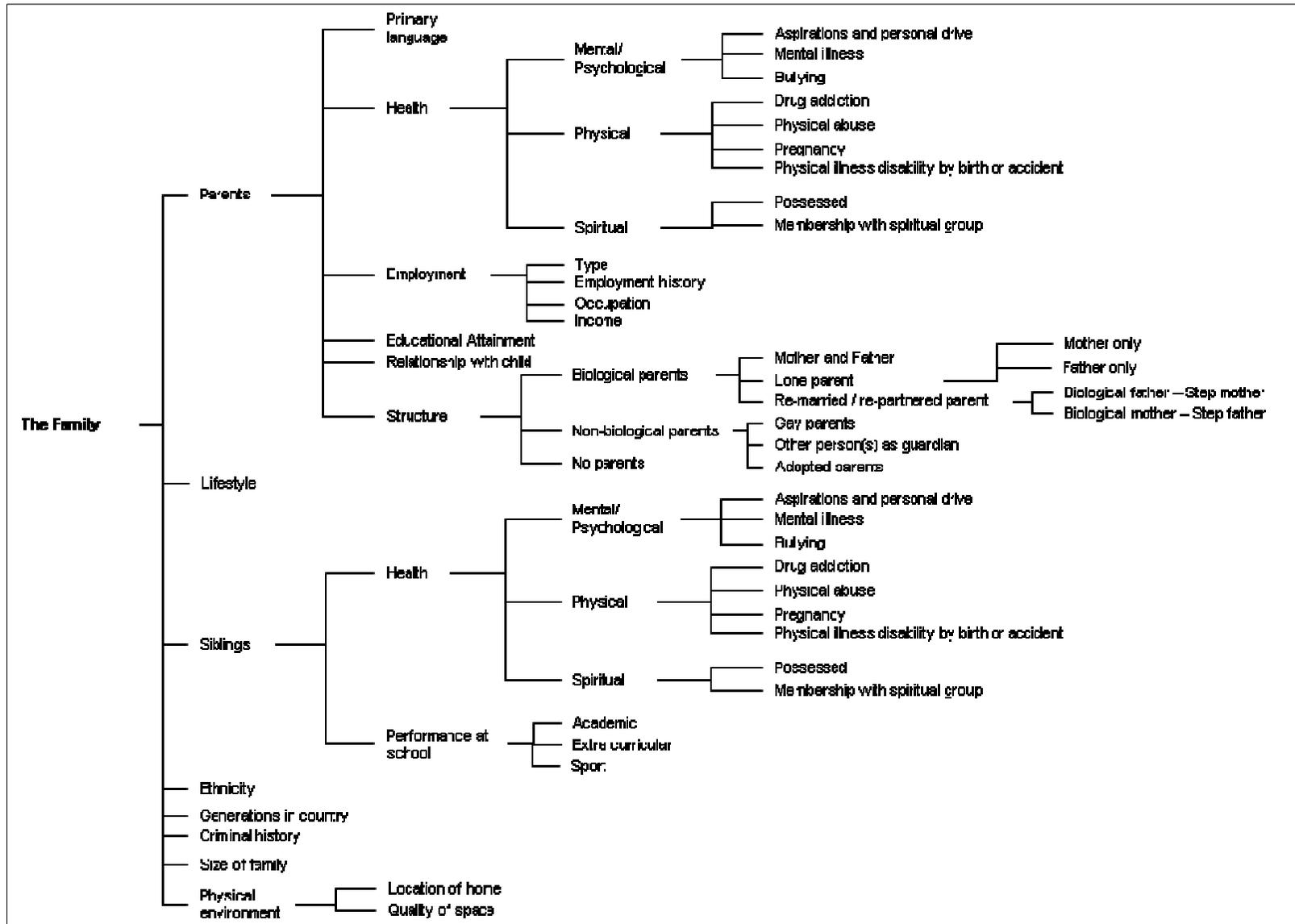
3.2.1 Chart 3.2a: Key Study Area 1: Wider External Factors-All Factors Framework



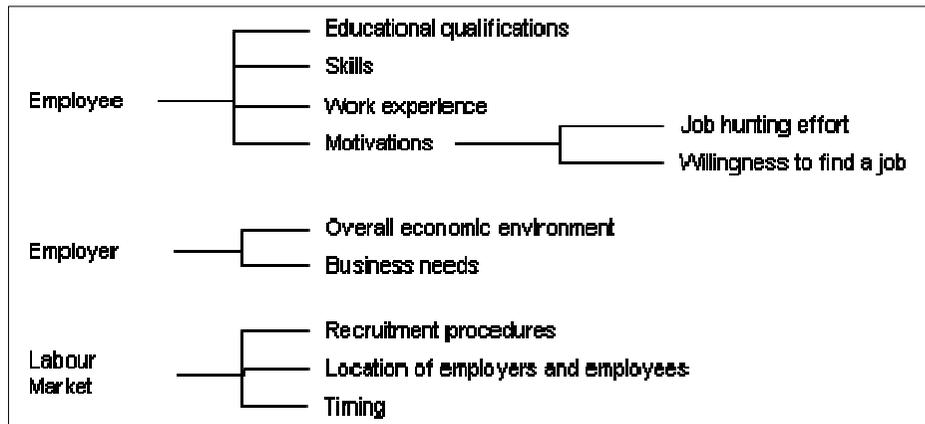
3.2.2 Chart 3.2b: Key Study Area 2: Socioeconomic Factors (1)-All Factors Framework



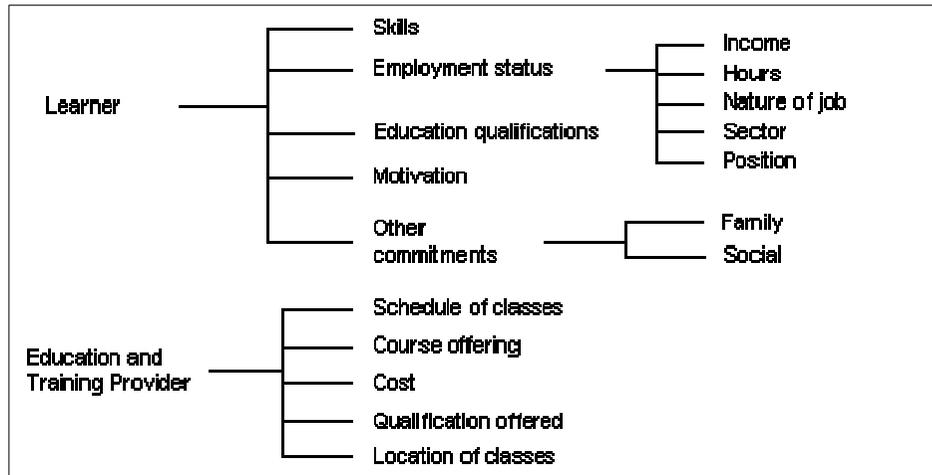
3.2.3 Chart 3.2c: Key Study Area 2: Socioeconomic Factors (2)-All Factors Framework



3.2.4 **Chart 3.2d: Key Study Area 3: Labour Market Performance-All Factors Framework**



3.2.5 **Chart 3.2e: Key Study Area 4: Participation in Education and Training-All Factors Framework**



3.3 Hypotheses and planned analyses

A number of hypotheses were formulated under each key study area, based on the issues that have been identified in the All Factors Framework. Table 3.3 presents these hypotheses. One consideration in deciding on the hypotheses was the availability of both quantitative and qualitative data to support the necessary analysis. Therefore, there are many factors identified in the All Factors Framework which do not feature in the list of hypotheses investigated during this study.

The types of analysis carried out included:

- Multivariate analysis – statistical approach to investigating how multiple independent variables affect the value of the dependent variable
- Bivariate analysis – statistical approach to investigating how two variables relate to each other
- Trend analysis – drawing observations on how characteristics change over time
- Descriptive statistical analysis – looking at selected populations, looking at the distribution of that population according to various characteristics
- Comparator group analysis – comparing characteristic of countries with similar Early School Leaver (ESL) rates, trends and/or contextual characteristics
- Contextual information literature review – secondary research into studies and reports

The mapping of analysis by Key Study Area described above has been amended from the mapping of analysis envisaged earlier in the study. Modifications were made based on the consideration of the nature and quality of each of the datasets and sources, and their limitations. In particular, the multivariate analysis that was planned for the rate of participation in education and training in later life (KSA 4) has not been carried out. This is because, from a statistical point of view, the type of data available for a number of the variables considered for the regression was inappropriate. A multivariate analysis requires variables which are numerical (interval scale). However, some variables proposed for this particular multivariate analysis were ranked (ordinal) variables (i.e. ISCED level, full time-part time distinction, and permanency of employment). Therefore, in this particular case, bivariate and descriptive analysis between the rate of participation in education and training and the level of ISCED has been carried out.

Moreover, it was decided not to include the multivariate analysis on the rate of early school leaving as a dependent variable and several aspects of national education systems as independent variables (KSA1). This exercise showed that there was an issue of multi-collinearity within this model meaning that quite a number of the independent variables included showed interaction between themselves. Moreover, the model had a variance of .01, meaning that all the independent variables together only explained 1% of the rate of early school leavers which is extremely low. Therefore, it was decided to perform bivariate analyses on all of these variables with the rate of early school leavers as a dependent variable which also shows potential significant correlations whilst avoiding interaction with other variables. Throughout the following sections, all the bivariate analyses performed are mentioned.

Table 3.3: Hypotheses and analyses per Key Study Area

Hypotheses	Multivariate Analysis	Bivariate Analysis	Trend Analysis	Descriptive Statistics	Comparator Group Analysis	Contextual Information Literature Review
Key Study Area 1						
Analysis to describe the overall state of early school leaving, its trend			Trend in ESL rate by country (EUROSTAT, OECD)		By groups of countries with similar ESL trends; By grouping of the latest ESL rates	
1. An increase in the length of compulsory education will decrease the number of early school leavers	Dependent variable: early school leaver rate Relevant independent variables: compulsory age; pupil-teacher ratio; average class size; public expenditure on education (EU LFS)	Compulsory education ending age vs. ESL rate (EUROSTAT, OECD)				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Information gathered from the literature review is be used to support the findings resulting from the quantitative analyses ▪ Mapping of characteristics of education and training systems ▪ Review of evaluations that have been previously carried out of education and training systems
2. High pupil- teacher ratio and large class size will increase the occurrence of early school leaving.		Pupil-teacher ratio vs. ESL rate; Class size vs. ESL rate (EUROSTAT)				
3. Countries having a high total expenditure on education per student have a lower rate in early school leaving		Public Expenditure vs. ESL rate (EUROSTAT, OECD)				
4. Students attending comprehensive compulsory education systems are less likely to leave school early than students attending more differentiated (parallel) compulsory education systems		Level of differentiation of compulsory education systems vs. ESL rate				
5. Offering a wider variety of post-compulsory educational programmes reduce the number of early school leavers.						
6. The repetition of classes increases the changes of a young person leaving school early						

Hypotheses	Multivariate Analysis	Bivariate Analysis	Trend Analysis	Descriptive Statistics	Comparator Group Analysis	Contextual Information Literature Review
7. The availability of support and guidance mechanisms available in school and specifically targeted at young people at risk will decrease the rate of early school leaving.						
8. A high level of employment opportunities for low-educated people increases the rate of early school leaving.		Employment rate vs. Rate of early school leaving (EUROSTAT)				
Key Study Area 2						
Comparison of ESL vs. Non-ESL population				By age; by ISCED level (EU LFS)		
9. Young people with a criminal history or deviant behaviour are more likely to leave school early.						
10. Young people affected by a physical or mental/psychological illness are more likely to be absent from school and in the longer run leave the school system early.						
11. Teenage pregnancy increases the risk for girls to leave school early.						
12. Previous academic failure and lack of commitment to school constitute risk factors for early school leaving.						
13. Young people being brought up in a less advantageous socioeconomic environment area more likely to leave school early.						
14. Young people receiving no parental support or having to cope with problematic family circumstances are more likely to disengage early from school.						
15. Young people from foreign background are more likely to leave school early than nationals						

Hypotheses	Multivariate Analysis	Bivariate Analysis	Trend Analysis	Descriptive Statistics	Comparator Group Analysis	Contextual Information Literature Review
Key Study Area 3						
16. Early school leavers perform less well in the labour market than the working population having completed upper secondary education or higher.		Employment Status vs. ESL Rate (EU LFS)		Comparison of employment rate by country by educational attainment by age group (EUROSTAT); Comparison of employment rate by country by education attainment (OECD) Comparison of employment rate of ESL population by gender (EU LFS)	By groups of countries with similar patterns of employment rates by educational attainment by age group	
17. Early school leavers have a higher chance of having precarious work conditions.			Comparison of employment characteristics between 1995 and 2004 (EU LFS)	Description of employment characteristics of ESL vs. non-ESL population (full time /part time; professional status; permanency; sector; occupation; night work; Sunday work) (EU LFS) Relative income levels by ISCED level (OECD)		

Hypotheses	Multivariate Analysis	Bivariate Analysis	Trend Analysis	Descriptive Statistics	Comparator Group Analysis	Contextual Information Literature Review
Key Study Area 4						
18. Availability and easy access to 'second chance' education will positively influence the participation of early school leavers in education later in life.				Population having attained upper secondary qualification after expected age. Overview of second chance school provision and policy in each country		
19. Early school leavers are less likely to return to education and training in later life than those who have completed upper secondary education or more.		Participation in education and training vs. ISCED level (EU LFS)		Participation in education and training by ISCED level (EU LFS) Description of characteristics of training (ie. Level, type) (EU LFS)		

4 OVERVIEW OF TRENDS OF THE RATE OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS IN EACH COUNTRY STUDIED

4.1 Introduction

This section of the report presents the findings with regard to the first key study question:

“Are European Education and Training systems achieving success in bringing the number of early school leavers down?”

The following sub sections present the rate of ESL and trends in the EU25, the four Candidate Countries, Norway and Iceland as well as the USA, Canada and Australia.

Country specific explanations of these trends are given where possible in order to identify which education and training systems are successful and which factors might contribute to a low rate of Early School Leaving. The analyses in the following sections are structured around the hypotheses formulated in the analytical framework.

4.2 Overview of the rates of Early School Leaving

The rate of early school leaving at national level can be compared through the use of EUROSTAT and OECD early school leavers indicators. Trends for the EU Member States are also available through EUROSTAT. However, for the comparator countries trends could only be identified for the USA and Canada, for the other countries data were not available.

4.2.1 Rate of Early School Leaving based on the EUROSTAT definition

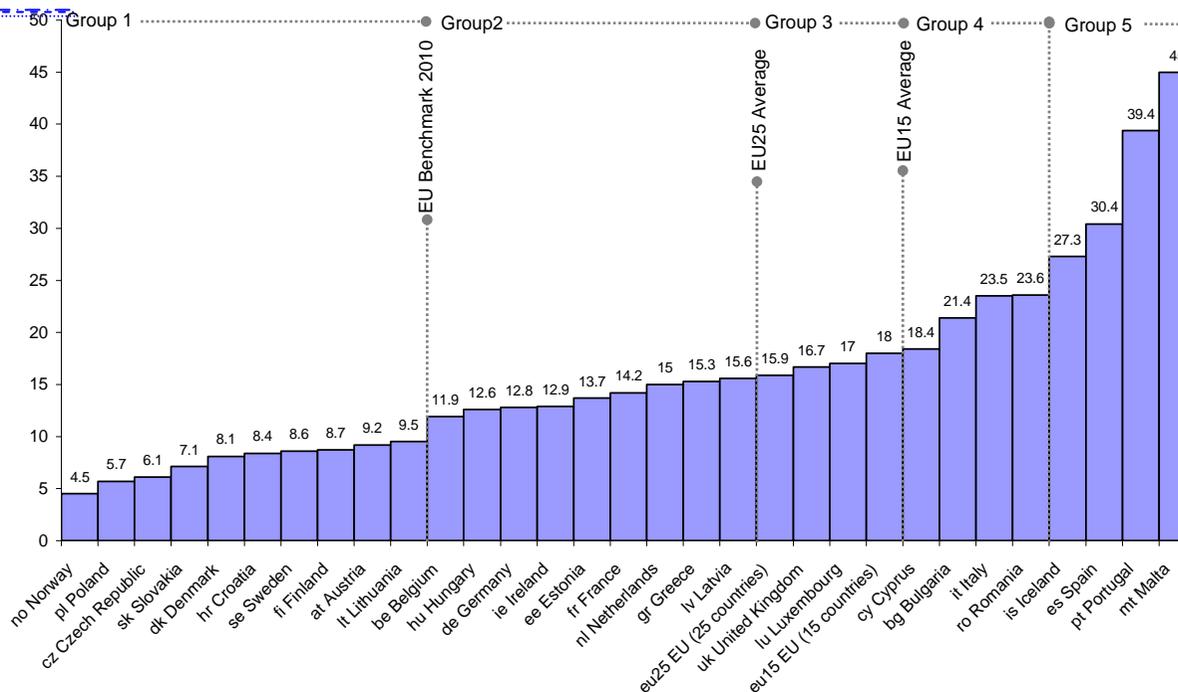
The EUROSTAT indicator for Early School Leaving is defined by three conditions informed by the results of the EU LFS:

- Those aged between 18 and 24 years,
- With at most ISCED Level 2 (below upper secondary qualification),
- And not in education or training (in the last 4 weeks before responding to the LFS)³

Chart 4.2a presents the rate of ESL per country (EU 24, 3 Candidate countries, Iceland and Norway) in relation to the EU2010 benchmark, and the EU15 and EU25 averages

³ It was agreed at the meeting of the Expert Group on Education in the EU LFS (Luxembourg, 28 June 2004) to restrict the definition of structural indicator on ESL to cover those who left the “regular education system” as opposed to those who do not follow any course.

Early School Leavers: Share of the population aged 18-24 with only lower secondary education or less and not in education or training during the last four weeks (2004)
 (Note: ESL Rate for NL, LU, HR, and IS is from 2003)



Source: EUROSTAT

Note: Data for Slovenia and Turkey have been marked as unreliable and therefore have been omitted from the graph; The ESL rate for NL, LU, HR and IS are not available for 2004; data presented in this chart are from 2003.

Key :

EU25 Average

EU15 Average

EU Benchmark 2010

Group	ESL Rate	Countries
1	Countries in this group are currently already achieving the EU Benchmark 2010 with an early school leaving rate of less than 10%.	Norway, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Denmark, Croatia, Sweden, Finland, Austria, Lithuania
2	Countries in this group have an early school leaving rate which is higher than the EU Benchmark 2010 but less than the current EU25 average of 15.9%	Belgium, Hungary, Germany, Ireland, Estonia, France, Netherlands, Greece, Latvia
3	Countries in this group have an early school leaving rate which is higher than the EU25 Average but less than the current EU15 Average of 18%.	United Kingdom, Luxembourg
4	Countries in this group have an early school leaving rate which is higher than the EU15 Average but less than 25%	Bulgaria; Romania; Italy; Cyprus
5	Countries in this group have rates of early school leaving greater than 25%	Malta; Portugal; Spain; Iceland

4.2.2 Rate of Early School Leaving based on the OECD definition

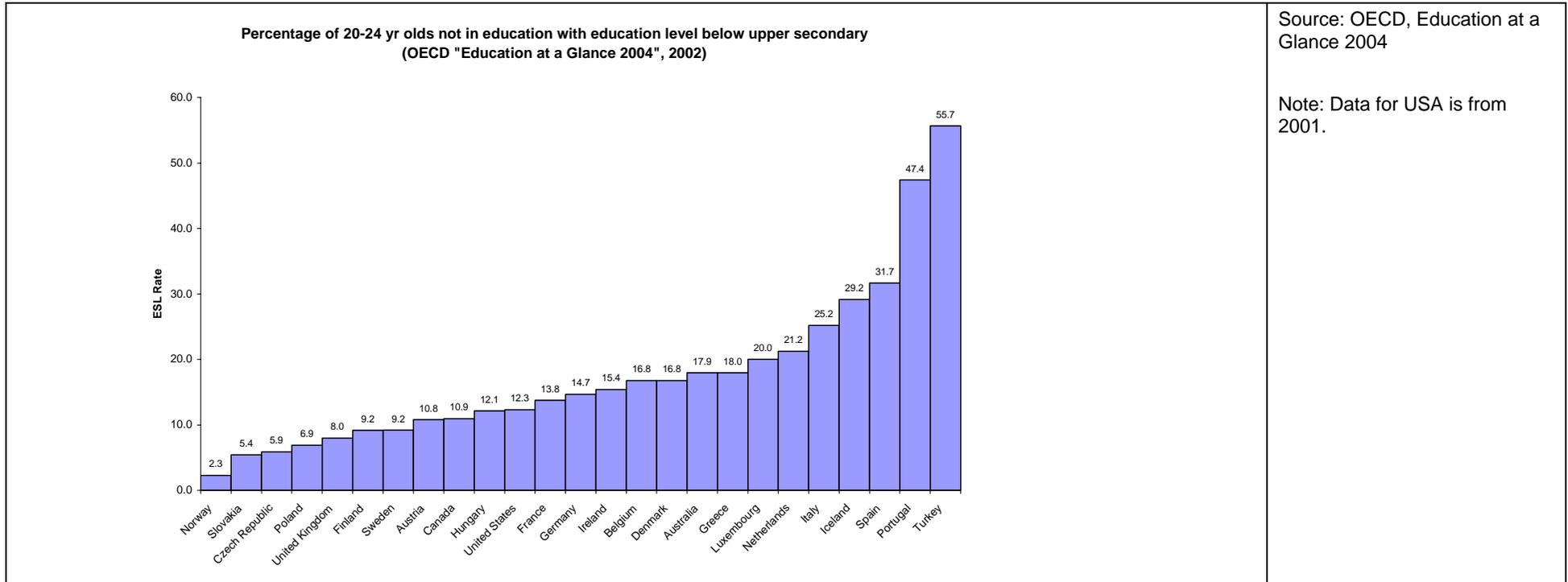
The OECD definition for Early School Leaving applies the following conditions to the results of the EU LFS:

- Aged between 20-24 years
- Not currently in education
- With education level below upper secondary

The key difference between the EUROSTAT and the OECD Early School Leaving indicator is the age group.

Chart 4.2b presents comparison of early school leaving rates based on the OECD definition. Data are only available for OECD member countries. However, the chart provides a comparison between selected EU Member States and the comparator countries (USA, Australia and Canada). Overall, there is a fairly equal distribution of Early School Leaving rates across the countries presented, except that the rates for Portugal and Turkey are significantly higher than for the other countries. USA and Canada have rates which are below average for the countries considered, while Australia performs less well with a rate closer to 20%.

Chart 4.2b: Early school leavers' rates based on the OECD definition



4.3 Overview of trends of Early School Leaving

4.3.1 *Trends in Early School Leaving based on the EUROSTAT Definition*⁴

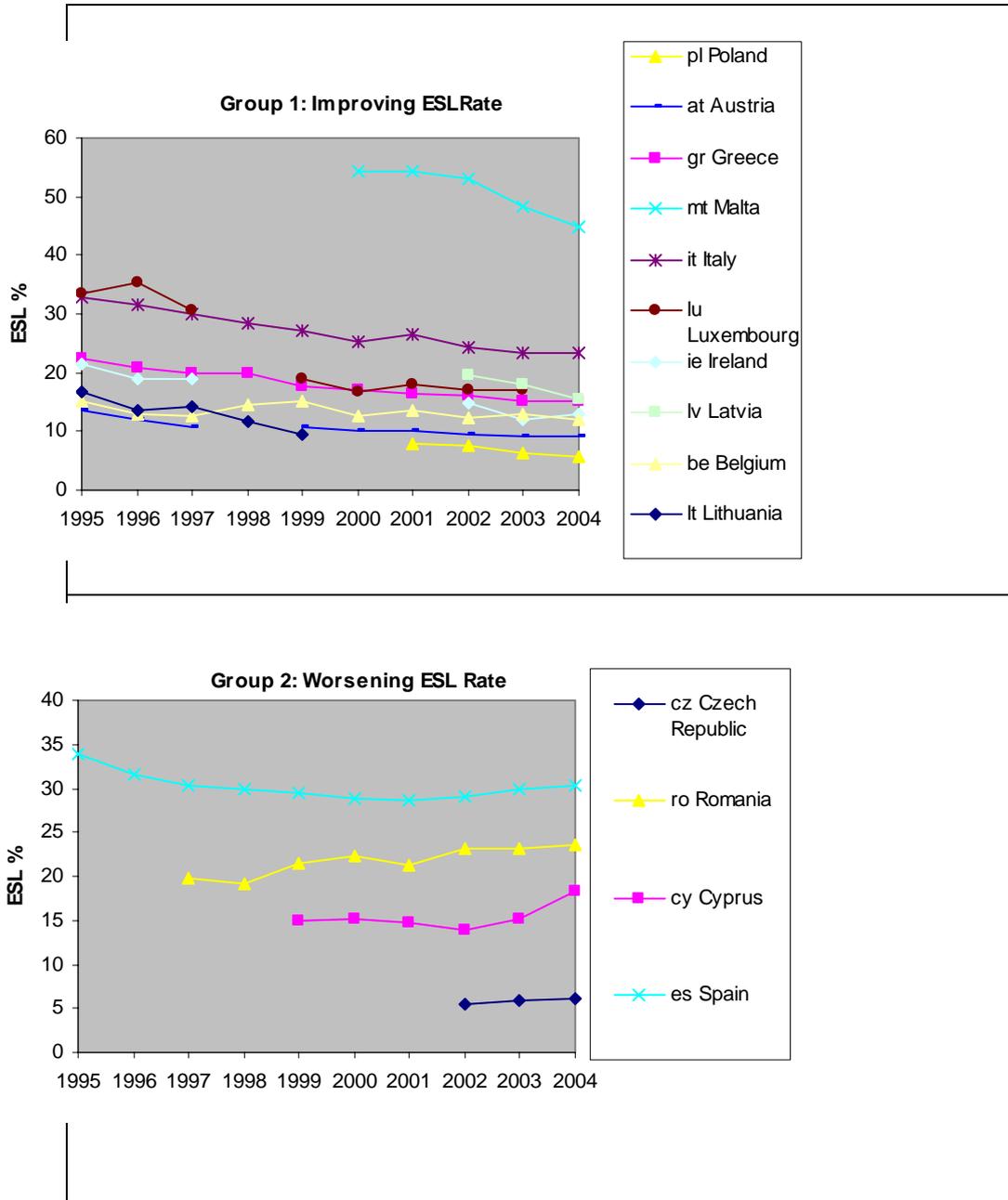
The following charts present the trends in the rate of early school leaving. The countries studied have been grouped according to:

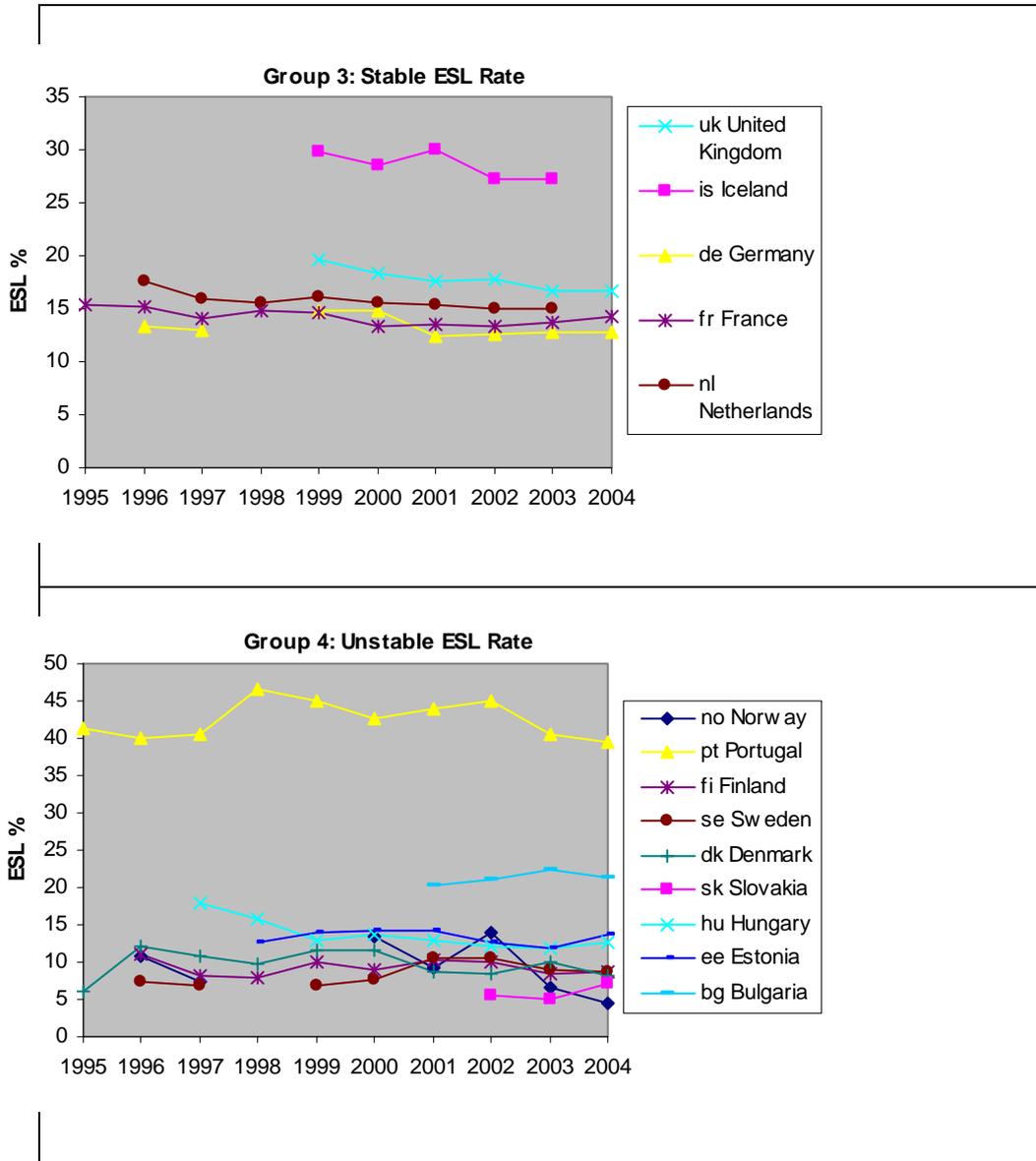
- a decrease in the rate of early school leaving in the last years
- an increase in the rate of early school leaving in the last years
- a stable rate of early school leaving over the last years
- an unstable rate of early school leaving over the last years⁵

⁴ Further explanation of the different definitions and measurements used is provided in Section 9.

⁵ The unstable rate for some countries might be due to small sample sizes of ESL within the LFS.

Chart 4.3a: Trends in ESL rate in the EU25 according to the Eurostat definition

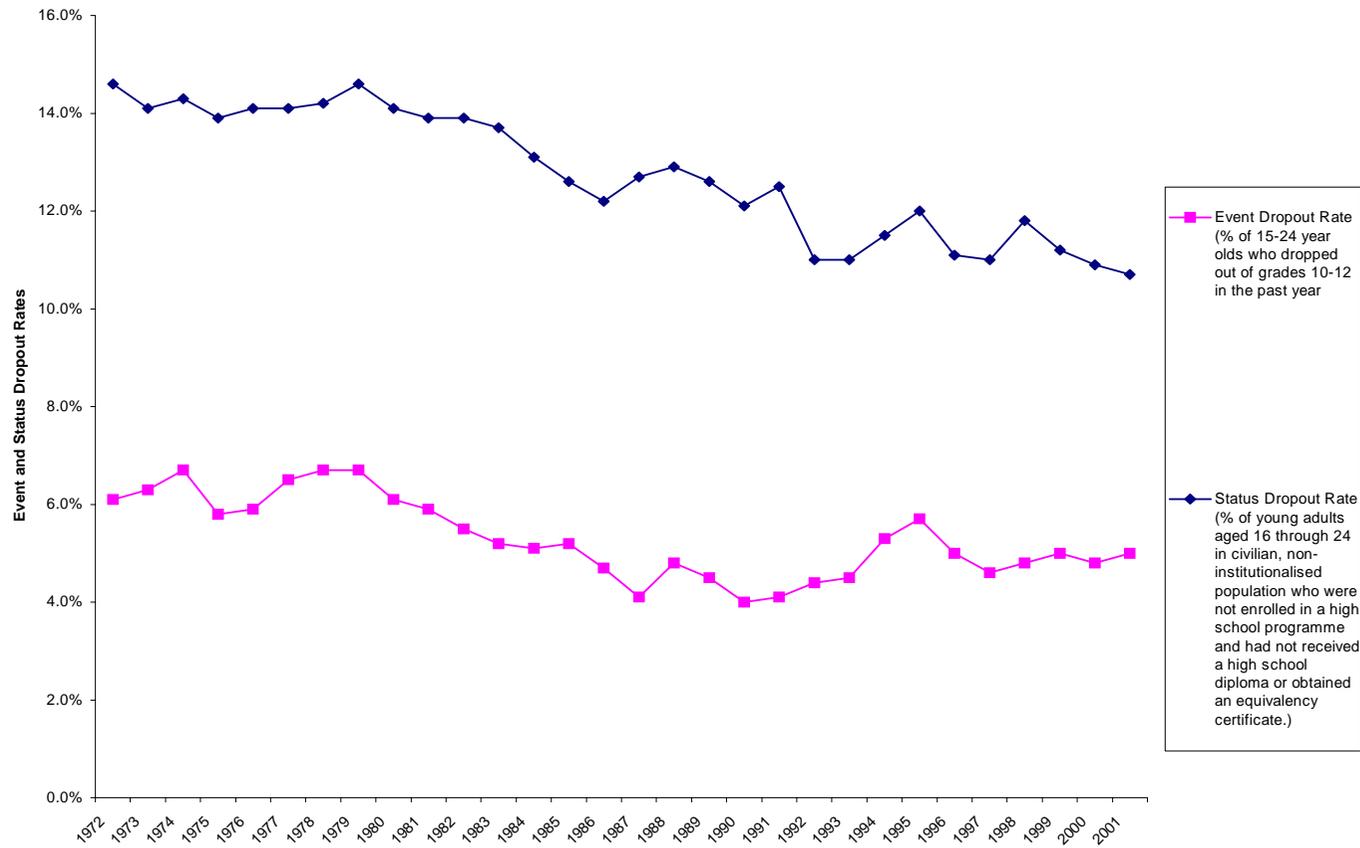




4.3.2 Trend in Early School Leaving in the USA based on Status Dropout Rate and Event Dropout Rate

The status drop out rate is a cumulative rate that estimates the proportion of young adults who are dropouts, regardless of when they dropped out. Conceptually, this is similar to the EUROSTAT and OECD indicators previously presented. More specifically, it is the proportion of 16-24 year olds who, as of October of that year, had not completed high school and were not currently enrolled. Based on this definition, the ESL rate in the USA has been on declining over the last thirty years. The event drop out rate is an estimate of the percentage of students who dropped out of school between the beginning of one school year and the beginning of the next. More specifically, it is the percentage of youth aged 15-24 who dropped out of grades 10-12.

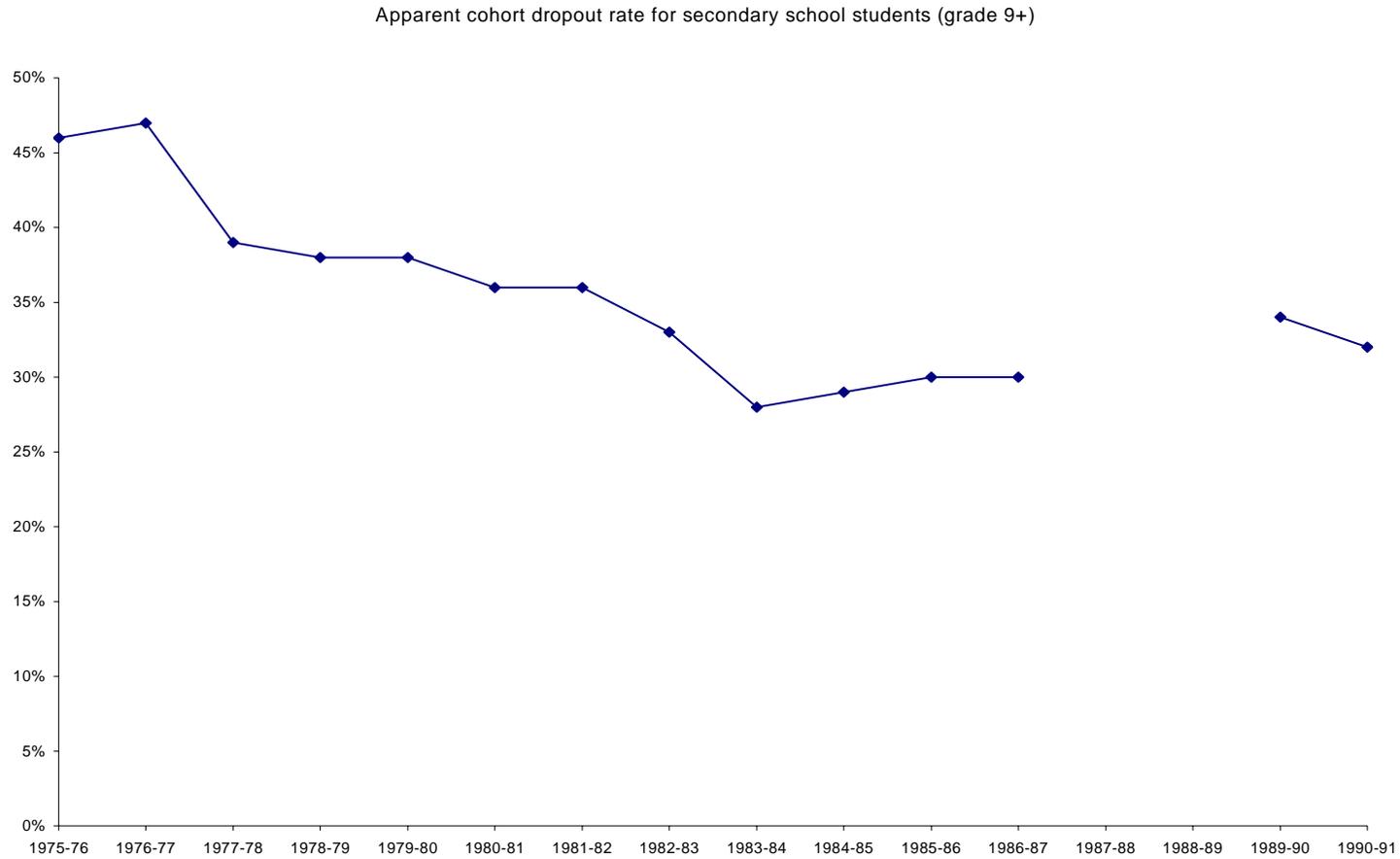
Chart 4.3b: Trend in ESL rate in the USA according to the status dropout rate and the event dropout rate



4.3.3 Trend in Early School Leaving in Canada based on the Cohort Apparent Dropout Rate

The complement of the estimated cohort graduation rate (a comparison of the number of students who enter Grade 9 in a particular year with the number of high school graduates three or four years later) is the apparent dropout rate. This is a cohort estimate since individual records are not traced or compared over time.

Chart 4.3c: Trend in ESL rate in Canada based on the Cohort Apparent Dropout Rate



5 THE INFLUENCE OF WIDER EXTERNAL FACTORS ON EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

5.1 Introduction

The following Section considers:

Firstly, the influence of external factors such as policy aspects of national education systems (an overview of the structure of secondary education per country is presented in Annex E) including: the length of compulsory education, pupil-teacher ratio, class size, comprehensive versus differentiated compulsory education, post-compulsory educational programmes, repetition of class, public (and private expenditure) on education and the quality and efficiency of the spending. These education policy aspects are discussed with regard to their potential influence on Early School Leaving based on a literature review and the analyses performed in this study.

Secondly, a literature review of existing policy measures and initiatives targeted at bringing the number of early school leavers down.

Thirdly, the potential influence of labour market conditions is in terms of the push-pull effects these might have on Early School Leaving.

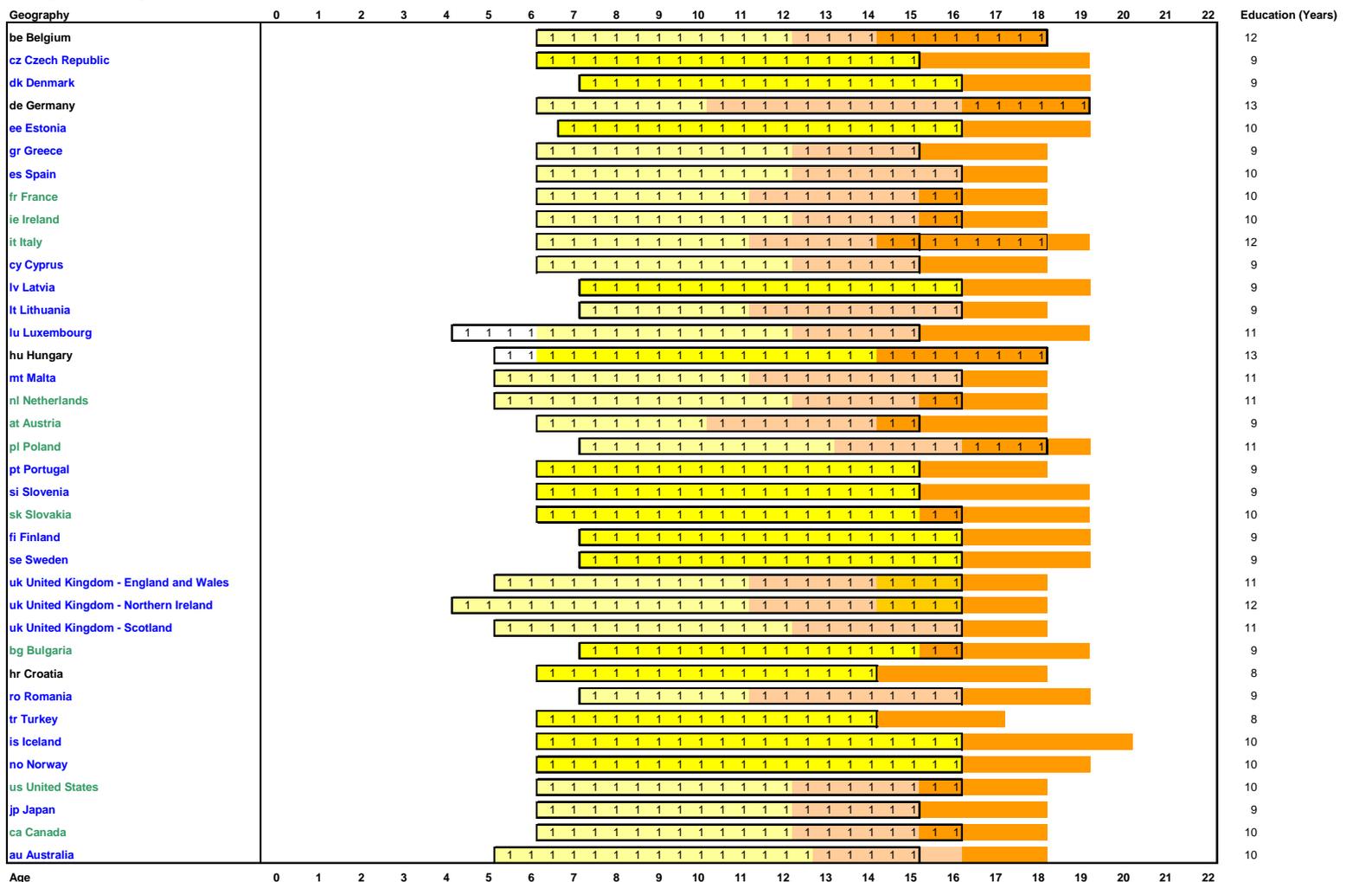
5.2 Influence of policy aspects of national education systems

5.2.1 Compulsory age

Hypothesis 1 “An increase in the length of compulsory education will decrease the number of early school leavers”

Chart 5.2a Length of compulsory education

Mapping of Years and Age of National Compulsory Education and Achievement of ISCED Levels

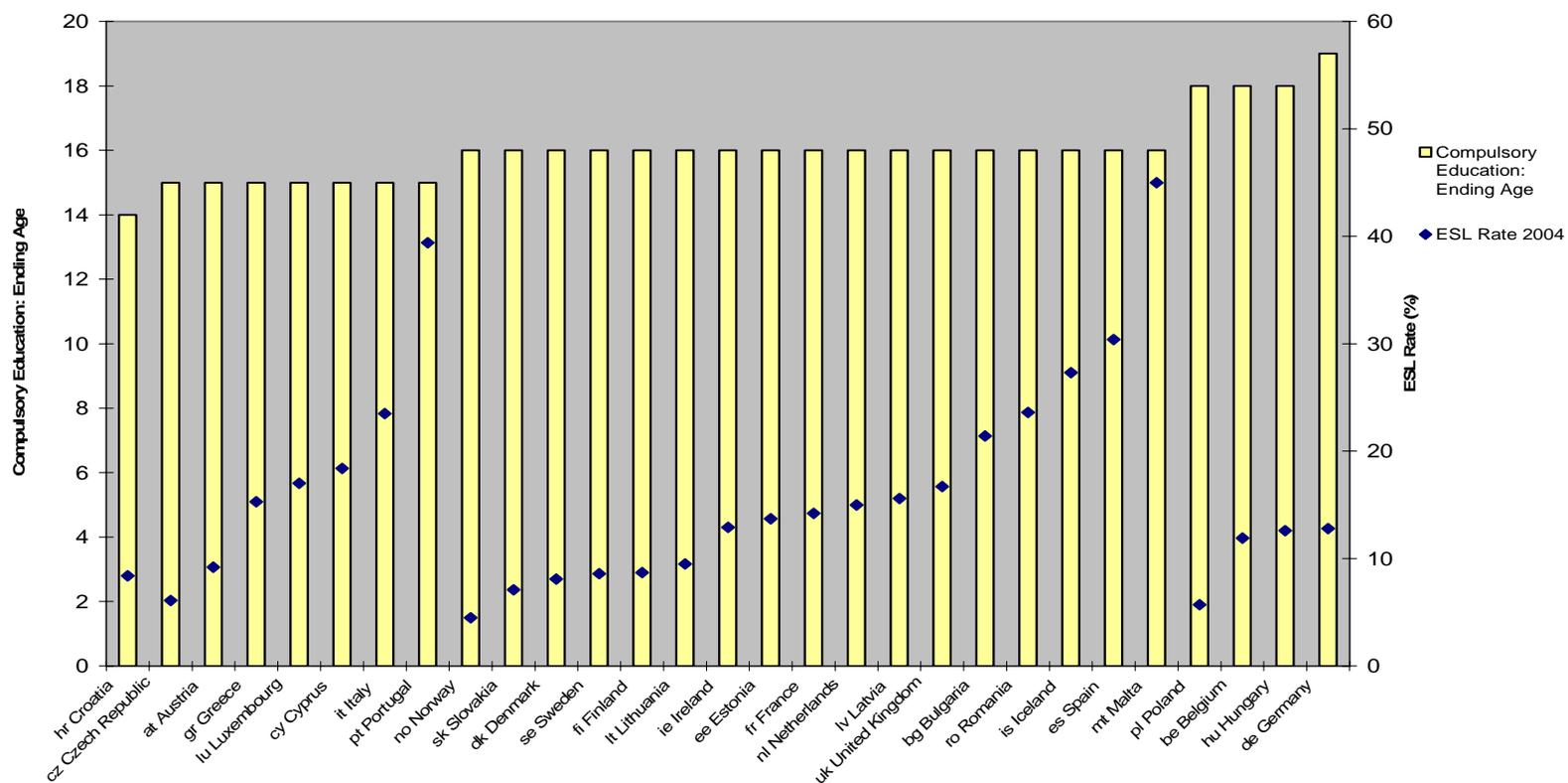


Sources: Eurydice National Summary Sheets; Key Eurydice Key Data on Education in Europe 2002; OECD Manual for ISCED97 Implementation in OCED Countries; UNESCO Statistics on Compulsory Education

- = compulsory education
- = new compulsory education
- = ISCED1 Primary
- = ISCED2 Lower Secondary
- = ISCED3 Upper Secondary
- Geography = Geographies where the compulsory school age is earlier than the typical age for starting upper secondary education
- Geography = Geographies where upper secondary education is started within compulsory education but is completed after the end of compulsory education

Chart 5.2b presents the compulsory education finishing age and the rate of Early School Leaving using the EUROSTAT indicator, for each country. The countries with the highest compulsory education finishing age (18-19 years old) have an ESL rate of around 10%. However, for the other countries, there is no strong link between compulsory education and the ESL rate. There is a wide range of ESL rates for education systems with compulsory education ending ages between 14 and 16 years.

Compulsory Education Finishing Age and ESL Rate (2004)
 (Note: ESL Rate for NL, LU, HR, and IS is from 2003)



When looking at the age when compulsory education ends, only in Belgium, Germany, Hungary and Poland are students obliged to attend secondary education until the age of 18 or 19 in the case of Germany, which is also the age upon which a qualification of upper secondary education can be obtained. However, these countries have forms of part-time education (for example class-room education combined with apprenticeships) or “out-of-school” options for the last years of secondary education, meaning that full-time compulsory education also ends around 15-16 years old. Italy has increased the compulsory age till 18 years old from March 2005 onwards. All other countries have the compulsory age until around 16 years old, when in most cases the split between lower and upper secondary education takes place or instead the completion of education within the single structure (primary education and the first years of secondary education take place in one single structure) occurs. For many countries including Belgium, France, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Slovakia, the UK and Bulgaria, the transition from lower to upper secondary education occurs one to two years before the end of full time compulsory education. In countries where the single structure is the only form of structure (Denmark, Estonia, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Norway) the end of the single structure education coincides with the end of compulsory education.

When comparing the regulations on compulsory age with the rates of ESL, Belgium, Germany and Hungary⁶ are not amongst the best performing countries, meaning that some other countries, not having the obligation to stay until the end of upper secondary education, perform better except for Poland which belongs to the best performing countries. Since there are only four countries that have 18 or 19 as a compulsory age, it is difficult to make conclusions on the influence of length of compulsory education on early school leaving based on data covering only one specific year. Therefore a bivariate correlation analysis was been conducted including the rate of early school leavers from 1998 till 2004 as well as the specific compulsory age for each country. The analysis showed that over all countries and all years, compulsory age has a statistically significant effect on early school leaving, i.e. the higher the compulsory age, the lower the rate of ESL⁷. It must be stated though that the correlation was quite weak ($r=.156$) and that a wide variety of factors, together with compulsory age might have an influence on early school leaving. Therefore this specific policy aspect can not be taking into consideration in isolation.

As explained in the Polish country report of CEDEFOP it could have had an effect on the rate of early school leavers in Poland, which extended the length of basic education by one year in 1998-1999 and for the remaining two years there is an obligation to attend some type of upper secondary school or “out-of-school” types of education⁸. It is difficult to confirm this thesis because no data are available for Poland before 2001⁹. The rate of early school leaving in Italy has been generally high over the

⁶ Italy is not taking into account here since the new compulsory age has only very recently been introduced and therefore no link can be made yet to the actual rate on early school leavers.

⁷ The bivariate analysis was significant at .00 level and the Pearson correlation was .156.

⁸ Refer – Net European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), Vera Czesana, *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems Country Report: Poland*.

⁹ It is impossible to confirm the significant correlation for a specific country since not enough observation years are available.

years but has been steadily falling over the last years. According to the country report of CEDEFOP for Italy, it seems that during the last ten years school attendance and the productivity of the system have grown sharply at all levels¹⁰. Future trends will show if the decision to extend the compulsory age from 14 to 18 years old in Italy leads to a decrease in the rate of ESL. In Luxembourg debates are currently taking place with regard to extending the compulsory age with the aim of specifically trying to keep the youngsters at risk longer in education for longer¹¹.

Although the length of compulsory education shows a statistically significant correlation with the rate of ESL a wide variety of factors, together with compulsory age have an influence on Early School Leaving. Therefore this specific policy aspect can not be taken into consideration in isolation when solutions are being sought for decreasing the number of early school leavers.

5.2.2 **Pupil-teacher ratio and class size**

Hypothesis 2: “A high pupil-teacher ratio and large class size will increase the occurrence of early school leaving”

The ratio of pupils to teaching staff is an important indicator of the resources devoted to education and is often treated as a measure of the quality of the learning environment, in that a smaller pupil-teacher ratio means a greater share of teaching resources per pupil¹². For example, in Slovenia reference is made to the sometimes poor quality of teaching to explain some of the drop-out rates. The restricted number of places in preferred courses as well as the academic approach to some courses, which is perceived as being too theoretical, and the lack of a student-centred approach can have an impact on motivation¹³.

Class size is also a consequence of resources devoted to education as well as a consequence of the proportion of time teachers spend teaching, the use of team teaching, different grouping of pupils according to the subjects taught. The level of education also influences class size: pupils' freedom of choice in terms of subject areas increases in secondary education and therefore the concept of class also changes, since class size may vary from lesson to lesson¹⁴.

¹⁰ Refer – Net, European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), Giorgio Allulli, Gabriella Di Francesco, Chiara Pecorini, Ismene Tramontano, *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems Country Report: Italy*.

¹¹ <http://www.deuxiemechance.lu/Projet.htm>

¹² Commission Staff Working Paper. *Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training*. 2005 Report (Brussels, 22.3.2005, SEC (2005) 419).

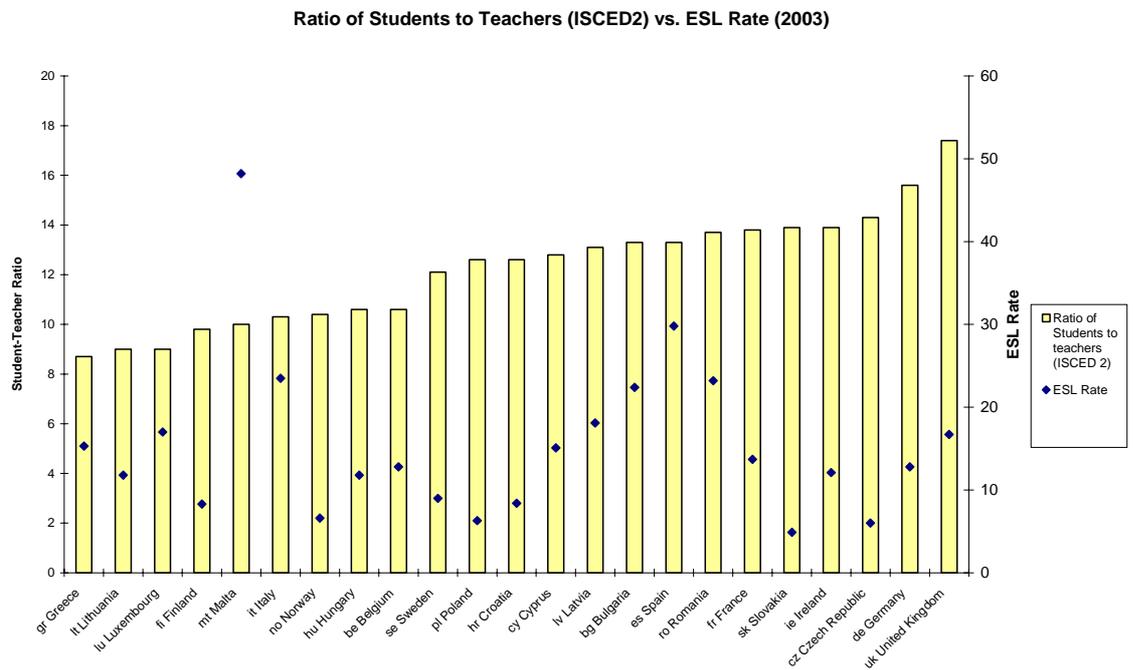
¹³ Refer – Net European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), Philip Ammerman, *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems Country Report: Slovenia*.

¹⁴ Commission Staff Working Paper. *Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training*. 2005 Report (Brussels, 22.3.2005, SEC (2005) 419).

According to the EGREES study¹⁵, 15 year old students from disadvantaged social backgrounds are on average taught in slightly smaller classes particularly in Belgium, Austria and France. In none of the old Member States are the weakest students taught in larger classes. Especially in Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands they are taught in smaller classes.

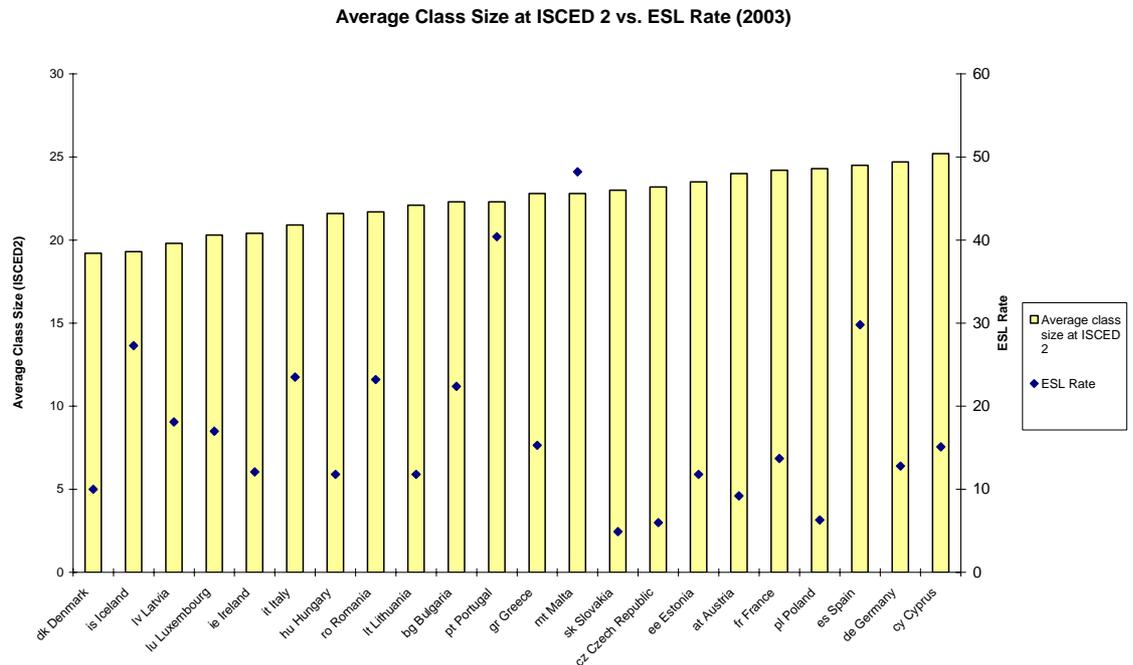
The following two charts are presented: Chart 5.2c shows the student-teacher ratio and ESL rate per country for 2003 and Chart 5.2d shows the average class size and ESL rate per country for 2003.

Chart 5.2c: Student-teacher ratio and ESL rate per country for 2003 (LFS)



¹⁵ EGREES, *Equity in European Educational Systems. A set of indicators*. A project supported by the European Commission, DG EAC. Project Socrates SO2-610BGE, April 2005-2nd edition.

Chart 5.2d: Average class size and ESL rate per country for 2003 (LFS)



These charts show that neither indicator has a direct link to the rate of Early School Leaving. As suggested by the literature, a differentiation has to be made according to the pupil-teacher ratio and class size specifically for weaker student groups¹⁶. The performed bivariate correlation analyses between the rate of early school leaving on the one hand and pupil teacher ration at ISCED level 1 and 2 as well as class size at ISCED level 1 and 2¹⁷ on the other hand over the period 1998 till 2004 over all countries showed no significant correlation. This does not mean that there is no influence from these education aspects. Other aspects such as the pupil-teacher ratio and class size according to ability of students might give more explanation¹⁸.

Studies report on the difference in impact on students' performance between reducing class sizes across programmes with classes of mixed ability and reducing the class sizes for disruptive or poorly performing students. A report from the US highlights the importance of small class sizes for special education classes for poorly performing, disruptive students or those students who are most at risk of early school leaving¹⁹.

¹⁶ These data are not available for a high majority of the study countries and therefore the commented analysis is beyond the scope of this study.

¹⁷ These data were based on OECD and EUROSTAT indicators.

¹⁸ Data to perform this is however not available for a great majority of the study countries.

¹⁹ Finn JD, *Class Size and Students at Risk what is known? What Is Next?* A Commissioned Paper National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students Office of Educational Research and Improvement U.S. Department of Education (1998)

Programmes in the US aim to reduce the student teacher ratios throughout grade levels, rather than just in remedial programmes. The Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) is cited as an important four-year class-size study conducted by the State Department of Education. Over 7,000 students aged 5 to 8 years old in 79 schools were randomly assigned into one of three interventions: small class (13 to 17 students per teacher), regular class (22 to 25 students per teacher), and regular-with-aide class (22 to 25 students with a full-time teacher's aide). Boyd Zaharias (1999)²⁰ reports that data from participating STAR school districts in Tennessee show that students in small classes were more likely to graduate on schedule; they were less likely to drop out of high school; and they were more likely to graduate in the top 25% of their classes. Mischel and Rothstein (2002) report that the effects of reduced class sizes found in the STAR experiment and much of the literature they have reviewed show that reduced class size benefits are more pronounced for minority and disadvantaged students than for other students.²¹

Even though pupil-teacher ratio and class size show no statistical significant effect on the rate of ESL it is suggested by the literature that these variables might have an impact on Early School Leaving in these countries where attention is paid to adjusting the pupil-teacher ratio and class size according to students abilities and disadvantages

5.2.3 Public and private expenditure on education

Hypothesis 3: "Countries having a high total expenditure on education per student have a lower rate in early school leaving"

As a share of GDP, public expenditure on education has fallen slightly over the past few years, to just less than 5% for the EU as a whole, although education accounts for a growing share of total public spending²².

According to Mingat and Suchaut²³ it is not necessarily the countries that spend the most on education whose students obtain the best results or that educate their students for the longest period. Inequalities in spending are, according to the EGREES²⁴ study, presented from the following two viewpoints : a) the relationship between public spending on a student in tertiary education²⁵ (which educates the students who were most successful at school and from more privileged social backgrounds) and on a pupil in primary education, which educates the whole population; b) the educational system's resources should be distributed unequally until the end of compulsory education to compensate the weaknesses of certain groups of students. For this reason the EGREES study takes account of the allocation of

²⁰ Pate-Bain H, Fulton D, and Boyd-Zaharias J, *Effects of Class-Size Reduction in the Early Grades (K-3) ON High School Performance: Preliminary Results (1999) From Project STAR*, Tennessee's Longitudinal Class-Size Study by April 1999

²¹ Mischel L & Rothstein R *The Class Size Debate* Economic Policy Institute's Education Program.2002

²² Office for Official Publications. *The EU Economy Review 2003*. European Economy Review, No. 6, 2003. Luxembourg.

²³ Mingat, A., Suchaut, B. *Les systèmes éducatifs africains*. Bruxelles : De Boeck, 2000.

²⁴ EGREES, *Equity in European Educational Systems. A set of indicators*. A project supported by the European Commission, DG EAC. Project Socrates SO2-610BGE, April 2005-2nd edition.

²⁵ In the EGREES study primary education is seen as the compulsory part and tertiary education as the selective part of education.

teacher-pupil ratios and then the size of classes between certain disadvantaged populations and the remaining population.

Taken into account the two viewpoints, the most egalitarian educational systems according to the EGREES study are Spain, Italy, Portugal and Denmark. But in general the old Member States²⁶ tend to spend around twice as much for a student in tertiary education (Austria, Finland, France, Greece and Norway) than for a primary pupil and the difference is even greater in the educational systems of Germany, Belgium, the UK, Sweden, the Netherlands and Ireland. Among the countries where the education resources show a differentiated distribution, the distribution is in favour of pupils at risk in Austria, Belgium and France but does not favour them in Spain, Italy and Portugal.

Charts 5.2e and 5.2f give an overview of the amount of public expenditure spent on educational institutions per country and the ESL rate in that country. It seems initially from these charts that no direct causal relationship can be found between the ESL rate and public expenditure. For example, Slovakia is one of the countries spending the least money and has one of the lowest ESL rates; the opposite is the case for example for Luxembourg. In order to be able to make some correct statements with regard to public expenditure on education in a given country and the potential effect on the rate of early school leavers thorough analyses have to be conducted, it is not sufficient to compare levels of amount of public spending with number of early school leavers since it gives no explanation with regard to the quality and effectiveness of the spending which are determinant to evaluate a possible impact on early school leaving. As suggested by the above mentioned EGREES study, it is important to investigate the distribution of resources according to the population at risk.

The fact that the specific distribution of resources in education is not reflected in the variables on public and private expenditure per student is also the reason why no apparent correlation was found between the rate of ESL per country from 1998 till 2004 and public and private expenditure per student at ISCED level 1 and ISCED level 2 to 4.

Moreover, as stated by the Commission Staff Working Paper²⁷, there is a risk that private investment in education is likely to be underestimated in many countries because of incomplete reporting of data. Not all countries can provide data on private schools, private household expenditure on educational materials and services, enterprise expenditure on initial training of the dual-system type, etc.

²⁶ The analyses conducted in the EGREES study concern data from 2000 and therefore no results are presented for the new Member States.

²⁷ Commission Staff Working Paper. *Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training. 2005 Report* (Brussels, 22.3.2005, SEC (2005) 419).

Chart 5.2e: Overview of public expenditure on education and ESL rate in the EU25 in 2002

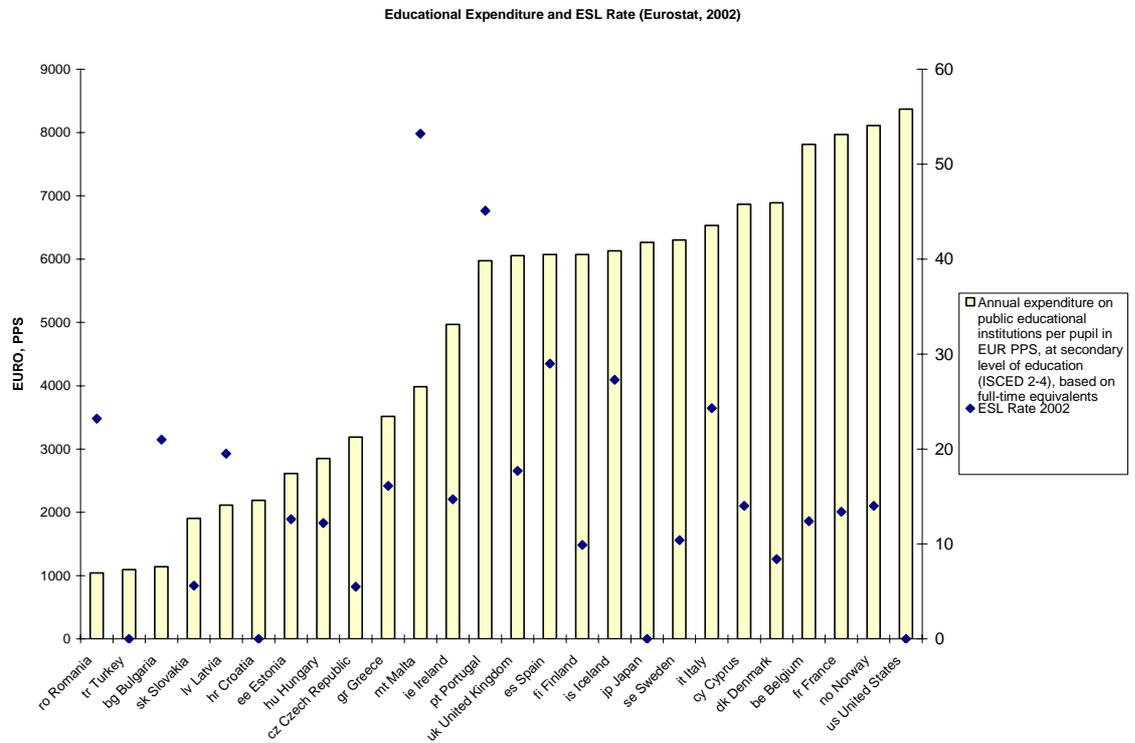
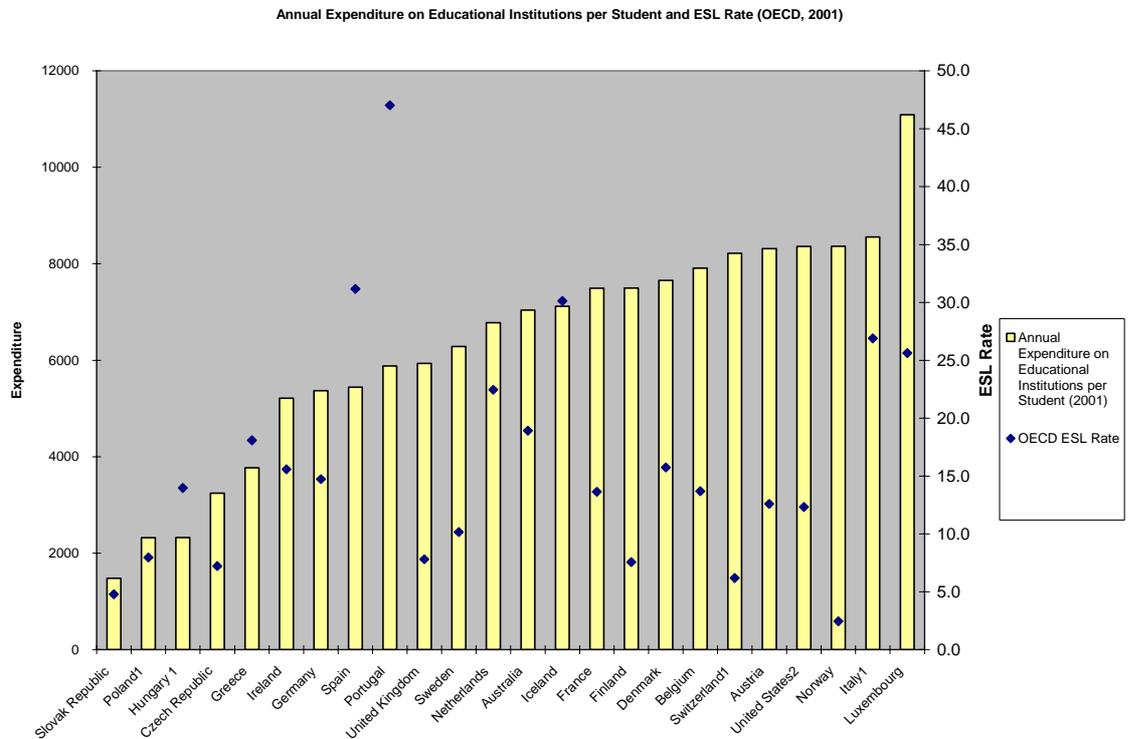


Chart 5.2f: Overview of public expenditure on education and ESL rate in the EU25 and the OECD countries in 2001



No statistical significant correlation was found between public and private expenditure on education per student and the rate of Early School Leaving. It is suggested though by the literature that the quality and effectiveness of the spending as well as the way education resources are distributed with regard to specific students’ needs might have an impact on early school leaving.

5.2.4 Comprehensive versus differentiated compulsory education systems

Hypothesis 4: “Students attending comprehensive compulsory education systems are less likely to leave school early than students attending more differentiated (parallel) compulsory education systems”

Within the compulsory education systems great variety can be found with regard to the age at which a student has to choose a particular branch or type of schooling. The differentiation can start as early as 10 years old (for example Germany and the so called “tracks system” or “tripartite system”) whereas other education systems continue with a core curriculum for all students until the age of 16 (for example, the UK which follows a comprehensive, integrated system). The differentiation broadly concerns: general secondary education, technical secondary education, vocational secondary education and in some countries there is the additional option of arts secondary education (for example, Belgium and Italy). The differentiation occurs based on students’ ability and preference and often already indicates if further education will be

undertaken (i.e. university, higher education or other forms) or if the student is more likely to go immediately to the labour market after secondary education.

Table 5.2g gives an overview on which education system is applied in each country. The following categories are applicable:

- The highly comprehensive system: a common core curriculum is applied until the age of 16
- The medium comprehensive system: a common core curriculum is applied until the age of 15
- The low differentiated system in which a particular branch or type of schooling has to be chosen from the age of 14 onwards
- The medium differentiated system in which a particular branch or type of schooling has to be chosen from the age of 12 onwards
- The highly differentiated system in which a particular branch or type of schooling has to be chosen from the age of 10-11 onwards

Table 5.2g: Overview of the different compulsory education systems per country²⁸

Comprehensive versus differentiated education system	Countries to which the particular education system applies
The highly comprehensive system (age 16)	Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Poland, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, Romania, Iceland, Norway, Australia, USA
The medium comprehensive system (age 15)	Cyprus, France, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Portugal, Slovenia, Japan
The low differentiated system (age 14)	Belgium Flemish Community, Italy, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Canada
The medium differentiated system (age 12)	Belgium French Community, Belgium German Community, Luxembourg, Netherlands,
The highly differentiated system (age 10-11)	Austria, Germany (i.e. the tripartite system consisting of the Hauptschule or basic-track, the Realschule or intermediate-track and the Gymnasias or academic-track), Slovakia, Czech republic, Hungary, Turkey, Malta

The largest group of countries contains those with highly comprehensive education system, i.e. students only choose a particular branch or type of schooling at the age of 16 which is often coinciding with the end of compulsory education. The second largest group of countries is those that apply a common core curriculum until the age of 15. Within the education systems offering the possibility of choice at a younger age, five countries and one region have a low differentiated system (age 14), two countries and two regions have a medium differentiated system (age 12) and seven countries have a highly differentiated system (age 10-11). In the case of Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Malta the differentiation is based on the particular school institution attended which also strongly influences the future academic track that will be followed.

²⁸ The countries have been allocated to a particular category based on the differentiation found within the secondary education (division overviews provided by Eurydice) as well as derived from other references listed in the bibliography (such as OECD, Learning for Tomorrow's World, First PISA Results 2003).

According to Lie et al, the PISA 2000 results²⁹ have shown that the Nordic education systems have been reasonably successful in providing a high proportion of students with a solid foundation in the core subject areas of the comprehensive schools. According to these PISA results, young people in the Nordic countries are well prepared for further studies, for transition to working life and for full participation in the knowledge society. Leading objectives in Nordic education are to provide all students with equal access to education and to remove obstacles to learning, especially amongst students from a disadvantaged background.

A report from the University of Oslo³⁰ suggests that the Nordic strategy for building up both high quality and equality in education was based on constructing a publicly funded comprehensive school system without selecting, tracking or streaming students during basic education until the age of 16. Comprehensive compulsory education seeks to provide all students with similar opportunities for learning by requiring each school and teacher to provide for the full range of student abilities, interests and backgrounds. Other countries though respond to diversity by grouping students through tracking or streaming, whether between schools or between classes within schools, with the aim of teaching students according to their academic potential and/or their interests in specific programmes³¹.

According to Klemm there are no empirical studies showing an advantage to any of the school systems³². Moreover, it was found in a study reported in the European Education journal that the quality of performance in integrated, comprehensive schools shows no measurable difference from that in tripartite or more differentiated school systems³³. This has been confirmed by the PISA 2003 results³⁴: although there is a tendency for the more stratified education systems to perform less well, this tendency is small and not statistically significant.

Klemm argues though that the achievement gap between low and high socioeconomic groups is much larger in the tripartite education system since the differentiation into branches mostly occurs along socioeconomic lines³⁵.

Although a bivariate correlation analysis on this aspect and the rate of early school leavers showed no significant correlation school systems, four of the eight best performing countries in terms of low early school leaver rate belong to the highly comprehensive compulsory education type. More particularly the four Nordic countries belong to this group.

²⁹ Sven Lie, Pirjo Linnkylö, Atsrid Roe. *Unity and Diversity in the Nordic Countries in PISA 2000*, OECD-PISA. Department of Teacher Education and School Development, University of Oslo, Norway.

³⁰ Sven Lie, Pirjo Linnkylö, Atsrid Roe. *Unity and Diversity in the Nordic Countries in PISA 2000*, OECD-PISA. Department of Teacher Education and School Development, University of Oslo, Norway

³¹ OECD, *Learning for Tomorrow's World*. First PISA Results 2003.

³² K. Klemm, "Analyse: Preis früher Auslese" (interview conducted by Steffen Welzel), *Gewerkschaft für Erziehung und Wissenschaft*, December 2001, p. 10.

³³ European Education, vol. 35, no 4, Winter 2003-2004, pp. 3-6, M.E. Sharpe, Inc.

³⁴ OECD, *Learning for Tomorrow's World*. First PISA Results 2003.

³⁵ K. Klemm, "Analyse: Preis früher Auslese" (interview conducted by Steffen Welzel), *Gewerkschaft für Erziehung und Wissenschaft*, December 2001, p. 10

As the literature shows, the specific comprehensive compulsory system of the Nordic countries seems to contribute to their success in having a low number of early school leavers. Especially, the interest in the Finnish comprehensive education system and the conditions of its outstanding quality has increased very much after the first results of the PISA study (OECD 2001, 2002). It is therefore useful to have a closer look at some of the specificities of the Finnish comprehensive education system. According to a joint research by Buchberger F. and Buchberger I.³⁶ the success of the Finnish education system is linked to the structural reform in the seventies (such as the introduction of a comprehensive education system and reform of the teacher education system) and more systemic reforms (such as changes in the strategic governance of the education system, strict decentralisation, introduction of coherent quality assurance mechanisms, coherent national information and communication strategy). Other important elements are the government and administrative elements which have been changed to an output-model with evaluation- and anticipation studies playing a decisive role in defining priorities for education development.

A research study from the Institute for Education Research at the University of Jyväskylä³⁷ states that small between-school variation is a characteristic of all the Nordic countries which is largely due to the fact that these countries have non-selective education systems where all students are provided with the same kind of comprehensive schooling. In contrast, variation between schools seems to be more pronounced in countries where students are enrolled into different kinds of schools at an early age. According to the results, small between-school variation is a key predictor of high student's performance. The same report describes the following reasons as contributing to the success of the Finnish education system:

- There is an extensive network of educational institutions covering the entire country.
- A lot of resources have been invested in the teacher education system which is of high quality
- Instruction and pedagogy at Finnish schools have been structured as to fit heterogeneous student groups. For example Finnish teachers know that no student can be excluded and sent to another school.
- Special education is usually closely integrated into normal teaching and is highly inclusive by nature.
- Every student has right to counselling.
- Heterogeneous grouping, which is higher in comprehensive systems, appears to be of the greatest benefit to the weakest students. In order to cope with heterogeneous groups, teachers are highly educated as pedagogical experts.
- The Finnish national core curriculum which used to be very strict and detailed underwent reorganisation in the early 1990s whereby it became more flexible, decentralised and less detailed.

³⁶ Buchberger F., Buchberger I. "*Problem Solving Capacity of a Teacher Education System as Condition of Success? An analysis of the "Finnish Case"*". Future College – PA des Bundes in O.Ö, Linz, At and Helsingin Yliopisto – University of Helsinki, FI

³⁷ Välijärvi J. et al. "*The Finnish Success in PISA- and some reasons behind it.*" PISA 2000, Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä.

- The outcomes of the whole Finnish nine-year comprehensive school are followed by sample-based surveys.

According to the research study from the Institute for Education Research at the University of Jyväskylä³⁸ the pedagogy in comprehensive schools differs considerably from the one applied in parallel systems, characterised by tracking and streaming. As part of the strategy, the school network is spread in such a way that students have a school near their homes whenever possible or if not, to provide free transportation to more widely dispersed schools. Also typical to Nordic educational systems are the inclusion of special education and instructional efforts to minimise low achievement.

Even though the above explanation on specific educational systems and their impact on low achievement is more targeted at student performance it could be derived that it might impact also on the decision to ultimately leave school early as bad school performance is closely linked to early school leaving³⁹. The PISA 2003 report⁴⁰ states that highly differentiated systems might influence performance negatively for some students because it is easier in these systems to move students not meeting certain performance standards to other schools, tracks or streams with lower performance expectations, rather than investing the effort to raise their performance. It could also be that a learning environment that has a greater variety of student abilities and background such as the more comprehensive systems may stimulate teachers to use approaches that involve a higher degree of individual attention for students. Moreover, while in homogeneous environments high performing students may profit from the wider opportunities to learn from one another and stimulate each other's performance, low performance may not be able to access affective models and support.

With regard to the particular case of Malta, which has the highest rate of early school leavers, a study conducted by the Education and Training Cooperation⁴¹ shows how school choice at early an age as 11, meaning particularly the type of secondary school attended in Malta, predetermines the future prospects of individuals. If Area Secondary Schools are attended, as opposed to Junior Lyceums, Church and Independent Schools, there is a higher risk for not continuing education after the compulsory age and choosing vocational rather than general education.

It might therefore be concluded that comprehensive compulsory education systems together with specific aspects such as high quality in teacher education, intensive student counselling and investment of resources in evaluation of the educational institutions might constitute factors for success. Other factors such as cultural influences on learning and schooling should be also analysed as well since not all countries with comprehensive compulsory school systems have a low rate of early school leavers. Moreover, according to the authors of the country report for the UK⁴² it

³⁸ Välijärvi J. et al. "The Finnish Success in PISA- and some reasons behind it." PISA 2000, Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä.

³⁹ OECD, *Knowledge and Skills for Life – First Results from PISA 2000, 2001*

⁴⁰ OECD, *Learning for Tomorrow's World. First PISA Results 2003.*

⁴¹ Gatt and Partners, "The School to Work Transition of Young People in Malta", Employment and Training Cooperation, Malta, 2005.

⁴² Sammons, P. Elliot et al. England. In : Döbert, H., Klieme, E. & Sroka, W. (Eds.): *Conditions in School Performance in Seven Countries. A Quest for Understanding the International Variation of PISA Results.* Münster et al. 2003.

is unlikely that the mere existence of comprehensive schooling accounts for the improvement of educational standards. The particular PISA 2000 cohort's performance for the UK is likely to have been significantly influenced by the introduction of a national curriculum, national assessments and an emphasis on core subjects.

Empirical studies show no advantage to ESL of either the comprehensive or the differentiated compulsory education system. Comprehensive compulsory education systems showing success with regard to ESL fulfil other conditions such as high quality in teacher education, intensive counselling and investment of resources in evaluation of the educational institutions.

5.2.5 *Variety of post-compulsory secondary educational programmes*

Hypothesis 5: "Offering a wider variety of post-compulsory secondary educational programmes reduces the number of early school leavers"

In this subsection is verified if some of the national trends of early school leavers can be linked to specific reform decisions with regard to post-compulsory educational programmes. More specifically, it is analysed if increasing the choice of study programmes between more general and more vocational directions or even more specifically between certain subject courses might have a positive impact on retaining students in school.

This is for example the case in Iceland, where the government has begun taking measures that should be helpful in reducing the drop-out rates by broadening the variety of courses⁴³.

In 2002 the Norwegian Ministry decided to improve the possibilities to opt for alternative training paths based on shorter school attendance and longer apprenticeship. Students with specific needs and particularly low motivation for school may enter apprenticeship directly from lower-secondary school. Theory instruction is provided periodically at school throughout the programme, and the students take the same trade / journeyman's exam as do students following "the 2 + 2 model"⁴⁴. This intervention might be one of the reasons for the marked decrease in the rate of ESL in Norway from 2002 to 2003.

The Portuguese Ministry of Education has introduced since 2002 some structural reforms in the education system of which the main purpose is to "achieve objectives in terms of both initial skills training that equips young people with the vocational skills they need for working life, while safeguarding and encouraging the completion of compulsory education and general, universal educational pathways, and countering the tendency among young people to enter employment too early, and advancing adult learning/development in a culture of lifelong learning". One of the new articles of the law specifies that vocational training under the Ministry of Education includes "apprenticeship, initial skill training, education and training provision, including those designed for 15 to 18 year olds, 10th grade vocational courses, technological

⁴³ OECD, *Economic Survey of Iceland 2005: The role of structural policies*

⁴⁴ Refer – Net European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), Hanne Shapiro, *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems Country Report: Norway*.

specialisation, adult education and training, vocational school courses, recurrent/adult education, and the technological and vocational components of school and extra-school education⁴⁵. These changes might be a reason for the gradual decrease in the number of early school leavers.

Since 1997, the Spanish government has introduced important changes in education and vocational training. It had adopted a comprehensive approach to raising levels of education, literacy and training for working people. The education system encourages links and partnership agreements with local companies⁴⁶. Although the rate of ESL in Spain is still high, it has steadily decreased from 1997 till 2001 which might be a consequence of these important changes. However, the rate of ESL has been slightly increasing during the last four years. No apparent reason can be found in the literature for this increase.

According to the CEDEFOP country report for Malta, the number of early school leavers will gradually fall because of significant changes in secondary education. This is confirmed by the trend for Malta presented on the graph in chart 4.3a. In the recent years, investments have been made in improvements in teacher training as well as the introduction of the National Minimum Curriculum. It is further explained that an additional impetus for staying in school will be the demands employers brought about due to increasing competition⁴⁷. According to the report from the Maltese Education and Training Cooperation⁴⁸, there is however still an issue with reinforcing the local cultural view that vocational education is inferior. It seems that during guidance on courses in secondary education not enough emphasis is placed on vocational education as a possible route. The focus in for example the Junior Lyceum schools tends to be on the general education track whereas the lack of information about vocational courses in Area Secondary schools tend to be related to the fact that most of these students are not expected to stay on at school but to find work and so information about post-secondary schools is considered irrelevant, at least to a percentage of students within these schools. These underlying reasons might be responsible for the fact that in general Malta still has a very high rate of early school leavers.

From 2002, reforms in Cyprus have, according to the country report for Cyprus, focussed on centralising apprenticeships and have introduced three diplomas (Certificate, Diploma, Higher Diploma). A total of five occupational qualifications and profiles have been introduced with the participation of social partners, and work is underway on additional ones. The Ministry's response to address the issue of early school leaving has been to introduce measures aimed at reforming the apprenticeship

⁴⁵ Refer – Net European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems Country Report: Portugal*.

⁴⁶ Refer – Net European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), Tom May, *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems Country Report: Spain*

⁴⁷ Refer – Net European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), Philip Ammerman, *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems Country Report: Malta*.

⁴⁸ Gatt and Partners, "The School to Work Transition of Young People in Malta", Employment and Training Cooperation, Malta, 2005.

and upper secondary educational institutions⁴⁹. It is also envisaged to develop a national vocational qualifications system, which includes accreditation for prior learning. Although the rate of early school leavers improved slightly in 2003, it worsened again in 2004.

In the Czech Republic, before 2000 children who failed to complete basic education could not apply for upper secondary programmes. This group included 60% of Roma children. From 2000 onwards those concerned can at least get a lower vocational qualification. In view of the fact that the proportion of children with incomplete basic education has been growing in recent years, this measure constitutes an important step towards enhancing access to education. There are also schools which concentrate “under one roof” schools of various type and standards, and various educational facilities (e.g. secondary vocational school, practical school, training centre, training facility). This arrangement facilitates smooth transfers between schools of various types for students facing study-related difficulties. With the exception of the practical school which trains pupils in performing simple tasks, the schools provide vocational education completed by the award of a vocational training certificate⁵⁰.

According to the CEDEFOP country report for Latvia, its large number of early school leavers points out two problems. First, it is possible to finish primary and secondary school with very low marks, but the upper secondary vocational education standard proscribes that the final mark in all subjects cannot be lower than four which is described as being “average”. For example, of the students enrolled in vocational education establishments under the authority of the Ministry of Education and Science in the 2000/2001 academic year, 33% had a mark of three being “weak” or lower in at least one subject area in the leaving certificate of the previous education establishment that they had finished. Neither general nor vocational education establishments offer students the opportunity to supplement their knowledge in subject areas where their prior knowledge is insufficient, which is why they leave school, as they cannot follow their studies. Secondly, the capacity of the vocational guidance system is insufficient – very often young people have no idea whether they are suited to the qualification they have chosen, and what it is that people in this field actually do. In many cases the choice of training programme is determined by several factors (for example, the school is close to or far enough away from home, there is no competition to enrol in the given programme, a friend is studying the same thing, the young person is undecided and relies on the advice of family, etc.) other than the wish to link one’s future to the chosen profession⁵¹.

The CEDEFOP report also states that modular training programmes, which are slowly emerging also in Latvia, could be one of the solutions for returning young people to the education system even after a break, or, by making it easier to switch programmes,

⁴⁹ Refer-Net European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), Philip Ammerman, *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems Country Report: Cyprus*.

⁵⁰ Refer-Net European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), Vera Czesana, *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems Country Report: Czech Republic*.

⁵¹ Refer – Net European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), Philipp Grollmann and Klaus Ruth, *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems Country Report: Latvia*.

they would feel less restricted by the chosen course of study. The characteristic behaviour of the teenager, which often includes impulsive and categorical decisions, also must be taken into account. This means that the vocational training system has to increase internal mobility, that is, the possibility to a more easy transfer from one programme to another in case a young person has understood that the chosen programme is no longer of interest. Moreover, starting from September 2004, VET schools may open new vocational programs for students with low success of formal education. The number of students in these classes will be smaller - 16 (in comparison with 25 in regular programs)⁵².

The Flemish Government has targeted early school leavers through the “Vilvoorde Pact” by adopting a modular system for technical and vocational education dividing the knowledge and skills to be acquired into smaller modules, which are evaluated separately. This ensures that even early school-leavers receive some kind of qualification. As part certificates may represent an important experience of success for young people, the modular system can help prevent students losing interest in school⁵³.

As a Finnish study reveals, the reason for leaving school is also related to specific study programmes. For example the contents of study programme might not match the hopes and expectations given to the future profession. A solution for students experiencing these difficulties might be studying in a vocational school during which a student compares his or her abilities and professional expectations to the contents of a specific study programme⁵⁴.

According to Riele⁵⁵, the slow climb in retention rates during the 1970s meant that already by the early 1980s there was growing recognition in Australia (at least amongst academics) that schools had to change to cater for the increasingly diverse senior student population. Schools have indeed changed in the past two decades, mainly by broadening the curriculum to include more vocational type subjects. This has been a major step forward, which has the potential to meaningfully (re-)engage marginalised students in education.

Although offering the possibility for different study programmes seems to be chosen as a potential measure to decrease the number of early school leavers it seems that for example in the New Member States, according to the National Training Fund⁵⁶, the drop-out rates from vocational education exceed those from general education. These increased drop-out rates imply that vocational education and training is less successful at retaining young people compared to general education. According to the National Training Fund this may be due to the fact that vocational courses attract the weakest

⁵² Refer – Net European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), Annemiek Cox, *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems*

⁵³ Ministry of the Flemish Community, *An introduction to Flemish labour market policy 2002*.

⁵⁴ Refer-Net European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), Kari Nyysölä, *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems Country Report: Finland*.

⁵⁵ Riele K.T., *Second Chance Education for Early School Leavers*. AARE Conference 2000, 4-7 December, University of Sydney.

⁵⁶ National Training Fund, *Early school leavers and dropouts from Secondary education*, 1999

students and/or that they do not offer interesting studies for them. On the other hand, it should also be noted that drop-out rates from vocational programmes leading to a double qualification are generally lower than those from vocational programmes which only offer a vocational qualification (the exceptions are Latvia where they are higher and Lithuania where they are equal). Moreover, girls present lower drop-out rates from vocational programmes compared to general education programmes in all countries (except Hungary and Lithuania where they are equal to boys).⁵⁷

It was also found in according to a progress report⁵⁸ from the Flemish government that in 2003, 1/18 came from general education, 1/13 from technical education, 1/12 from vocational education, and 1/8 from arts education. This also clearly shows the higher number of early school leavers coming from “lower level” directions.

The subject of post-compulsory programmes can not be expressed in a kind of ranking per country since not enough detailed information is available per country and therefore no statistical analyses are presented in this sub section.

According to the literature, differentiating the content of post-compulsory education programmes, offering a wider variety of choice as well as more vocational options might increase young people’s motivation to stay longer in work. Moreover, matching the vocational programmes with demand in the labour market might increase the chances of finding a job afterwards.

5.2.6 **Repetition of classes**

Hypothesis 6: “The repetition of classes increases the chances of a young person leaving school early”⁵⁹

Students who have not acquired an adequate mastery of the curriculum at the end of a school year of who are not regarded as sufficiently mature to move on immediately have an opportunity to repeat the year. This occurs, according to Eurydice in the following countries: Belgium, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Finland as well as all the New Member States, Bulgaria and Romania. For some countries, having students repeating a year happens only very rarely such as for example in Finland. Other countries, such as Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Cyprus, Sweden, the UK, Iceland and Norway, students normally progress automatically from one year to the next throughout compulsory education with supplementary teaching support measures provided for those in difficulty. It might be though that in these countries students have to repeat a year under exceptional circumstances (for example due to long illness). In these countries where it is possible to take a year again, students are not allowed to do so an unlimited number of times (Belgium, Spain and Cyprus)⁶⁰.

⁵⁷ National Training Fund. *Early school leavers and drop outs from secondary education*. 1999

⁵⁸ Communication to the Flemish government: *Follow-up of the Lisbon process: progress report 2003*

⁵⁹ No statistical analyses can be presented for this hypothesis since data on early school leavers’ previous academic performance is not available at EU level.

⁶⁰ Eurydice, *Key Education Data in Europe*, 2005.

According to the PISA 2003⁶¹ the results suggest that countries with high proportions of students who have repeated a grade at the upper secondary level at least once tend to perform worse. Especially Belgium and Italy seem to have a high proportion of repeaters. Moreover, it seems that in Luxembourg the youngsters at risk have typically had to repeat classes or come from special classes in primary education.⁶²

USA research shows that for many children repeating grades can be harmful to the child's self esteem and motivation⁶³, research also suggests that children who repeat classes are more likely to drop out and less likely to attend post high school educational programs.⁶⁴ Studies by the National Center for Education Statistics⁶⁵ found that students retained between 5th and 8th grades were almost 11 times more likely to become early school leavers than students who had never repeated a grade. An Irish study also finds that students who experience difficulties getting grades and are retained at a grade level are those most likely to become early school leavers, with many students finding it hard to reconcile being put in classes with younger students.⁶⁶

It is estimated that 2.4 million students are retained in the United States every year⁶⁷ at an average cost of \$6,500 per student, putting the cost of retention for the US at more than \$15 billion per school year.⁶⁸ Social promotion (moving up a grade despite poor results) is an alternative to retention in the USA; however studies show that in fact, both retention and social promotion policies result in excessively high drop-out rates, especially for poor and minority students.⁶⁹ It is believed that it would be more cost effective to invest instead in resources to improve student performance by attracting more qualified teachers, providing smaller class sizes, better materials and more effective teacher training.⁷⁰

This variable is not included in the MCA because it can not be expressed in a kind of ranking per country since not enough detailed information is available for each study country and therefore no statistical results are presented in this sub section.

⁶¹ OECD, *Learning for Tomorrow's World*. First PISA Results 2003.

⁶² <http://www.deuxiemechance.lu/Projet.htm>

⁶³ Thompson, C L. - Cunningham, E K. *Retention and Social Promotion: Research and Implications for Policy*. ERIC Digest Number 161, 2000

⁶⁴ Jimerson S R, Anderson GE and Whipple AD, *Winning the Battle and Losing the War: Examining the Relation between Grade Retention and Dropping Out Of High School Psychology in the Schools*, Vol. 39(4), 2002 (2002)

⁶⁵ *The National Educational Longitudinal study*, National Center for Education Statistics, 1998

⁶⁶ Eivers E, Ryan E and Brinkley A, *Characteristics of Early School Leavers: Results of the Research Strand of the 8 to 15 Year old Early School Leavers Initiative*. Educational Research Centre Dublin, 2000

⁶⁷ Shepard & Smith, 1990) quoted in Peg Dawson, NCSP *A Primer on Student Grade Retention: What the Research Says* NASP Communiqué, June 1998 (vol. 26-8)

⁶⁸ Fager J & Richen R *When Students Don't Succeed: Shedding Light on Grade Retention* (1999) Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

⁶⁹ College of Human Resources, Education & Public Policy University of Delaware: *Education Policy Brief January*, 2000

⁷⁰ IDRA 2005 Newsletter.

The PISA 2003 results as well as other research suggest that students who repeat classes tend to perform worse and might even drop out more easily because of a lack of motivation.

5.3 Initiatives and measures targeted at early school leavers

Hypothesis 7: “The availability of support and guidance mechanisms available in school and specifically targeted at young people at risk will decrease the number of early school leavers”

The fact that a young person leaves school early is influenced by a mixture of factors contained in the different key study areas. However, in order to target policy aiming at reducing the number of early school leavers, the potential impact of all these factors have to be analysed separately. For example, a youngster not having the financial possibilities to pursue post-compulsory education can be supported by specific allowances whereas a youngster having low learning abilities could be helped by after-school classes to catch up on other students.

Early school leavers are often equated with, or confused with ‘students at risk’. The Youth Research Centre⁷¹ suggests that in fact there are at least six ‘types’ of early leaver, each with very different reasons and needs:

- positive leavers, who choose to take up employment, apprenticeship or alternative career paths
- opportune leavers, who haven’t decided on a career path, but leave to take up a job or perhaps a relationship in preference to school. Later, they may need advice or a ‘second chance’ at training
- would-be leavers, or ‘reluctant stayers’, who prefer to leave but lack opportunities beyond school. The opportunity for better teacher–student relationships and negotiated curriculum could improve their situation
- circumstantial leavers, who leave school for non-educational reasons, for example family need. Innovative approaches, with flexible attendance and part-time work, might improve their retention
- discouraged leavers, who have not had success in their schooling, and who have low levels of performance and interest. More flexible school policies and curriculum might help these students, catering for their diverse learning and pastoral needs
- alienated leavers, whose needs may be similar to the discouraged students, but which are more difficult to meet. Dwyer suggests that alternative local and community post-school programs beyond the school might re-engage these students

In order to bring the number of early school leavers down, governments are implementing programmes and testing out pilot projects. This subsection provides for an overview of such intervention measures with a specific focus on those measures which have seem to be successful. The target group of early school leavers is a very

⁷¹ Dwyer, P., *Opting out: Early school leavers and the degeneration of youth policy*. Tasmania: National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, 1996

heterogeneous one and therefore the measures can be divided in several categories, depending on which profile of young people at risk they are particularly trying to reach as well as the tools used to intervene. Moreover, a distinction should be made between measures implemented at national level and those at lower levels (i.e. regional and local). Annex F gives an overview of measures taken in specific countries.

Review of the current policies and provision of programmes across many of the study countries highlights the complexity involved in addressing the failing student, the early school leaver or in the provision of support for second chance students. For example in the USA many federal level policy initiatives and funding programmes filter down to state and locally adapted multi agency responses; one successful example is the Dropout Prevention Program, which is primarily a grant program to assist schools with annual dropout rates above their state average to implement effective dropout prevention and re-entry efforts. Grants are given to state education agencies (SEAs) and local school districts to implement sustainable and coordinated school dropout prevention and re-entry programs such as professional development; reduction in student-teacher ratios; counselling and mentoring for at-risk students; and the implementation of comprehensive school reform models.

5.3.1 *Integrated response*

One key element in the success of ESL measures is recognising the involvement between programmes, broader community networks and support agencies, schools and parents. Despite some claims that schools should take responsibility for measures to prevent early school leaving the integrated approach is being favoured in policy documents and reports in many countries; for example Australia through the Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce (2001) and through The Pathways project and Home-School Community Liaison Scheme in Ireland. The Irish Pathways project cites the 'importance of maintaining effective links with all relevant referring agencies and service providers in order to establish a coherent and consistent response in ensuring that 75% of those entering into the mentoring arrangement progressed onto training, employment or further education.'⁷²

The Irish Early School Leavers Forum Report by the National Economic and Social Forum identified that many initiatives have been developed with similar target groups in mind and little attempt made to co-ordinate or integrate with existing provision⁷³. Many pilot programmes and policies are implemented at national regional and local levels, but as a result of lack of co-ordination or consistent funding sources, their impact is unsustainable. Fleming (2001) suggests that integration needs to combine not only delivery mechanisms and services provision, but also putting back together the broader capital context in which early school leaving develops.⁷⁴ Examples of successful multi agency responses in Ireland include the Comprehensive Pathway Approach, which is based on the belief that no one agency has the resources or the ability to respond to early school leaving completely so response has to be an interagency one; similarly the School Completion Programme is based on integrated cross community approach to tackling educational disadvantage through grouping of schools into clusters or main and primary feeder schools. Each cluster has established

⁷² A FÁS Perspective on Pathways.2005. National Youth Federation.

⁷³ Early School Leavers Forum Report No. 24 Ireland

⁷⁴ Fleming (2001) *Effective Integrated responses to early school leaving* National University of Ireland

a committee which is responsible for developing and overseeing implementation of a plan to tackle early school leaving in the area. 400 schools have been included in the programme.⁷⁵

Another integrated response consists in some kind of intensive follow-up of failing students by registering them. In the Netherlands in 2001, the Regional Information and Coordination Act was implemented as a consequence of the launch of the action plan Early School Leaving. Every youngster under 23 years old leaving education without basic qualification is an early school-leaver. Educational institutions are obliged by law to inform the municipality of all early school leavers. By registering these names and trying to lead these youngsters back to education, the aim is to reduce the drop out rate. The RMC budget will be increased in 2004. The government policy with respect to early school leaving is geared towards those that have left education without basic qualifications. The schools must report each education participant up to 23 years of age to the local authorities in his or her city of residence who has not yet earned basic qualifications and who has been absent from his or her study programme for one month. These reports are passed on to the Regional Registration and Co-ordination Centre (RMC) in the contact municipality of the region in question⁷⁶. In addition to reporting and registering early school-leavers, the RMC also supervises early school-leavers that are looking to re-enter education. The RMC fulfils a central role in co-ordinating a network of all intermediaries, such as the education world, municipalities, agencies for child welfare and the CWI (Centre for Work and Income), that are involved with the target group. From the latest RMC reports, it seems that in most regions there is a well functioning network. The starting point for the individual reinstatement process is the earning of basic qualifications. If this level cannot be achieved by a person, then the maximum achievable position on the labour market forms the starting point. This can also be a study programme level lower than the level of basic qualifications or a route that is more directly oriented towards finding a job on the labour market. This intensive policy of following up failing students might have an influence on the gradual stable rate of early school leaving. Ireland and Italy have also established a registration system for young people who have dropped out⁷⁷.

5.3.2 **Supporting Failing Students within the school system.**

A Study by Woods (1995)⁷⁸ on elements of successful early school leavers programmes in the USA found that creating support schools within schools, providing student centered programmes and links to the world of work in successful programs (goal setting, vocational skills, job training, work study, work attitudes and habits, and career counseling) have been found to be effective in reducing the high dropout rates within many large schools. Successful examples of such programmes in the USA include the Accelerated Schools, 'Communities in Schools' (CIS) and the now completed 'Quantum opportunities programme' which have both been successful in increasing student retention. The CIS model is based on using existing community services within school sites to try to support students whose non academic problems

⁷⁵ Submission to the NESF Project Team on Early School Leaving, Youth Council of Ireland.

⁷⁶ Refer – Net European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), Annemiek Cox, *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems Country Report: Netherlands*

⁷⁷ The European Commission, *EU report on education and training in employment policies*, April 2001.

⁷⁸ Woods E(1995) *Reducing the Dropout Rate* (1995) NW Regional Educational Laboratory

such as low income, dysfunctional families, health or mental health problems, or substance abuse is impacting on their academic performance.⁷⁹

Studies in Ireland report widespread recognition from schools, statutory agencies and community groups of a shift in emphasis in the efforts to reduce educational disadvantage and social exclusion from provision not just for those who have left school early to focusing more on pro-active measures to prevent students leaving school early.⁸⁰ Consequently national programmes in Ireland are targeting resources at those schools experiencing the greatest difficulties with early school leaving; for example the School Completion Programme and the National 8-15 Initiative & Stay in School retention scheme initiative aim to facilitate individual school plans to help meet the curricular, learning, social and personal needs of individual targeted children. Other programmes identified across the study countries include individualised attention and instruction for students struggling to meet standards, use of tutoring and mentoring systems for students who are lacking in confidence or facing difficulties; and provision of greater flexibility and diversity in the course offer to students to meet with changing nature of the labour market

In the Czech Republic, a nationally comprehensive system of counselling plays an important role in preventing students from dropping out of the education system. In the USA, state programmes such as The Adopt-A-Student Program in Atlanta, Georgia match business volunteers as mentors with low-achieving high school juniors and seniors in a career-oriented support system, with studies reporting an increase in the graduation rate in contrast to a comparison group of non participants⁸¹.

To support less able pupils Greece has implemented a programme of "supplementary teaching support"; the programme covers 25% of pupils in each class, who can have 12 hours of supplementary teaching in the main subjects.⁸² In Luxembourg, pilot projects have been developed to address the poor choice of orientation of subjects.

Recent government targets in Australia aimed at increasing student participation, retention and achievement have meant that more young people are staying on in schools into the post-compulsory years. Much of this retention is the result of 'learning' programs developed by schools for 'at-risk' students, although these often have a different 'feel' to traditional remedial classes.⁸³

5.3.3 Vocational Education

The majority of the countries covered by the study have recognised the importance of providing flexible vocational qualifications for students who are not interested by more traditional academic subjects and qualifications and would otherwise have a higher

⁷⁹ Morley E, Rossman S (1998) *Helping At-Risk Youth Lessons from Community-Based Initiatives*. Urban Institute.

⁸⁰ Fleming T & Murphy M 2000, *Squaring the Circle. Paper No. 3 Dublin Employment Pact. Analysis of programmes in Dublin schools to prevent early school leaving*. National University of Ireland

⁸¹ Orr 1987 & Dryfoos 1990 in EG Woods (1995), *Reducing the Dropout Rate*, NW Regional Educational Laboratory,

⁸² *EU report on education and training in employment policies The European Commission 2001*

⁸³ Centre for Learning and Work Studies, *Non-Traditional and Non-Systemic Educational Programs in Fmp Secondary Schools*, Monash University 2003.

propensity to drop out of the education system. In England and Wales for example, the Curriculum 2000 programme has reformed the post compulsory programmes developed primarily for 16 to 19 year olds. The new Advanced Subsidiary (AS) qualification has also been developed and represents the first year of the full A level study and counts for 50% of the marks. The AS level encourages take up of more subjects and is intended to reduce the numbers who drop out. It is also designed to encourage more mixing of general and vocational subjects. Vocational A Levels (AVCEs) have also replaced Advanced GNVQs and can be taken on a single subject basis; they emphasise knowledge, skills and understanding in broad vocational areas and focus on investigative work and assignment writing. France also has a number of national initiatives aimed to increase the attractiveness of vocational education, which could reduce the rate of ESL such as creation of vocational Baccalaureate to increase staying on rates at higher levels of study; opportunities to obtain vocational diplomas through apprenticeships at companies and the division of vocational qualifications into modules.

In Malta, where ESL rates are particularly high, the Government has streamlined the upper secondary educational system; in addition the main vocational educational schools are adopting a competency based continuous assessment model that will switch emphasis away from end-of-year examination. Similarly, in Latvia, the creation of more flexible modular training programmes is seen as one solution to ensuring that young people return to the education system; students are more able to switch programmes if they unhappy with their present course of study⁸⁴.

In order to reduce early school leaving, Germany is compensating for the increased number of young people leaving school without a diploma by increasing the supply of three-year pre-work training programmes, with the result that the proportion of young people without qualifications in the 17–20 age groups has fallen to approximately 5%.⁸⁵

5.3.4 Difficult behaviour

Students are often referred to alternative schools and programs if they are at risk of leaving the education system because of truancy, disruptive behavior, suspension, pregnancy. In England policy states for example, that any pupil excluded for more than 15 days must receive suitable alternative education; so for those who can return to the mainstream education system, Placement Panels are often used to support reintegration into schools. Many Local Education Authorities (LEAs) run local Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) for pupils with behavioural difficulties or those facing serious barriers to re-entry into mainstream education in order to provide viable alternative education for pupils out of school. The LEAs do not have to offer the full National Curriculum to pupils, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) believes that this flexibility will enable LEAs to ensure that more time is spent addressing the child's behavioural problems, for example through counselling, citizenship or Personal Social and Health Education programmes. Inspections have found that the majority of units are successful in improving pupils' behaviour and contribute effectively to their

⁸⁴ *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems* Refer Net European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP)

⁸⁵ *EU report on education and training in employment policies – Analysis of the 2000 National Action Plans*. April 2001

personal development.⁸⁶ Other alternative programmes in the UK for students include College placements for some pupils who are disaffected with school or Home tuition.

In France, the National Classes-Relais programme focuses on students who are severely disruptive, with serious behavioural problems who are missing school or facing exclusion from education. The programme provides individualised teaching and youth work support in alternative schools designed to return them to mainstream schooling (or training, depending on age) as soon as possible. Teaching is tailored to the individual with small class sizes and the opportunity for some older students to undertake work experience in local firms. Overall, 67% of the young people surveyed who had been in a Classe - Relais in 1997/98 were still in education or vocational training at the end of the 1998/99 school year. Kitching R (2001)⁸⁷ suggests that young people respond in particular to the high degree of personal attention, the individualised, flexible teaching style and the opportunity to gain work experience. Wyn et al (2004)⁸⁸ also identifies the importance of the individualised element in contributing to successful re-engagement of young people in education. Programmes must be responsive and relevant to the young person's life and linked to their individual goals, but recognising and accommodating problems such as drug addiction or homelessness.

In Ireland, the National Pathways Effective Support for Early School Leavers Model was established as part of the Employment Youthstart Initiative in 1996. Pathways were seen as a proactive multi agency response to the needs of early school leavers and who were experiencing various forms of social exclusion. The programme tracks all early school leavers within 4 weeks of receiving referrals and tries to develop Mentoring Arrangements with individual early school leavers and Gateway Programmes with small groups which offer support in accessing relevant services and which assist in the early school leavers' progression⁸⁹

Teenage pregnancy

Research has shown that it is important that teenage mothers receive targeted support to ensure that they do not leave the education system. Research by the Teenage Pregnancy Unit in the UK found that one of the key problems with educational provision for pregnant school girls seems to be that the support is too generic, with some pregnant teenagers or teenage mother finding they are being taught with students who have learning difficulties, for example.⁹⁰ With teenage pregnancy rates one of the highest in Europe, the UK has launched many initiatives to support the continued learning of teenage mothers or pregnant teenagers; for example, the Care to Learn (2003) programme of financial support is available to any young parent between the age of 16 to 19 who wants to continue in education or training. The funding is intended to cover the young person's childcare costs and any additional travel

⁸⁶ *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools (1998/99) UK*

⁸⁷ Kitching R (2001) *Violence, Truancy and School Exclusion in France and Britain*. Franco-British Council Report of a seminar held in London 28-29 March 2001

⁸⁸ Wyn J, Stokes H and Tyler D 2004. *Stepping Stones TAFE and ACE Program Development for Early School Leavers* NCVER consistent with the findings reported by St Ledger and Ward (1998) and Bradshaw et al. (2001). Australia

⁸⁹ National Youth Federation. *A FÁS Perspective on Pathways*. 2005 Ireland.

⁹⁰ Teenage Pregnancy Unit *Evaluation of Teenage Pregnancy Strategy 2004 Interim Report*. UK

incurred. The Standards Fund Teenage Pregnancy Grant programme supports the 'reintegration' of young women conceiving whilst of statutory school age, back into education. It is part of the Government's Vulnerable Children's Grant programme. Evaluation of the Standards Fund Teenage Pregnancy Grant by Selman et al (2001)⁹¹ found that before the existence of the grant, pregnant young women and mothers of school age had a limited range of approaches available to them regarding their continued education, for example attending Pupil Referral Units (with students with behavioural issues) , mainstream education or home tuition. A significant proportion of the young women in all areas covered by the evaluation had effectively disengaged themselves from school education so reintegration efforts would often fail. The study found that the use of reintegration officers played an invaluable role in breaking down barriers including issues relating to childcare and transport and working with educational establishments to change prevailing negative perceptions of pregnant young women / young mothers at an institutional level.

Socially excluded – poverty

Financial pressures on poorer households can put pressure on students to leave education early in order to enter the labour market. In order to encourage students to return to school, a number of countries provide packages of financial support for young people. In the UK for example, the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) scheme provides support for students who come from low income families. Students must attend a full time course at school or college and be aged over 16. In order to receive weekly payments young people have to achieve certain levels of attendance and achievement and sign a Learning Agreement which outlines the attendance and performance objectives. Evaluation of the EMA scheme by the National Centre for Social Research found that the EMA scheme was highly valued for providing the opportunity for young people from lower income families to have the chance to remain in education and had made a positive impact in terms of punctuality and attendance, motivation, retention and levels of achievement of early school leavers.⁹²

Minority groups

A number of countries are focusing ESL policy on ensuring the education of children from minority groups. In Romania and Bulgaria for example, governments and multi lateral donors are implementing programmes to improve participation levels and reduce early school leaving by Roma Students. In Bulgaria the Strategy for integration of children and students from minority groups aims to create conditions and possibilities for equal access to education by reducing the existing educational segregation of Roma origin children. A draft Law introducing a Fund for "Educational Integration of children and students from minority groups" has been prepared and in the 2003-2004 school year in some schools an assistant – teacher position was introduced in the first grade with the purpose for more successful adaptation for the minority groups' children in their school life. In Ireland, many ESL programmes are focusing specifically on addressing the high ESL rates of children of Traveller communities (by age 15 80% of children from Traveller backgrounds have dropped

⁹¹ Selman et al (2001) *Monitoring of the Standards Fund Grant: Teenage Pregnancy*, Newcastle Upon Tyne: University of Newcastle upon Tyne

⁹² Knight T, White C (2004) *The Reflections of Early Leavers and Second Year Participants on the Education Maintenance Allowance Scheme. A Qualitative Study*. National Centre for Social Research

out). In Romania a framework of targeted programmes such as the Access to Education of the Disadvantaged Groups programme (2002-2004) is noted by CEDEFOP which is focused on the Roma population. The programme is implemented in 10 counties and will be extended in other 12-15 counties. The European Union Phare and the Government of Romania jointly finance the programme. The main objectives are: improving the quality of pre-school education, encouraging students to complete their basic education (prevention of early dropout) increasing participation in distance education as a second chance offered to those having failed to finish compulsory education⁹³.

In the USA, data indicates that the percentage of Hispanics who dropout of school has remained higher than that of Blacks and Whites in every year throughout a 30 year period⁹⁴; a regional programme in Colorado which has sought to target the high Hispanic drop out rates involves early identification and intervention, a teen mother programme and a programme for ESL re-entry for all students, resource teachers spend their time counselling and supporting students and their families. Dropout rates fell significantly in the school system during the two-year period reported. The retention rate for Hispanics showed marked improvement, with greater changes than those noted for other students.⁹⁵

Reintegration of Early School Leavers

Across the study countries many successful examples of programmes which target and support those young people who have already left education were identified. Programmes focus on supporting early school leavers to return to education, or achieve some qualification, vocational training, and apprenticeships or on the job training. In Belgium the First Job Agreement and the 'integration pathways' for young people, offer a wide range of opportunities to young people who are early school leavers including self-assessment, screening, guidance, job clubs, training, and employment opportunities in the regular labour market are the main options. The key element assigned to the FJA responds to criticism of earlier programmes where the emphasis on training met with some resistance from early school leavers or 'school fatigue'.⁹⁶ The FJA programme offers a training-employment contract, designed to combine part-time education with part-time work in related areas (lasting between one and three years) and an apprenticeship.

The Youthreach programme in Ireland are located in a wide variety of settings and the personal, social, educational and vocational problems experienced by many participants mean that advice, guidance and counseling often form an important part of the role of those who teach in the programme. In addition, a guidance service is provided to each programme by qualified personnel on a limited part-time basis: these include staff from the Training and Employment Agency.⁹⁷

⁹³ Refer - NetEuropean Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP). *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems*

⁹⁴ Kaufman et al (2005) *Dropout rates in the United State*, National Centre for Education statistics. USA

⁹⁵ Woods E(1995) *Reducing the Dropout Rate* (1995) NW Regional Educational Laboratory

⁹⁶ Discussion Paper on The "Rosetta Plan" - *A Springboard for Young People into Employment*.2001

⁹⁷ OECD, *Career Guidance: A Handbook for Policy Makers*. 2004

In the Netherlands national educational policy fits into the preventative and curative categories; in guiding dropouts in the direction of formal learning or job related courses that give priority to the achievement of a basic qualification.⁹⁸ In addition to reporting and registering early school-leavers, the Regional Registration and Co-ordination Centre (RMC) also supervise early school-leavers that are looking to re-enter education. The RMC fulfils a central role in co-coordinating a network of all intermediaries, such as the education world, municipalities, and agencies for child welfare. The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science conducted an extensive analysis of the approach to early school leaving. The main conclusion was that the approach to early school leaving is continually improving. Agreements have been reached with 92 % of the adult and vocational education institutions with respect to the reporting of early school-leavers.

Targeted programmes and interventions to combat early school leaving can be divided according to the profile of the young person at risk it is aimed at, what the measure used is and the level of intervention (national, regional or local). More evaluations have to be conducted to analyse the real impact of these interventions but the literature shows several of these interventions which have proved to be beneficial in retaining specific risks groups longer in education.

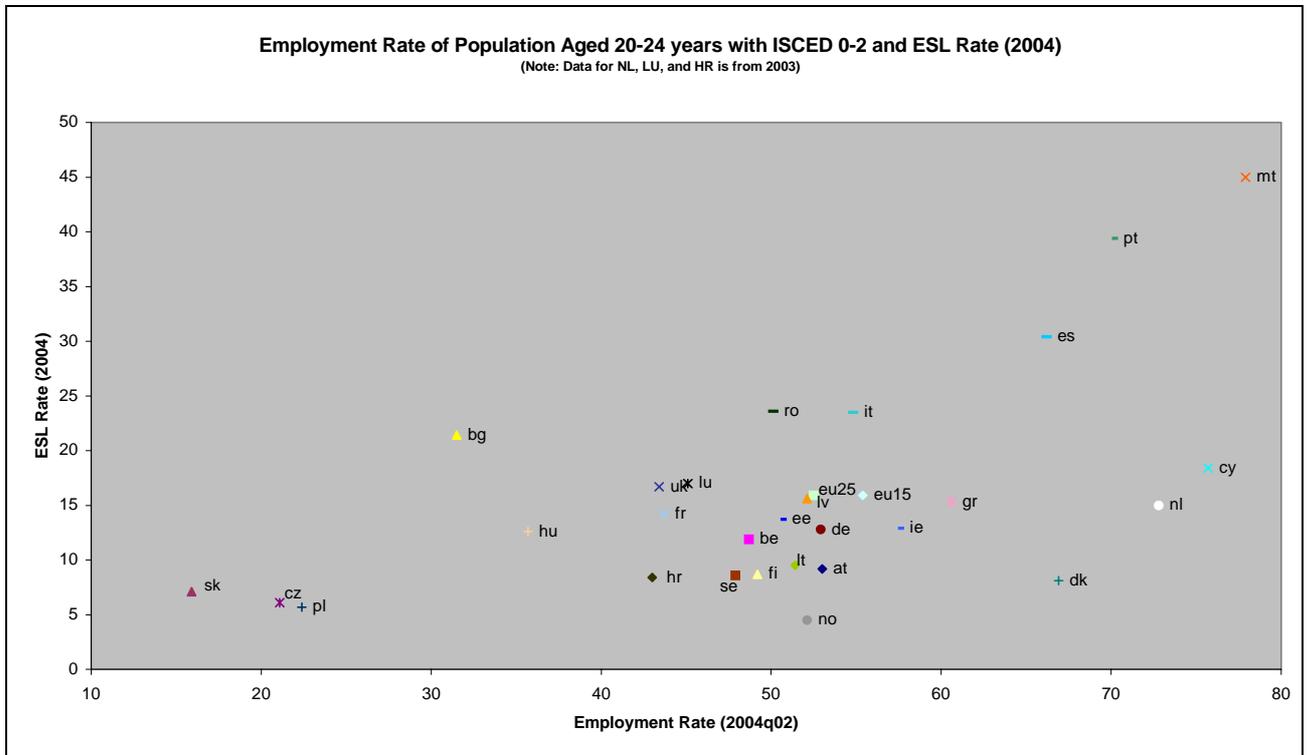
5.4 Influence of labour market conditions on early school leaving

Hypothesis 8: “A high level of employment opportunities for low-educated people increases the rate of early school leaving”

Chart 5.4 plots the ESL rate for 2004 against the Employment Rate of the population aged 20-24 years with at most lower secondary qualifications (note: the case of the UK, this includes ISCED3C as in the UK this is regarded as a lower secondary qualification).

⁹⁸ *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems* Refer – Net European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP)

Chart 5.4: Employment rate of population aged 20-24 years with ISCED 0-2 and ESL rate for 2004 (LFS)



The literature reveals that in a few southern countries like Malta and Portugal, the availability of jobs for low qualified people is an incentive for leaving school early. A report on the high number of early school leavers in Malta explains that the major reasons for leaving school early include support for family or family business. It reflects the high number of micro- and family-enterprises in Malta⁹⁹. A report from the Maltese Education and Training Cooperation reveals on the other hand that there are few work opportunities for 16-18 years old mainly because they lack qualifications. In addition, there is also more bureaucracy involved for employers when they employ young persons under 18 years old. Section 7 of this report has a closer look at what the work conditions are for early school leavers in Malta who are in employment.

In the Netherlands where the employment rate amongst early school leavers seems to be quite high, push factors - behavioural and learning problems - are in general the most important reasons for leaving school early. Pull factors are considered far less important in general, but given the fact that early school leaving is especially high among VBO and MBO students¹⁰⁰ these young people appear to be more sensitive to the 'pull' of the labour market. If there is work, VBO and MBO students are tempted to

⁹⁹ Refer – Net European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), Philip Ammerman, *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems Country Report: Malta*.

¹⁰⁰ These are students following preparatory or intermediate classes in the vocational direction so at the lower secondary education level.

take it to become financially independent and often without waiting to obtain a certificate (SCP 2000)¹⁰¹.

It might be that the less favourable labour market in the New Member States influences the rate of early school leavers in the sense that it is better to stay as long as possible at school than to try and find employment.

The chart presented above confirms that in some countries a high rate for early school leavers goes together with a high rate of employment within the group of people with a lower secondary degree aged 20 to 24 years old¹⁰². As already stated above, a more in-depth analysis will reveal if this relatively high employment rate of lower qualified youngsters for some countries goes together with stable work under good working conditions.

The figures presented above suggest that the availability of jobs for low-skilled persons might be a disincentive in some countries to stay longer in school. Equally a disadvantageous labour market might positively influence gaining an upper-secondary diploma.

¹⁰¹ E G R I S. European Group for Integrated Social Research. *Youth Policy and Participation. Potentials of participation and informal learning in young people's transitions to the labour market. A comparative analysis in ten European regions National report of the Netherlands.*

¹⁰² A bivariate correlation analysis between the rate of early school leavers and the employment rate for ESL 18-24 years old was significant at the level .001 with a Pearson correlation of .581 meaning that a high employment rate within that age group goes together with a high rate of early school leavers in a particular country as well as the opposite.

6 THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS ON EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

6.1 Introduction

This section addresses the key study question of the socio-economic characteristics of young people at risk. The analysis in this key study area is mainly based on the literature review as well as on the LFS data providing more descriptive statistics. In particular, this section analyses the following aspects of socio-economic characteristics of young people at risk:

- Internal aspects, i.e. individual aspects of early school leavers, such as composition of the early school leaver group in terms of gender and ISCED level obtained, deviant behaviour, teenage pregnancy, physical and psychological illness, and previous academic performance.
- External aspects, i.e. the influence of the environment of early school leavers, such as socio-economic status, family circumstances, ethnicity and peers.

These socio-economic characteristics of early school leavers are investigated according to the hypotheses formulated in the analytical framework, which has been presented in section 3.

6.2 Composition of the early school leavers group

Table 6.2a shows the gender and the highest level of ISCED level achieved by the early school leaver population. These characteristics are shown for early school leavers aged 18-24 and the “old” early school leavers (older than 24 years old) in 2004.

Table 6.2a: Gender and highest attained ISCED level of early school leavers

	BE		CZ		DK		DE		EE		EL		ES		FR		IE		IT		CY		LV		LT	
	Young ESLs: 18-24 yrs	Old ESLs: >24 yrs																								
Female	35%	55%	53%	75%	36%	60%	50%	69%	26%	55%	39%	55%	38%	53%	43%	57%	37%	49%	42%	54%	42%	57%	34%	52%	38%	61%
Male	65%	45%	47%	25%	64%	40%	50%	31%	74%	45%	61%	45%	62%	47%	57%	43%	63%	51%	58%	46%	58%	43%	66%	48%	62%	39%
No formal education or below ISCED1	0%	0%	4%	1%	6%	18%	0%	0%	1%	3%	3%	7%	1%	5%	4%	3%	4%	1%	2%	14%	3%	28%	0%	3%	3%	2%
ISCED1	25%	59%	0%	1%	0%	1%	15%	10%	23%	14%	44%	75%	20%	60%	11%	56%	20%	60%	7%	41%	31%	51%	7%	12%	12%	50%
ISCED2	75%	41%	96%	98%	94%	82%	85%	90%	76%	83%	53%	18%	79%	35%	85%	41%	76%	39%	92%	45%	66%	21%	93%	84%	85%	48%
ISCED3C (shorter than 3 years)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	LU		HU		MT		IL		AT		PL		PT		SI		SK		FI		SE		UK		EU25	
	Young ESLs: 18-24 yrs	Old ESLs: >24 yrs																								
Female	59%	58%	46%	61%	45%	55%	45%	59%	49%	67%	33%	54%	38%	52%	30%	65%	45%	69%	40%	47%	45%	40%	48%	57%	42%	57%
Male	41%	42%	54%	39%	55%	45%	55%	41%	51%	33%	67%	46%	62%	48%	70%	35%	55%	31%	60%	53%	55%	60%	52%	43%	58%	43%
No formal education or below ISCED1	14%	20%	0%	0%	0%	5%	2%	5%	0%	0%	2%	2%	3%	21%	9%	3%	4%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	2%	7%
ISCED1	68%	65%	10%	14%	1%	43%	19%	28%			28%	0%	44%	65%	6%	20%	6%	5%	2%	65%	4%	49%			15%	41%
ISCED2	18%	15%	90%	86%	99%	52%	79%	67%	100%	100%	70%	98%	53%	14%	85%	77%	89%	93%	98%	35%	96%	51%	32%	50%	77%	50%
ISCED3C (shorter than 3 years)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	67%	50%	6%	2%

Note: All data 2004 except NL 2003

It is clear from the table 6.2a that the early school leaver group can not be viewed as a homogenous group in terms of gender and highest ISCED level obtained¹⁰³.

6.2.1 Gender characteristics of early school leavers

In terms of gender differences of early school leavers, the following observations can be made from table 6.1:

- For 15 countries the gender gap between young early school leavers increased in comparison with the “older” early school leavers and this mostly in favour of the female population, except for Luxembourg where the majority of the “younger” early school leavers are women.
- The Czech Republic has a closing gender gap but a higher number of female early school leavers in the younger generation. This is in contrast to the closing gender gap but higher male proportion in the younger generation of early school leavers in the following countries - France, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria, Sweden, UK. Germany has the same number of female and male early school leavers.

The Flemish progress report¹⁰⁴ states that, after a few years of a decreasing rate of early school leavers, the rate increased slightly again from 2002 till 2003. This was entirely due to the rise of male early school leavers and therefore widened the gap between female and male early school leavers even more.

Studies in several countries have confirmed that girls are less likely than boys to actually leave school early¹⁰⁵. When school achievement, individual schools and other factors are taken into account, the likelihood of boys leaving school early is about 1.9 times higher than for girls.¹⁰⁶

According to the evaluation study carried out by the Finnish National Board of Education, there is a statistically significant difference in attitudes between girls and boys. On the basis of school specific averages at the final stages of basic education, it was established that girls relate in a more positive way to the study of the assessed subjects and to the usefulness of the subjects than boys. In northern Finland and the rest of the Finland apart from the capital city area, the difference between boys' and girls' performances is clear. Girls perform better than boys¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰³ This issue and a few consequences of the heterogeneity of the early school leavers group will be further elaborated in section 10 since it is important in terms of targeting the initiatives efficiently and in terms of possible “leaving” certificates.

¹⁰⁴ Communication to the Flemish government: *Follow-up of the Lisbon process: progress report 2003*.

¹⁰⁵ Wyn J. and Holden E. (1994) *Early School Leavers: Young Women and Girls at risk*, Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne.

¹⁰⁶ Submission to the NESF Project Team on Early School Leaving, National Youth Council of Ireland, August 2001; LSAY Briefing Number 2, October 2000, *Early school leaving and 'non-completion' in Australia*.

¹⁰⁷ Refer-Net European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), Kari Nyysölä, Achieving the Lisbon Goal: *The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems Country Report: Finland*.

According to a study conducted in Britain, girls' experiences of school tend to be very different from boys, which affect the reasons girls may self-exclude. Girls that are experiencing difficulties are less likely to engage in behaviour that attracts the attention of support systems and school authorities. They are more likely to internalise their responses through anxiety, depression, eating disorders and self-harming. Additionally, girls disproportionately or exclusively face a number of experiences such as pregnancy and caring responsibilities¹⁰⁸.

The Maltese report from the Education and Training Cooperation¹⁰⁹ explains that a common reason for Maltese girls to leave school early is that they decide to work and earn money with the prospect of marriage. It shows the existence of a culture in which a woman's future is considered to lie at home.

In Ireland, increasing attention is being given to the educational 'under-achievement' of boys and young men. The research in this country showed marginalisation among young men and highlighted the serious consequences of failure within the education system and how under-achievement contributed to a spiral of exclusion which led to homelessness. Other studies also highlighted achievement differentials between boys and girls, with more boys than girls failing to achieve 5 D grades in the Junior Certificate examination¹¹⁰.

6.2.2 **ISCED attainment level of early school leavers**

In terms of ISCED level obtained, the following observation can be made from table 6.1:

- There are some significant differences between the “younger” and “older” early school leavers groups, especially with regard to ISCED level obtained. In the majority of the countries surveyed, the younger generation of early school leavers has more people with ISCED 2 attainment when leaving school. The exceptions are the Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland, Slovakia and the UK.
- Whereas in the majority of countries the proportion of people with no formal education or below has decreased, this proportion has slightly increased in Ireland, Lithuania, Slovenia, Slovakia and UK. This might be due to the fact that within this younger generation a number of people might still go back to education.
- Amongst the countries with the highest rate of early school leavers, in Malta and Spain the proportion of early school leavers obtaining ISCED 2 instead of ISCED 1 has significantly increased. In Portugal, the proportion of early school leavers with ISCED 2 attainment is still quite low, but has also increased.

¹⁰⁸ Osler O., Street C., Marie, Lall. And Vincent K. (2001) *Not a problem? Girls and School Exclusion*. London. National Children's Bureau for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

¹⁰⁹ Gatt and Partners, *“The School to Work Transition of Young People in Malta”*, Employment and Training Cooperation, Malta, 2005.

¹¹⁰ National Economic and Social Forum. *Early School Leavers Forum Report No. 24*.

Table 6.2b shows the ISCED attainment levels in the EU25 from 1998-2004 for early school leavers of all age groups.

Table 6.b2: ISCED level of ESL attainment in the EU25, 1998-2004, all age groups

YEAR /Education level attained	No formal education or below ISCED 1	ISCED 0-1	ISCED 1	ISCED 2 (lower secondary)	ISCED 3c (shorter than 3 years)
1998	0%	33.7%	0%	39.6%	0%
1999	0%	48.4%	0%	48.0%	3.7%
2000	0%	46.6%	0%	49.5%	3.8%
2001	3.9%	0%	40.4%	52.0%	3.6%
2002	2.9%	0%	40.3%	53.3%	3.5%
2003	6.0%	0%	38.1%	52.7%	3.2%
2004	6.4%	0%	40.5%	50.9%	2.1%

6.2.3 Age when leaving school

Another aspect contributing to the differentiation within the group of early school leavers is age when leaving school. The average age of young people leaving with only primary or lower secondary education ranges between 14.5 (Greece) to 19.6 (in Denmark). In Sweden, the average age of leaving education from lower-secondary education (as well as the other levels of education) is particularly high (22 years old). This may be explained by the fact that in this country young people who have attended various short-term training courses after leaving the school system are likely to have been considered as continuing education. In contrast, in Greece, Italy, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Spain young people tend to leave primary and lower-secondary education earlier than in the other countries (at around 15 years of age). There is less variation between countries at ISCED levels 3 and 4. The oldest school leavers are in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, France and Portugal (on average, they leave being around 20 years old) while the youngest ones are in Slovakia and Hungary (around 18 years old)¹¹¹.

The early school leaving group is very heterogeneous with regard to gender, level of education attained when leaving school early as well as age upon when leaving school. Amongst the younger group of early school leavers, there are more boys than girls across the EU25, except for in the Czech Republic and Luxembourg. But in general, the gender gap is closing in the majority of the countries. With regard to highest ISECD level attained, 77% of the youngest early school leavers attain now ISCED level 2 (i.e. lower secondary education), whereas only half of the early school leavers older than 24 years old have attained this education level. There is high variety with regard to the age upon when leaving school ranging from 14.5 in Greece to 22 years old in Sweden.

¹¹¹ Eurostat. *Young People's Social Origin, Educational Attainment and Labour Market Outcomes in Europe*. 2003

6.3 Internal aspects influencing early school leaving

6.3.1 *Deviant behaviour*

Hypothesis 9 “Young people with a criminal history or deviant behaviour are more likely to leave school early”

Criminal or deviant behaviour is also the cause of permanent exclusion from school which makes the young person an early school leaver. Research suggests that permanent exclusion most commonly occurs when schools experience perceived unacceptable, abusive or violent behaviour. Aggressive behaviour and disruptive behaviour is generally the culmination of other factors, including sense of personal inadequacy, not keeping up with work, feeling humiliated by failure or following bullying and teasing¹¹².

A study in Canada showed that early school leavers are more likely than graduates to engage in a number of activities that involve a degree of rebellion or insubordination, and therefore, might be considered deviant. These activities include regular alcohol consumption, soft and hard drug use. Since some of this behaviour is beyond the limits of the law and may lead to other illegal activities, early school leavers also had a higher rate of conviction compared to graduates. Early school leavers were more likely than graduates to be regular rather than occasional drinkers. Male leavers tend to have the greatest likelihood of being regular drinkers. The use of soft drugs such as marijuana and hashish, and the misuse of prescription drugs such as tranquillizers, was much less common than alcohol consumption among students. Early school leavers, however, were considerably more likely than graduates to report that they had engaged in such activities¹¹³.

6.3.2 *Psychological or physical illness*

Hypothesis 10 “Young people affected by a physical or mental illness are more likely to be absent from school and in the longer run leave the school system early”

Children with medical needs are a very diverse population, including short-term illness/injuries requiring short but frequent absences; single/one off, medium to long term absences; the chronically/terminally sick; and those with mental illness. Length of time spent in hospital school/service varies considerably, from a few days to long-term care and those unlikely to return to school.

Issues leading to early school leaving are numerous and complex, and the range of issues faced by children with medical needs includes:

- Vulnerability to social and academic exclusion – missing out on peer contacts and social aspects of school as well as falling behind with studies.
- Regular and frequent absences from school leading to disenfranchisement and alienation.

¹¹² Parsons, C., Bennis L., Hailes J. and Howlett K. (1994) *Excluding Primary School Children*. Christ Church College, Canterbury, Kent.

¹¹³ Government of Canada. *Leaving School - Results From a National Survey Comparing School Leavers and High School Graduates 18 to 20 Years of Age* - January 1995

- Those with chronic conditions being at greater risk of developing psychosocial and academic problems (by a factor of two, although still only applying to a small share of children experiencing chronic illness).

A study in Austria reveals that young people with some form of disability tend to leave education or training at the earliest opportunity¹¹⁴. In Canada it was found that physically disabled youth spoke of feeling alienated and having a difficult time in school¹¹⁵.

6.3.3 Teenage pregnancy

Hypothesis 11 “Teenage pregnancy increases the risk for girls to leave school early”

Across the study countries, the average age of finishing school is 16. This study therefore analyses whether giving birth before 16 years of age has an impact on teenage mothers’ ability to stay in school. It also examines the impact of pregnancy between ages 16 to 18 on the attendance of post compulsory education.

Because of the high rates of teenage pregnancy in UK compared to the rest of Europe, government policy has repeatedly emphasised the importance of reducing the rate of teenage motherhood, to reduce the risk of long-term social exclusion and welfare dependency. In its recent White Paper the Department of Education and Skills reports that three-quarters of 18 year-old mothers are not in education, employment or training.¹¹⁶

Using data from the National Child Development Study, a report¹¹⁷ found that a birth before the age of 16 is associated with negative impact on schooling. Teenage childbearing decreases the probability of post-16 schooling by 18% to 24%. Only 10% of teenage mothers in the sample attended post-compulsory education, while this proportion is 50% for the other teenagers. The study also takes into account the influence of various factors which could determine whether the teenage mother decides to leave education; for example, family characteristics such as parental education, living arrangements, number of siblings, parental ethnicity (approximated by country of birth), social class of the father and mother’s interest in child’s schooling and test score in English and Maths at age 7.

Other studies report difficulties in separating out teenage pregnancy as the causal indicator from other factors. For example, Holmlund (2004)¹¹⁸ reported that many teenage mothers are also from disadvantaged backgrounds - a significant indicator on

¹¹⁴ Refer-Net, European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), Kurt Schmid, *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems Country Report: Austria*.

¹¹⁵ Government of Canada. *Leaving School - Results From a National Survey Comparing School Leavers and High School Graduates 18 to 20 Years of Age* - January 1995

¹¹⁶ White Paper: *14-19 Education and Skills 2005*

¹¹⁷ Chevalier A, Viitanen T, *The Long-Run Labour Market Consequences of Teenage Motherhood* July 2000

¹¹⁸ Holmlund H *Estimating Long-Term Consequences of Teenage Childbearing – An Examination of the Siblings Approach* Swedish Institute for Social Research Stockholm University 2004

early school leaver rates. Klepinger et al. (1995, 1999)¹¹⁹ used a number of indicators such as age and socio-economic background to try to determine the link between teenage pregnancy and early school leaving in the USA. A substantial reduction in the schooling attainment of teen mothers, lower participation in the work force and lower wages have been reported. Other studies in the USA have found that early childbearing has negative effects on educational achievement. Hoffman *et al.* (1993)¹²⁰ found that teen mothers accumulate fewer years of schooling than those who delay childbearing.

A study in Canada¹²¹ showed that both marital status and dependent children have a dramatic effect on school leaving, especially among women. Household responsibilities, notably childcare, are not conducive to the completion of high school studies. Not surprisingly, leavers were much more likely than graduates to be married or to have dependent children.

In 1991, 22% of female leavers were or had been married, compared with just 5% of female graduates. The corresponding proportions were lower among men, but the discrepancy persisted: 9% of male leavers, but only 2% of male graduates, were or had been married. Similarly, much higher proportions of leavers than graduates had dependent children. While more than a quarter (27%) of female leavers had dependent children, this was the case for only 4% of their graduate counterparts. Far fewer men than women had children, but again, there was a difference between leavers and graduates: 7% of male leavers versus a negligible 1% of male graduates.

In the USA, some schools do not allow students who are pregnant or parents to remain enrolled. Regardless of whether these policies are prevalent or not, many teen parents do not finish their education, although pregnancy is not necessarily the reason for their non-completion. About four in ten teen parents have finished high school, and about half of teen parents left school prior to becoming pregnant. Their children are more likely to be high school dropouts themselves so the combination of teenage childbearing and dropping out of high school has particularly negative long-term consequences¹²².

6.3.4 Previous academic performance

Hypothesis 12 “Previous academic failure and lack of commitment to school constitute risk factors for early school leaving”

Pupils’ experiences of schooling are a significant predictor of early school leaving. Indeed, some research has indicated that variables relating to school experience are

¹¹⁹ Klepinger, Daniel, Shelly Lundberg, and Robert Plotnick (1995). ‘Adolescent Fertility and the Educational Attainment of Young Women’, *Family Planning Perspectives*, Vol.27, No. 1, pp. 23-28. quoted in Chevalier A, Viitanen T, *The Long-Run Labour Market Consequences of Teenage Motherhood July 2000 Version 2.4*

¹²⁰ Hoffman, Saul D., E. Michael Foster and Frank F. Furstenberg Jr. (1993). ‘Re-evaluating the Costs of Teenage Childbearing’, *Demography*, Vol. 30, No. 1, pp. 1-13.

¹²¹ Government of Canada, *Leaving School - Results From a National Survey Comparing School Leavers and High School Graduates 18 to 20 Years of Age* - January 1995

¹²² Aron L, Zweig JM *Educational Alternatives for Vulnerable Youth: Student Needs, Program Types, and Research Directions*, the Urban Institute, November 2003

the best screening predictors for potential dropout, and that other variables such as family, behaviour and personality, although significant, are less important.¹²³

Low achievement at school is an important factor in leaving school early. If a student is doing well at school, he or she will stay on, regardless of school and generally other factors. Conversely, if students do not feel good about themselves at school, they will tend not to want to stay there.¹²⁴ When interviewed about their reasons for leaving school early, students speak about having poor results or not feeling smart enough to pass subjects at higher level, perceiving a lack of support and alternatives, and seeing school rules and regulations in a negative way.¹²⁵ The PISA survey confirms the high correlation between early school leavers and students performing at the lowest levels of proficiency (level 1 and lower)¹²⁶. An American study confirmed this correlation, having found that low achieving students dropout at much higher rates than high achieving students¹²⁷. Also in the Czech Republic the observation was made that those most at risk of dropping out from school without a recognised qualification are poor achievers¹²⁸.

Those who experience difficulty in meeting the academic demands of school, who get low grades, and who are retained at a grade level are those most likely to become early school leavers.¹²⁹ Indeed, some research identified grade retention as the single most powerful school leaving predictor.¹³⁰ Those who are retained at a grade level often find that they are older than their classmates, a factor that has been also associated with early school leaving. The difficulties experienced in meeting academic demands increase over time. Whereas pupils may fall only slightly behind their classmates in the early years of schooling, as time goes on they experience more difficulty and less success in a school context, weakening their motivation to stay in a school.¹³¹

According to the literature reviewed in the study, several internal aspects of a young person might influence early school leaving such as deviant behaviour, physical or psychological illness, pregnancy as well as previous academic failure.

¹²³ Janosz et al (1997) *Disentangling the weight of school dropout predictors: a test on two longitudinal samples*, Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 26, 733-762.

¹²⁴ Marks, GN and Fleming N, 1999, *Early school leaving in Australia*, ACER LSAY research report no. 11, ACER, Melbourne.

¹²⁵ *Early school leavers and VET*, Research at a Glance, NCVET, Australia.

¹²⁶ OECD, *Knowledge and Skills for Life – First Results from PISA 2000,2001*

¹²⁷ Rumberger and Lamb. *The early employment and further education experiences of high school dropouts; a comparative study of the United States and Australia*. University of California Santa Barbara; Australian Council for Educational Research, 1998.

¹²⁸ Refer-Net European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), Vera Czesana, *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems Country Report: Czech Republic*

¹²⁹ Alexander KL et al (1997) *From first grade forward: Early foundations of high school dropout*. Sociology of Education, 70, 87-107.

¹³⁰ Rumberger (1995) *Dropping out of middle school: a multi-level analysis of students and schools*. American Journal of Educational Research, 32, 583-625.

¹³¹ Eivers E et al (2000) *Characteristics of early school leavers: results of the research strand of the 8-15 year old early school leavers initiative*, Educational Research Centre, St. Patrick's College, Dublin.

6.4 External aspects influencing early school leaving

6.4.1 Socio-economic status

Hypothesis 13 “Young people being brought up in a less advantageous socio-economic environment are more likely to leave school early”

Evidence from a Canadian National Survey suggests that a number of socio-economic characteristics are associated with the likelihood that a person will leave school before they graduate from initial education and training. These characteristics include:

- Parents’ education and occupation. Young people from families where parents have low levels of educational attainment or blue-collar jobs have a higher risk of early school leaving.¹³²
- Geographical location. Youngsters in rural locations are at higher risk of early school leaving and they tend to leave school relatively early as well, in comparison to city dwellers.¹³³ Although few studies have examined the effects of living in a disadvantaged area on educational attainment, those that have done so have typically found significant effects on early school leaving. There is some evidence from an American study of a ‘contagion factor’ where educational attainment is negatively associated with high welfare receipt and male unemployment rates in the area.¹³⁴
- Cultural characteristics such as language and immigration. Early school leavers’ rates are higher amongst ethnic minorities.

Moreover, the combination of several factors seems to be associated with a higher risk of early school leaving. It is therefore crucial that dropout prevention programmes take account of these socio-economic characteristics and try to address them in an efficient way with specific methods and tools targeted at these specific groups¹³⁵.

According to a US report¹³⁶, a combination of the following three factors is associated with 58 percent of the variation in school completion rates across the American states:

- 1) socio-economic characteristics,
- 2) number of parents living in the home,
- 3) and a history of changing schools frequently.

¹³² *Leaving School, Results from National Survey Comparing School Leavers and High School Graduates 18 to 20 years of age*, 1995, Government of Canada.

¹³³ *Leaving School, Results from National Survey Comparing School Leavers and High School Graduates 18 to 20 years of age*, 1995, Government of Canada and Refer-Net European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), Ulrike Damyranovic, Haralabos Fragoulis, *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems Country Report: Bulgaria*.

¹³⁴ Crane J (1991) *The epidemic theory of ghettos and neighbourhood effects on dropping out and teenage childbearing*. *American Journal of Sociology*, 96, 1226-1259.

¹³⁵ *Leaving school. Results from a national survey comparing school leavers and high school graduates 18 to 20 years of age*. Government of Canada, January 1995.

¹³⁶ Barton P E, *One-Third of a Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities*, Policy Information Centre, ETS, 2005

These factors combined predict estimated state completion rates within four percentage points in 24 states. A close study of the states with completion rates that are substantially different from predicted rates might reveal important differences that affect student retention. Also, improvements in school quality that raise student achievement will also improve completion rates, for succeeding students are more likely to complete school.

Several studies inside as well as outside the EU showed that drop out rates were lowest for students from higher family status (based on family socio-economic status and parental education) and highest for students from low status family¹³⁷. An US study demonstrated that in every year between 1972 and 1994 persons from low-income backgrounds were twice more likely to drop out than their middle-class counterparts¹³⁸.

According to the EGREES study¹³⁹, the increased risk of leaving school early when coming from a disadvantaged background is particularly high in Belgium and particularly low in Finland and Sweden.

The most dramatic evidence of the low participation of poorer children in the Irish educational system is provided by the 1997 report of the NESF. It shows that 55 percent of early school leavers come from families where fathers are unemployed, compared to less than 20 percent in the total cohort.

Ireland is closer to the British system than it is to those of the successful continental countries. A number of studies have pointed to the high variability of standards across the Irish primary and post-primary educational system, for example. Thus the 1995 OECD Economic Survey of Ireland notes that "the performance of Irish schools is much more uneven than in other countries", and suggests that "the variability of school performance may be one explanation for the large differences in student performance according to the social status of their parents".¹⁴⁰

The relative differences in attainment by class are similar in Ireland and Scotland. There is no evidence of any reduction in class differences in educational attainment over time in either country, a pattern which is consistent with previous single-country analyses (see Smyth, 1999). Having at least one parent in paid employment is positively associated with staying on to upper secondary level in Ireland and has become increasingly important in Scotland over time. Interestingly, the 'returns' to social class membership appear to be lower for females than for males, that is, female educational attainment is somewhat less sharply differentiated by socio-economic background, although class differences among females remain substantial. This

¹³⁷ Rumberger and Lamb. *The Early Employment and Further Education Experiences of High School Dropouts: A Comparative Study of The United States and Australia*. University of California Santa Barbara; Australian Council for Educational Research. 1998 and National Youth Council of Ireland. Submission to the NESF Project Team on Early School Leaving, National economic and social Forum, Report nr 24 and OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 1998.

¹³⁸ Hill M. Walker, *Structuring School-Based Interventions to Achieve Integrated Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Prevention Goals for Safe and Effective Schools*, Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior

¹³⁹ EGREES, *Equity in European Educational Systems. A set of indicators*. A project supported by the European Commission, DG EAC. Project Socrates SO2-610BGE, April 2005-2nd edition.

¹⁴⁰ Frank Barry and Aoife Hannan. *Education, Deprivation, Hysteresis, Unemployment*. Department of Economics, University of Dublin. 1997

pattern may reflect a ceiling effect, given extremely high levels of participation among (certain groups of) young women¹⁴¹.

In Estonia, the main reason for dropping out of school is poverty. Children living on the streets without parental care are especially likely not to follow school¹⁴².

With regard to the traveller community in Ireland, a study revealed that by the time they reach the age of 15, 80% of children from traveller background have dropped out. Overall only 44% of traveller children aged 12-15 participate in any education. This small community with no more than 10,000 children of school attendance age, representing little more than 1% of the school attendance population, account for 1 in 6 of all unqualified early school leavers. Even with the establishment of high level support through government funding for the traveller community, the problem of ESL persists¹⁴³.

In Greece, it is reported that one reason for the departure of students from education in Greece is to address a family task such as illness in family or caring for siblings¹⁴⁴.

The 2000 PISA results¹⁴⁵ show that in no other industrial state does social background count as much for educational success as it does in Germany. Even with the same school facilities, a working class student had less chance than a middle class child of getting into upper secondary education.

This finding could also be related to the results of the 2003 PISA¹⁴⁶ on highly differentiated compulsory education systems. Education systems with lower ages of selection tend to show much larger social disparities. Moreover, in countries with a larger number of distinct programme types, socio-economic background tends to have such a significantly larger impact on student performance that equity is much harder to realise. The 2003 PISA report furthermore states that the more differentiated and selective education systems tend to show not only much larger variation in school performance, but also larger performance differences between students from more or less advantaged family backgrounds.

It must be stated though that a country like Finland is, when compared to the UK or Germany, rather homogeneous economically, socially as well as culturally. Moreover, the catchment areas of the schools are more similar since there is little residential segregation brought about by socio-economic segregation¹⁴⁷.

¹⁴¹ Emer Smyth. *Gender differentiation in education and early labour market transitions: A comparative analysis*. Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). 2001

¹⁴² EFT. *Vocational Education and Training against social exclusion*. 2000.

¹⁴³ National Youth Council of Ireland. *Submission to the NESF Project Team on Early School Leaving*, National economic and social Forum, Report nr 24.

¹⁴⁴ Refer-Net European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), Philip Ammerman, *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems Country Report: Greece*.

¹⁴⁵ OECD, *Knowledge and Skills for Life – First Results from PISA 2000,2001*.

¹⁴⁶ OECD, *Learning for Tomorrow's World*. First PISA Results 2003.

¹⁴⁷ Gundel Schümer, "What can we learn from international comparisons? PISA 2000 disentangled." Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin.

One of the reasons shown in the PISA 2003 report for close association between the age at which differentiation begins and social selectivity is that students are more dependent upon their parents and parental resources when they are younger. Therefore, in systems with a high degree of educational differentiation parents from higher socio-economic backgrounds are in a better position to promote their children's chances than in a system in which such decisions are taken at a later age and students themselves choose. Moreover, a concentration of low-achieving pupils growing up in unfavourable social conditions results in lower achievement than would be predicted solely on the basis of the pupils' individual abilities and social background. Conversely, a concentration of high achievers growing up in favourable social conditions results in higher learning outcomes than would be predicted on the basis of the pupils' individual and family characteristics.

A Maltese study¹⁴⁸ found that whilst middle class and upper class children learn subjects that lead to higher education, lower class children are more likely to be placed in vocational options which reduce their chances to attend university later on. Educational institutions are faced with the dilemma of equalising the life chances of their students and preparing young people for positions in a differentiated labour market. This leads to the differentiation of school curricula by type of skills required, which also leads to different eventual social destinations.

In Malta, this is further reflected in the type of secondary school attended. The proportion of young people opting for continuing their education is highly influenced by the type of secondary school attended. In comparison to students from Church Schools, Junior Lyceums and Independent schools, a significantly smaller percentage of students from Area Secondary Schools decide to stay on at school. The percentage of students attending Area Secondary schools and staying after compulsory education is decreasing and has fallen drastically to 25.1% in 2000, whereas there are slow increases for the other types of secondary schools. The report from the Education Training Cooperation in Malta states that the statistics clearly show that the type of secondary school attended predetermines to a great extent the probability of whether students stay on at a school or not on completion of compulsory education. Moreover, the highest percentage of students opting for technical and vocational tracks after compulsory education comes from Area Secondary Schools. Church and Independent Schools, and a little less so Junior Lyceum cater mainly for the general education strand. Students from Area secondary schools either move on to work straight away after finishing or end up in unemployment or stay at home. The authors conclude that this highlights how economic background tends to offer exclusive transition paths¹⁴⁹.

6.4.2 Parents' influence

Problematic family circumstances

Hypothesis 14 "Young people receiving no parental support or having to cope with problematic family circumstances are more likely to disengage early from school"

Family structure has an impact on early school leaving. The family may provide a stable environment for children, which promotes learning, but in many cases the family

¹⁴⁸ Gatt and Partners, "The School to Work Transition of Young People in Malta", Employment and Training Cooperation, Malta, 2005.

¹⁴⁹ Gatt and Partners, "The School to Work Transition of Young People in Malta", Employment and Training Cooperation, Malta, 2005.

structure does not support learning. Research shows that the family situations of leavers and graduates differed sharply.¹⁵⁰

The attitudes toward schooling, levels of education, and occupations of their parents are all associated with the likelihood that pupils will leave school before graduation. Pupils whose parents did not consider the completion of secondary school very important are more likely to leave school early.¹⁵¹

Parental structure

Youngsters from lone-parent or no-parent families have a higher risk of early school leaving.¹⁵² This is related to the poverty resulting in such families rather than the merits of single parent rearing. Family conflict, lack of any meaningful family support, weak family ties and changes in family situation (such as separation) affects the rate of early school leaving.¹⁵³

The analysis presented in Chart 6.4a is based on the 2004 LFS data. It shows the difference between the parental structure of ESL and non-ESL in terms of single parent families with only the mother present or the father and two parent families. Although the analysis shows a clear difference in the parental structure of ESL and non-ESL, the data used for this analysis have some limitations which are elaborated in detail in Annex G. In short, these limitations relate to:

- Only about 60% of the total ESL population in the 2004 survey and about 70% of the non-ESL population is actually analysed (this is due to the limitations of some variables upon which the construction of parental structure is based. A full elaboration of these limitations is presented in Annex G)
- The survey is not carried out as a household survey in Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Iceland and Norway, and therefore this analysis cannot be carried out for these countries.
- The data does not allow conclusions to be made about the historical parental structure, at the time when the child was going through primary and secondary

¹⁵⁰ 25% of leavers were in lone-parent families, double the proportion for graduates (12%). *Leaving School, Results from National Survey Comparing School Leavers and High School Graduates 18 to 20 years of age*, 1995, Government of Canada.

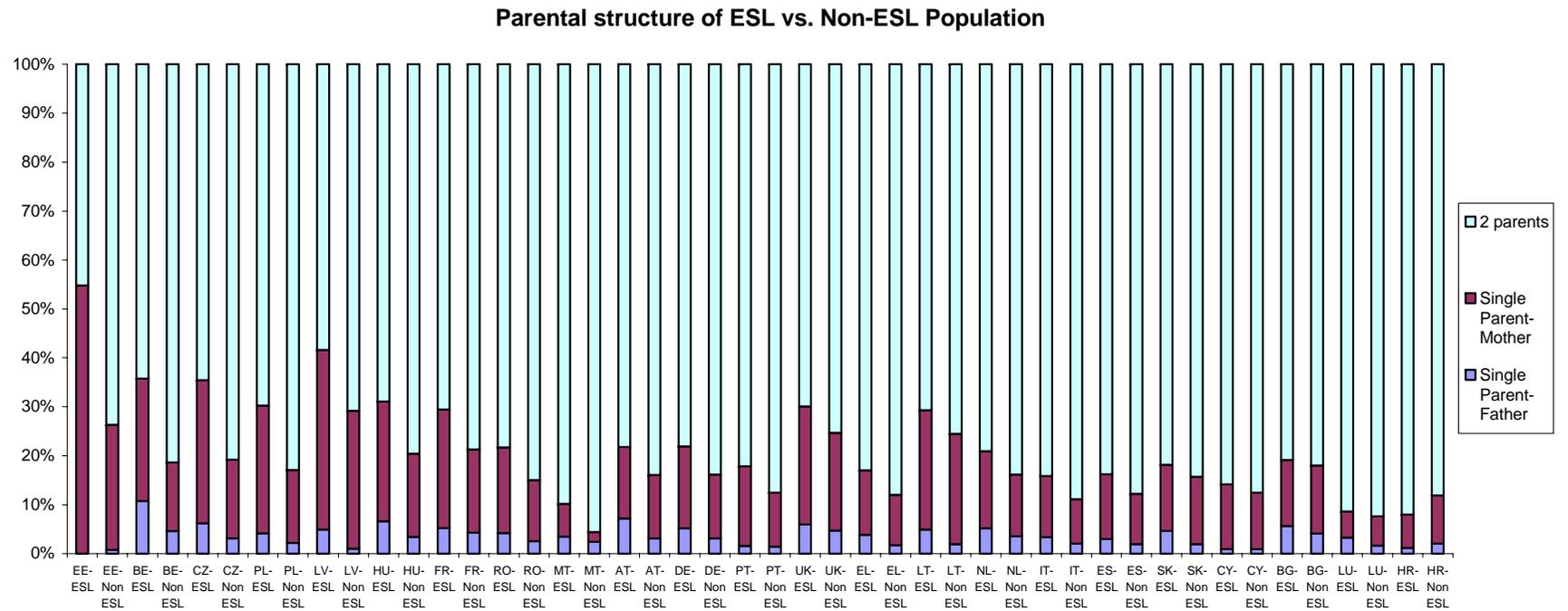
¹⁵¹ The small minority of parents who did not value high school completion seemed to have a considerable influence on their children's education decisions. *Leaving School, Results from National Survey Comparing School Leavers and High School Graduates 18 to 20 years of age*, 1995, Government of Canada.

¹⁵² *Youth Drop Outs: Problem & Solutions*. Marla Spergel, published by Hillwatch.

¹⁵³ *Pathways, Effective Support for Early school leavers*, Ireland.

education. Therefore the link between this factor and the chances of early school leaving should be treated with caution.

Chart 6.4a: Parental structure of ESL versus non-ESL population for 2004 (LFS)



The results of the analysis¹⁵⁴ show that in all countries (where data is available), except Croatia, the proportion of respondents living in single parent households was greater for early school leavers than non-early school leavers. In Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Czech Republic, Belgium and Estonia, the difference in the proportion of two parent families between ESL and non-ESL populations was greater than 10%. In France, Romania, Malta, Austria, Germany, Portugal, UK, Greece, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Italy and Spain the difference was a more moderate 4-6%. In Slovakia, Cyprus, Bulgaria, and Luxembourg, the difference was a very minor 1-2%. However in Croatia, the non-ESL population had 4% more single parent households than the ESL population. On average, the proportion of single parent families was about 5% higher for the ESL population over the non-ESL population. Across all countries the proportion of single parent mothers was greater than single parent fathers.

Parental education and employment status

The most striking difference between early school leavers and non-early school leavers is in the proportion of parents with low levels of education (ISCED 1-2). These percentages are particularly high in the countries of Southern Europe (80 per cent in Spain, 68 per cent in Italy and 66 per cent in Greece; information for Portugal is not available) and comparatively low in Slovakia, Finland, Hungary, Sweden and Austria (below 30 per cent). If compared with the data on children's educational attainment, these data point out the remarkable improvement that younger generations in Southern European countries have made in their educational attainment. Overall, in all examined countries the proportion of young people with at least upper-secondary education is higher than the percentages of parents with the same level of education.

With the exception of Finland, the proportion of people leaving education at an earlier stage is much higher among those whose parents have low levels of education than among those who have more educated parents (outflow percentages) and these differences are also significant¹⁵⁵.

A Canadian report¹⁵⁶ found that parental education, particularly that of mothers, seemed to have a greater impact on women than on men. In two-parent families, there were eight times as many female leavers whose mothers had low education as had high education. By contrast, among male leavers, low-education mothers were three times as numerous as those with high education. In fact, 56% of female leavers in 2-parent families had mothers who had not graduated from high school, compared with 38% of male leavers.

Another Canadian study¹⁵⁷ showed that a substantial share of leavers from two-parent families had parents who were not working. The fathers of 14% of leavers were not employed, double the figure for graduates' fathers (7%). Mothers were much less likely

¹⁵⁴ While data for SI exists, the ESL population falls below the EUROSTAT publication guidelines.

¹⁵⁵ Eurostat. *Young People's Social Origin, Educational Attainment and Labour Market Outcomes in Europe*. 2003

¹⁵⁶ Government of Canada, *Leaving School - Results From a National Survey Comparing School Leavers and High School Graduates 18 to 20 Years of Age* - January 1995

¹⁵⁷ Government of Canada, *Leaving School - Results From a National Survey Comparing School Leavers and High School Graduates 18 to 20 Years of Age* - January 1995

to be employed outside the home, but again, the proportion of leavers' mothers who were not employed (30%) exceeded the proportion for graduates (24%). This discrepancy did not prevail among lone-parent families. Almost equal shares of leavers and graduates from such families had parents who were not employed 18% and 19%, respectively. Moreover, leavers were much more likely than graduates to have parents employed in blue collar fields (primary industries, processing, etc.). For instance, 55% of leavers from two-parent families had fathers who worked in these occupations; this compared with 40% of graduates (Chart 3-7). On the other hand, just 11% of leavers had fathers with managerial, professional or technical jobs, compared with 30% of graduates. The trend was similar in lone-parent families, but because the majority of these families are headed by women, relatively few parents had blue collar jobs.

6.4.3 *Changing schools*

Research suggests that the effects of mobility can be seen as negative, neutral or even beneficial, depending on the circumstances of the young person. Fields (1997)¹⁵⁸ reports that highly mobile students are more likely to get lower grades of maths and reading on standardised tests than their peers, more likely to have poorer attendance records, have a higher chance of dropping out or of being suspended, a greater chance of staying back a grade, and have significantly more referrals and assessments for reading difficulties. Barton (2005)¹⁵⁹ reported that changing schools frequently is one of a combination of three factors (socioeconomic characteristics, number of parents living in the home, and a history of changing schools frequently) associated with 58 % of the variation in completion rates between states in the USA. Another US study¹⁶⁰ found that absenteeism, disciplinary problems and frequently changing schools are all found at a much higher than the average rate in students that drop out.

A number of studies report, however, that there are inherent difficulties in assessing the impact of changing schools on rates of early school leaving. For example, Buerkle and Christenson (1999)¹⁶¹ suggested that mobility in the case of families living in high-risk situations 'is often so mixed up with various problematic issues that it becomes nearly impossible to sort out its impact on outcome variables'.

6.4.4 *Ethnicity*

Hypothesis 15: Young people from foreign background are more likely to leave school early than nationals.

Research on ethnic minority groups in the United Kingdom suggested that dropping out of school can be related to incidents at home such as abuse, threats of arranged

¹⁵⁸ Fields (1997) Quoted in *Changing Schools: It's Impact on Student Learning Appendices* Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, Australia 2002

¹⁵⁹ Barton P (2005) Policy Information Report. *One Third of a Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities*. ETS

¹⁶⁰ School Dropouts: Education Could Play a Stronger Role in Identifying and Disseminating Promising Prevention Strategies, United States General Accounting Office, GAO-02-240, February 2002, p. 3 quoted in Barton P (2005) Policy Information Report. *One Third of a Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities*. ETS

¹⁶¹ *Changing Schools: It's Impact on Student Learning Appendices* Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, Australia 2002

marriages and bereavement.¹⁶² Importantly, many non-attenders indicated parents who encourage or condone truancy. Within the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in a large UK northern town, for example, there was a tolerance within families when young men were not attending school.¹⁶³

Estimations of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science suggest that most of the drop outs in basic education are children from Roma origin¹⁶⁴.

In the Netherlands, the young people who leave school early are relatively often (ethnic minority) males from a lower class-background. Especially young Turkish and Antillean males (almost 25% and 18% respectively) tend to end the school before obtaining a diploma in secondary education. In comparison with Dutch children, non-Dutch children are already in a disadvantaged position during primary education, as a consequence of insufficient command of the Dutch language, which in turn is linked with the social and cultural background of many non-Dutch children. This disadvantageous position is often not addressed during the remainder of their school career. As a group, they perform less well in school and have a greater chance of leaving school early than Dutch children¹⁶⁵.

The OECD report from 1998 shows that the drop out rates in the USA were lowest for Asian and non-Hispanic Whites and the drop out rates were highest for Blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, an American study¹⁶⁷ found that the drop out rates over the past three decades for Whites have been consistently lower than the rates observed for either Blacks or Hispanics. The percentage of Hispanics who were dropouts has remained higher than that of Blacks and Whites in every year throughout a 30 year period (this report notes that this is high because more than half were foreign born Hispanics). Data cited indicates that language may be a barrier to participation in US Schools among Hispanic immigrants.

The Canadian School Leavers' Survey¹⁶⁸ found that early school leaver rates were particularly high among aboriginal people. Over 40% of aboriginal 18-20-year-olds were leavers (compared with 16% for the population aged 18-20 overall), and just 30% were high school graduates (versus 63% for all 18-20-year-olds). This exceptionally

¹⁶² Britton L., Chatrik B., Coles B., Craig G., Hylton C., Mumtaz S., Bivand P., Burrows R. and Convery P. (2002) *Missing Connexions: The Career Dynamics and Welfare Needs of Black and Minority Ethnic Young People at the Margins*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

¹⁶³ *The needs of excluded young people in multi-cultural communities*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

¹⁶⁴ Refer-Net European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), Ulrike Damyranovic, Haralabos Fragoulis, *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems Country Report: Bulgaria*.

¹⁶⁵ E G R I S European Group for Integrated Social Research. *Youth Policy and Participation. Potentials of participation and informal learning in young people's transitions to the labour market. A comparative analysis in ten European regions National report of the Netherlands*. August-September 2001

¹⁶⁶ OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 1998.

¹⁶⁷ Philip Kaufman, Martha Naomi & Christopher Chapman, *Dropout rates in the United States*, MPR Associates Inc, NCES, 2001

¹⁶⁸ Government of Canada, *Leaving School - Results From a National Survey Comparing School Leavers and High School Graduates 18 to 20 Years of Age* - January 1995

high leaver rate was not surprising, as large proportions of aboriginal people had other characteristics associated with early school leaving. Close to half lived with one parent or with neither parent, compared with fewer than a quarter of all 18-20-year-olds. The percentage of aboriginal people with dependent children (16%) was four times the figure for the 18-20 age group overall (4%). Just 8% of the population aged 18-20 was immigrant, and most of them had been in Canada at least 10 years. Immigrants, however, were less likely than the Canadian-born population to be leavers. Just 11% of 18-20-year old immigrants were school leavers, compared with 17% of people who had been born in Canada.

Linguistic minorities represented 8% of the 18-20-year-old population (English in Quebec; French in the rest of the country; and all those who most often used a non-official language). Little difference existed between the leaver rates of minority and majority language groups.

Coming from migrant family can also have the opposite effect. An Australian report showed that even though the average educational attainment of parents in non-English speaking families is lower than for parents from English speaking backgrounds, they have higher educational aspirations for their children and place a premium on completing high school as a form of enhancing their children's future education and work prospects¹⁶⁹.

Table 6.4b presents the sub-groups of ESL according to their nationality (own country national, a person from another EU15 country or a person from a non-EU15 country). It must be stated though that this variable is linked to the Member State's specific laws on naturalisations, i.e. a person categorised as a "national" might belong to an ethnic minority background and therefore the issues discussed in the literature review above may not apply. Moreover, the categorisation "non-EU15" gives no indication whether the person is from an EU25 Member State or a third country national.

¹⁶⁹ P. Miller; P. Volker. *The youth labour market in Australia*. The Economic Record, 63. 1987.

Table 6.4b: Distribution of ESL according to nationality (LFS 2004)

Country	% ESL categorised as “nationals”	% ESL categorised as “other EU15”	% ESL categorised as “non-EU15”
Austria	72.6	1.6	25.8
Belgium	88.3	2.9	8.7
Cyprus	70	20	10
Czech Republic	96.7	0	3.3
Denmark	90.9	0	9.1
Estonia	63.2	0	36.8
Finland	97.7	0	2.3
France	90.7	1.8	.7
Germany	72.5	3.2	24.2
Greece	75.7	0	24.3
Hungary	99.1	0	.9
Ireland	96.5	1.8	1.8
Italy	94.1	0	5.9
Latvia	100	0	0
Lithuania	100	0	0
Luxembourg	50	50	0
Malta	100	0	0
Netherlands	No data is available for 2004	NA	NA
Poland	100	0	0
Portugal	97.7	.3	2
Slovakia	100	0	0
Slovenia	100	0	0
Spain	88.6	.3	11.1
Sweden	93.1	0	6.9
UK	95.7	.9	12.1

Table 6.4b shows that in all the Member States, except in Luxembourg, the majority of the ESL belongs to the group of “nationals”. There are hardly any of the ESL categorised as “other EU15” nationals. In Austria, Estonia, Germany and Greece, around 25% of the ESL are from outside the EU15.

Given the limitations of the data, it is difficult to make conclusions on the impact of ethnicity on early school leaving. As suggested earlier, to fully analyse this potential impact, more in-depth analyses is necessary on issues such as whether the language

spoken at home different than the one at used at school and whether a more disadvantaged background could potentially impact on early school leaving.

6.4.5 Peers

School life consists of more than classes, teachers, and school activities. Friendships can be an important part of the experience, for both social and academic reasons. Friends can exert a "push" or "pull" by encouraging each other to remain in school or by being a force that pulls students away from school. A study from the Canadian Government showed that there was little difference between leavers and graduates in terms of having close friends at the same school (more than 90% for both groups). The exception was female leavers who were somewhat less likely than female graduates to have close friends at their school. The story was different for friendships outside school. Over 70% of the male leavers had close friends not attending any school, compared with 45% of male graduates. The difference was less marked among women: 59% versus 41%. The survey asked respondents to indicate the importance their friends attached to high school completion. Most graduates had friends who strongly supported high school completion, while the friends of leavers were less clearly convinced of the value of a high school diploma. Fewer than half of the leavers, compared with 80% of the graduates, reported that most of their friends believed completing high school was "very important". Conversely, about 12% of the leavers said that their friends felt that it was not very important to finish high school, whereas this was the case for only 2% of the graduates¹⁷⁰.

The reviewed literature as well as the analyses carried out on the LFS data for 2004 with regard to specific external aspects strongly suggests that a disadvantaged socio-economic background might influence a young person to leave school early. Several factors are important with regard to socio-economic background - poverty, as a consequence of parental structure, parents' education and employment, problematic family circumstances as well as frequently changing schools, ethnicity and more specifically the influence of foreign language spoken at home and cultural influences and the influence of peers.

¹⁷⁰ Government of Canada. *Leaving School - Results From a National Survey Comparing School Leavers and High School Graduates 18 to 20 Years of Age* - January 1995,

7 LABOUR MARKET PERFORMANCE OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS

7.1 Introduction

One of the key questions of this study is “How are early school leavers performing on the labour market?” In this section the following sub questions are analysed:

- What is the employment rate across countries and years of early school leavers in comparison with non-early school leavers?
- What are the working conditions for early school leavers in terms of security of employment, working hours, earnings and occupational status?

7.2 Comparison of labour market participation of early school leavers and non-early school leavers

Hypothesis 16: “Early school leavers perform less well in the labour market than the working population having completed upper secondary education or higher”

The Commission Staff Working Paper on “Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy. European Higher Education in a worldwide Perspective”¹⁷¹ states that the EU employment rate of people with lower qualifications¹⁷² is lower than almost all the other countries in the comparison (for example the USA, Australia and Canada). Moreover, the gap between the employment rates between people with upper secondary education and people with lower secondary education in the EU is more pronounced than in the USA or Japan.

At a European level, in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom unemployment rates decline with increasing levels of qualifications.¹⁷³ In France, for example, unemployment rates at the upper secondary level are about half the figure for the lowest qualified and even reduced to about one third for leavers from tertiary level education. Similar relations hold in countries like the United Kingdom, Ireland, Denmark and the Netherlands. Moreover, apprenticeships evidently perform very favourably, both compared to school-based education at the same level of training and across qualification levels. In all countries operating any such training, unemployment rates for apprentices tend towards those of tertiary level leavers and are certainly far from those of leavers with compulsory education only. But there is additional variation between the same types of education across countries. Notably, southern European countries are distinct in the sense that there are hardly any benefits attached to achieving higher qualification levels in terms of unemployment. Rather, unemployment

¹⁷¹ European Commission, Commission Staff Working Paper. Annex to the: Communication from the Commission. *Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy. European Higher Education in a Worldwide perspective.* {COM(2005)152final}, SEC(2005)518, Brussels.

¹⁷² The employment rate of people with less than upper secondary education in the EU was 54% in 2002.

¹⁷³ Walter Müller & Maarten Wolbers. *Educational attainment of young people in the European Union.* Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES) & Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA). 2001.

rates in southern Europe are often even higher at the upper secondary level as compared to those of the lowest qualified leavers, and not much reduced for tertiary level graduates either.

The institutional structure of education and training systems has long since been considered a likely explanation for cross-national differences at labour market entry in general and the remarkably better performance of countries operating (dual) systems of occupationally-specific training at the secondary level like Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands or Germany. In such countries there are relatively low levels of both youth unemployment and secondary sector employment among young people¹⁷⁴. The main argument in academic literature is a relationship between transition patterns and outcomes and the structured integration. This occurs through the provision of transferable occupational skills and extensive work experience with a specific employer in the context of dual training system arrangements, mostly apprenticeships, enabling market entrants to effectively compete for jobs in occupationally segmented labour markets. In countries lacking such systems of training provision, in contrast, early labour market careers are said to exhibit more volatility, unemployment and job mobility, reflecting more extensive periods of initial job search and the acquisition of work experience through mobility and job hopping¹⁷⁵.

According to Brauns et al.¹⁷⁶ labour market entry in Germany is found to be quite smooth and immediate for vocationally qualified leavers, while extensive periods of searching for a first job is confined almost exclusively to the least qualified. After initial employment has been found, education plays a negligible role in the risk of unemployment which is tied more to aspects of employment positions. The strongest stratification of unemployment risks according to education prevails in Germany. According to the authors, this finding is due to the sharp skill-divide between vocational qualified and vocationally unqualified school-leavers. In the German occupational labour market, vocational qualifications provide a clear advantage over having only general education at every level. Vocationally qualified school leavers profit from a smooth transition into employment immediately after completing their training. Moreover, they seem to benefit from job allocations which provide them with quite substantial security of employment during their early career. The opposite side to the employment security offered to vocationally qualified school leavers in occupational labour markets is the way in which unqualified school leavers are excluded from the labour market.

Attained qualifications are a main asset in worker competition for jobs available in the labour market. But education is not the only resource of workers in job search: work experience, past employment history, networks and contacts, or geographical mobility might all be reasonably and convincingly related to individuals' labour market success. In addition, social differentiation according to gender, ethnicity or class background might be expected to operate, both due to their association with the availability of market resources and more fundamental persisting social inequalities.

¹⁷⁴ OECD, "Getting started, settling in: *the Transition from Education to the Labour Market*". 1998.

¹⁷⁵ Walter Müller & Maarten Wolbers. *Educational attainment of young people in the European Union*. Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES) & Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA). 2001.

¹⁷⁶ Hildegard Brauns, Markus Gangl, Stefani Scherer. *Comparative Analysis of Transitions from Education to Work in Europe*. Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES).

Labour market processes depend on the qualification attained. Early labour force experiences are an immediate consequence of educational decisions taken earlier, and thus intimately linked together and potentially both mutually reinforcing and behaviourally interdependent.

According to Müller and Wolbers¹⁷⁷ three country groups are distinguished between twelve EU member countries, representing both distinct configurations of institutional arrangements and empirical patterns of labour market entry. More specifically, a distinction is made between:

1. Austria, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands as the group of Northern European countries where strong occupational labour markets are regularly claimed to operate.
2. The southern European countries, including Greece, Italy, and Portugal, regularly claimed to exhibit a rigid labour market, both in terms of formal employment protection and career mobility patterns.
3. The residual set of countries, including Britain, Ireland, France, Belgium, but also Spain, as a final group of European countries, which (to varying degrees) lack either institutional feature of labour markets.

Entering the labour market in a southern European context is likely to imply an extended period of unemployment before securing a first job as compared to the Northern European experience, even after controlling for education and economic context factors. The comparative analysis performed by Müller and Wolbers¹⁷⁸ strongly suggests avoiding oversimplified accounts of the Southern peculiarity. The lack of contract regulations allowing the adjustment of job rewards and initial productivity certainly have some role to play in this respect. Still, there is the intriguing observation that it is the highly qualified who face integration problems rather than the lowest qualified who would generally be expected to bear the unemployment costs of strong employment protection.

Any explanation based on the effects of strict employment protection would thus have to come to terms with the fact that the lowest qualified do not do worse in Southern Europe as compared to Northern European economies. According to Müller and Wolbers¹⁷⁹, there are two potential factors that might explain this pattern. The first argument would continue to focus on the detrimental effects of strict employment protection on young people's employment chances, but would argue that family networks in the small-firm based Southern economies effectively provide the functional substitute which generates the flexibility necessary to integrate less qualified leavers. If this were the case, one would expect different selectivity patterns to operate at the secondary level of educational systems. Another argument consistent with the

¹⁷⁷ Walter Müller & Maarten Wolbers. *Educational attainment of young people in the European Union*. Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES) & Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA). 2001.

¹⁷⁸ Walter Müller & Maarten Wolbers. *Educational attainment of young people in the European Union*. Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES) & Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA). 2001.

¹⁷⁹ Walter Müller & Maarten Wolbers. *Educational attainment of young people in the European Union*. Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES) & Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA). 2001.

observed patterns would be to focus on differences in supply-side reactions to institutional rigidities in the labour market. If new entrants to the labour market intend and, indeed are, to a larger extent enabled to fulfil their occupational aspirations early in their careers, then one would also expect a selection of relatively highly educated into unemployment.

The Maltese report by the Employment and Training Cooperation found that youth unemployment has risen from 4.4% in 1994 to 6% in 2000. This rise is similar for both males and females¹⁸⁰. The majority of those who leave school early end up mainly in low level occupations such as machine operators or elementary jobs. Only about 10% manage to find clerical jobs or work as technicians and associated professional jobs. There are few job opportunities with future prospects for advancement for young persons who opt out of education at the age of 16.

There are a number of features common to the jobs of early school leavers. First of all, most of the jobs do not require any specific skills. The exceptions to this would be those engaged in a trade job and those performing clerical duties. Secondly, most of the jobs are also low paid jobs, many of them, probably earning a minimum wage. The only exceptions to this pattern are those working in family business. It is further found in this report that it is especially students attending the Area Secondary schools that are channelled to low level type of employment. They further state that it is an important weakness of the Maltese education system that so many of these students end up with no qualifications. It is recommended to draw up some kind of certification on other competences and skills besides academic subjects. This would enable these young people to show evidence of the skills and abilities that they have developed during their compulsory years. The authors conclude that all this shows that in today's society, compulsory education is not enough to prepare young people for jobs of a certain responsibility. Further education is necessary for better employment possibilities and consequently better pay and better quality of life.

It is furthermore observed in the above mentioned study that the increase in qualified school leavers in the course of educational expansion fosters indeed a greater risk of labour market exclusion for the unqualified. In other words, in occupational labour markets, educational expansion leads to an even stronger closure against those already being largely excluded.

Even if the British have made great efforts to reform their vocational education and training system and to deregulate the labour market, almost no indication of improved relative chances was found for those with vocational qualifications. Rather the opposite situation in relation to the labour market entry was observed.¹⁸¹

Analysis in France, the UK and Germany¹⁸² shows that young people's risk of unemployment is strongly related to their educational (non-) achievement in all three countries. Unemployment rates are typically highest among school leavers with

¹⁸⁰ Gatt and Partners, *"The School to Work Transition of Young People in Malta"*, Employment and Training Cooperation, Malta, 2005.

¹⁸¹ Hildegard Brauns, Markus Gangl, Stefani Scherer. *Comparative Analysis of Transitions from Education to Work in Europe*. Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES). 2001

¹⁸² Hildegard Brauns, Markus Gangl, Stefani Scherer. *Comparative Analysis of Transitions from Education to Work in Europe*. Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES). 2001

compulsory education only and lowest among graduates from higher education. Despite substantial cross-country differences in national unemployment rates, the absolute rates faced by the lowest and the highest qualified school-leavers, are fairly similar. This implies that in all three countries, tertiary education provides significant advantages, and compulsory education major disadvantages with respect to labour market integration. Moreover, benefits are observed pertaining to vocational qualification: in all three countries, vocational qualifications significantly reduce the likelihood of unemployment in the longer term as compared to having only general education at the same level. Overall, employers tend to reward two facets of educational achievement: the hierarchical level of education reached and the vocational specificity of one's education.

Further analysis carried out by Brauns et al.¹⁸³ resulted in the finding that much weaker direct effects of formal education on young people's chances of persisting in the labour market, once an entry has taken place, in Germany than in the UK and France. In Germany, tight selection at entry into the occupationally structured labour market implies a smooth and, in terms of job allocation, structured transition into the employment system for those who are endowed with the critical entry tickets. Once these school leavers enter the closed system, they are able to convert their educational resources into a (more or less) beneficial labour market position whose attributes largely determine chances of continued employment.

The results of the empirical analyses conducted by Cristina Iannelli & Acunacion Soro-Bonmati¹⁸⁴ have confirmed that the labour market position of those with only compulsory education or less is more disadvantaged in Spain than in Italy: they are more likely to be unemployed (but also inactive), employed in atypical contracts (fixed-term contracts and part-time contracts) and to have lower occupational status. The Spanish lower secondary leavers seem to be more mobile than their Italian counterparts: unemployed Spaniards are more likely to move into jobs (and also into inactivity) but once employed, they are more likely to move out of employment (towards both unemployment and inactivity). These results support the expectation that those with low levels of education in Spain face lower difficulties in finding jobs but higher risks of losing employment than their Italian counterparts. In Spain there seems to be a clear linear effect of education on the chances of being unemployed whereas this linear effect seems to be absent in Italy.

This result can according to the authors be attributed to the faster expansion of tertiary education in Spain which has led to higher competition between people with different levels of educational attainment. Thus, the positions previously occupied by those with only compulsory education are now taken by people with higher educational levels. This has resulted in a crowding-out of the least qualified towards unemployment, unstable employment and lower occupational positions. Another interesting result, strictly linked to this crowding-out effect, is that the marginal returns to higher educational levels, that is the relative advantage of having achieved an educational level above the previous one, are higher in Spain than in Italy. Thus achieving higher

¹⁸³ Hildegard Brauns, Markus Gangl, Stefani Scherer. *Comparative Analysis of Transitions from Education to Work in Europe*. Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES). 2001

¹⁸⁴ Cristina Iannelli & Acunacion Soro-Bonmati. *The transition from School to Work in Southern Europe: The Cases of Italy and Spain*. Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES). 2001.

educational levels seem to benefit young Spaniards more than Italians. However, the overall returns to education are lower in Spain than in Italy.

Moreover in Spain, leavers from academic tracks are significantly more likely to be unemployed (and inactive) than those leaving from short and long vocational tracks. Even though there are some significant differences among people with different types of diploma or living in different areas of the country, in Spain the results remain substantially unchanged.

In Italy, furthermore the chances of being unemployed and inactive are strongly influenced by the area of residence and the type of diploma acquired. Thus, young people with lower-secondary education are significantly more likely to be unemployed (and inactive) in the South of Italy than in the rest of the country¹⁸⁵.

In Latvia¹⁸⁶, the lack of education brings with it the risk of social exclusion, because of several reasons:

- They can not find employment, because they lack professional skills
- They can not take a job because of their age: employers are unwilling to engage young people below the age of 16 and even below 18
- They cannot acquire skills even with the assistance of the State Employment Service, because it only offers programmes for those of 18 years of age and above.

Iceland's economic structure on the other hand implies that there are unusually good job opportunities for workers with few formal educational qualifications.¹⁸⁷

In Belgium, early school leavers seem according to DIVA not to have any disadvantage in finding a job immediately after leaving school but after only three months a gap between early school leavers and non-early school leavers becomes visible. In comparison with non-early school leavers, 10 to 15% more early school leavers tend to be inactive. The difference with people having pursued higher education is even 25%. Two years after having left school, 10% of early school leavers have never worked yet¹⁸⁸.

Based on a comparative study of the USA and Australia¹⁸⁹, it was found that 61% of US students who never dropped out were engaged in productive activities compared to 39% for dropouts who completed high school and 34% for dropouts who did not complete high school.

¹⁸⁵ Hildegard Brauns, Markus Gangl, Stefani Scherer. *Comparative Analysis of Transitions from Education to Work in Europe*. Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES). 2001

¹⁸⁶ ETF, European Training Foundation. *Vocational Education and Training against social exclusion*. Riga 2000.

¹⁸⁷ OECD, *Economic Survey of Iceland 2005: The role of structural policies*.

¹⁸⁸ DIVA, *LLL in Flanders, Data, developments and policy*, December 2003.

¹⁸⁹ Russel W. Rumberger and Stephen P. Lamb, *The Early Employment and Further Education Experiences of High School Drop-outs: A Comparative Study of the United States and Australia*. OECD, 1998.

Annex H presents a chart per country (EU25) on the employment rate by highest educational attainment for the year 2004¹⁹⁰ as well as the employment rate for 25-64 years old by highest education level attained¹⁹¹.

From these charts the following observations can be made:

- Overall, all countries show a clear distinction between the different education levels in terms of employment with those who have only obtained lower secondary education or lower, having the lowest rate of employment except for Iceland, Portugal, Greece and Luxembourg for which for some age groups the employment rate of ESL comes very close or is even higher than the employment rate of the other ISCED levels.
- The disparity between the employment rate of the different education levels varies quite highly between the EU25 with Slovakia having the highest disparity between lower secondary education and the higher education levels over all age groups and Iceland having the lowest disparity.
- The countries having a relatively high employment rate for the lowest educated over all age groups (i.e. an employment rate generally above 75%) are: Cyprus, Iceland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Sweden (except for the early years and last years of the active population)
- Several countries show trends in which the employment rate of the lowest educated is higher than the ones for the non-early school leavers but this is mostly due to age, when the higher educated are probably still pursuing education. The following countries show this trend for older age groups (i.e. 25 and older) as well though: Spain (same employment rate as those with ISCED3-4 between 25 and 29 years old but decreasing trend for the lowest educated from then on), Greece (employment rate of lowest educated stays in general very close to those with ISCED3-4), Iceland (the lowest educated have a higher employment rate till 34 years old and again from around 55 years old) and Luxembourg (the lowest educated have a higher employment rate between 35 and 45 years old)
- Two groups of countries emerge: those of which the employment rate for people who have only obtained lower secondary education or lower are below the overall employment rate for almost all age groups and those who are mostly close or higher than the overall employment rate. Countries below are Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Hungary, Norway (except for between the age of 35 and 39 years old), Poland (except for between 35 and 49 years old), Slovakia, United Kingdom.
- Finland is a special case having the employment rate for the lowest educated below the overall employment rate till the age of 35 and then increasing above the overall employment rate. Croatia has an employment rate for the lowest educated mostly above the overall employment rate but this rate highly decreases from the age of 45 onwards. Ireland has an employment rate for the lowest educated very close to the overall employment rate between 30 and 45 years old whereas for the age groups below and above the 30-45 years old it is

¹⁹⁰ Rates are calculated on the basis of the LFS dataset.

¹⁹¹ This chart is based on the OECD, Education at a Glance 2004 and is not available for the different age groups.

below the overall employment rate. The Netherlands show an employment rate for the lowest educated close till 45 years old and from then onwards the trend is below the overall employment rate.

- The overall employment rate for EU25 is around 63% in 2004. The following countries have an employment rate for the lowest educated mostly below this average for 25 till 54 years old: the Czech Republic, Germany, Croatia (low overall employment rate), Hungary (low overall employment rate), Lithuania (the employment rate for the lowest educated is very unstable), Latvia (the employment rate for the lowest educated is very unstable), Malta (low overall employment rate), Norway (except for 35-49years old), Poland (extremely low employment rate), Slovakia and the UK.

Also in the four OECD study countries it might be said that there is a great difference between the employment rate of those with only below secondary education and those with higher levels of education, as shown by the last chart in Annex H. This chart presents the employment rate of 25-64 years old by highest educational level based on OECD data 2002 for EU 25, Canada, Australia, USA and Japan. The EU25 has the lowest rate of employment for those with no upper secondary education qualification¹⁹² but Canada has the highest disparity between the lowest educated ones and the higher levels whereas Japan has the highest rate and the smallest disparity. Within the OECD countries, USA and Canada are performing worse than Australia and Japan with regard to the employment of those with no upper secondary education qualification, with Japan performing best.

Table 7.2 presents the strength and significance of the correlation between educational attainment and employment status and points out the above mentioned charts where the relationship is statistically significant.

¹⁹² The rate is for 2002, 2003 and 2004 respectively 53.8; 54.1 and 54.3. So only a slight increase since 2002 can be observed.

Table 7.2: Strength of correlation between early school leaving and employment status in the EU25 over the period 1995-2000-2004 based on the LFS data

Country	Pearson Correlation 1995	Pearson Correlation 2000	Pearson Correlation 2004
Austria	-.106*	-.165**	-.201**
Belgium	-.158	-.142**	-.155**
Cyprus	NA	.007	-.118
Czech Republic	NA	NA	-.262**
Denmark	-.060	-.024	-.065
Estonia	NA	-.186	-.076
Finland	NA	-.022	-.009
France	-.186**	-.232**	-.197**
Germany	NA	-.263	-.295**
Greece	.153**	.086*	.051
Hungary	NA	-.111**	-.128*
Ireland	-.234**	NA	-.214**
Italy	.068**	.022	-.023
Latvia	NA	NA	-.025
Lithuania	NA	-.151*	.019
Luxembourg	-.030	-.098	-.044
Malta	NA	-.035	-.057
Netherlands	NA	-.040	NA
Poland	NA	NA	-.092
Portugal	.110**	.008	.012
Slovakia	NA	NA	-.273**
Slovenia	NA	-.098	-.178
Spain	.076**	.057**	.025
Sweden	NA	-.049	-.095*
UK	NA	-.174**	-.138**

Table 7.2 shows the correlations between only having attained a qualification from lower secondary education or lower and the risk of being unemployed and this for 1995, 2000 and 2004¹⁹³. A negative number means that for that country and year an

¹⁹³ **=Pearson Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, meaning the presented correlation is highly significant and *= Pearson Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level, meaning the presented correlation is significant. The higher the presented number is, the higher the correlation is. No * means there is no correlation. NA means that the correlation is not available due to the high number of missing values on one

early school leaver has a higher change of being unemployed than a non early school leaver. A positive number means that for that country and year people with upper secondary education or more have a higher risk of being unemployed.

The following observations can be made from the table 7.2:

- In the EU25, 14 countries show, at least for one of the years presented, a significant correlation between education level and employment status. This means that having a specific diploma in these countries will influence ability to find a job. It must be noted though that all the correlations are quite weak.
- All the significant correlations presented are negative, except for the southern countries Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. That means that for the southern countries at least in 1995 people with upper secondary education or more were at higher risk of unemployment than early school leavers at the labour market entry level. It must be stated though that the correlations are quite weak (i.e. $r < .156$). This trend continued in Greece and Spain in 2000. In 2004, none of the Southern countries still show a significant correlation. This trend of a sometimes higher employment rate for the lowest educated is confirmed in the literature review above.
- The highest correlation is to be found for Germany in 2004. This means that in Germany early school leavers have the highest risk of being unemployed. It is important to mention that in general Germany has a high unemployment rate so it can be expected that people without upper secondary qualification will have most problems finding a job. This is confirmed by the literature review showing that the strongest stratification of unemployment risks according to education prevails in Germany
- Five New Member States show a negative correlation either in 2000 or in 2004. In Hungary, where data is available for 2000 and 2004, the correlation seems to have become a bit stronger thus meaning that the risks of being unemployed have increased for the lowest educated.
- Denmark, which has data available for all years, shows no significant correlation between employment status and educational level meaning that the lowest educated have not specifically a higher change of being unemployed than the higher educated and therefore having more equal chances in finding a job.

7.2.1 Gender differences in employment status of early school leavers

According to a study conducted by EGREES¹⁹⁴ the return per additional year of education is generally of the order of 7% for men and of 6% for women. This situation is, however, highly depending on the country. In Ireland, Greece, the Netherlands, Portugal and France there is the greatest gender-related differential in return, whereas it almost zero in Austria, Finland and Norway.

of the variables. The analyses only takes into account 18-24 years old that are either an early school leaver or not and that belong to the active population.

¹⁹⁴ EGREES, *Equity in European Educational Systems. A set of indicators*. A project supported by the European Commission, DG EAC. Project Socrates SO2-610BGE, April 2005-2nd edition.

A survey conducted by the government of Canada¹⁹⁵ stated that the vast majority of both leavers and graduates had worked at a job since leaving school (92%). A similar proportion of male leavers (97%) and male graduates (93%) held a job, but female graduates (92%) were more likely than female leavers (84%) to have done so. Two thirds of leavers and graduates had just one job in the last six months. Graduates were more likely than leavers to have had two jobs and less likely than leavers to have had no job in the last six months. Leavers were more likely than graduates to be unemployed the week prior to being surveyed. Thirty-four per cent of the male leavers were unemployed compared with 23% of the male graduates. For women, 26% of the leavers were unemployed compared with 18% of the graduates. Twenty-four per cent of female leavers were not in the labour force compared with 6% of female graduates. More male leavers than graduates were employed in blue collar primary industries and processing occupations (62% compared with 48%) and fewer were in white collar clerical, sales and service jobs (28% compared with 44%). Female leavers and graduates were clustered in clerical, sales and service jobs with female leavers tending to be in service jobs (40%) and female graduates tending to be in clerical and related positions (39%). It was surprising that 26% of the male leavers and 17% of the graduates worked 50 or more hours per week. Another 47% of the male leavers and 56% of the graduates worked 40-49 hours a week. Females were less likely to work long hours; however, 34% of female leavers and 41% of female graduates worked between 40-49 hours per week. Although there was little difference between leavers and graduates, 11-12% of the males and 24-26% of the females worked less than thirty hours per week. The two main reasons given for working less than 30 hours per week were "Only a part-time job" and "Could not get more hours".

According to a comparative study of the USA and Australia¹⁹⁶, American male school dropouts held similar jobs to those who never dropped out, whereas for females differences by school completion status were somewhat more pronounced. Females who never dropped out were more likely to be employed in clerical jobs while female dropouts who never completed were most likely to be employed in sales and service jobs. Australian male employment rates were substantially higher than female rates which reflects differences in labour market opportunities available to teenage males and females; teenage girls have been more severely affected by long term changes in the Australian industry structure which have reduced work opportunities in areas traditionally pursued by school drop outs, i.e. manufacturing

Another US study¹⁹⁷ found that high levels of illiteracy translate directly into high rates of high school dropout with consequences in life outcomes. In contrast to about 80% of adults aged 25 and over with bachelor's degrees and 65% of high school graduates participating in the labour force in 1998, only 43% of high school dropouts were employed. The unemployment rate for high school dropouts aged 25 and older was almost double that of persons with four years of high school and almost four times higher than college graduates. With recent dropouts, the picture is according to this

¹⁹⁵ Government of Canada. *Leaving School - Results From a National Survey Comparing School Leavers and High School Graduates 18 to 20 Years of Age*. January 1995

¹⁹⁶ Russel W. Rumberger and Stephen P. Lamb, "The Early Employment and Further Education Experiences of High School Drop-outs: A Comparative Study of the United States and Australia". OECD, 1998.

¹⁹⁷ Hill M. Walker, *Structuring School-Based Interventions to Achieve Integrated Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Prevention Goals for Safe and Effective Schools*, Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior

study, even more dismal. Of the 1997 1998 dropouts, more than one in four was unemployed.

Annex I presents the employment status of early school leavers according to gender per country for the year 2004. The following observations can be made:

- In all the countries, female early school leavers have a lower percentage of employment with the highest difference in Malta (around 38%) and the lowest difference in Sweden (around 10%)¹⁹⁸.
- The countries with the lowest difference (i.e. between 10 and 20%) are: the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Finland and UK.
- The countries with a high difference (i.e. 20% or more) are: Belgium, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, Ireland, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Slovenia.
- The highest inactivity rates amongst female early school leavers are found in Malta, Belgium and Greece.

It is clear from the above mentioned charts that women are still more at risk of having no job when being an early school leaver in the majority of the countries. Given the fact that in all countries female early school leavers have a higher rate of inactivity, it might be that they tend to take the role of housewife and are not actively seek work. Moreover, they might have left school to perform a caring role.

According to the statistical analysis performed on LFS data as well as several research studies, it can be confirmed that ESL perform less well in the labour market than non-ESL with the exception of specific age groups in a few countries. Moreover, cross-country differences are observed in the employment rate of ESL with some countries, like for example Germany, having a stronger stratification of unemployment risks according to education on the one hand and cross-country differences on the other hand with regard to entry in the labour market, appreciation of vocational qualifications and likelihood of losing employment. In all the study countries, female ESL have a lower percentage of employment than their male counterparts.

7.3 Working conditions of early school leavers

Hypothesis 17: "Early school leavers have a higher chance of having precarious work conditions"

7.3.1 Employment characteristics of early school leavers

The above literature review reports that early school leavers are at higher risk of having to work under less advantageous working conditions, in particular in terms of security of employment, the flexibility to be shown in working hours as well as lower earnings. Another trend was that early school leavers are more likely to have blue collar jobs than those people who attained higher levels of education. According to a

¹⁹⁸ The difference is lower in Slovakia but this is due to the general low percentage of employed early school leavers.

comparative study between the USA and Australia¹⁹⁹, dropouts who never completed high school were more likely to hold jobs as labourers and less likely to hold jobs in the managerial, professional and technical areas or military.

Annex J shows the main employment characteristics of early school leavers compared to non-early school leavers and this for three different age groups in the years 1995²⁰⁰ and 2004²⁰¹. The following variables of the LFS were used - occupation, economic activity in main job by sector, professional status, permanency of employment, full-time versus part-time employment, employment including night, Sunday work or shift work in general.

Main conclusions can be drawn on three different levels:

- Differences between early school leavers across countries for a given year.
 - Differences of early school leavers across age groups within one country (within one observation year as well as across the two observation years).
 - Differences between early school leavers and non-early school leavers in one given year and across the EU25.
1. Differences between early school leavers across countries – main conclusions:
 - There does not seem to be much difference between the main employment characteristics within the group of early school leavers across countries.
 - In terms of economic activity in the southern countries and the majority of the New Member States a more equal distribution of early school leavers is found between agriculture, services and industry. In some countries, such as Poland, early school leavers shifting to agricultural work when they get older, whilst early school leavers of all ages in Slovenia tend to be mostly working in industry.
 - In Greece, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Portugal and Finland more early school leavers tend to move over to being self-employed when older.
 - In the New Member States more early school leavers of all ages seem to be engaged in craft and related trades occupations.
 - Shift and Sunday work tend to be more common in Poland for all early school leavers in 2004.
 2. Differences of early school leavers across age groups within one country– main conclusions:
 - In terms of occupational status, it seems that for the majority of the countries (except for the Czech Republic) the older early school leavers groups tend to move upwards with regard to occupations such as legislators, managers and

¹⁹⁹ Russel W. Rumberger and Stephen P. Lamb, “*The Early Employment and Further Education Experiences of High School Drop-outs: A Comparative Study of the United States and Australia*”. OECD, 1998.

²⁰⁰ No data is available for this year for the New Member States.

²⁰¹ These age groups are: 18-24; 25-36 and 37 and older.

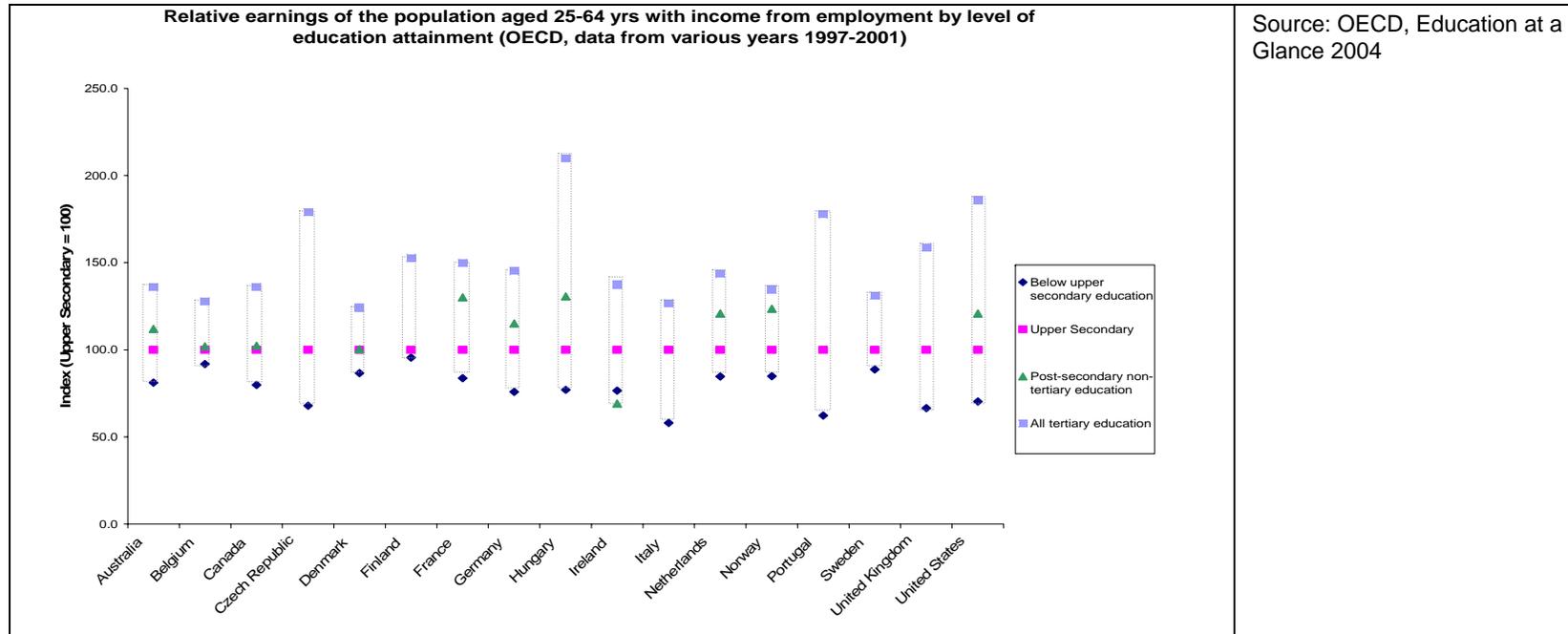
clerks and this trend did not change a lot over the years. They tend to have less likely occupations related to shops and sales when older. Also with regard to elementary occupations and even more so in 2004 than in 1995 (except for example in Cyprus). In Germany and Austria in 2004, older early school leavers seem to be more engaged in elementary jobs than younger early school leaver's generations. Luxembourg and Austria seem to have a much higher proportion of early school leavers of all ages working in elementary occupations in 2004 than in 1995.

- The economic activity seems to show the same patterns across generations of early school leavers and this over the two observation years. In both years the majority of younger as well as older early school leavers tend to work in service sector as opposed to agriculture and industry. Except for in the Czech Republic, the ESL over all generation tend to work more in industry
 - The same trend is visible with regard to professional status. Almost all young as well as the old early school leavers belong to the employee category with a little increase in self-employed across generations. This same trend is visible in both observation years.
 - Whereas a higher proportion of the oldest generation of early school leavers in 1995 had a permanent contract than the younger generation, the opposite is found for 2004 (except for Denmark Ireland, Italy and Austria for both observations years, the percentage of early school leavers having a permanent job goes down as they grow older). Although the difference is in general not high, it could point to the fact that early school leavers have now to work under less secure employment conditions when growing older.
 - In terms of number of working hours, a higher proportion of the younger generation of early school leavers in 1995 had a full-time job than the younger generation, the opposite is found for 2004 although the difference is very small.
 - For both observation years, young early school leavers as well as older early school leavers hardly do night work, Sunday work or shift work
3. Differences between early school leavers and non-early school leavers across EU25 – main conclusions:
- A much higher proportion of non-early school leavers tend to be legislators, senior officials, managers and professionals, whereas the majority of the early school leavers perform service work, crafts work and elementary occupations.
 - The majority of the non-early school leavers seem to work in the service sector, whereas the majority of the early school leavers works in either industry or service.
 - Both early school leavers and non-early school leavers tend to be employees with a slightly higher proportion of early school leavers, especially the older age group being self-employed.
 - Both groups have a relatively low number of people with a permanent contract but this number increases considerably over the age groups for non-early school leavers whereas it increases less for early school leavers.
 - No significant difference is found between the two groups with regard to full-time or part-time employment.

- There is no significant difference found between the two groups with regard to shift, night or Sunday work.

Early school leavers' average earnings are presented in chart 7.3²⁰² .

Chart 7.3: Relative earnings with income from employment by level of education attained



Source: OECD, Education at a Glance 2004

²⁰² OECD data have been used since income data are not collected through the LFS.

At OECD level average earnings increase with education level and are almost twice as high for those with higher education than for those with only lower-secondary attainment²⁰³. The countries having the highest disparity between earning of the lowest educated and the higher educated are the Czech Republic, Italy, Portugal and to a lesser extent the UK and the USA. Countries with the lowest disparities are Belgium, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden with Finland having the lowest disparity. With regard to the level of earnings, the lowest educated earn the least in Italy and Portugal and the most in Finland.

The analyses conducted and the literature review undertaken show that the differences between ESL and non-ESL with regard to income, occupational status, sector and security of employment are pronounced in some countries than in others. But in general it might be concluded that ESL earn less, are more found in blue collar jobs with less employment security and more part-time work than the non-ESL.

²⁰³ OECD. *Education at a Glance 2004*.

8 SCOPE FOR RETURNING TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN LATER LIFE

8.1 Introduction

This section addresses the key study question on the scope for returning to education and training in later life.

This question can be divided into two sub questions. Firstly, in how far are early school leavers returning at a later point in life to some form of education in order to still obtain their upper secondary diploma? In order to answer this sub question it is important to map what the provision is in every country in terms of second chance education (a mapping of this provision is presented in Annex K). Secondly, in how far do early school leavers participate to Lifelong Learning? In particular, what are there opportunities, given their somewhat disadvantaged level to engage in continuous education and training?

8.2 Availability and access to second chance education

Hypothesis 18: "Availability and easy access to 'second chance' education will positively influence the participation of early school leavers in education later in life."

8.2.1 Availability of second chance education across countries²⁰⁴

The Commission Staff Working Paper on the contribution of universities to the Lisbon strategy²⁰⁵ states that participation in lifelong learning increases with education level. The lifelong participation rate in 2003 in the EU is more than seven times higher for people with higher education than for those with lower-secondary as the highest level attained. Lifelong learning (LLL) is defined as 'all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective.'²⁰⁶

Early school leavers or unskilled workers often face barriers to lifelong learning, such as bad experiences at school, lack of confidence in their ability to learn, lack of opportunity for employer-financed training and lack of money to finance their own training. It is widely recognised that the availability of second chance education is essential for early school leavers who wish to have another opportunity to gain qualifications in order to access further education or to access the labour market.

In Canada for example, the Youth in Transition Survey (over 45,000 students surveyed) revealed that 14%, or one in seven, of those who were dropouts in December 1999 took advantage of the "second chance system" to further their

²⁰⁴ Annex K gives an extensive overview of the provision of second chance education facilities and systems per country.

²⁰⁵ European Commission, Commission Staff Working Paper. Annex to the: Communication from the Commission. *Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy. European Higher Education in a Worldwide perspective.* {COM(2005)152final}, SEC(2005)518, Brussels.

²⁰⁶ European Commission, *European Report on Quality Indicators of Lifelong Learning, Fifteen Quality Indicators. Report based on the work of the Working Group on Quality Indicators 2002*

education.²⁰⁷ For some early school leavers, it is also necessary to provide alternative structures or 'second chance' education which addresses the young person's issues with education establishments.

In many countries, second chance education for the early school leaver is the responsibility of adult education or further education providers. In Spain, adult education programmes aim to provide students over 18 with the opportunity to gain or update basic training at various educational and vocational levels. In the UK, the further education sector has traditionally provided early school leavers with opportunities to retake qualifications and access Higher Education. The government is building flexibility into the higher education system to ensure that early school leavers can access distance and part time learning institutions. The 'Access to Higher Education (HE)' courses are designed to help those with no or insufficient qualifications to have the opportunity to benefit from Higher Education. The 1 year full time or 2 year part time level 3 courses prepare students for HE in specific or general areas and students are subsequently widely accepted onto HE courses. In Sweden, each municipality is responsible for ensuring that adult education is available. Municipal adult education is free of charge to pupils. Every inhabitant of a municipal area, who has turned 20 years and is living in Sweden, is entitled to take part in the basic adult education programme, if they do not have a compulsory school leaving certificate.²⁰⁸

Review of relevant literature reveals that many countries are reshaping or filling in the gaps in provision so that early school leavers of all ages and levels can retrain, retake qualifications or learn new skills. In the Czech Republic, children who failed to complete basic education could not previously apply for upper secondary programmes. Early school leavers can now access upper secondary programmes to get a lower vocational qualification but must meet admission requirements. This is an important step to reducing the level of early school leaving in the country²⁰⁹.

Ireland offers a combination of routes for early school leavers: Adult Literacy programmes, Basic and Community Education provision, Youthreach (second chance education and training for disadvantaged 15 to 20 year olds who have left school early with minimal or no qualifications), Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) and Self-funded night-class provision in second-level schools and other centres.

Recognition of second chance qualifications

It is essential that the qualifications offered within second chance schools are recognised, accepted and linked to the school based certificates offered. In Finland second chance schools are commonly referred to as workshops and have become an important tool for providing training for people at risk of social exclusion. They offer subsidised employment, practical training and apprenticeship training. However, the workshops do not have official status within the Finnish education system, and therefore do not have right to grant vocational qualifications. In the Czech Republic recent second chance measures include introducing shortened courses for gaining an

²⁰⁷ Statistics Canada, *In and out of high school: First results from the second cycle of the Youth in Transition Survey, 2002*

²⁰⁸ *National Agency for Education – Sweden*

²⁰⁹ *Refer - net Country Report Czech Republic*

apprenticeship certificate but recognition of certificates from retraining also remains the issue, as they are not universally accepted and lack a formal link to certificates issued by schools.²¹⁰

In the US the GED Testing Program offers an important second chance opportunity for adults and out-of-school youth to demonstrate their academic skills and to earn the High School Equivalency Certificate. More than 800,000 people take the GED Tests each year. GED tests are open to candidates who are 18 years and older or for 16 or 17 year olds who have been granted an age waiver from their local educational agency. Individuals not enrolled in an accredited high school and individuals who have not graduated from an accredited high school or have not already received a high school equivalency diploma are also eligible. The GED is widely recognised as an important route for students to access college courses and further education.²¹¹

Vocational and work based learning routes

Vocational and work based learning routes are offering viable second chances options for early school leavers who want to gain training to enter employment or qualifications to move on to further education. An Australian study reports that just 40% of early school leavers who complete high school did so by returning to school. The remaining early school leavers completed high school through a Technical and Further Education College (TAFE), apprenticeships, traineeships or other certificate courses which do not require a Year 12 certificate for entry, but could be seen as providing a senior school certificate equivalent. The OECD reports that vocational education and training in Australia are playing a major role in the transition from school into work of teenage males in particular who do not complete high school.²¹² Similarly in Hungary, vocational training schools (Apprenticeship training) offer remedial programme for drop-outs and low achievers that provides a viable second chance for further education. In Spain the government has introduced important changes in vocational training which have had a significant impact on improving the number of students without higher secondary qualifications. The Refer-Net Report states that the numbers reduced by 19% between 1997 and 2001.²¹³

In Austria programmes have been established which enable young people who left school early to complete their studies at a later date. Initial Vocational Education Training (IVET) opportunities are offered to young people with “learning problems” after general compulsory schooling: these take the form of “Integrative Berufsausbildung” (Integrated Vocational Training) and the provision of training places either in a company, a school or in a training programme of the Austrian Public Employment service.

In a number of study countries the absence of an apprenticeship system (Lithuania for example) or rigid qualifying criteria, lack of funding means that early school leavers are denied access to a second chance at gaining vocational qualifications or training. In

²¹⁰ Refer - net Country Report Czech Republic

²¹¹ Barton P (2005) Policy Information Report. *One Third of a Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities*. ETS.

²¹² *The Early Employment and Further Education Experiences of High School Dropouts: a Comparative Study of the United States and Australia*, OECD (1998)

²¹³ Refer-Net. *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems*

Italy for example, policy makers are focusing on strengthening the apprenticeship route to improve both take up and the quality of provision in order to ensure that young people who drop out of education have an opportunity to obtain a well recognised qualification. In Cyprus, where ESL rates are comparatively high, one policy response has been to introduce measures aimed at reforming the apprenticeship and upper secondary educational institutions to improve completion rates.²¹⁴

In the UK the current Apprenticeships schemes are only available to young people between the ages of 16 and 24. In the Governments Skills Strategy White Paper²¹⁵ it is acknowledged that one of the key measures required to support the second chance schools is the opening up the 'Modern Apprenticeship' programme to individuals aged over 25 which would allow early school leavers greater flexibility to make the decision to return to education at a later stage. Similarly in Estonia, through the amendment to the Vocational Education Institutions Act, access to basic (preliminary) vocational education has been opened for young people (up to 25 years of age) who have not completed basic education.

Examples of successful second chance schools

A number of reports describe how early school leavers leave formal education because they feel alienated from schooling or may have had negative relationships with teachers and find the curriculum irrelevant or experience "learning fatigue"; Riele (2000)²¹⁶ suggests that these students may be better off leaving school and returning at a later stage and cites a study of early school leavers in Victoria, Australia where 21% attempted returning to school, but of the returnee's 63% left again before completing, largely due to the same school-related issues that made them leave initially (Holden, 1992).²¹⁷

The adult and community education (ACE) sector and technical and further education (TAFE) institutes in Australia are providing programs for young people that re-connect them with education. Wyn et al (2004) ²¹⁸ suggest that the ACE and TAFE programs and settings are considered effective pathways for some young people who have left school early because early school leavers are attracted to the programs by the quality of relationships between students and staff; flexibility in the mode of delivery, choice of study areas and opportunities for personal autonomy. Teachers' student-centred approaches to learning, for example self-paced learning, are important.

²¹⁴ *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems Refer-Net* European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP)

²¹⁵ '21st Century Skills – Realising our Potential: Individuals, Employers, Nation for England' (2003)

²¹⁶ Riele KT, *Second Chance Education for Early School Leavers. AARE Conference 2000*, 4-7 December, University of Sydney 2000

²¹⁷ Holden, E. (1992). *Getting a life. Pathways and early school leavers (Working Paper 9)*. Melbourne: Youth Research Centre in Riele KT, *Second Chance Education for Early School Leavers. AARE Conference 2000*, 4-7 December, University of Sydney 2000

²¹⁸ Wyn J, Stokes H and Tyler D *Stepping Stones TAFE and ACE Program Development for Early School Leavers* NCVET 2004

Reports on Second Chance Schools in Australia by Riele (2000) suggest that the central concept underpinning the 'second chance' approach, mentioned in interviews by both staff and students, should be 'support'.

*"Schools [must] ask different questions about each student: not, as at present, where does this student fit into our categories and processes, but rather, how can we build on the interests, capacities and experiences which make her or him a unique individual"*²¹⁹

The UK is also currently working to reform further education and training provision (adults as well as for early school leavers) through the "Success for All" five year strategy; the government highlights the importance of greater personalisation of learning programmes and greater choice for learners – the needs of learners must be central and opening up services – delivering learning through new and different types of provider and in new ways.²²⁰

In the USA the Accelerated Schools Project approach (ASP) is used in over 1000 elementary and middle schools. The approach also takes a student centred focus to education within the school and has been used successfully to improve schooling for children in "at-risk" situations.²²¹ Instead of placing failing students into remedial classes the colleges accelerate learning by providing all students with challenging activities that traditionally have been reserved only for students who are doing well in school. 'Alternative school' means an environment established apart from the regular educational program that includes policies, rules and resources designed to accommodate student needs and to provide a comprehensive education consistent with the student learning goals and content standards established by the school district. Lehr et al (2003)²²² report that Alternative Schools have undoubtedly become important in aiding school retention however no national data is available about success rates, either in terms of graduation rates or academic achievement.

Second chance schools often focus on flexible and multiple pathways to qualification and achievement. The Australian study on second chance schools concludes that in order to improve completion rates or retention in education systems, structures should be in place which allow young people to leave education and come back at a later stage, as the experience of learning for many students is not a linear process; life events will take the learner away from school and they may or may not return in the future. For example, literacy courses set up in Italy attracted very poor participation because the Ministry of Education set up 'rigid, school-like provision' and there was no 'visible relationship between the literacy provision and a social policy favourable to support the student (Lichtner 1991).

²¹⁹ Blakers and Nicholson (1988: 46) quoted in Riele KT, *Second Chance Education for Early School Leavers. AARE Conference 2000, 4-7 December*, University of Sydney 2000

²²⁰ *Success for All. The Second Year*, Learning and Skills Council, November 2004

²²¹ *Based on a sample of only eight Accelerated Schools that had reached an advanced stage of implementation*

²²² Camilla A. Lehr, Eric J. Lanners, and Cheryl M. Lange *Alternative Schools Policy and Legislation Across the United States Research Report 1 College of Education and Human Development 2003*

Evaluation reports of the European Commission Pilot Second Chance Schools programme also concluded that the strength of the Second Chance schools is in their innovativeness, in their comprehensive and integrated approaches (through partnerships with other organisations, employers) and their flexibility to address the versatile needs of the target population.²²³

An interesting example of an innovative interim programme is the Project Learning for Young Adults (PLYA) programme in Slovenia. It is an education programme for young adults aged from 15 to 25 years who failed in school, have no vocation, and are unemployed. The programme's basic aim is to help these young people to rejoin their peers, develop working and learning habits, and motivate them for learning. At present PLYA projects are active in eight Slovenian cities but it is expected that they will gradually be introduced to all larger cities in the country.²²⁴

The Second Chance opportunities in Ireland are an example of comprehensive, flexible provision, with funding to support learning. Back to Education Initiatives in Ireland provide part-time Further Education programmes for young people and adults. The aim is to give people an opportunity to combine a return to learning with family, work and other responsibilities. Anyone who has left full-time education can take part in a course being offered, but priority will be given to those with less than upper secondary level education. In support of the programme the government has also developed the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA), which is an educational opportunities scheme for the unemployed, students with children or who are claiming social benefits payable to people who wish to pursue approved second or third level courses of education.²²⁵ In the UK, the Adult Learning Grants (ALG) have also been introduced (piloted but eventually to be extended to all adults in the workforce) as there were previously no guaranteed forms of student support entitlement for adults in further education. Evaluation of the pilot shows that 13% of recipients say they would not have taken their course without the funding from the ALG. The report also found that 90% of ALG learners are on track to complete their course (the equivalent retention rate in areas without ALG is 68%). In the evaluation study, 20% of recipients said they would probably or definitely have dropped out without the availability of the Adult Learning Grant.²²⁶

In Bulgaria a recent EC-Phare-funded programme "A School for Everyone – Bulgaria" filled a gap in provision by focusing on open access and second-chance education for drop-outs through 13 pilot centres for vocational education, secondary education, and primary education, teacher resource centres and "school dialogue centres". The centres offer evening classes, remedial and guidance sessions and drop-out prevention work involves about 5 000 at-risk children. The programme has succeeded in giving a second chance for education for some 800 drop-outs²²⁷.

²²³ Karin Oster K, Linna EK, Jansen J, Carvalho R. *Second Chance Schools, Summary Report on the Evaluation of the European Pilot Schools, BBJ Consultancy for European Commission Directorate-General of Education and Culture*. October 2000

²²⁴ *Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (SIAE)*

²²⁵ *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education Department of Education and Science* July 2000

²²⁶ *Summary Of The Evaluation Evidence On The Adult learning Grant, Skills Strategy White Paper 21st Century Skills* 2003

²²⁷ EURYDICE, Bulgaria Unit

Distance Education

In Romania, Belgium and Iceland, increasing participation in distance education as a second chance is offered to those who have failed to finish compulsory education. In Norway distance learning courses are offered by private institutions receiving state grants; they offer the possibility to young people aged at least 14 years to obtain official qualifications (lower and upper secondary education). Courses last from 12 study hours up to 1½ years of full-time study. Participants cover approximately 70% of fees and state grants cover the rest. In certain cases, fees may be covered 100% by state grants or the employer. In the UK institutions like the Open University have traditionally offered distance learning options for students who wish to retake qualifications or engage in life long learning. In Bulgaria, it is reported that distance learning or correspondent form of schooling is very promising route for early school leavers as it gives the opportunity for young people who need to work to study flexibly.²²⁸

8.2.2 *Participation of early school leavers in second chance education*

Based on a comparative study of the USA and Australia²²⁹, it seems that a substantial proportion of American high school drop outs eventually complete high school, either by earning a regular high school diploma or by earning a high school equivalency certificate recognized as equivalent to regular diploma by employers and post secondary institutions. It was found within this longitudinal study that 44% of all dropouts completed high school two years after normal high school graduation. Most of these youngsters obtained a high school equivalency certificate such as the GED which has been explained earlier, rather than regular high school diploma. 24% of the people in the survey said they were enrolled in school or an alternative programme that would prepare them to obtain a diploma or equivalent certificate.

While university plays an important role for males who complete Year 12, vocational education and training in Australia is playing a major role in the transition from school into work of teenage males who do not complete high school.

The longitudinal survey within the comparative study of USA and Australia found that dropouts who completed high school had almost as much difficulty as dropouts who never completed high school in engaging in productive activities. The authors therefore raise the question of the utility of returning to complete high school.

Moreover, it was found in an Australian study²³⁰ that some young people who tried to return to school were refused entry because they were perceived as troublemakers. For these young people it is necessary to provide alternative structures or 'second chance' education.

The EU LFS dataset does not allow reproducing exercises similar to the ones mentioned above. Longitudinal surveys are necessary to find out what path an

²²⁸ EURYDICE, Bulgaria Unit

²²⁹ Russel W. Rumberger and Stephen P. Lamb, "*The Early Employment and Further Education Experiences of High School Drop-outs: A Comparative Study of the United States and Australia*". OECD, 1998.

²³⁰ Riele K.T., *Second Chance Education for Early School Leavers*. AARE Conference 2000, 4-7 December, University of Sydney.

individual early school leavers follows after having left school and if he or she went back to obtain an upper secondary school diploma.

However, two analytical approaches were taken to interrogate the data from the EU LFS dataset, to gain insights into whether or not those without upper secondary qualifications actually return to education later on to obtain this qualification. In the first approach, the LFS dataset contains data on the age when a person obtained ISCED 3 and therefore an approximation of the likelihood that persons return later in life to obtain an ISCED level 3. This assumes that persons obtaining their ISCED level 3 after 24 years of age was previously an early school leaver.

Chart 8.2a gives an overview of the distribution of age groups by which the population with at most upper secondary qualifications²³¹ achieved that qualification in 2004.

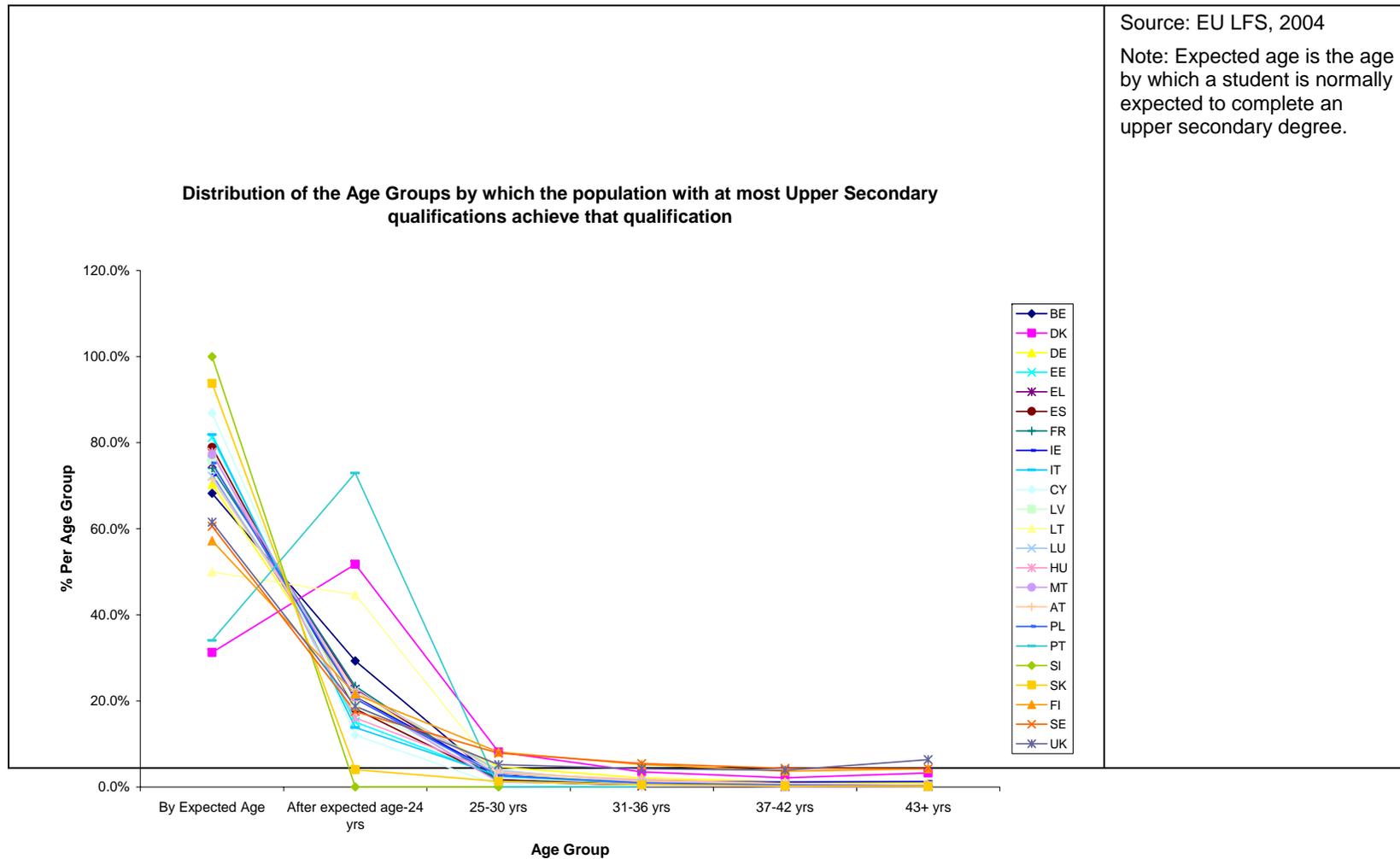
It is clear from the chart that there is little evidence of the return to education and training in later life. However, some countries can be considered as still providing some scope, in particular Sweden, Finland, Denmark and the UK. It has to be said though that this scope is higher for the UK, since the rate of early school leavers is initially higher.

For most countries in EU25, a majority of the population attained ISCED Level 3 by the expected age for attaining ISCED Level 3 in each given country. However, for Portugal and Denmark a majority of the population obtained their ISCED Level 3 within the second age category (after the expected age but before 25 years of age). The distribution over the age groups 25-30 till 43 years and older seems equal for these countries that still show some scope. An interesting follow up question would be “what is the return of attaining ISCED Level 3 after the age of 30?”

It is difficult to link the fact that these four countries perform better to what is found with regard to second chance school provision in these countries. In general, research with regard to quality and access to second chance school education is very scarce.

²³¹ It was not possible to include populations with higher educational levels since the question asked “At what age did you obtain your highest degree” and therefore it can not be traced back for these people when they exactly obtained their ISCED 3 level.

Chart 8.2a: Distribution of the age groups by which the population with at most upper secondary qualifications achieve that qualification



The second analytical approach taken into account investigates how the ESL rate of a generation of the population changes over time. On the assumption that there is scope for ESL to return to education to obtain an upper secondary degree in later life, then the proportion of ESL within a generation of the population from year x to some future time year x+y should decrease. In order to test this assumption, the following approach was taken to analysing the EU LFS data:

- Taking the age aggregations within the data set as a limitation
- Considering that the analysis would probably be more reliable when looking at age groups rather than single year groups (because of ESL population size)

Then, age groups in year x were identified so that the same generation of the population could be identified in year x+y (then y years older).

An illustration of this is set out in table 8.2b, mapping age groups to years.

Table 8.2b Generational Analysis: Scope for Returning to Education and Training to obtain ISCED3 degree

1995	1996	1997	1998	2001	2002	2003	2004
16	17	18	19 ^d	22	23	24	25 ^d
17	18	19 ^c	20 ^d	23	24	25 ^c	26 ^d
18	19 ^b	20 ^c	21 ^d	24	25 ^b	26 ^c	27 ^d
19 ^a	20 ^b	21 ^c	22 ^d	25 ^a	26 ^b	27 ^c	28 ^d
20 ^a	21 ^b	22 ^c	23 ^d	26 ^a	27 ^b	28 ^c	29 ^d
21 ^a	22 ^b	23 ^c	24 ^d	27 ^a	28 ^b	29 ^c	30 ^d
22 ^a	23 ^b	24 ^c	25 ^h	28 ^a	29 ^b	30 ^c	31 ^h
23 ^a	24 ^b	25 ^g	26 ^h	29 ^a	30 ^b	31 ^g	32 ^h
24 ^a	25 ^f	26 ^g	27 ^h	30 ^a	31 ^f	32 ^g	33 ^h
25 ^e	26 ^f	27 ^g	28 ^h	31 ^e	32 ^f	33 ^g	34 ^h
26 ^e	27 ^f	28 ^g	29 ^h	32 ^e	33 ^f	34 ^g	35 ^h
27 ^e	28 ^f	29 ^g	30 ^h	33 ^e	34 ^f	35 ^g	36 ^h
28 ^e	29 ^f	30 ^g	31 ^k	34 ^e	35 ^f	36 ^g	37 ^k
29 ^e	30 ^f	31 ^j	32 ^k	35 ^e	36 ^f	37 ^j	38 ^k
30 ^e	31 ⁱ	32 ^j	33 ^k	36 ^e	37 ⁱ	38 ^j	39 ^k
31	32 ⁱ	33 ^j	34 ^k	37	38 ⁱ	39 ^j	40 ^k
32	33 ⁱ	34 ^j	35 ^k	38	39 ⁱ	40 ^j	41 ^k
33	34 ⁱ	35 ^j	36 ^k	39	40 ⁱ	41 ^j	42 ^k
34	35 ⁱ	36 ^j	37	40	41 ⁱ	42 ^j	43
	36 ⁱ				42 ⁱ		

Blocks with the same letter in superscript indicate the specific age group in year x to be compared to the specific age group in year x+y. For example, the age group 19-24 years in 1995 should be compared with the age group 25-30 years, indicated by the same letter in superscript in 2001. This is because the 19-24 year olds in 1995 would have become 25-30 years olds in 2001. By comparing the groups in this way, certain generation factors within a cohort of the population can be kept constant. However, one must remember that this analysis remains constrained by the fact that the analysis is being carried out on survey data (different respondents) rather than the ideal case of a longitudinal study (same respondents).

A reading of the ESL rates according to this analytical approach was carried out for a selection of countries (BE, DK, GR and ES). These results are shown in table 8.2c. In the same way that the age group blocks were read above, the boxes sharing the same letter in subscript are the elements of comparison. For example, for BE, we see that the age group 19-24 years in 1995 had an ESL rate of 17%. This rate had actually increased to 22% in 2001 for the same group, then aged 25-30 years²³².

Table 8.2c ESL rate for age groups for selected countries

ESL Rates for given age group and year								
	1995	1996	1997	1998	2001	2002	2003	2004
BE								
19-24	17 ^a	14 ^b	14 ^c	15 ^d	15	14	14	13
25-30	27 ^e	24 ^f	22 ^g	23 ^h	22 ^a	21 ^b	20 ^c	17 ^d
31-36	34	32 ⁱ	30 ^j	32 ^k	28 ^e	27 ^f	23 ^g	23 ^h
37-42	41	39	38	38	36	33 ⁱ	32 ^j	29 ^k
DK								
19-24	6 ^a	12	11 ^c	10 ^d	9	9	11	9
20-25	9 ^e	13 ^f	12 ^g	10 ^h	11 ^a	10	8 ^c	7 ^d
31-36	14	16 ⁱ	13 ^j	14 ^k	10 ^e	12 ^f	11 ^g	10 ^h
37-42	16	19	19	19	18	17 ⁱ	15 ^j	12 ^k
GR								
19-24	24 ^a	22	21 ^c	22 ^d	18	18	16	16
20-25	33 ^e	31 ^f	29 ^g	30 ^h	26 ^a	25	22 ^c	22 ^d
31-36	42	40 ⁱ	38 ^j	36 ^k	32 ^e	31 ^f	30 ^g	28 ^h
37-42	50	48	46	44	40	40 ⁱ	37 ^j	32 ^k
ES								
19-24	35 ^a	33	31 ^c	31 ^d	30	30	32	32
20-25	48 ^e	45 ^f	43 ^g	44 ^h	38 ^a	37	35 ^c	34 ^d
31-36	57	54 ⁱ	53 ^j	52 ^k	47 ^e	46 ^f	45 ^g	42 ^h
37-42	67	64	62	61	54	52 ⁱ	50 ^j	48 ^k

²³² It might be expected though that the cohort age group 19-24 years old in particular might show a lower number than the following cohort age group 25 to 30 years old since they are still in education and therefore a higher proportion of people is expected to not complete upper secondary education in comparison with older age groups where the likelihood to still be in school is lower.

Overall, although no firm conclusions can be drawn, there seems to be a general pattern of increase in the ESL rate for the younger age group (19-24 years). While for the older age groups (31-36 and 37-42 years) there seems to be a decreasing tendency.

The literature as well as the analyses performed with the LFS data show that there is not a great scope for obtaining an upper-secondary qualification later in life. It is suggested by the literature though that well organised and easily accessible systems of second chance education might have a positive impact on ESL returning to education at secondary level.

8.3 Participation of early school leavers to lifelong learning (LLL)

Hypothesis 19: "Early school leavers are less likely to return to education and training in later life than those who have completed upper secondary education or more."

Based on a comparative study of the US and Australia²³³, more than three quarters of students who never dropped out of high school were either working toward or had already completed some form of postsecondary education and training two years after completing high school whereas less than 10% of high school dropouts who never completed high school had participated in post secondary education and training. School dropouts who completed high school were more likely than dropouts who did not complete high school to participate in postsecondary education and training although they were less likely to do so than those who never dropped out.

Data from the National Educational Survey shows that in Australia up to two thirds of male dropouts and over one third of female dropouts participated in vocational education and training; supporting the perspective that more dropouts in Australia take advantage of post school vocational education and training opportunities which serve a similar function²³⁴; in fact two-thirds of the VET students have left school before year 12 and many have only Year 10 schooling, however over 30% of VET students fail to complete half their courses.²³⁵

A study on the longer term outcomes of early school leaving found that the disadvantages in accessing education experienced by early school leavers persist; 18% of school completers were in further study/ work seven years from completing year 12 at school, compared to 0% of early school leavers. There was some variation between male and female school leavers identified: 0% of female early school leavers were in training or work compared to 14% of male early school leavers – which is likely to be the result of the high take up of apprenticeship programmes.²³⁶

²³³ Russel W. Rumberger and Stephen P. Lamb, "The Early Employment and Further Education Experiences of High School Drop-outs: A Comparative Study of the United States and Australia". OECD, 1998.

²³⁴ Russel W. Rumberger and Stephen P. Lamb, "The Early Employment and Further Education Experiences of High School Drop-outs: A Comparative Study of the United States and Australia". OECD, 1998

²³⁵ *Young Persons' Education, Training and Employment Outcomes with Special Reference to Early School Leavers*. A Report prepared for the Business Council of Australia and Dusseldorp Skills Forum by Applied Economics 2002

²³⁶ Lamb, S., and McKenzie, P, 2001, 'Patterns of Success and Failure in the Transition from School to Work in Australia', ACER

In Canada, a study found that career uncertainty or indecision, lack of knowledge, and the absence of a concrete direction were important underlying factors regarding educational and vocational goals of early school leavers. Graduates to a greater extent than leavers may have specific, long-term, occupational destinations which serve to motivate and structure their educational progress. Leavers, on the other hand, may lack these objectives, and thus appear less motivated and focused. This uncertainty is also reflected by the fact that over twice as many leavers (20%) as graduates (9%) did not know where they would get the type of training or education that they specified, and more leavers (24%) than graduates (13%) indicated either "no specialization" or "don't know" when asked what skill or type of training they desired²³⁷.

Education and training for early school leavers can often take the form of training and learning of new skills to compete within the labour market. In Australia, a 2001 study of early school leavers, found that 21% of early school leavers were employed and in education / training a year after leaving school compared to 34% of year 12 completers.²³⁸

In Cyprus where early school leaving rates are high there is also a low rate of participation in Lifelong Learning. Based on the 2002 Labour Market Survey, only 3.7% of the population sampled participated in LLL courses. The Ministry of Education is in the process of drafting a National Strategy for Life-long Learning based on the European Commission's Memorandum on Lifelong Learning.²³⁹

In Lithuania, Poland, Cyprus and Latvia the proportion participating in non formal education is more than ten times higher for highly educated people than for low educated ones.²⁴⁰

Analysis of the EU LFS confirms that the EU shares the same trend as USA, Canada and Australia. The participation in education and training in later life is highest among those with education qualifications higher than ISCED Level 3 (tertiary level). Those with only lower secondary qualifications show the lowest rate of participation.

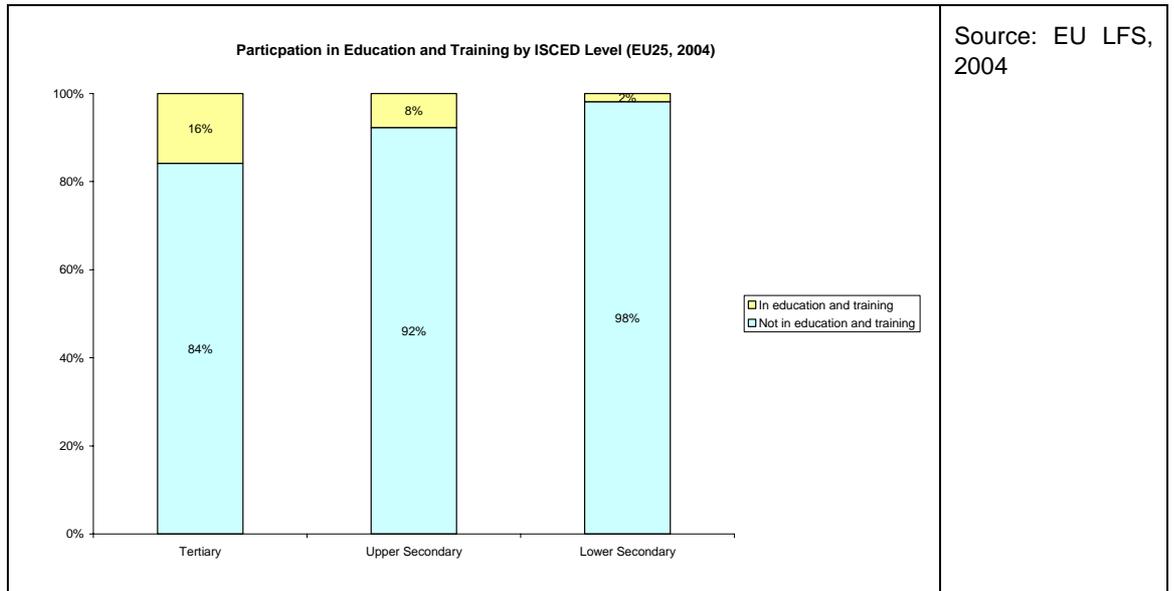
²³⁷ Government of Canada, *Leaving School - Results From a National Survey Comparing School Leavers and High School Graduates 18 to 20 Years of Age* - January 1995

²³⁸ *Young Persons' Education, Training and Employment Outcomes with Special Reference to Early School Leavers*. A Report prepared for the Business Council of Australia and Dusseldorp Skills Forum by Applied Economics 2002

²³⁹ *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems* Refer-Net/European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP)

²⁴⁰ Kailis E, Spyridon P, *Lifelong Learning in Europe, Statistics in Focus*, EUROSTAT August 2005

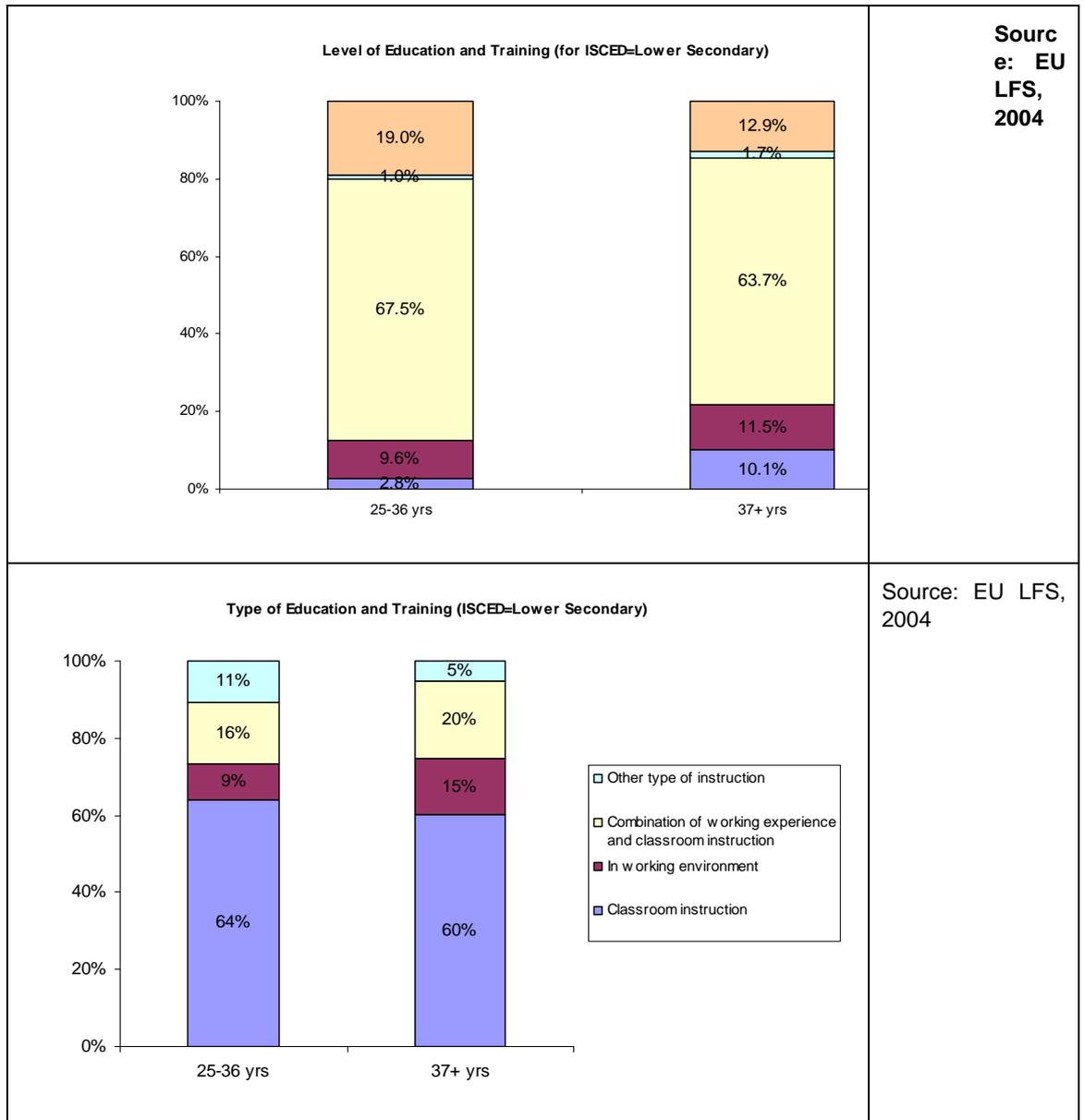
Chart 8.3a: Participation in education and training according to ISCED level



Looking in particular at the characteristics of the education and training engaged in by those with the at most lower secondary education, a number of observations can be made. A majority of the respondents who were students or apprentices in regular education reported that the education and training they were participating in was at ISCED Level 3. As seen in the chart below, the figure was similar for both age groups 25-36 years and 37+ years. Note that these respondents do not include those in non-ISCED Level training programmes²⁴¹. The response to the question on the level of education and training are well in line with the question on the type of instruction received, with about 60% of respondents receiving classroom based instruction.

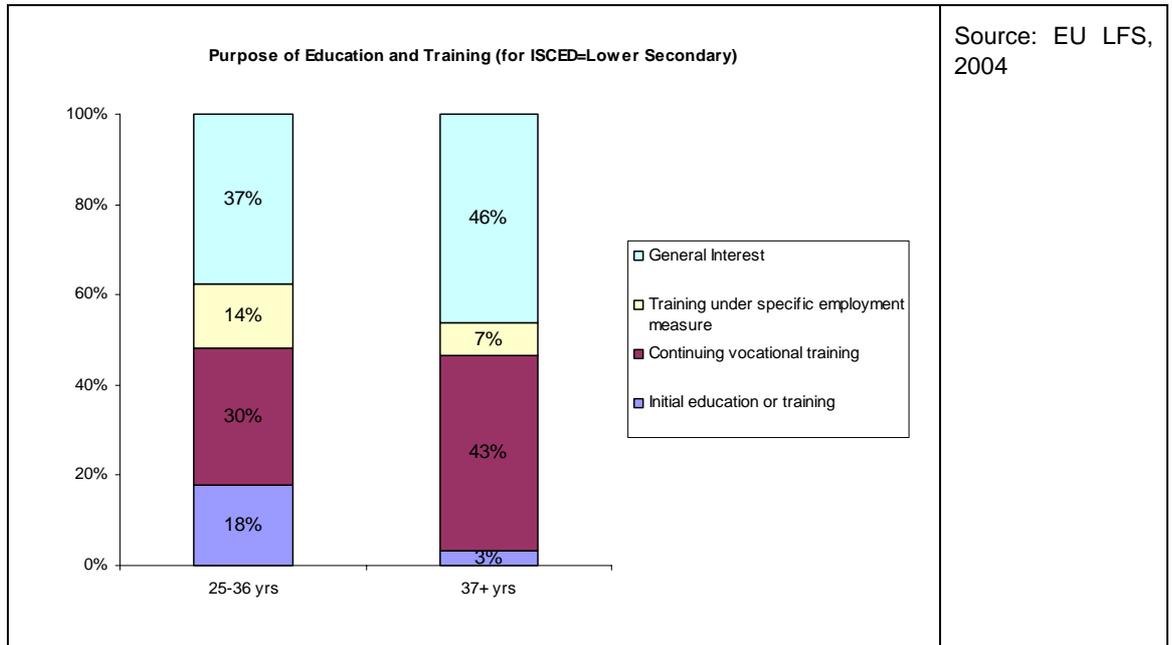
²⁴¹ By a non-ISCED level training programme is meant training or education followed outside the regular education system like for example an evening foreign language course.

Chart 8.3b and c: Level of education and training engaged in and type of education and training followed



In terms of the purpose for the education and training, a majority of those with at most lower secondary qualifications reported general interest and continuing vocational training as reasons.

Chart 8.3d: Purpose of education and training pursued



Jobs and training

For most member states participation in training is lower for the unemployed than the employed. However Spain, Greece, Luxembourg, Austria and Portugal record similar participation rates in non formal education for the employed and unemployed population.²⁴² In Ireland, CEDEFOP reports that on-the-job training is the most used form of training, particularly by the less well educated and those in lower skilled occupations.²⁴³

In the UK, the Department for Education and Skills estimates that of 16 year olds who leave school each year with few or no qualifications a high proportion (22% in 2001) do not go onto training or work after they leave school. In order to improve access to training and education, the government is working with the Connexions service to improve the young people’s access to training and support in particular in basic literacy and numeracy skills. The Connexions Service will also have a key role with the 19% of young people with maths and English below Level 1 who find work when they leave school, particularly for the three quarters of them who are in jobs without training. Personal advisers will be able to track the progress of these young people and intervene, with their employers, to help them improve their literacy and numeracy skills.²⁴⁴

²⁴² Kailis E, Spyridon P, *Lifelong Learning in Europe, Statistics in Focus*, EUROSTAT August 2005

²⁴³ Adams M, *Developments in the field of vocational education and training (VET) in Member States and in acceding and candidate countries*, CEDEFOP January to November 2004

²⁴⁴ DfES Skills for Life, *The National Strategy for Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills*. 2001

In the UK, the government is also taking steps to improve access to training and learning for employees. The Sector Skills Development Agency is identifying and setting in place measures to improve the skills, education and training needs of employers and employees across the UK. Employers have expressed real concerns about whether those who leave school at 16 with relatively few qualifications really have the basic skills, especially in maths and communication, which they will need for work. The evidence of the Skills for Life survey shows that among those with low or no qualifications in the adult population, literacy and numeracy levels are also low.²⁴⁵ The SSSA identified that there is a shrinking proportion of jobs which are available for low or unskilled people and therefore a declining demand. They estimate that the percentage of people aged over 16 in employment with no qualifications has reduced from 20% in 1993 to 10.9% in 2003.²⁴⁶ In Germany, Austria, Denmark, Portugal measures are being put in place to support the ongoing participation of more unskilled workers in training within companies.²⁴⁷ In the Netherlands, evaluation has recently been completed of a three year (2001 to 2003) pilot scheme introducing Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs). Companies, training and development funds and intermediary organisations, as well as learners, were positive about continuing ILAs. The evaluation highlighted the potential of combining ILAs with provision for the accreditation of prior learning as a promising way of promoting lifelong learning.²⁴⁸

Informal training

EUROSTAT reports that participation rates in informal learning are linked to educational attainment²⁴⁹. Informal learning is identified in the study as self studying using professional material; online web education; educational audio or videotapes and visiting facilities such as learning centres. In Hungary, Poland, Latvia, Greece, Estonia and the Czech Republic the rate of participation for the low educational attainment population is reported as less than 10%.

The LFS data as well as the literature confirm for all the study countries that non-ESL are more likely to participate in LLL than ESL. The majority of those ESL engaged in LLL follow class-room based education and do this out of general interest or follow continuing vocational training.

²⁴⁵ Department for Education and Skills, White Paper: 14-19 Education and Skills February 2005

²⁴⁶ Stanfield C, Campbell M and Giles L, *The UK Workforce: Realising Our Potential*. Research Report 7 SSSA November 2004

²⁴⁷ The European Commission EU report on education and training in employment policies: *Analysis of the 2000 National Action Plans for Employment*. 2001

²⁴⁸ Adams M, *Developments in the field of vocational education and training (VET) in Member States and in acceding and candidate countries*, CEDEFOP January to November 2004

²⁴⁹ Kailis E, Spyridon P, *Lifelong Learning in Europe, Statistics in Focus*, EUROSTAT August 2005

9 CONCLUSIONS ON THE HYPOTHESES FROM THE FOUR KEY STUDY AREAS

Hypotheses	Validity of the hypotheses	Additional comments
Key Study Area 1: Wider external factors		
1. An increase in the length of compulsory education will decrease the number of early school leavers	A statistically significant correlation has been found between the length of compulsory education and the rate of early school leavers in the EU25 over the last ten years. Also, according to the literature, changes in the length of compulsory education was one factor that led to lower ESL rates in Poland. It should be noted though that the length of compulsory education, together with other aspects of national education systems, might have an impact on the number of early school leavers and the variable compulsory age is therefore not to be looked at in isolation.	Since Italy has only recently increased the compulsory school leaving age till 18 years old, there is scope for further investigating the influence this might have on the rate of ESL in the future.
2. High pupil- teacher ratio and large class size will increase the occurrence of early school leaving.	The bivariate correlation analysis indicated no significant correlations. However, an average at national level was presented for these variables and therefore effects at individual school were not taken into account. According to the literature, smaller classes for disadvantaged pupils may have an influence on early school leaving.	The hypothesis should be investigated in more depth with regard to the specific pupil-teacher ratios and class sizes applied to classes which include students at risk.
3. Countries having a high total expenditure on education per student have a lower rate in early school leaving	The analysis undertaken provided no support for this hypothesis. Literature reviews show that it is not necessarily the countries that spend the most on education whose students obtain the best results or that educate their students for the longest period ²⁵⁰ . Simple comparison of public expenditure on education and ESL rates show that no direct causal relationship can be found between the ESL rate and public expenditure.	Further investigation of the influence of public and private expenditure on early school leaving would benefit from analyses of the amount of spending at the individual school level as well as the quality factors like for example increasing the expenditure for particular disadvantaged groups by providing more teachers to have smaller classes.

²⁵⁰ Mingat and Suchaut 2000

Hypotheses	Validity of the hypotheses	Additional comments
4. Students attending comprehensive compulsory education systems are less likely to leave school early than students attending more differentiated (parallel) compulsory education systems	The hypothesis cannot be confirmed on the basis of the analysis undertaken in this study and the literature review did not reveal empirical evidence to confirm this hypothesis. ²⁵¹	According to the literature the use of a comprehensive compulsory education system together with other aspects such as a high quality of teaching might decrease the occurrence of early school leaving. This seems to be particularly the case in the Scandinavian countries.
5. Offering a wider variety of post-compulsory educational programmes reduce the number of early school leavers.	This hypothesis could not be confirmed on the basis of statistical analysis since data is lacking. However, the literature ²⁵² suggests that offering a variety of courses after compulsory education might decrease the risk of ESL in the sense that it motivates students and offers students with difficulties the option of following other pathways than those traditionally expected. Providing the ESL with the opportunities to undertake compulsory education programmes is also shown to be important, for example in the Czech Republic.	Although the preferred choice of a majority of national policies is to widen the scope of education towards vocational education, it is important that these vocational directions end in a qualification that is sufficient for entering the labour market. The literature mentions that for some countries, it was found that the occurrence of early school leaving is higher in vocational directions. Therefore attention should be paid to counselling with the aim of finding out what the best option is for a specific person rather than just redirecting “weaker”

²⁵¹ Klemm 2001; European Education, vol. 35, no 4, Winter 2003-2004

²⁵² CEDEFOP, Hanne Shapiro

Hypotheses	Validity of the hypotheses	Additional comments
		students to these vocational directions. Alternating class room education with more practice oriented courses is considered beneficial.
6. The repetition of classes increases the chances of a young person leaving school early	This hypothesis could not be confirmed on the basis of data analysis; the literature suggests however that students who have to repeat one or more classes lose motivation and eventually leave school early in particular for minority students. ²⁵³	The hypothesis could be further investigated on the basis of longitudinal surveys in countries such as Italy and Belgium, where repeating classes occurs regularly.
7. The availability of support and guidance mechanisms available in school and specifically targeted at young people at risk will decrease the rate of early school leaving.	This hypothesis could not be confirmed by the data analysis since it was difficult to measure the impact of the initiatives as they were quite recent. The EMA evaluation in the UK for example and other evaluations in the USA show that specifically targeted initiatives might positively influence school retention.	The EU countries could benefit by exchanging good practice in this area. The advantage is that the measures and initiatives are quite targeted and therefore more easily transferable since the individual early school leaver characteristics appear common to all countries. The responsibility for implementation of such measures lies mostly at regional and local levels.

²⁵³ Intercultural Development Research Association; National Centre for Education Statistics 1998

Hypotheses	Validity of the hypotheses	Additional comments
8. A high level of employment opportunities for low-educated people increases the rate of early school leaving.	It is not possible to measure “push and pull” labour market conditions in a statistical valid way. However, the analysis of the employment rate for early school leavers aged 18-24 years old shows an association. Southern countries which have a relatively high employment rate for early school leavers also have high early school leaver rates. The opposite relationship is evident for several New Member States.	
With regard to Key Study Area 1, on the basis of the analyses conducted no variable except for the length of compulsory education seems to have a statistically significant influence on the rate of early school leaving. However it is suggested by several studies and research reports that all of these variables combined with specific issues and depending on implementation at individual school level might have an impact on the occurrence of early school leaving.		
Key Study Area 2: Socio-economic characteristics		
9. Young people with a criminal history or deviant behaviour are more likely to leave school early.	This hypothesis is supported by national and international surveys and research projects. ²⁵⁴	
10. Young people affected by a physical or mental/psychological illness are more likely to be absent from school and in the longer run leave the school system early.	This hypothesis is supported by evidence from national and international surveys and research projects. ²⁵⁵	
11. Teenage pregnancy increases the risk for girls to leave school early.	This hypothesis is supported by evidence from the UK and USA ²⁵⁶ in particular. In the UK, for example teenage childbearing decreases the probability of post-16 schooling by 18%. ²⁵⁷ The risk factor of teenage pregnancy is lesser problem in the other	

²⁵⁴ Government of Canada. Leaving School - *Results From a National Survey Comparing School Leavers and High School Graduates 18 to 20 Years of Age* - January 1995

²⁵⁵ Government of Canada. Leaving School - *Results From a National Survey Comparing School Leavers and High School Graduates 18 to 20 Years of Age* - January 1995

²⁵⁶ Klepinger, Daniel, Shelly Lundberg, and Robert Plotnick (1995). ‘Adolescent Fertility and the Educational Attainment of Young Women’, *Family Planning Perspectives*, Vol.27, No. 1, pp. 23-28. quoted in Chevalier A, Viitanen T, *The Long-Run Labour Market Consequences of Teenage Motherhood* July 2000 Version 2.4

²⁵⁷ Chevalier A, Viitanen T, *The Long-Run Labour Market Consequences of Teenage Motherhood* July 2000

Hypotheses	Validity of the hypotheses	Additional comments
	countries studied.	
12. Previous academic failure and lack of commitment to school constitute risk factors for early school leaving.	This hypothesis is supported by the literature review ²⁵⁸ . The PISA survey also confirms the high correlation between early school leavers and students performing at the lowest levels of proficiency (level 1 and lower) ²⁵⁹ . It seems that, together with the repetition of classes, poor previous performance might ultimately lower motivation and lead to dropping out ²⁶⁰	
13. Young people being brought up in a less advantageous socioeconomic environment area more likely to leave school early.	This hypothesis is strongly supported by the literature. A disadvantageous socio-economic background negatively influences the decision to stay at school. Barton (2005) and Rumberger and Lamb (1998) find that socio-economic characteristics are a significant predictor of Early School Leaving. ²⁶¹ Rumberger and Lamb (1998) also found that drop out rates were lowest for students from higher family status (based on family SES and parental education) and highest for students from low status family. ²⁶² Studies show that percentages of people leaving education at an earlier stage are much higher among those whose parents have low levels of education than among those who have more educated parents. ²⁶³ Such backgrounds also play a role in influencing pupils to take “weaker” directions in secondary education directions.	It was argued in the literature that some countries such as Germany, due to their specific national education system, reinforce the negative consequences of socio-economic background whereas countries, such as the Scandinavian ones seem to compensate for these negative aspects. Attention must be paid though to the fact that Scandinavian countries

²⁵⁸ Janosz et al (1997) Disentangling the weight of school dropout predictors: a test on two longitudinal samples, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 26, 733-762.

²⁵⁹ OECD, *Knowledge and Skills for Life – First Results from PISA 2000,2001*

²⁶⁰ Eivers E et al (2000) *Characteristics of Early School Leavers: Results of the Research Strand of the 8-15 year old early school leavers initiative*, Educational Research Centre, St. Patrick's College, Dublin.

²⁶¹ Barton P E, *One-Third of a Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities*, Policy Information Centre, ETS, 2005

²⁶² Rumberger and Lamb, *the Early Employment and Further Education Experiences of High School Dropouts: A Comparative Study of The United States and Australia*. University of California Santa Barbara; Australian Council for Educational Research. 1998 and National Youth Council of Ireland. Submission to the NESF Project Team on Early School Leaving, National economic and social Forum, Report nr 24 and OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 1998.

²⁶³ Eurostat, *Young People's Social Origin, Educational Attainment and Labour Market Outcomes in Europe*. 2003

Hypotheses	Validity of the hypotheses	Additional comments
		like for example are less diverse economically, culturally and socially than for example Germany.
14. Young people receiving no parental support or having to cope with problematic family circumstances are more likely to disengage early from school.	This hypothesis is supported by the literature review. Literature shows that young people who face family conflict, lack of any meaningful family support, weak family ties and changes in family situation (such as separation) are more likely to leave school early ²⁶⁴ . The results of data analysis show that for all countries except Croatia (where data is available) the proportion of respondents living in single parent households was greater for early school leavers than non-early school leavers.	
15. Young people from foreign background are more likely to leave school early than nationals	The majority of the international studies support this hypothesis. However there is evidence of the opposite tendency. The link between ethnicity and staying in school is influenced by factors such as not speaking the language, socio-economic background and cultural issues. It is difficult to make conclusions with regard to the impact of ethnicity on early school based on the LFS data analysis since no distinction can be made between a national by birth and a national being from an ethnic background.	
With regard to Key Study Area 2, only a few statistical analyses have been performed. However it is strongly suggested by other surveys and research that all of the above hypotheses can be confirmed. In particular, the combination of external and internal factors will increase the chances of leaving school early. It must further be stated that, for these youngsters who are at risk from a socio-economic point of view, special support and accompanying measures will impact on the eventual decision to leave school early. The influence of the aspects of this KSA are universal and not dependent on a specific country but national education policy might be stronger in some countries to compensate more disadvantaged socio-economic characteristics. Moreover, the composition of early school leavers shows great variety in terms of age, gender and ISCED level at which they left school. It is therefore suggested that when developing and implementing measures and initiatives targeted at combating early school leaving, these issues together with the other aspects discussed in this KSA are taken into account.		

²⁶⁴ Pathways, Effective Support for Early school leavers, Ireland.

Hypotheses	Validity of the hypotheses	Additional comments
Key Study Area 3: Labour Market Performance		
<p>16. Early school leavers perform less well in the labour market than the working population having completed upper secondary education or higher.</p>	<p>For the majority of the countries this hypothesis was supported. For a number of countries, however, dependent on age group, the hypothesis could not be confirmed. For example, southern European countries are distinct in the sense that there are fewer benefits attached to achieving higher qualification levels in terms of unemployment. Rather, unemployment rates in Southern Europe are often even higher at the upper secondary level as compared to those of the lowest qualified leavers and not much reduced for tertiary level graduates either.</p> <p>Moreover, cross-country differences are observed in the employment rate of ESL with some countries, like for example Germany, having a stronger stratification of unemployment risks according to education on the one hand and cross-country differences on the other hand with regard to entry in the labour market, appreciation of vocational qualifications and likelihood of losing employment. Trends over time show that two groups of countries emerge, those of which the employment rate for people who have only obtained lower secondary education or lower are below the overall employment rate for almost all age groups (Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Hungary, Norway Poland, Slovakia and UK) and the other countries where the rates are mostly close to or higher than the overall employment rate.</p> <p>In all the study countries, female early school leavers have a lower percentage of employment than their male counterparts.</p>	<p>At a European level unemployment rates decline with increasing levels of qualifications. This is the case in the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the UK . This is also the case for the OECD countries studied.</p> <p>In Southern European countries however, including Italy, Greece and Portugal studies have shown that few employment benefits are attached to achieving higher qualification levels in terms of unemployment. Similarly in Iceland, many job opportunities are reported for workers with few formal qualifications.</p> <p>In Denmark, no significant correlation between employment status and educational level were established.</p> <p>The EU employment rate of people with lower qualifications is lower than almost all the other countries studied (for example the USA, Australia and Canada). Moreover, the gap between</p>

Hypotheses	Validity of the hypotheses	Additional comments
		<p>the employment rates between people with upper secondary education and people with lower secondary education in the EU is more pronounced than in the USA or Japan.</p>
<p>17. Early school leavers have a higher chance of having precarious work conditions.</p>	<p>Evidence suggests that early school leavers have a higher chance of having precarious work conditions. In general they tend to have lower relative earnings from income. The countries having the highest disparity between the earnings of the lowest educated and the higher educated are the Czech Republic, Italy, Portugal and to a lesser extent the UK and the USA.</p> <p>A higher proportion of non early school leavers tend to be legislators, senior officials, managers and professionals compared to the majority of early school leavers who have predominantly blue collar occupations.</p> <p>A higher proportion of the oldest generation of early school leavers in 1995 had a permanent contract than the younger generation of early school leavers, but the opposite was found in 2004 (except for Denmark, Ireland, Italy and Austria where the percentage of early school leavers with a permanent job reduced with time). A slightly higher proportion of early school leavers compared to non school leavers were reported to be self employed especially in the Southern countries and some New Member States²⁶⁵.</p>	

²⁶⁵ Source: LFS Data

Hypothesis	Validity of hypothesis	Additional comments
Key Study Area 4: Scope for returning to education and training later in life		
<p>18. Availability and easy access to ‘second chance’ education will positively influence the participation of early school leavers in education later in life.</p>	<p>Research and evaluation is scarce, but the hypothesis can be partly confirmed for countries that offer some form of organised second chance education. Even more beneficial is the opportunity to gain specific certificates as for example the GED certificate in the USA is seen as an important route for accessing college courses or university by previous early school leavers. In Spain the government has introduced important changes in second chance provision through vocational training which have had a significant impact on reducing the number of students without higher secondary level qualifications.</p> <p>In the UK early school leavers are given a second chance to participate in further education through the ‘Access to Higher Education (HE)’ courses which are designed to help students with no or insufficient qualifications to have the opportunity to benefit from Higher Education; students are subsequently widely accepted onto HE courses</p> <p>For many early school leavers the second chance schools provide basic skills training which may help young people to develop learning habits and motivate them for learning in the future; either in formal education or through work based learning. For example, the Project Learning for Young Adults (PLYA) programme in Slovenia.</p>	<p>Second chance schools need to be formally recognised so that qualifications will be accepted by further education establishments and employers.</p> <p>Hardly any national or international data are available on number of persons enrolled in second chance education and on aspects such as access and quality of the second chance education systems.</p>

<p>19. Early school leavers are less likely to return to education and training in later life than those who have completed upper secondary education or more.</p>	<p>This hypothesis is supported through analyses on the LFS data as well as the literature review. Students who complete upper secondary education are more likely to participate in LLL than early school leavers. Studies as well as analyses based on the LFS data confirm this trend for all the study countries. Rumberger and Lamb (1998) show from their studies of the Australia and the USA that only 10% of high school dropouts had participated in post secondary education and training.²⁶⁶ In Cyprus where early school leaving rates are high there is also a low rate of participation in Lifelong Learning. Based on the 2002 Labour Market Survey, only 3.7% of the population sampled participated in LLL courses.²⁶⁷</p> <p>Studies have shown that early school leavers may however gain access to education and training through employment. Data analysis²⁶⁸ shows that a majority of those with at most lower secondary qualifications reported general interest and continuing vocational training as reasons for pursuing education.</p>	<p>Second chance schools need to be formally recognised so that qualifications will be accepted by further education establishments and employers.</p> <p>Hardly any national or international data are available on number of persons enrolled in second chance education and on aspects such as access and quality of the second chance education systems.</p>
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²⁶⁶ Russel W. Rumberger and Stephen P. Lamb, “*The Early Employment and Further Education Experiences of High School Drop-outs: A Comparative Study of the United States and Australia*”. OECD, 1998

²⁶⁷ *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems* Refer-NetEuropean Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP)

²⁶⁸ EU LFS, 2004

10 METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL FOR NEW OR MODIFIED DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITIES

10.1 Introduction

This section reviews the variation across countries of the phenomenon and issue of early school leavers. It looks into both the conceptual aspects that define early school leaving, and the technical aspects of early school leaver indicators which aim to measure it, at the national and international levels. Particular focus is placed on analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the EUROSTAT indicator for early school leaving and proposals for how any weaknesses might be addressed.

Finally, the section closes with a list of “open-ended” questions which aim to consider the wider policy issues of how the phenomenon of early school leaving affects the individual and society more broadly.

10.2 Variations in the concepts of early school leaving

“Early school leaving can be understood as young people leaving school before the legal school leaving age and/or leaving school with limited or no formal qualifications”²⁶⁹

This definition needs to be seen in the wider context, in terms of the negative economic and social consequences that result from a lack of qualifications. Early school leavers are at a disadvantage in the labour market; are challenged in their ability to develop personally and socially; and are at increased risk of poverty and social exclusion. Therefore the definition of early school leaving needs to recognize the generally unfavourable outcomes facing such young people²⁷⁰. Moreover, even within the total population of early school leavers, variations of educational attainment exists, putting those who leave education before completion of the first cycle of post-primary education at even greater disadvantage²⁷¹.

The wide disparity in the political and social perceptions of young persons who leave education without formal qualifications is directly linked to the wider variations in educational and training pathways across countries. Annex L elaborates on the prevailing definition of early school leaver in each of the countries concerned. Within the EU, only Spain has a statutory definition for a young person without qualifications.

²⁶⁹ Cullen B., *Evaluating Integrated Responses to Educational Disadvantage*. Dublin, 2000, Combat Poverty Agency.

²⁷⁰ Johnston H., ‘The Nature and Effectiveness of Irish Policy Interventions in Addressing Educational Disadvantage’ in *Transitions in Youth: Combating Exclusion. Proceedings of the fourth European Workshop of Network on Transitions in Youth*, Dublin, 1997, ESRI & Combat Poverty Agency.

²⁷¹ Combat Poverty Agency, *Submission on Early School Leavers and Youth Unemployment to the National Economic and Social Forum*, Dublin, September 2001.

Spain: Young people who have not achieved the objectives of compulsory secondary education (normally completed at the age of 16) who, for this reason, have failed to obtain a qualification providing them with access to a job or a chance to continue their studies in one of the various educational options.

While not statutory, Finland, France and the Netherlands have official definitions for such young persons.

Finland: Strictly speaking, pupils who have left the single structure compulsory school (Peruskoulu) at age 16 without a leaving certificate and without continuing their studies on upper secondary level the same year. But such pupils are now very rare and therefore, Peruskoulu is not considered to be a sufficient level of education for anybody. Government policy is, and has been since the 1970s, to provide upper secondary level education or training to all of every age group, plus a higher education certificate (vocational or university) to some 60 to 65% of the age group. A vocational or higher education certificate or degree is regarded as necessary to be adequately qualified.

France: Young people of over 16 who leave the education system with training level VI or V(bis). The first group includes pupils who have no qualifications when they leave lower secondary education (1st to 3rd years, preparatory classes for an apprenticeship (CPA), or 'integration' classes to prepare for a qualifying vocational training programme (classes pré-professionnelles de niveau – CPPN), special education (SES) or one-year vocational training (CEP)). The second group includes pupils who have left the 4th year or preparatory classes for a first vocational qualification (vocational proficiency certificate (Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle – CAP) or a vocational studies certificate (Brevet d'Etudes professionnelles – BEP)) before the final year. All young people who are not at school or in an apprenticeship are considered as having left the education system. In the inter-ministerial nomenclature of educational levels of 11 July 1967, level V training corresponds to that of people occupying jobs that normally require a level of training equivalent to that of the BEP and CAP. Level VI corresponds to that of people occupying jobs that do not require training beyond the end of compulsory education.

Netherlands: A early school leaver is defined as a young person 12 to 23 years of age who has left education without a basic qualification and has not re-enrolled in education within a month of leaving school.

For the rest of the countries, the definition used for early school leaving is implicit and more reflective of the perceptions of citizens, decision-makers and employers. The variations in definitions is also reflective of the differences in education systems such as those elements that each country traditionally considers as necessary education; concepts of social integration; and labour market conditions.

In addition, the definition is dependent on conditions such as: completion of compulsory education (such as in Italy and Austria); completion of compulsory education with a certificate enabling them to continue studying or to embark on training (such as in Denmark, Spain and Norway); or stipulating a level of higher than that of completion of compulsory education for example the end of post-compulsory/upper secondary education or its equivalent (such as in Flanders and Iceland). There are also definitions based on the impossibility of finding a job or an apprenticeship place. Some countries such as Finland and Germany even go a step further to state that pupils must have completed at least vocational or higher education to be considered as adequately qualified, and that a certificate of upper secondary general education is not considered to be sufficient.

Moreover, a distinction has to be made between a complete lack of qualifications and qualifications which are insufficient for access to specific courses or employment. For example, in the UK, students taking qualifications recognised at the national level receive certificates listing the subjects passed (GCSEs). Students with a pass in one single subject therefore receive a certificate and are not considered to be without qualifications. The issue though is that one such pass may not be adequate for them to pursue education leading to some higher level qualifications, or to obtain suitable employment. This situation is similar in Finland, where virtually all pupils leave compulsory education with a certificate²⁷².

In the USA, the concept of early school leaving is more popularly known as dropouts. It has been recognised that in recent years, the demand for a high skilled labour force has made a high school education a minimum requirement for entry into the labour force.²⁷³ Therefore, a high school dropout is defined as lacking that very important prerequisite to accessing additional education, training, or entering the labour force. As such, addressing the level of high school dropouts has become part of national legislation through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which embodies the four principles education reform plan: stronger accountability for results, expanded flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work.²⁷⁴ It aims to make sure that all children achieve academic proficiency within 12 years and gain the educational skills necessary to succeed later in life. Under this Act, the School Dropout Prevention Program was established to fund initiatives aimed at dropout prevention and providing opportunities for re-entry programs for students in grade 6-12.

Overall the range of concepts of an early school leaver demonstrates that the definition relates to any combination of the following criteria:

- Failure to complete upper secondary education (or high school) and not attending further education or training.
- Failure to complete compulsory schooling (i.e. prolonged or complete non attendance).
- Failure to gain qualifications or school leaving certificates.
- Failure to participate in education or training by those of school leaving age
- Failure to gain qualifications required for participation in further education
- Failure to gain qualifications required for access to a wide range of labour market opportunities to sustain life chances

10.3 Variations in early school leaving measurement

The variations in the concepts and treatment of early school leaving described above transcend to definitions and identification of indicators for the measurement of it. The

²⁷² Eurydice. 'Measures taken in the Member States of the European Union to assist young people who have left the education system without qualifications' December 1997.

²⁷³ Kaufman, P., Alt, M.N., and Chapman, C. (2004). Dropout Rates in the United States: 2001. (NCES 2005-046). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.

²⁷⁴ No Child Left Behind 2001. <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml?src=pb>

measurement of (the rate of) early school leavers is moreover sensitive to the economic, social and cultural values and contexts of a society, as represented by the length of compulsory education, levels of qualifications, and labour market conditions, for example. Moreover, variations of measurement also occur as a consequence of what the purpose of a specific data collection (for example monitoring systems that collect data for administrative purposes).

As discussed in Section 4, the understanding of the trends in the concept (not the technical indicator) of early school leaving and, more significantly, the comparison across countries has been complicated by these differences in definition and measurement. With most national and international contexts, measuring the phenomenon of early school leaving has been done through a basket of interrelated and complementary indicators which consider both the negative action of leaving school early / dropping out and the positive action of completing school, graduating and obtaining a degree. Furthermore, these measurements specify a combination of the following conditions:

- Age when leaving school or obtaining qualification
- Time when event of leaving school or obtaining qualifications occurs
- Age range to which the indicator is applied
- Level of education attainment
- Cohorts or generation
- Current status (in education and training or not in education and training)
- Status measurement of total population or event measurement of only those who have become early graduated or dropped out of school

In the case of EUROSTAT, two indicators can be used to give a sense of the state of early school leaving with the EU Member States. Firstly, the early school leaver indicator gives a rate of those aged 18-24 years, with less than upper secondary degree qualifications and who are currently not in education or training. Secondly, the structural indicator on educational attainment (20-24) gives a complementary view with the percentage of the population aged 20-24 having completed at least upper secondary education.

The OECD indicator takes parameters very similar to that of the EUROSTAT early school leaver indicator, however applies the criteria to the population aged between 20 and 24. This difference alone raises issues of comparability across the two seemingly similar datasets. Both the OECD and EUROSTAT indicators are 'status' indicators, meaning that they give a measure for at a particular point in time, of the percentage of early school leavers based on their particular criteria.

The EUROSTAT indicator on ESL based on the LFS data collected in each Member State is the most commonly used measurement on ESL in the EU25. There is however a wide array of other sources of 'intelligence' at national Member State level that can provide further insight into issues relating to early school leavers (e.g. participation rates by subject area; typologies of post-school learning; destinations of school leavers). Numerous national (and regional) bodies, such as registration and coordination centres (for example in the Netherlands and Norway) funding agencies, careers services and local education authorities (for example in the UK) will all, as a

matter of course, collect management information of varying qualities and usefulness (typically focusing on an educational cohort rather than the population at large). This information is not comparable across Member States and is in most cases not statistically valid (as it is management information used primarily for internal administrative purposes not a survey). To map these intelligence sources (their coverage, validity, robustness) for a single member state is a large-scale undertaking. Moreover, a review of national policy documents shows that when targets in the field of combating early school leaving are mentioned, the focus is on the EUROSTAT ESL indicator as well as the EU benchmark of not more than 10% of ESL by 2010. A few examples of the nationally defined targets can be found in Annex M. It must be noted that besides targets set for the percentage of ESL, targets for completion rates of upper secondary education are also regularly mentioned in policy documents.

The United States has had a longer tradition of and more comprehensive approach to the measurement of dropouts. Three types of dropout rates have been defined, recognising the different dynamics that can be measured within the phenomenon of early school leaving. Like the EUROSTAT and OECD indicators, the USA has an indicator called the status dropout rate which is a cumulative rate that estimates the proportion of young adults aged 16 to 24 in civilian, non-institutionalised population, who are dropouts (ie. not enrolled in a high school programme and who have not received a high school diploma or obtained an equivalency certificate), regardless of when they dropped out. In addition to the status dropout rate, there is the event dropout rate which, rather than giving a cumulative measure, measures the occurrence of 'new' dropouts in a given year. More specifically, the event dropout rate measures the percentage of young people aged 15 through 24 who dropped out of grades 10 and 12 in the past year. Finally, there is the cohort dropout rate which measures, for a particular cohort of students sharing similar characteristics, what happens to them over time. All in all, the combination of these focused, early school leaver-centric measurements allows for a more robust understanding of the state of early school leaving. The limitation of one indicator is compensated by the advantages of another, e.g., the trend of the status dropout rate year to year may be increasing, seeming to indicate a worsening in the situation. However, the event dropout rate for the same years could be decreasing, indicating that while the overall proportion of early school leavers within a population is increasing, the situation may not actually be as negative since year on year lesser people are actually dropping out.

Associated with these rates is the stopout rate, another US based concept. The stopout rate essentially measures the return to education after temporarily dropping out. By taking such a measurement together with the other dropout rates, the dynamic of movement into and out of education by young people can be better understood, and therefore better addressed and targeted. The measurement of these rates is based on both survey data and school records reported and aggregated up to state and national level.

In the case of Canada, there is no standard method for calculating a high-school non-completion rate. However, the approach taken is to make estimates of a range of indicators. Based on school administrative data, estimates of the complement of the 'graduation' rate and the 'apparent cohort dropout rate' are used to provide a picture of the state of high-school non completion. Rather than aiming to directly measure the population of non-completers, the approach is to take the complement of those who have completed (1-graduation rate) as a proxy.

10.4 Critique of the EUROSTAT early school leaving indicator

In light of the variation in the conceptual definition and likewise the range of indicators used to quantify early school leaving, it can be concluded that the current EUROSTAT definition of early school leaving is pragmatic, considering that it is applied across the 25 EU Member States. However, like most other indicators and measurement techniques applied to such different contexts, there are clear weaknesses with the existing definition:

- *Technical measurement issues*
 - It is an indicator that does not correspond to an intuitive understanding of early school leavers (for example, the criteria of whether or not one has been in training during the last 4 weeks is a rather weak proxy²⁷⁵). Using the indicator to set up an EU 2010 Benchmark target is therefore problematic, even unhelpful.
 - In the actual calculation of the early school leaver rate from the EU LFS, any respondent who has not provided an answer to one or more of the three variables that make up the indicator (age, highest education level and whether or not one is currently in education and training) is automatically classified as an early school leaver. While this may be appropriate in cases when responses to age and highest education level are not provided, the assumption is more problematic when the last variable is not answered. This is because a respondent could be 22 years old, with highest level of education at ISCED Level 4 but didn't answer the question of whether or not he was in education and training in the last four weeks. Even if his ISCED level clearly indicates that he is not an early school leaver, as a result of this syntax, he will be labelled so²⁷⁶.
 - Another problematic assumption taken by the indicator is for those cases where a respondent has a low ISCED qualification (Level 0, 1, 2). If such a respondent responds yes to the question on education and training in the last four weeks, he will not automatically be tagged as an early school leaver, regardless of the type of current education and training he is participating in. Thus, he could be taking a language course and still not be counted as an early school leaver when in fact no steps are being taken to achieve an upper secondary degree²⁷⁷.
- *Accuracy* - The indicator is measured based on survey data from the EU LFS rather than potentially more accurate school records and registers, exposing the calculation of the indicator to methodological and estimation errors related to surveys²⁷⁸.

²⁷⁵ As mentioned earlier in this report the 2004 LFS allows to substitute the use of the last 4 weeks for any kind of training by the participation in regular education but it will still only concern the last 4 weeks.

²⁷⁶ It is within Eurostat's objectives to improve the treatment of 'no answer' along with the transition to annual averages.

²⁷⁷ As stated above, this can be avoided with the LFS 2004 indicating if the education and training followed concerns the regular education system.

²⁷⁸ It must be stated though that such a data collection on large scale might encounter methodological problems in countries where registers of individuals' educational history are not available.

- *Representativeness* –The indicator uses a fixed definition of non qualification although this obviously varies between Member States. Even though a fixed definition is necessary for measuring EU progress and the benchmark on education attainment for young people is linked to the completion of upper secondary education, there is variety amongst the Member States in what is perceived, especially in labour market needs in what means ‘no qualifications’. Moreover, lower secondary vocational qualifications might be more advantageous in some labour markets than lower general secondary qualifications.
- *Comparability* - As the indicator is currently defined, it does not allow for comparisons with definitions of early school leavers used in third countries. A main point of this is the choice of age-group as a reference group.

Also an issue of representativeness as well as comparability is the reference period used for this study which is the spring data (second quarter) which can be resolved by working with annual averages.

- *Ability to address the issues of early school leavers from a policy and programme perspective*
 - The current measure is a measure of status and therefore gives the cumulative rate of early school leaving within the population. Like the case of the USA, it should be complemented by a measure which can clearly indicate the exact proportion or number of “new” early school leavers is each year and at which age between 18 and 24 years old they became an early school leaver
 - The current measure treats the early school leavers as one homogenous group, as it does not identify and thereby differentiate, between the age and educational level at which they left education. This level of understanding of the early school leaver population is important as it would allow for a more targeted approach at that segment of the early school leaver population which is at highest risk and/or the largest in size.

Given these weaknesses it is recommended that a number of separate indicators are developed and used.

10.5 Proposals for new indicators and data collection

The underlying concept of ESL could be considered as the ‘failure’ of schools. Governments and to a lesser extent families invest in schools and the education of pupils for economic, social and cultural objectives. All EU countries provide compulsory education and in recent years the variations in the period of compulsory education have reduced between EU Member States. The costs of the ‘failure’ of schools are high both for the pupil that fails and for society more generally.

There are five aspects of ESL when taking it as a ‘failure of schools’ concept. Each is considered briefly below in terms of its relevance, ambiguity, practicality, and comparability. Moreover, proposals are made on how to collect data on these new indicators.

Truancy: The concept is clear, pupils do not turn up when fit and well. However, as an indicator of ‘failure’ it may be ambiguous and truancy is not just the fault of schools.

Nor is truancy necessarily a reliable sign of final outcome of schooling. Truancy is easy to measure based on schools records but these may not be compiled and aggregated at regional, national or EU levels because of issues of comparability. Comparisons with countries with compulsory education should not be problematic if data are available.

Those expelled or suspended. The concept is relevant. Why should schools and other pupils put up with disruptive even violent pupils? The indicator is likely to be linked to wider social costs. However, there are differences in policies, cultural norms and practices between states and institutions. The indicator should be easy to measure from school records, but it is possibly difficult to gather statistics. Comparisons with countries with compulsory education should not be problematic if data are available. It could additionally give an indication on the way national education policies deal with such pupils and what their scope is for returning to education.

Those failing to obtain ‘minimum qualifications’. The concept is highly relevant and indicative of the failure of investment. However it is problematic because of differences in definitions between Member States. Also for qualifications to have some value, they should not necessarily be given as a reward just for turning up during the compulsory years. It is possible to collect this information as part of the Labour Force Survey which would allow for comparisons across the Member States. A common competence based definition would make this an excellent indicator of performance²⁷⁹.

School leavers failing to enter further training within a period of time. The concept is relevant but is not a strong intuitive aspect of ESL or schools failure. Variations in the value of this indicator are dependent upon systems and policies of training provision and labour market conditions in the states under consideration and not just on the consequence of schools performance. The indicator is practical and has analogies with part of the current EUROSAT composite indicator. Comparisons with countries with compulsory education should not be problematic if data are available.

School leavers failing to enter ‘official labour market’ within a period of time. The concept is relevant and can be seen as an aspect of schools failure to achieve economic objectives. However variations in the value of this indicator are dependent on labour market conditions in the states under consideration and not just on the consequence of schools performance. The indicator is practical. Comparisons with countries with similar levels of compulsory education should not be problematic if data are available.

10.6 Application of indicators and statistics on early school leaving

The following considers for which different EU policy, research and evaluation functions the various definitions and aspects of ESL could be used:

Measuring progress of the Lisbon Strategy

Schools’ performance is clearly critical to the Lisbon Strategy but labour market participation is probably the most appropriate relevant indicator. Indeed after a period of years where policies have been put in place to prolong participation in education and

²⁷⁹ This could be linked to the effort already undertaken in the area of the framework of common reference levels for vocational education and training as well as the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area.

training there is now a potential need to increase labour market participation amongst school leavers. Labour market participation and unemployment by age group are relevant indicators.

Identifying factors that influence schools performance and failure

There is scope for comparisons of inputs (resources: human and costs, years of compulsory education) and outputs (each of the five aspects identified above). Research to improve the understanding of factors influencing ESL would be most efficient through longitudinal cohort studies, similar to those carried out by the USA and Australia. There is however, not necessarily a benefit in such studies at the EU level. Those affected by ESL are probably the least mobile amongst the EU workforce. The role of the EU in this work should therefore be to facilitate interchange and learning and comparisons with other countries.

Identifying the effectiveness of interventions to reduce early school leaving

There are interesting interventions that could be examined (early interventions, and supplements, such as SURESTART in the UK). A variety of methods and techniques for the measurement of inputs, outputs and subsequent performance are available, such as the detailed tracking of beneficiaries of these interventions, which can help with the understanding the impact that they have.

10.7 Scope for further investigation into the early school leaving phenomenon

This last sub section formulates a few issues which are relevant for further investigation, transnational research and cooperation. It is by no means exhaustive but tries to widen the scope for more in-depth analysis of the occurrence of early school leaving in relation to education and training systems.

The disadvantage of early school leavers with regard to EU student and labour mobility

It is appropriate that the Commission should focus its research effort on issues where Commission competence is strong. As stated in The Commission Staff Working Paper on “Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy. European Higher Education in a worldwide Perspective”²⁸⁰ it is widely recognised that mobility has the potential to increase the professional and personal competence of the labour force and that mobility has a positive impact on learning, including language skills, and that it contributes to understanding other cultures which is an asset in an increasingly global economy. It is considered as a high EU policy priority.

The intra EU student as well as labour mobility of those with relatively low qualifications is likely to be particularly low. Those identified as early school leavers (by whatever definition) characteristically have low or no vocational qualifications. It is likely therefore that early school leavers could be especially disadvantaged with respect to the opportunities to enter higher education or the labour market in countries other than their own. Initiatives at the EU level that could reduce this disadvantage might include

²⁸⁰ European Commission, Commission Staff Working Paper. Annex to the: Communication from the Commission. *Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy. European Higher Education in a Worldwide perspective.* {COM(2005)152final}, SEC(2005)518, Brussels.

bringing closer the systems for crediting the results of schooling. There would be merit in examining through research, both the scale of this potential problem and the differences in practice between Member States.

Peer reviews of policies with regard anti-early school leaver measures

As already touched upon in section 5 containing an overview of initiatives and measures targeted at early school leavers, there would be mutual benefit from holding further peer reviews of such measures that have led to reductions in the number of early school leavers. Furthermore, the scope for exchange of good practices on measures and practices which work in the field of combating early school leaving within the Open Method of Coordination, should be explored.

More in-depth comparative studies

More specific comparative studies could investigate those factors identified in the All Factors Framework which have not been covered by the analysis in this study. In particular, the understanding of the socio-economic background of early school leavers such as economic standing of the family, parental background, and ethnicity could help to further understand the dynamics of early school leaving and how to better tackle it. Likewise, in relation to the performance of early school leavers in the labour market, there is scope for supplementing the investigation of employment participation rates with actual income levels as another means of gauging performance.

The investigation of these concepts could be based on the Statistics on Income and Living Conditions Survey (EU-SILC) which was only started in 2004, and therefore was not available for use during this study. This survey provides relevant cross-sectional data relevant to the study of early school leavers, including:

- Income data (personal and household)
- Social exclusion
- Non-monetary deprivation (ie. extent of consumer debt)
- Physical and social environment (ie. crime, vandalism)
- Housing condition
- Labour market (age when started first job, changes of job)
- Education (highest level of ISCED attained)
- Health status

Moreover, there are plans for the collection of longitudinal data on some of these variables, although not for the educational ones. As data collection through this survey has only begun, it will be a few years before the time series data will be robust enough to allow for meaningful analysis.

In addition, the EU-SILC could be used as a vehicle to specify more particular data collection which would help to address gaps in the data availability for the study of early school leavers. This could be done through the additional collection of education related data through the core survey, or through the addition of a special module carried out longitudinally.

The costs involved in “school failure”

There is scope for investigating the costs of early school leaving to the individual and society in order to inform debates over the priority that should be given to anti-early school leaving measures. The indicators for measuring the “school failure” aspect of early school leaving as described above could serve as a starting point.

The effects of transition within national school systems

Further research on the effect of different transition models in countries on early school leaving, more specifically the absence or presence of a single structure (comprising primary and lower secondary education), having to move school from lower to secondary education, high discrepancy between compulsory and post-compulsory programmes etc. are these encouraging or discouraging factors for early school leaving? This should be looked at together with the age when early school leavers leave the school system.

The effects of the end-of-secondary school examination

A great variety can be found amongst national education policy in terms of how certificates are awarded at the end of upper secondary education. In the EU25 there is for example variety with regard to the way in which certificates are awarded: solely on the basis of continuous assessment during the final years, through external examination (such as for example the French baccalauréat) or a combination of internal final year exams and an assessment of the results achieved during the final year. In the USA and Japan (JFSAT) for example, the end-of-secondary school examinations are external. Questions that might be investigated and relate to the way certificates are awarded could be: -How to certify satisfactory completion of upper secondary education whilst not discouraging too many candidates? -How to use examination results to monitor school system performance? -How to raise the standards of performance while increasing the number of successful candidates?

Effects of pre-school on later school performance

According to the PISA 2003 results in many countries a very substantial association was found between attending pre-school and performing well age 15. This is also confirmed by the EU Economy Review 2003²⁸¹ (p 178): The available evidence suggest that early child education and care may be associated with even higher returns than traditional schooling.

Future demographic changes and implications for education expenditure

As argued in the EU Economy Review 2003²⁸², the number of school-age children is declining at present which raises an important cost-efficiency issue. In principle, decreasing student numbers might be expected to free resources which could be used for investment in other areas of education. In practice, the more likely outcome may be

²⁸¹ *EU Economy Review 2003*, European Economy No 6 2003, office for Official Publications of the EC. Luxembourg

²⁸² *EU Economy Review 2003*, European Economy No 6 2003, office for Official Publications of the EC. Luxembourg

an increase in expenditure per student, at least in the short to medium term. If this is so, an important issue for education policy-makers is how to ensure that increased spending per student leads to genuine quality improvements. Alternatively, in systems where lower- and upper-secondary education are integrated, the fall in the number of lower-secondary pupils may make it possible to increase upper-secondary participation at limited financial cost. The key margin for future expansion in basic education appears to be quality. Thus types of policies that might lead to quality improvements could have potentially large economic benefits.