

DRAFT THEMATIC GUIDANCE FICHE FOR DESK OFFICERS

EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING (ESL)

VERSION 2 – 27/01/2014

RELEVANT PROVISIONS IN THE LEGISLATION

Regulation	Article
CPR (1303/2013)	Article 9 (10) - Thematic objective: investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning Annex I CPR: section 5.5 Annex XI Thematic ex-ante conditionalities: section 9.1
ESF Regulation (1304/2013)	Article 3: Scope of support <u>(c)</u> Investing in education, skills and life-long learning through: (i) Preventing and reducing early-school leaving; promoting equal access to good-quality early-childhood, primary and secondary education
ERDF Regulation (1301/2013)	Article 3: Scope of support (d) Investment in social, health, research, innovation, business and educational infrastructure (e) Investment in the development of endogenous potential through fixed investment in equipment and small-scale infrastructure; including small-scale cultural and sustainable tourism infrastructure, services to enterprises, support to research and innovation bodies and investment in technology and applied research in enterprises Article 5: Investment priorities (10) Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning by developing education and training infrastructure

EAFRD Regulation	Article 5: Union priorities for rural development (1) (c) fostering lifelong learning and vocational training in the agricultural and forestry sectors
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This is a draft document based on the new ESIF Regulations published in OJ 347 of 20 December 2013 and on the most recent version of the relevant Commission's draft implementing and delegated acts. It may still require review to reflect the content of these draft legal acts once they are adopted.

1. Rationale for the policy and main objectives

Education and training policy is an area where, as a result of the subsidiarity principle, the EU has supporting competence as defined by the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Lisbon Treaty). The Treaty (Article 165) provides that "the Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action". In addition Article 9 requires EU to "take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health." Measures to reduce ESL address the quality improvement of education and training and its outcomes, help to reduce skill mismatches, and support employability and social cohesion.

High rates of ESL are seen as a bottleneck for smart and inclusive growth. ESL impacts negatively on youth employment and increases the individual risk of poverty and social exclusion. Hence, policies fighting the Early School Leaving give more chances to pupils facing poverty to gain upper secondary qualification which provides them with better long-term labour market chances. The need to reduce ESL has therefore been defined as one of the headline targets of the Europe 2020 strategy: By 2020 the European average rate of ESL should be less than 10% (from 14.1% in 2010; 13.5% in 2011). At EU level ESL rates are defined by the proportion of the population aged 18-24 with only lower secondary education or less and no longer in education or training.

Currently, 11 Member States are over the 10% benchmark with Malta (22.6%), Spain (26.5%) and Portugal (23.2%) having the highest rates of ESL (see table below). Member States' national targets, as set out in their National Reform Programmes, are by and large very cautious and would also suggest that Europe may fall short of the 10% target for 2020. On 30 May 2012, the European Commission presented a set of country-specific recommendations to Member States on reforms to increase stability, growth and employment across the EU. Six countries (Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Malta and Spain) received recommendations to address ESL.

Table 3.1. Early leavers from education and training (%)

	2009	2012							2020
	Total	Total	Males	Females	Native-born	Foreign-born		Total	Target
						EU 27	Non EU 27		
EU 27	14.3	12.8p	14.5	11.0	11.6	22.8	26.7	25.6	< 10.0
Belgium	11.1	12.0	14.4	9.5	10.6	17.4	26.0	22.6	9.5
Bulgaria	14.7	12.5	12.1	13.0	12.6	:	:		11.0
Czech Republic	5.4	5.5	6.1	4.9	5.5	(10.0)	(8.5)	(9.3)	5.5
Denmark	11.3	9.1	10.8	7.4	9.0	:	(11.7)	10.1	< 10.0
Germany	11.1	10.5p	11.1p	9.8p	9.1	:	:	:	< 10.0
Estonia	13.9	10.5	14.0	7.1	10.6	:	:	:	9.5
Ireland	11.6	9.7	11.2	8.2	9.2	15.1	6.8	12.3	8.0
Greece	14.5	11.4	13.7	9.1	8.3	(24.7)	45.8	42.0	9.7
Spain	31.2	24.9	28.8	20.8	21.4	39.1	41.1	40.7	15.0
France	12.2	11.6	13.4	9.8	10.8	23.5	22.7	22.9	9.5
Croatia	3.9	4.2	4.6u	3.6u	4.2	:	:	:	4.0
Italy	19.2	17.6	20.5	14.5	14.8	35.4	40.5	39.1	15.0-16.0
Cyprus	11.7	11.4	16.5	7.0	8.1	21.6	19.5	20.7	10.0
Latvia	13.9	10.5	14.5	6.2	10.6	:	:	:	13.4
Lithuania	8.7	6.5	8.2	4.6u	6.4	:	:	:	< 9.0
Luxembourg	7.7b	8.1p	10.7p	5.5p	7.1	(11.1)	:	10.6	< 10.0
Hungary	11.2	11.5	12.2	10.7	11.4	:	:	:	10.0
Malta	36.8p	22.6	27.5	17.6	22.7	:	:	:	-
Netherlands	10.9	8.8p	10.2p	7.3p	8.6	13.0	11.9	12.2	< 8.0
Austria	8.7	7.6	7.9	7.3	6.0	(10.2)	21.5	17.7	9.5
Poland	5.3	5.7p	7.8p	3.5p	5.7	:	:	:	4.5
Portugal	31.2	20.8	27.1	14.3	20.9	:	19.4	20.3	10.0
Romania	16.6	17.4	18.0	16.7	17.4	:	:	:	11.3
Slovenia	5.3	4.4	5.4	3.2u	4.2	:	(10.3)	(10.1)	5.0
Slovakia	4.9	5.3	6.0	4.6	5.3	:	:	:	6.0
Finland	9.9	8.9	9.8	8.1	8.7	:	:	(14.9)	8.0
Sweden	7.0	7.5	8.5	6.3	6.7	(10.3)	13.1	12.8	< 10.0
United Kingdom	15.7	13.5	14.6	12.4	13.7	16.1	9.9	12.2	-
Montenegro	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	-

Iceland	21.3	20.1	23.6	16.5	19.3	32.6	:	28.1	-
MK*	16.2	11.7	11.1	12.3	:	:	:	:	-
Serbia	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	-
Turkey	44.3	39.6	36.1	43.0	:	:	:	:	-
Norway	17.6	14.8	17.6	11.9	14.6	20.1	15.3	17.1	-
Switzerland	9.1d	5.5	5.7	5.3	3.7	8.9	17.1	14.1	-

Source: Eurostat (LFS). Intermediate breaks in time series for MT (2010), NL (2010) and LV (2011). Notes: "b" = break in time series; "d" = definition differs; "p" = provisional; "()" = Data lack reliability due to small sample size; ":" = data either not available or not reliable due to very small sample size; *MK: The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; see Annex [***].

Drivers of ESL

ESL is a complex phenomenon and the reasons why young people leave education and training prematurely are highly individual. Nevertheless it is possible to indicate some recurrent characteristics of ESL processes. They are influenced by educational factors (e.g. the structure, access and quality of educational provision), by individual and by socio-economic conditions (e.g. living conditions and family background, pull factors from local labour markets). All such conditions must be taken into account when supporting pupils at risk of dropping out.

- Social drivers of ESL: ESL is mainly a social phenomenon and strongly linked to social disadvantage and low education backgrounds. Children from parents with low levels of education, from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and with migration or Roma background are more likely to leave education and training before completing upper secondary education levels than other young people. They tend to lack sufficient support from their families, face discrimination within the education system (such as low expectations from teachers and peers, being assigned to lower-status school tracks or segregated school settings, etc) and have limited access to non-formal and in-formal learning opportunities outside compulsory schooling. Often they are forced to contribute to the family income as early as possible, have to take care of younger siblings and lack support to cope with their emotional, social or educational difficulties.
- Educational drivers of ESL: ESL processes often start already in primary education with first experiences of school failure and growing alienation from school. Transition between schools and between different education levels are particularly difficult for pupils who face already difficulties in school education. Inflexible educational pathways, grade repetition, segregation or the lack of early tracking also increase the risk of ESL. Also the lack of an adequate educational offer in the region can foster early school leaving. On the contrary, targeted individual support, guidance and counselling, a good quality educational offer as e.g. attractive VET study courses and work-based learning can contribute to better educational attainment.

Policy shortcomings

The success rates of Member States in reducing ESL are different due to the specific situation(s) within the country, but also due to the way policies against ESL are conceptualized. Only few Member States follow a consistent and comprehensive strategy to reduce ESL. In most Member States policies and measures against ESL lack evaluation and monitoring. Insufficient data collection is one of the reasons for that; data often do not allow for monitoring developments and assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of measures to reduce ESL.

Many initiatives against ESL are not sufficiently linked to other policies addressing young people. There is also often a lack of sound analysis of the specific problems within a region or target group. With regard to ESF co-financed measures in six Member States, a Special Report of the Court of Auditors in 2006 concluded that "ESF co-financed activities for ESL were initiated without adequate analysis of the existing situation and the expected or targeted result." The report also states that "activities did not form part of a strategic plan (...)."

Often projects and initiatives exist in parallel and have no or only weak links with the initiatives of other communities or organisations. Despite their reported success, their impact too often remains at the local or regional level. Valuable experiences in these projects and initiatives get lost when projects finish. There is often limited possibility to scale-up successful measures and ensure sustainable funding.

EU policy on ESL

The Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early School Leaving (OJ C 191 2011) proposes a policy framework for comprehensive and evidence-based policies to reduce ESL. It underlines that a comprehensive national or regional strategy against ESL is needed which comprises prevention, intervention and compensation measures.

Such a strategy can take different forms. However, a strategy is more than a collection of measures addressing different aspects of ESL. Measures need to be embedded in a **strategic approach** towards reducing ESL which responds to the specific situation in a country and includes **prevention, intervention or compensation measures** as needed. A strategy should be **based on evidence, cover all relevant educational sectors**, including early childhood development, and involve all policy sectors and stakeholders that are relevant to address ESL.

2. How to operationalize the policy theory with regard to ESIF?

ESF/ERDF funding can support a broad range of actions, including cross sectoral initiatives to reduce early school leaving. The objective of the ex-ante conditionalities in this area is to ensure that such measures are based on evidence and are embedded in an overall comprehensive strategy. Supported measures could fall under the following categories:

Prevention measures, which seek to avoid the conditions from arising where processes leading to early school leaving can start. By way of example,

- Increasing participation in good quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) to give children a good start in education and to build their resilience. This requires an adequate offer of places in ECEC, particularly in disadvantaged areas.
- Systematic language support for children with migrant background.
- Active desegregation policy which improve the social, ethnical and cultural 'mixity' in schools, thus allowing for better peer learning and promoting integration.
- Targeted support for disadvantaged schools to e.g. broaden their educational offer or employ additional or differently qualified staff (such as school psychologists and social workers) to work with young people at risk of ESL and able to address diversity.
- Improving educational offer and ensuring that good quality education is accessible for all, including marginalised communities in deprived areas. Education and training facilities should be within easy reach in the early years of education in order to avoid the necessity to commute, which increases the risk of ESL. Targeted actions on areas most affected by poverty and target groups at risk of discrimination should be supported preferably on the basis of poverty maps.
- Increasing the permeability of educational pathways and strengthening vocational education pathways. Such measures can have a very substantial systemic impact on school education systems; they often require strong political support in a country.

Intervention measures address emerging difficulties at an early stage and seek to prevent them from leading to school drop-out. Intervention measures can focus on the whole school or training institution or can address individual pupils who are at risk of discontinuing their education or training. By way of example,

- Student-focused measures focusing on mentoring and tutoring, personalized learning approaches and improved guidance.
- Better cooperation with and greater involvement of parents and local community
- Providing necessary financial support in the form of allowances or in-kind.
- Improving the school climate and the creation of supportive learning environments, adapting learning environments to the (specific) needs of students (by investing in infrastructure and equipment of schools, the way school buildings are designed)
- Enhancing cooperation between the schools and local service providers, and promoting access to local support networks

Compensation measures offer opportunities for education and training for those who dropped out. They aim to support young people to re-enter mainstream education or provide a so-called “second chance”. Successful approaches in second chance institutions differ therefore considerably from mainstream schools by addressing the difficulties pupils had in mainstream schooling. Nevertheless there is evidence that preventing ESL shows better results than compensating the negative effects of ESL. The experience of failure, a lack of self-confidence in learning and increased social, emotional and educational problems after dropping-out increase the constraints to achieve a qualification and finish education successfully. Therefore, compensation – as necessary as it is and will always be for some young people - should not be the main pillar of strategies against ESL, but rather a last resort. By way of example,

- Successful second chance education programmes, which provide learning environments responding to the specific needs of early school leavers, recognise their prior learning and support their well-being.
- Routes back into mainstream education and training such as transition classes¹ with a strong emphasis on guidance.
- Recognising and validating prior learning, including competences achieved in non-formal and informal learning.
- Targeted individual support, which integrates social, financial, educational and psychological support for young people in difficulties.

Criteria to assess the strategic value of a certain initiative are similar to those assessing the ex-ante conditionality:

- Measures are based on a strategy against ESL, which identifies the main causes triggering ESL in the country/ region, the groups most affected by ESL. Measures should build on evidence on the number, age, sex of school drop-outs and early school leavers, and preferably socio-economic status and ethnicity of early school leavers (either of students or neighbourhood).
- The measures are consistent with the specific situation within the country or region and well-targeted. They address the main triggers for ESL processes and have the potential to reduce ESL.
- Measures cover prevention, intervention and compensation and address all education levels up to ISCED3 (upper secondary education), (often) starting with the provision of good quality early childhood education and care, better transition from one educational level to another (especially from primary to lower secondary education) and include also forms of 2nd chance education.

¹ Transition classes give an opportunity to students at risk of dropping out or at former drop-outs to gradually regain confidence, catch up on missed learning and be reintegrated in regular classes enabling them to re-join their year groups as smoothly as possible and without losing any time. A transition class consists of few students who receive intensive tuition from a substantial number of teachers over a period of three months to one year. Transition classes can exist within mainstream schools or outside of schools. Examples exist in several European countries with slightly different focus or set up.

- Measures address both general education and vocational education and training. They address also special needs education or (if systems are inclusive) the needs of students with specific educational needs. There is both a horizontal coordination between different actors at local, regional and national level and vertical coordination through different levels of government.

Infrastructure

Investments in education are one of the categories of public expenditure highlighted in the 2013 Annual Growth Survey which should be prioritised and strengthened, while ensuring the efficiency of such expenditure. Furthermore, all Member States have received a CSR with regard to education and training in 2013. In a number of Member States, particularly in the less developed regions, such reforms of education and training systems may also need to be supported by investment in education infrastructure, triggering ERDF expenditure.

The education ex-ante conditionalities are also applicable to ERDF. In each case a strategic policy framework should be in place which, inter alia, explains how infrastructure needs have been appraised and how this has been translated into decisions mapping out the long-term infrastructure network, which will form the framework for co-financed investments. The strategy should also specify the financial resources to be allocated, either from EU or national sources, to implement the envisaged measures.

- In contrast to the 2007-2013 period, where infrastructure investments were eligible only in convergence regions, for 2014-2020 they are now eligible in all regions. The principle of thematic concentration allowing for a genuine focus of resources nevertheless needs to be respected. Another important change concerns that the purchase of equipment has become an eligible expenditure from the European Social Fund. This widens the range of possibilities for the ESF to undertake education-related investments. In any case, the purchase of infrastructure, land and buildings remain non-eligible for the ESF.
- Infrastructure investments can be financed by the ERDF, if covered by the operational Programmes and if the budget foreseen is realistic. Investments proposed under a programme should be based on a mapping exercise, taking into account demographic trends, as also highlighted in the guidance on the ESL ex-ante conditionality. Additionally, the selection of specific investments by the managing authority should take account of a “demographic proofing” criterion.
- An integrated approach with ESF investment is highly desirable in order to maximise effectiveness. Identified weaknesses in current spending, such as isolated piecemeal investments, should be addressed notably through a strategic approach. The possibilities presented by investments in the current programming period should be fully exploited and be taken into account in the programming for the new period.
- Funding is unlikely to be sufficient to implement wide reforms or investment programmes. It should therefore be concentrated on areas within the overall strategy allowing for a measurable incremental impact and added value (e.g. with a demonstration or seed effect).

- Infrastructure investment should preferably go beyond the refurbishment of buildings. They can also encompass investments necessary for modernising teaching and learning methods, including teaching material, which could also be supported by ESF.
- Where appropriate, investments should contribute to equal access to quality education and in any case should not support special schools systems, but contribute to breaking down segregation.
- Investment in school infrastructure can play a role in integrated urban development and could be part of strategies developed to meet, inter alia, social challenges in urban areas or as part of ITI's in general. However, it should be closely coordinated with national education policy in order to ensure long-term sustainability of investment.
- Strategic linkage should be established with any investments proposed for strengthening ICT applications for e-learning under thematic objective 2 (e.g. for teaching purposes) and the related ESF investment priority on ESL and schools.

3. Good/bad practices and examples

Currently, the Netherlands and Ireland have probably the most comprehensive approach in Europe. Other countries are developing strategies against early school leaving. While the Netherlands do not use Structural Funding to finance their policies against ESL, the Irish programmes against ESL were supported by ESF:

- The School Completion programme (SCP) is targeted at young people between the ages of four and 18 years who are at risk of early school leaving. The objective of the SCP is to provide a range of interventions and supports including breakfast clubs, mentoring programmes, counselling and other out of school initiatives. The SCP is overseen by a National Coordination Team who advise, monitor and support the local projects and retain oversight of the area-based retention plans. In 2009 there were 124 local projects employing 251 full time project staff and 3,400 sessional and part-time staff. It was funded under the National Development Plan, also with assistance from the European Social Fund (ESF).
- The SCP is part of the activities of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) which was established in 2002 under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, that emphasises the promotion of school attendance, participation and retention. The other strands of the NEWB are the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) and the Educational Welfare Service (EWS); they work together to secure better educational outcomes for children and young people. In June 2011, the functions of the National Educational Welfare Board transferred to the newly established office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. Focus is on harmonising policy issues that affect children in areas such as early childhood care, education and participation, youth justice, child welfare and protection and research.

5. Further reading

- links to web sites, reports, other sources of information

- Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving (OJ C 191 of 1.7.2011, p. 1)
- SWD "Reducing early school leaving" [SEC(2011)96], 26 January 2011
http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/leaving_en.htm
- National Reform Programmes and related assessments/ SWDs and country-specific Council recommendations
http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm
- National ET 2020 reports from 2011
http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/progress-reports_en.htm
- Education Monitor 2012
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=SWD:2012:0373:FIN:EN:PDF>
- Eurydice – country reports
https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Ongoing_Reforms_and_Policy_Developments
- Mapping of country practices in collecting data on early school leaving (will be published on website in Feb 2013; available via susanne.conze@ec.europa.eu)
- Results of the Peer Review on ESL in March 2013 (covering 8 countries)
- MS legislation and policy documents