

# Policy Paper on Early School Leaving

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## An overview

The Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU) is the platform for cooperation between the national school student unions active in general secondary and secondary vocational education in Europe. This policy paper is a result of many consultations and conversations with our member organisations throughout statutory events.

## Introduction

Approximately 10% of all 18-24 year olds in Europe are considered Early School Leavers. Early school leaving often leaves young people at a disadvantage in today's society, where the skills and qualities gained during education are so often deemed necessary to progress and thrive. OBESSU believes that it is the responsibility of the European Member States to make the effort in reducing these numbers and allowing for equal access to education and the removal of these barriers to the students who are struggling to stay in education, and complete upper secondary education.

There are three categories of drivers for ESL identified; (*Research for CULT Committee - How to tackle early school leaving in the EU*)

- individual level drivers,
- institutional level drivers,
- and national level drivers.

If we are to effectively combat ESL we must also address other issues in the process.

## Individual level drivers

Individual level drivers is what affects the individual into making the decision to leave school early, and on the personal level what influences one's view on education and ESL.

Academic study has discovered that socioeconomic background is one of the most powerful factors of ESL. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are much more likely to engage in Early School Leaving. Removing the financial barriers to education should be a priority in all EU member states, allowing students to gain high levels of education and to break the cycle of generational ESL. Outside of socioeconomic backgrounds, the geographical location of students can also have a huge impact on ESL. Particularly during the COVID19 Pandemic, the urban/rural divide and the difference of the quality of education in rural and urban communities really came into light. Rural students continue to face additional challenges to urban students



- Access to internet and technology
- Access to affordable transportation to and from school
- Access to quality local schools and resources
- And many more.

Furthermore, students with SEN (Specific Educational Needs), which include students with Learning Specific Disorders, have a higher chance of becoming Early School Leaving in comparison to those students without disabilities (Early School Leaving and Learners with Disabilities and/or Special Educational Needs, European Agency for special needs and inclusive education, 2017).

All of these things have the potential to affect the levels of ESL in a community.

#### Therefore OBESSU demands

- The removal of all financial barriers to education in all EU member states.
- The improvement of access to educational resources in rural areas.
- Access to safe and affordable transportation to and from school both in rural and urban areas.
- Additional support for students from low socio-economic backgrounds, in particular, those balancing studies with part-time jobs and supporting their families.
- Initial teacher training and the continuous professional development of teachers to include sociology based learning when teachers are encouraged to acknowledge their own privileges and have the ability to support less advantaged students.
- Initial teacher training to include an adequate amount of training in order to fully support SEN students.
- Certified resources for teachers and students in relation to SEN and the teaching and integration of SEN students

### **Institutional level drivers**

These are how schools and educational institutions affect the levels of ESL, how the environment around the student may increase or decrease levels of ESL. Educational methods, such as the availability of apprenticeships at businesses or the policy towards failing students, have an impact on students' motivation and participation. Students' levels of motivation for their education and/or training tend to remain greater if they know they have access to a good apprenticeship and are gaining practical, relevant skills in their courses. If this is not the case, a lack of motivation and disengagement may develop, increasing the risk of ESL. Situations where students feel disconnected from their educator, it often follows that these students then become disconnected from their education. Teachers should serve as a support system for their students so that they may learn in a safe and supportive environment. When students have experience with bullying during their education from their classmates and fellow students, this has the potential to increase levels of ESL, particularly when these negative encounters occur frequently and repeatedly. As a result of this we can also see a high level of ESL in groups of young



students who can be seen as 'different' such as those who are members of the LGBTQ+ community and those who are of a minority race etc.

#### Therefore OBESSU demands

- The availability of inclusive, high quality practical VET courses
- Pedagogy training for teachers and educators in initial teacher training on combating bullying and creating a safe learning environment.
- An importance and effort being placed towards ensuring that all students feel supported and secure within their learning environment.
- A zero tolerance approach to bullying of any kind within the educational environment and the school community.
- A whole school approach being implemented to create an environment of inclusion and celebrating differences within the school community.
- Resources and supports created so that teachers and students feel empowered and able to combat bullying and discrimination.

#### **National level factors**

ESL rates can rise or fall depending on the views of the society on education (*Research for CULT Committee - How to tackle early school leaving in the EU*). An important national contextual driver of ESL is cultural perceptions on education. Early school leaving is expected to be lower in countries where the public appreciation for education and formal qualifications is stronger. The converse can also be true: when society expresses distrust or dissatisfaction with a country's educational system, the likelihood of completing school or training decreases, resulting in higher ESL rates. Without correct resources and funding being put into education there is a much higher dissatisfaction with education and the school system. The education and ESL rates of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are much more affected by the economic situation and employment rates of their country. Inclusive education to include those from minority groups can lower ESL rates of those groups, as those students are often those most at risk of ESL.

#### Therefore OBESSU demands

- Education is a priority for funding and that adequate funding is dedicated to education when drawing national budgets.
- The quality of education is upheld to the highest standard, and constantly revised and improved by national governments.
- More effort given to inclusion of minorities within society as a whole and to decrease segregation within communities in the national society.
- The upkeep of school buildings to ensure a safe place for students to learn and thrive.



**Further reading and references:**

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/629193/IPOL\\_STU\(2019\)629193\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/629193/IPOL_STU(2019)629193_EN.pdf)

[https://www.iglyo.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Education\\_Report\\_April\\_2018-4.pdf](https://www.iglyo.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Education_Report_April_2018-4.pdf)

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