



Let's care

BUILDING SAFE AND CARING SCHOOLS
TO FOSTER EDUCATIONAL INCLUSION
AND SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT

D6.8 Policy Recommendations in the form of Green Paper



Funded by
the European Union

Horizon Europe research and innovation programme
project number 101059425

Funded by the European Union under grant agreement of the project 101059425. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



DELIVERABLE ID

Deliverable No.	D6.8	Work Package No.	WP6	Task/s No.	T6.5
Work Package Title		Policy recommendations and advocacy. Dissemination, exploitation and communication			
Linked Task/s Title		Advocacy actions, policy makers interaction and policy recommendations			
Dissemination level		PU	(PU-Public, SEN-Sensitive)		
Due date deliverable		2025-11-30	Submission date		2025-12-01
Deliverable name		Policy Recommendations in the form of Green Paper			

DOCUMENT CONTRIBUTORS

Deliverable responsible	POLO				
Contributors			Organisation		
Stefano Cobello			POLO		
Elena Milli			POLO		
Alessio Perpolli			POLO		
Reviewers			Organisation		
Maria Martín Lopez			COM		
Giulia Di Lisio			COM		
Paloma Santa Úrsula			COM		
Eva Bajo Marcos			COM		
Amaia Halty Barrutieta			COM		
Ángela Ordóñez Carabaño			COM		

DOCUMENT HISTORY

Version	Date	Comments
0.1	2025-11-07	Initial draft
0.2	2025-11-20	First review



0.3	2025-11-26	Second version
0.4	2025-11-27	Second review
1.0	2025-12-01	Final version for submission



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	8
1. Introduction.....	9
2. Methodological framework.....	11
2.1. Framework guiding the recommendations.....	11
2.2. Process followed	11
3. Policy recommendations for Safe Education.....	13
Safe Learning	16
3.1. Fostering inclusive and adaptive learning environment.....	16
3.1.1. Core issue: the failure of "one-size-fits-all"	16
3.1.2. Proposed policy actions	17
3.1.3. Guiding questions for consultation.....	18
Safe Teaching.....	18
3.2. Investing in teacher development and support.....	18
3.2.1. Core issue: the link between teacher welfare and student success.....	18
3.2.2. Proposed policy actions	20
3.2.3. Guiding questions for consultation.....	20
Safe School	21
3.3. Developing strategic planning and inter-sectoral collaboration for ESL prevention.....	21
3.3.1. Core issue: a systemic challenge.....	21
3.3.2. Proposed policy actions	22
3.3.3. Guiding questions for consultation.....	23
3.4. Strengthening family and community partnerships	23
3.4.1. Core issue: from "involvement" to "partnership".....	23



3.4.2.	Proposed policy actions	24
3.4.3.	Guiding questions for consultation.....	25
3.5.	Addressing vulnerability and promote diverse aspirations	25
3.5.1.	Core issue: the aspiration gap.....	25
3.5.2.	Proposed policy actions	26
3.5.3.	Guiding questions for consultation.....	27
	Safe Education	28
3.6.	Prioritizing "Safe Education"	28
3.6.1.	Core issue: safety as a prerequisite for learning.....	28
3.6.2.	Proposed policy actions	29
3.6.3.	Guiding questions for consultation.....	30
4.	Conclusions.....	31
	References	33
	Annex - LET'S CARE research and results	34
1.	Statistics on early school leaving and underachievement in Europe.....	34
2.	Desk research	35
3.	Desk research for policy scoping.....	36
4.	Qualitative research and ethnographies.....	38
5.	Participative process, feedback and policy recommendation co-creation contents.....	39
6.	Summary of the key findings of LET'S CARE researchers.....	41
6.1.	Relationships and school climate	41
6.2.	The figure and the role of the teacher	42
6.3.	Economic and social determinants of educational disengagement	42
6.4.	Socio-Emotional Education (SEE) and holistic development	43



6.5. Inclusive and adaptive learning environments	43
6.6. Family-school partnerships and community engagement.....	44



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
ELET	Early Leavers from Education and Training
ESL	Early School Leaving
EU	European Union
NATs	National Citizens
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PMAB	Policy Makers Advisory Board
SEE	Socio-Emotional Education
SEL	Social-Emotional Learning
SMAT	Sueños, Miedos, Alegrías, Tristezas(Dreams, Fears, Joys and Sorrows)
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
UDL	Universal Design for Learning



Executive Summary

"Policy Recommendations in the form of Green Paper" (D6.8), presents a strategic framework of policy recommendations for preventing Early School Leaving (ESL) and mitigating academic underachievement across the European Union, based on the findings of the LET'S CARE research project. It proposes a systemic shift towards a Safe Education approach that integrates emotional security, belonging, and well-being) as fundamental prerequisites for effective learning, moving beyond isolated interventions. The document is the basis for consultation and feedback from stakeholders to inform the subsequent, more definitive White Paper (D6.9).

The document synthesizes extensive research - including literature reviews, economic analysis, qualitative ethnographies, and participatory consultations involving stakeholders across six countries (Bulgaria, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, and Spain) - to propose a systemic framework for creating "Safe Education" environments.

The policy recommendations are structured following the 4 ecological pillars on which LET'S CARE approach is based:

- Safe Learning: transition from punitive to positive discipline; integrate Socio-Emotional Education into curricula; fund training in adaptive pedagogies; reform curricula to theoretical overload; allocate resources for specialized staff (psychologists, special pedagogues) and smaller class sizes.
- Safe Teaching: Reduce non-didactic workload via digitalization and administrative support; invest in teacher well-being and tutoring capacity. Fund continuous professional development (CPD) focused on socio-emotional competencies, inclusive practices, and conflict resolution.
- Safe School: Develop inter-sectoral strategic plans coordinating education, social services, health, and employment ministries; establish data-driven Early Warning Systems; implement robust anti-bullying protocols; formalize family-school partnership charters with funded empathetic communication training; strengthen community linkages with third-sector organizations; promote cultural competence; integrate student voice methodologies (Photovoice, SMAT); validate diverse aspirations; strengthen vocational guidance and VET pathways.
- Safe Education: Integrate the Safe Education Framework (Safe Learning, Safe Teaching, Safe Schools, Safe Education) into national and regional policies.

The paper is divided in six main chapters:

- Introduction contextualizes ESL challenges with statistical evidence across partner countries;
- Methodological Framework explains the evidence-based approach combining desk research, qualitative ethnographies, and participatory consultations;



- Policy Recommendations constitutes the core, organizing proposals into four pillars (Safe Learning, Safe Teaching, Safe Schools, Safe Education) with specific actions, responsible actors, and consultation questions;
- Conclusions emphasize the paradigm shift from isolated interventions to ecosystem-based approaches;
- Annex 1 provide detailed research findings, including statistics, literature reviews, policy scoping analysis, ethnographic results, and participatory process outcomes.

1. Introduction

Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education is a central pillar of European social policy as demonstrated by the European Education Area initiative¹. However, **Early School Leaving (ESL)** and academic underachievement remain persistent structural challenges that threaten social cohesion and economic stability across the Union. As of 2023, approximately 9.5% of individuals aged 18 to 24 in the EU have abandoned the educational system without upper secondary qualifications. This translates to roughly 3.1 million young people whose potential remains unexpressed². While the EU aims to reduce this figure to below 9% by 2030 (Council Resolution 2021/C 66/01)³, the pace of reduction varies significantly across member states. Among the LET'S CARE partner countries, the landscape is fragmented. Challenges persist in Spain (13.0%) and Italy (9.8%), which remain above the European average, while progress is evident in Lithuania (8.4%), Bulgaria (8.2%), Portugal (6.6%), and Poland (4.1%), which have met or exceeded the 2030 target thresholds⁴.

However, retention rates alone do not capture the full picture. Quality of learning remains a critical concern. **Underachievement in core competencies** - reading, mathematics, and science - has reached alarming levels. In 2022, data indicate that a significant share of students in the EU was affected by underachievement in reading (26.2%), mathematics (29.5%), and science (24.2%)⁵. The disparity between countries is significant. Bulgaria demonstrates rates that are considerably higher than the European average, with 53.6% of 15-year-olds showing insufficient proficiency in

¹ European Education Area <https://education.ec.europa.eu/>

² *Education and training monitor 2024 – Comparative report*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/815875>

³ Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), (2021/C 66/01), [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226(01))

⁴ EUROSTAT, 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/edat_lfse_16/default/table?lang=en&category=educ.educ_outc.edatt.edatt1

⁵ *Education and training monitor 2024– Comparative report*

mathematics, 52.9% in reading, and 48% in science. Conversely, Poland reports the lowest percentages of underachievement among the partner countries: 23% in mathematics, 22.2% in reading, and 18.6% in science, although a decline in performance has been observed recently. Other partner countries generally align with or sit slightly below the European average. However, mathematics remains the greatest hurdle; notably, Italy (29.6%) and Portugal (29.7%) are the only partner countries slightly exceeding the European average for insufficient proficiency in this subject⁶.

These aggregate statistics mask profound disparities rooted in socioeconomic background, origin, and ability. ESL is rarely the result of a single event; it is a process fueled by the **interconnectedness of personal, family, and community issues**. The risk of educational disengagement is not distributed equally; it is concentrated among the most vulnerable.

- **The migrant gap:** Analysis reveals a stark divide based on nationality. While the ELET rate for nationals in reporting countries is 8.1%, the rate for individuals of foreign origin is nearly triple, reaching 23.1%. In Spain and Italy, the gap is particularly acute, with foreign-origin youth dropping out at rates of 29.6% and 24.3% respectively⁷.
- **Socioeconomic determinants:** Educational outcomes are inextricably linked to the domestic environment. Students from households characterized by low income, financial instability, or low parental educational attainment face a substantially increased probability of dropping out⁸.
- **Disability and health:** Persistent academic struggles are frequently compounded by learning difficulties, emotional distress, or disability⁹. These factors often intersect with socioeconomic disadvantages to create cumulative barriers to attendance and engagement.

Current educational systems frequently fail to address these intersectional vulnerabilities, leading to a reduced sense of "school belonging" for marginalized groups. When schools fail to provide a "Safe Education" that accounts for emotional security and secure attachment, students move from cognitive engagement toward complete disengagement.

Addressing these challenges requires more than academic remediation, it demands a **holistic policy shift**. This document presents the policy recommendations derived from the LET'S CARE desk research, policy scoping, qualitative ethnographies, and participatory stakeholders' consultations. This paper aims to propose a strategic framework to **prevent ESL and foster inclusive learning environments**. Its primary purpose is to invite feedback from stakeholders, including the Policy

⁶ *The twin challenge of equity and excellence in basic skills in the EU – An EU comparative analysis of the PISA 2022 results*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/881521>

⁷ *Education and training monitor 2024– Comparative report*

⁸ LET'S CARE D 2.2 Policy paper: economics of early school dropout: impact assessment and policy recommendations

⁹ LET'S CARE D 2.1 Literature review on Safe Learning (P1), Safe Teaching (P2), and Safe School (P3)



Makers Advisory Board (PMAB), to refine and strengthen these recommendations before moving toward a White Paper and subsequent implementation of strategies.

2. Methodological framework

The formulation of policy recommendations requires a transparent and evidence-based approach to ensure credibility and relevance. The methodological process adopted by the LET'S CARE project aimed to guarantee that the proposals presented in this Green Paper are firmly grounded in research and stakeholder engagement. The recommendations are informed by the theoretical foundation of the LET'S CARE project and aligned with EU priorities for inclusive and equitable education. The approach integrates empirical evidence, participatory processes, and policy analysis to address ESL and underachievement from a systemic perspective.

2.1. Framework guiding the recommendations

Based on the theoretical model (D2.3 – Safe Education theoretical model), the process began with a comprehensive review of existing literature and policy frameworks, assessing the impact of ESL and the cost-effectiveness of early interventions (D2.2 Policy paper: economics of early school dropout: impact assessment and policy recommendations). This was complemented by qualitative research employing participatory action methodologies (D3.1 Methodological report - qualitative and collaborative data collection and D3.3. School Ethnographies), which provided in-depth insights into the experiences of students, educators, and families across six European countries. School ethnographies and LET'S CARE World Café consultations facilitated structured dialogues with stakeholders, ensuring that the voices of practitioners and beneficiaries informed the policy design. Crucially, the D6.7 Policy Scoping Report served as a cornerstone for this work, analyzing existing legislation and policy instruments while capturing the needs and perspectives of teachers and families. Together with previous deliverables this report provided the analytical foundation for identifying gaps and opportunities for innovation.

The methodology and the analysis of the main results are discussed in more depth in Annex 1.

2.2. Process followed

The formulation of the recommendations followed a structured, multi-phase analytical process from empirical evidence to policy recommendations.

- **Evidence mapping phase:** as identified above, all relevant project deliverables (literature reviews, qualitative studies, ethnographies, participatory consultations, and the Policy Scoping Report) were systematically examined to extract, through a narrative synthesis approach, both

the core findings emerging from each document and the preliminary policy implications these findings suggested. This initial narrative extraction produced two parallel corpora:

- 1) a consolidated set of empirically grounded findings on the determinants of educational disengagement and the conditions enabling Safe Education, and
- 2) a preliminary set of potential policy directions already implicit in the data.

Including D6.7 Policy scoping report from the outset ensured that both research results and the current European policy landscape were considered in combination, enabling an integrated understanding of systemic opportunities and constraints.

- **Thematic analysis phase:** In the second stage, these elements were subjected to a cross-deliverable thematic analysis to identify recurrent patterns, convergences, and structural problems across sources. Through this process, the findings and recommendations were grouped into thematic clusters considering their connection to the theoretical bases of the LET'S CARE Safe Education framework (particularly attachment theory, socio-emotional learning, inclusive pedagogy, and ecosystemic models of school success). The analysis allowed to map which issues consistently emerged across different methods (desk research, ethnography, PAR, policy analysis) and which recommendations were repeatedly voiced by the target groups.
- **Policy translation phase:** the thematic clusters were compared through the construction of a gap-analysis matrix, which systematised the reasoning process from evidence to policy by structuring each thematic cluster into four interconnected components:
 - 1) Identified finding (empirical or stakeholder-based),
 - 2) Existing policy or structural condition (as identified in D6.7),
 - 3) Resulting systemic gap (educational, relational, organisational or governance-related),
 - 4) Corresponding policy actor (legislative, curricular, organisational or funding measure).

This analytical structure established a clear and transparent chain of reasoning: from what the data shows, to why this constitutes a structural deficit, to what precise action is required at the appropriate governance level.

The resulting set of policy levers was aligned with the four pillars of the LET'S CARE Safe Education model—Safe Learning, Safe Teaching, Safe Schools, and Safe Education. This framing provided a coherent conceptual architecture ensuring that the recommendations not only addressed isolated issues but contributed to a systemic reorientation of educational ecosystems towards relational safety, inclusion, well-being, and academic engagement.

- **Validation phase:** this final step will start after the publication of this deliverable and will engage stakeholders in reviewing and refining the proposals, reinforcing their relevance and feasibility and leading to the development of policy recommendations in the form of white paper (D 6.9). There will be organized at least 6 workshops with a total of 60 relevant

stakeholders (e.g. school directors, representatives of family or teachers associations, education experts, researchers, etc.), decision and policy makers at different geographical level (local, regional, national and European) and the LET'S CARE PMAB (Policy Makers Advisory Board) in order to get feedback and review of the proposed policy actions. The consultation workshops that will be organised by the LET'S CARE partners according to the stakeholders' availability and local needs. Specific guiding questions for the implementation of these workshops have been developed and included in a specific paragraph for each policy recommendation.



Figure 1 – Graphical representation of the methodological process followed

3. Policy recommendations for Safe Education

The LET'S CARE research indicates that preventing ESL requires a paradigm shift: moving from isolated interventions to a "Safe Education" ecosystem. The **Safe Education approach** is a comprehensive, systemic strategy designed to address learner diversity, underachievement, and ESL challenges in Europe by shifting focus from simple instruction to creating a safe and supportive school environment. The approach asserts that educational effectiveness is fundamentally tied to the student's relational experience of safety, emphasizing that a secure emotional connection with adults is critical for the engagement and performance of high-risk students, viewed within an ecological systems context. Its implementation is based on four integrated components:

- **Safe Learning**, which focuses on creating learning environments where students are protected from physical and emotional threats, allowing them to engage fully in cognitive activities;
- **Safe Teaching**, which focuses on equipping educators with the tools and strategies to foster an inclusive and secure classroom environment;
- **Safe Schools**, which focuses on implementing systemic measures, such as anti-bullying protocols and physical security, to ensure a safe environment for all;



- **Safe Education**, systematically integrates these principles across all levels to promote secure relationships, prevent social exclusion, and promote greater educational equity and social justice.

The following table summarizes the key policy actions proposed in this Green Paper. It links the evidence of current systemic deficits, identified by LET'S CARE research and data collection, to the specific actors responsible for change and the operative recommendations required to mitigate Early School Leaving and academic underachievement.

Impact on Safe Education Subdimension	Evidence of Problem / Systemic Gap	Addressed Actors (Level)	Specific Policy Recommendation
Safe Learning	Unsafe school climate; punitive discipline; lack of socio-emotional education	School directors; Pedagogical staff	Transition from punitive discipline to positive discipline and nonviolent communication; integrate Socio-Emotional Education (SEE) into curricula.
	Lack of inclusive and adaptive learning environments	Ministry of Education; Teacher training institutes	Fund training in adaptive pedagogies (UDL, project-based learning); reform curricula to enhance relevance and reduce theoretical overload.
	Structural deficits (large class sizes, lack of specialists)	Ministry of Education; Regional authorities	Allocate resources for specialized staff (psychologists, special pedagogues) and enforce smaller class sizes.
Safe Teaching	Teacher burnout, emotional exhaustion, and administrative overload	Ministry of Education; Regional authorities; School boards	Reduce non-didactic workload via digitalization and administrative support; invest in teacher well-being and tutoring capacity.
	Skills gap in socio-emotional education	Ministry of Education; Teacher training institutes	Fund continuous professional development (CPD) focused on socio-emotional competencies, inclusive practices, and conflict resolution.



Safe School	Weak anti-bullying measures and lack of systemic safety protocols	School directors; Local authorities	Implement robust anti-bullying protocols and cultivate a pervasive culture of respect and safety.
	Fragmentation across ministries and lack of coordinated governance	Ministry of Education; Regional/local administrations	Develop inter-sectoral strategic plans for ESL prevention; establish collaboration agreements between central and local authorities.
	Regional disparities and lack of data-driven targeting	Central and regional education authorities	Create shared digital systems for data-driven resource allocation to high-risk students and regions.
	Weak family-school collaboration and community engagement	School boards; Local authorities; Regional education authorities	Enforce partnership charters; fund empathetic communication training; allocate resources for structured parent engagement programs; strengthen community linkages.
	Inequality of recognition and lack of cultural competence	Schools; Regional authorities; Career guidance services	Promote cultural competence; integrate student voice methodologies (Photovoice, SMAT); validate diverse aspirations; strengthen vocational guidance and VET pathways.
Safe Education	Lack of systemic integration of safety principles	Ministry of Education; Central educational authorities	Integrate the Safe Education Framework (Safe Learning, Safe Teaching, Safe Schools, Safe Education) into national and regional policies.

Table 1 – Summary of key problems, policy makers and actors, policy recommendations

Safe Learning

3.1. Fostering inclusive and adaptive learning environment

3.1.1. Core issue: the failure of "one-size-fits-all"

Rigid, one-size-fits-all educational models remain a structural barrier to equity and engagement across Europe. PISA 2022 data¹⁰ show that underachievement in mathematics ($\approx 30\%$) and reading ($\approx 25\%$) disproportionately affects students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, migrant families, and those with special educational needs. These groups are also over-represented among Early Leavers from Education and Training (ELET) with an incidence of 23.1%, where EU average stands at 9.3% (Eurostat 2024)¹¹.

LET'S CARE participative data collection¹² and World Cafès highlighted key systemic shortcomings:

- **Pedagogical rigidity:** Limited flexibility in teaching methodologies leaves diverse learners behind¹³. Without adaptive strategies, students facing challenges do not feel valued or included. Families interviewed emphasized the importance of inclusive practices, language support, and culturally responsive pedagogy to overcome barriers for learners with migrant background and those with disabilities¹⁴.
- **Relevance gap:** A persistence disconnect exists between theoretical curricula and the students' lived realities. High levels of "theoretical overload" reduce motivation, as students fail to see the practical utility of their education.
- **Structural deficits:** there is a critical shortage of specialized staff (psychologists, special pedagogues) and the persistence of large class sizes, which make individualized attention impossible.

Rationale of the recommendation:

The consortium recommends this policy because **inclusive and adaptive environments are preconditions for equity and success**. They enable schools to respond to learner diversity, reduce

¹⁰ The twin challenge of equity and excellence in basic skills in the EU – An EU comparative analysis of the PISA 2022 results, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/881521>

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/edat_lfse_40/default/table?lang=en&category=educ.educ_outc.edatt.edatt1

¹² LET'S CARE D3.3. School Ethnographies

¹³ LET'S CARE World Cafès

¹⁴ LET'S CARE D3.1 – Methodological report (1) qualitative and collaborative data collection

dropout risk, and align with EU priorities on inclusion and lifelong learning. Without structural and pedagogical adaptation, vulnerable students remain at high risk of disengagement and ESL.

3.1.2. *Proposed policy actions*

The strategy for fostering inclusive and adaptive environments should combine pedagogical modernization with structural and resourcing changes, with clear responsibilities for national and local authorities.

Allocate resources for specialized staff and smaller classes: The Ministry of Education and regional authorities should allocate *significant, dedicated funding for inclusive education*. This funding is to be used for a structural increase in the number of qualified in-school specialists (e.g., psychologists, speech therapists, special pedagogues) and to enforce reduced class sizes. The presence and accessibility of these specialized staff are crucial for providing emotional support and facilitating genuine inclusion.

Fund pedagogical training in adaptive methods: The Ministry of Education and teacher training institutes should be responsible for mandating and funding comprehensive training for all educators in active learning, project-based methods, and the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework¹⁵. This *ensures teachers are equipped to cater to diverse student paces and abilities and adopt non-directive techniques* like mirroring, scaffolding, and modeling.

Reform curricula and assessment: Curriculum developers and central education authorities should undertake a reform of curricula and assessment systems to *enhance relevance and practicality, reducing theoretical overload and integrating real-world-relevant content*. This ensures learning is engaging and applicable, reducing one source of disengagement.

Implement positive discipline and Socio-Emotional Education (SEE): School boards and directors should systematically transition disciplinary practices from punitive models to *positive discipline approaches*. At the same time, they should ensure the formal integration of Socio-Emotional Education (SEE) into the curriculum across all grade levels *to help learners develop emotional regulation, empathy, and conflict resolution skills, which are key protective factors against disengagement*.

¹⁵ <https://u-dl.com/udl-guidelines/> Suggestion emerged during the LET'S CARE World Cafès

3.1.3. Guiding questions for consultation

The following questions can be used to guide the discussion during the consultation workshops with the stakeholders (e.g. decision and policy makers at different geographical level, school directors, representatives of family or teachers associations, education experts, researchers) and the LET'S CARE PMAB, in order to validate the recommendations and support the development of the policy recommendations in the form of white paper.

From Your perspective

- *Are there any other elements or actions that could be integrated into this recommendation?*
- *In your national context, does the current assessment system (exams/grades) accurately reflect a student's skills, or does it penalize those with diverse learning styles? How could it be reformed?*
- *How should curricula and assessment evolve to reflect real-world competencies while maintaining rigor?*
- *What structural changes (e.g., class size reduction, specialist staff allocation) are most feasible in your context to enable genuine inclusion, and what funding models could support these changes sustainably?*
- *How can teacher training in adaptive methodologies (UDL, project-based learning) be scaled without overburdening educators or creating inequities between schools?*

Safe Teaching

3.2. Investing in teacher development and support

3.2.1. Core issue: the link between teacher welfare and student success

Across the EU, teacher shortages, ageing workforce, workload and limited attractiveness of the profession threaten the capacity of schools to prevent disengagement and underachievement. The EU Education and Training Monitor 2022 places the teaching profession at the centre of system resilience, documenting widespread shortages (notably in STEM and languages), an ageing workforce, and persistent gaps in recruitment/retention - especially in disadvantaged areas - while highlighting the need for more attractive career structures and sustained professional



development¹⁶. The European Commission monitor on education and training systems¹⁷ supports these findings: many systems are introducing alternative pathways into teaching, stronger appraisal-linked development, and incentives for service in high-need areas, yet workload and non-didactic tasks remain a barrier to quality practice and collaborative improvement. International survey evidence (OECD, TALIS 2018 Database¹⁸) shows teachers spend just over half of their working time teaching, with substantial time on administrative and non-instructional activities; it also finds that collaborative, practice-based CPD and mentoring are among the most impactful development approaches.

LET'S CARE results confirm that the capacity of educators to cultivate an empathetic, inclusive, and secure classroom is intrinsically linked to their own professional safety and institutional support. Focus groups¹⁹ and participative consultations (LET'S CARE world cafès) with teachers across the six piloting countries (Italy, Spain, Portugal, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Poland) identified significant barriers to this capacity:

- *Burnout and Emotional exhaustion*: Teachers are increasingly expected to manage complex psychosocial dynamics without adequate emotional support.
- *The skills gap in Socio-Emotional Education (SEE)*: While pedagogical training is standard, there is often a lack of systematic training in SEE, conflict resolution, and diversity management.
- *Administrative overload*: A major systemic challenge undermining instructional quality is the excessive non-didactic workload. The accumulation of bureaucratic tasks diverts time and energy away from the primary task of building relationships.

Rationale of the recommendation:

Investing in teacher development and support is foundational to preventing early school leaving and underachievement. **High-quality teaching, protected time, and access to specialist support** enable teachers to build secure bonds, deliver inclusive pedagogy, and steward whole-school climate, conditions the consortium's evidence identifies as necessary for Safe Education and

¹⁶ *Education and training monitor 2024– Comparative report*

¹⁷ European Commission: *European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Structural indicators for monitoring education and training systems in Europe 2023 – The teaching profession*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/849109>

¹⁸ https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/about/programmes/edu/talis/talis2018supportmaterials/TALIS_2018_Technical_Report.pdf

¹⁹ LET'S CARE D3.1 – Methodological report qualitative and collaborative data collection

progress toward EU targets.

3.2.2. *Proposed policy actions*

Addressing the challenges faced by educators requires a strategy focused on skill development, workload mitigation, and institutional recognition.

Fund Continuous Professional Development (CPD): The Ministry of Education and teacher training institutes should allocate *dedicated funding for continuous, compulsory, and practical training for all school staff*. This training should focus on key areas like: Socio-Emotional Competencies and emotional availability; Inclusive practices, diversity management, and conflict resolution skills; Specific pedagogical methodologies, including Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and differentiated instruction, to cater to diverse student needs. Furthermore, this training should not be limited to teachers but extended to all school staff and parents, improving the school-family partnership and ensuring a consistent and common language of empathy across the educational ecosystem.

Reduce non-didactic workload: Central and Regional education authorities should implement immediate and drastic policy measures to reduce and streamline administrative tasks for teachers. This should include digitalizing data, eliminating redundant reporting, and utilizing dedicated administrative assistants to offload non-didactic duties, *ensuring the focus of educators' time shifts back to direct teaching and student support*.

Invest in teacher well-being and tutoring capacity: School boards and local authorities should allocate adequate economical resources and time for tutoring activities to enhance the teacher's capacity to build strong teacher-student bonds and provide necessary socio-emotional support. Furthermore, policies should proactively *address burnout and ensure that teachers feel respected and recognized* for their work.

3.2.3. *Guiding questions for consultation*

The following questions can be used to guide the discussion during the consultation workshops with the stakeholders (e.g. decision and policy makers at different geographical level, school directors, representatives of family or teachers associations, education experts, researchers) and the LET'S CARE PMAB, in order to validate the recommendations and support the development of the policy recommendations in the form of white paper.

From Your perspective

- *Are there any other elements or actions that could be integrated in this recommendation?*
- *Considering the increasing complexity of the teaching profession, what specific non-teaching tasks could be removed, automated, or reassigned to administrative staff to allow teachers to focus on "Safe Teaching"?*
- *How can professional development in socio-emotional education and inclusive practices be embedded into existing teacher training frameworks without adding to workload stress?*

Safe School

3.3. Developing strategic planning and inter-sectoral collaboration for ESL prevention

3.3.1. Core issue: a systemic challenge

ESL is not merely an educational failure; it is a systemic challenge rooted in **intersectional vulnerability**. While the EU average for Early Leavers is 9.5% (2023), this figure conceals profound disparities. As the data presented in the introduction highlights, the risk is disproportionately concentrated among vulnerable groups, including those with migrant backgrounds (23.1% compared to 8.1% for nationals) and individuals with severe disabilities (incidence rate of 44.2%)²⁰.

The LET'S CARE life stories of NEETs ²¹ demonstrate that dropout is rarely a single event. Literature and EU-wide analysis show that early leaving is associated with lower employability, lower wages, and longer spells in low-status jobs, and that ESL correlates bidirectionally with unemployment at regional level, making early, coordinated intervention a high-return investment²². The D6.7 Policy Scoping Report further evidence fragmentation across ministries and levels of government as a core barrier and points to multi-actor planning as a success factor (e.g., Portugal's TEIP, Spain's PROA+, Bulgaria's Support for Success) when combined with structured monitoring and targeted resourcing.

²⁰ EUROSTAT, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/edat_lfse_40/default/table?lang=en&category=educ.educ_outc.edatt.edatt1

²¹ LET'S CARE D3.1 – Methodological report (1) qualitative and collaborative data collection

²² LET'S CARE D 2.2 Policy paper: economics of early school dropout: impact assessment and policy recommendations



Rationale of the recommendation:

To reach EU targets on Early Leavers from Education and Training and underachievement and to maximise socio-economic returns, **strategic planning** and **inter-sectoral collaboration (education, social protection, health, employment and community services)** should become standard features of ESL prevention.

3.3.2. Proposed policy actions

The implementation of effective ESL prevention strategies requires concerted action across multiple governmental and civil sectors to establish an **ecosystem of support** around the learner.

Inter-sectoral strategic planning: The Ministry of Education, in formal collaboration with Ministries of Social Affairs, Employment, and Health, should develop and implement national/regional action plans for Early Leaving from Education and Training prevention. Collaboration agreements should be established between central decision-making bodies and regional/local administrations. This is essential to bridge the gap between national policy goals and local implementation realities. These plans should *move beyond mere educational metrics to include targets related to social inclusion and mental health support for vulnerable youth*.

Establish coordinated governance and data-driven targeting: Central and regional education authorities should establish mechanisms for *coordinated governance and resource allocation*. This would require the implementation of digital and administrative systems to facilitate shared data-driven targeting of resources toward students and regions identified as high-risk, thereby *reducing regional disparities and fostering equitable participation*.

Formalize partnerships with the third sector: Educational and regional authorities should formalize and fund partnerships with third-sector organizations and local community services. This policy action aims to *create a cohesive supportive ecosystem around the learner*, ensuring continuity of support and reinforcement of the value of *education beyond school hour*, particularly for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Prioritize early and relational interventions: Policies should ensure the early identification of students at risk and prioritize the funding of early, relationally grounded interventions, aligning with the evidence that such approaches are cost-effective and critical for academic success and well-being. *Systems should transition from reactive punishment (for absenteeism) to proactive support*. We recommend the implementation of Early Warning Systems (EWS) utilizing digital databases to identify risk factors, such as irregular attendance or behavioral changes, allowing intervention before dropout occurs.

3.3.3. Guiding questions for consultation

The following questions can be used to guide the discussion during the consultation workshops with the stakeholders (e.g. decision and policy makers at different geographical level, school directors, representatives of family or teachers associations, education experts, researchers) and the LET'S CARE PMAB, in order to validate the recommendations and support the development of the policy recommendations in the form of white paper.

From Your perspective:

- *Are there any other elements or actions that could be integrated in this recommendation?*
- *What are the primary bureaucratic or funding barriers currently preventing an integrated collaboration between schools, health authorities, and social services?*
- *Which early warning indicators and sharing protocols are feasible in your context, and how can inter-agency data flows be enabled while respecting privacy and safeguarding?*
- *Which indicators, beyond educational attainment, should be prioritized to monitor the success of inter-sectoral strategies (e.g., mental health, social inclusion, employability), and how can these be integrated into current reporting systems?*

3.4. Strengthening family and community partnerships

3.4.1. Core issue: from "involvement" to "partnership"

Currently, families are too often viewed by the system as "risk factors" to be managed, rather than "resources" to be empowered. Parental involvement is identified by the Safe Education approach as a fundamental protective factor for preventing ESL. However, a significant gap exists between the ideal of collaboration and the reality of school-family interactions. LET'S CARE Participative Action²³ Research and LET'S CARE World Cafès reveal that for many vulnerable families, particularly those with migrant backgrounds or low socioeconomic status, the school is often perceived as a distant or judgmental institution. Barriers such as language difficulties, fear of judgment, and perceived

²³ LET'S CARE D3.1 – Methodological report qualitative and collaborative data collection & LET'S CARE D3.3. School Ethnographies



teacher unavailability prevent genuine engagement. Parents also emphasised the importance of teachers' empathy and emotional competence in building trust.

Furthermore, schools frequently operate in isolation from the wider community, missing opportunities to leverage local NGOs, sports clubs, and cultural organizations to create a supportive ecosystem around the child.

Rationale of the recommendation:

The consortium proposes this policy because **family–school partnerships create the conditions for belonging, early identification, and timely support** - all of which are indispensable for preventing ESL and reducing underachievement. **Embedding partnership standards and community agreements** transforms engagement in a systematic practice that facilitate academical engagement and success.

3.4.2. Proposed policy actions

Strengthening family and community partnerships requires formalizing the mutual commitment between these two social agencies and dedicating resources to improve the quality of interaction and communication among all stakeholders.

Enforce a mutual "partnership charter": The school boards should promote the *formalization of school-family partnership*, for example, by enforcing a mutual "Partnership Charter". This charter should clearly outline the *mutual rights, responsibilities, and expected behaviors* of both schools and families, emphasizing mutual respect and accountability.

Fund training in empathetic communication: Regional education authorities and teacher training institutes should be responsible for developing and funding continuous training for all stakeholders (teachers, school staff, and parents) *in empathetic communication, active listening, and conflict resolution*. This policy is necessary *to overcome barriers* such as fear of judgment and to ensure the quality of interaction is prioritized over the quantity of meetings.

Allocate resources for structured parent engagement programs: Local authorities and school boards should allocate dedicated resources for *structured parent engagement programs* (e.g., "Parent School" curricula and joint initiatives). Furthermore, they should strengthen in-school support systems with *accessible psychological and pedagogical expertise* to facilitate early intervention and mediate conflicts.

Strengthen community linkages: School directors and local governments should actively *build strong partnerships with the wider community, including third-sector organizations*, to reinforce the value of education and ensure continuity of support beyond school hours.

3.4.3. Guiding questions for consultation

The following questions can be used to guide the discussion during the consultation workshops with the stakeholders (e.g. decision and policy makers at different geographical level, school directors, representatives of family or teachers associations, education experts, researchers) and the LET'S CARE PMAB, in order to validate the recommendations and support the development of the policy recommendations in the form of white paper.

From Your perspective

- *Are there any other elements or actions that could be integrated in this recommendation?*
- *Beyond language barriers, what are the hidden structural factors (e.g., work schedules, lack of childcare, digital divide) that currently prevent vulnerable families from engaging with schools in your region?*
- *How can schools and local authorities leverage community organizations (NGOs, cultural associations, sports clubs) to create a supportive ecosystem for vulnerable students, and what incentives or frameworks would make these collaborations effective?*
- *What types of training or resources would most effectively empower parents - especially those from disadvantaged or migrant backgrounds - to engage confidently and constructively with schools?*

3.5. Addressing vulnerability and promote diverse aspirations

3.5.1. Core issue: the aspiration gap

The LET'S CARE participative data collection highlight a dual challenge: an inequality of opportunity and an inequality of recognition. While the European statistical data confirms that students with migrant backgrounds or disabilities face drastically higher dropout rates²⁴, the LET'S CARE

²⁴ EUROSTAT 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/edat_lfse_40/default/table?lang=en&category=educ.educ_outc.edatt.edatt1

qualitative findings reveal a deeper issue: the erosion of student agency. Life stories collected from NEETs (young people Not in Education, Employment, or Training) illustrate²⁵ that dropout is often the final stage of a long process where a student's specific aspirations were ignored or devalued. Current educational systems tend to prioritize a narrow definition of "academic success," often failing to recognize or nurture diverse talents (artistic, vocational, practical).

Furthermore, for students from marginalized backgrounds (migrants, ethnic minorities), the lack of cultural recognition in the curriculum creates a disconnection with the school environment²⁶. Engagement drops when schools fail to act as "inclusive mirrors", reflecting the diverse identities of their students. These findings show that when students are empowered to express their views, they articulate strong aspirations for stability and fairness. The system's failure is not a lack of student ambition, but a lack of systemic support for diverse pathways.

Rationale of the recommendation:

The consortium recommends this policy because vulnerability is systemic and cannot be addressed by classroom measures alone. **Equity-weighted investment, empower learners' voice, high-quality guidance (academic and vocational) and formal coordination with social/health services** are necessary to reduce risk exposure, validate diverse aspirations, and move the EU decisively toward the ELET and underachievement targets.

3.5.2. Proposed policy actions

The strategy to address vulnerability requires direct intervention to ensure equity and the implementation of methods that empower students to voice their needs and shape their own aspirations.

Ensure equitable access and targeted resource allocation: Regional governments and Ministries of Social Service, in coordination with educational authorities, should ensure *equitable access to quality education and all associated resources, directly working to reduce poverty's impact on educational outcomes*. This includes ring-fencing funds for comprehensive emotional and academic support specifically tailored for vulnerable groups, such as those in socio-economically disadvantaged regions and migrant youth.

Strengthen coordination with social and health services: Local authorities should establish robust, formal communication channels between schools and external Social and Health Services to

²⁵ LET'S CARE D3.1 – Methodological report (1) qualitative and collaborative data collection

²⁶ LET'S CARE D3.3. School Ethnographies



ensure that the educational institution is part of a coordinated support network that addresses the holistic needs of the most vulnerable students. To address the 44.2% dropout rate among students with disabilities²⁷, we recommend moving beyond "access" to "genuine inclusion." This requires not just physical accessibility, but the presence of specialized support staff²⁸ who can adapt the social environment to be welcoming for all the learners.

Promote the use of methodologies for learners' empowerment: School directors and pedagogical staff should be mandated and trained to *implement methodologies that foster self-esteem and social inclusion* by empowering students to express their views. Specific methods, such as Photovoice (allowing students to visually document their reality) and SMAT (Sueños, Miedos, Alegrías, Tristezas - Dreams, Fears, Joys and Sorrows), should be integrated into pedagogical practice *to give children and young people genuine agency over their educational context*. Schools should institutionalize mechanisms for students to voice their aspirations and critique their learning environment. Student councils and feedback loops should be substantive, not superficial.

Introduce cultural competence: Schools must actively "learn about the cultures" of their students. Schools and regional authorities should fund initiatives that *integrate the cultural capital of migrant and minority families into the school life*, ensuring that *diversity is treated as a pedagogical resource* rather than a hurdle.

Promote and validate diverse aspirations: Curriculum developers and career guidance services should reform their programs to *systematically promote and validate diverse non-academic and vocational aspirations*. Policies should ensure that *guidance is inclusive, flexible, and culturally sensitive*, actively working to *overcome the intergenerational transmission of social exclusion* by broadening students' perception of viable future success. Schools should enhance transition support (primary → lower secondary; lower secondary → higher secondary/VET), workplace exposure, and career education modules linked to local labour markets. We recommend strengthening vocational guidance and support for Vocational Education and Training (VET) as prestigious, high-value options, not "fallback" routes.

3.5.3. Guiding questions for consultation

The following questions can be used to guide the discussion during the consultation workshops with the stakeholders (e.g. decision and policy makers at different geographical level, school directors,

²⁷ EUROSTAT,
https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/edat_lfse_40/default/table?lang=en&category=educ.educ_outc.edatt.edatt1

²⁸ LET'S CARE D3.1 – Methodological report (1) qualitative and collaborative data collection

representatives of family or teachers associations, education experts, researchers) and the LET'S CARE PMAB, in order to validate the recommendations and support the development of the policy recommendations in the form of white paper.

From Your perspective

- *Are there any other elements or actions that could be integrated in this recommendation?*
- *How can national education systems better validate and certify "non-formal" learning and "soft skills" to support students who may not excel in traditional standardized testing?*
- *How can schools and guidance services integrate cultural competence and student voice into career counseling to better reflect diverse identities and aspirations?*
- *What mechanisms (e.g., partnerships with employers, experiential learning programs) could strengthen the link between education and local labor markets while safeguarding equity for vulnerable students?*
- *What policy measures could ensure that vocational education and training (VET) is perceived as a prestigious and high-value pathway rather than a fallback option?*

Safe Education

3.6. Prioritizing "Safe Education"

3.6.1. Core issue: safety as a prerequisite for learning

Current educational models often prioritize academic results over relational security, failing to recognize that these aspects are inextricably linked. The Safe Education approach establishes that educational success is deeply connected with the secure emotional attachment. This psychological bond, initially established by children with their caregivers, should be reinforced within the school culture and climate. The PISA 2022 EU comparative analysis²⁹ show linkage between school climate, sense of belonging, teacher support and performances: educational relational systems with stronger belonging and supportive climates produce better outcomes and narrower equity gaps. This is a reminder that teacher relational personal ability is a systemic lever for preventing ESL and underachievement. The LET'S CARE project findings have consolidated this picture.

²⁹ *The twin challenge of equity and excellence in basic skills in the EU – An EU comparative analysis of the PISA 2022 results*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/881521>



Ethnographic results³⁰ have revealed that learners' sense of belonging drops where schools are perceived as unsafe. Compromised relational "safety", manifesting itself through a poor teacher-pupil relationships or punitive discipline, serves as a primary issue for ESL, particularly among economically and culturally disadvantaged social groups (as emerged during the LET'S CARE World Cafès). Secure relationships, Socio-Emotional Education (SEE), and positive discipline have been identified by students, families and teachers as foundations for engagement and success³¹. Participatory ethnographies³² and World Café consultations highlight the need to institutionalise SEE, strengthen anti-bullying and positive discipline, and improve teacher relational capacity through continuous professional development and reduced non-didactic burden. This approach aligns with the Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success (2022/C 469/01)³³, which puts well-being and positive climate at the centre of systemic action.

Rationale of the recommendation:

Prioritising "Safe Education" elevates **relationship-centred practice and whole-school climate** from isolated initiatives to **system standards**. The consortium recommends this policy because the quality of relationships and climate is a **necessary condition for learning, inclusion and equity**; embedding systematically safety in the school environment enables prevention of disengagement and ESL, and supports progress toward the EU underachievement targets.

3.6.2. Proposed policy actions

Implementing the Safe Education approach requires systemic integration of safety considerations into every level of the educational structure, being aware that safety is vital for both learners and educators.

Systemic integration of the Safe Education Framework: The Ministry of Education and central educational authorities should integrate the four Safe Educational approach's interdependent components - Safe Learning, Safe Teaching, Safe Schools, and Safe Education- into national and regional educational policies. This involves *shifting institutional culture to value well-being, positive*

³⁰ LET'S CARE D3.3. School Ethnographies

³¹ LET'S CARE D3.1 – Methodological report (1) qualitative and collaborative data collection

³² LET'S CARE D3.3. School Ethnographies

³³ Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), (2021/C 66/01), [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226(01))



relationships, a sense of belonging, and socio-emotional skill development as core components of educational policies and as a necessary condition for academic success.

Ensure a pervasive culture of safety (Safe schools): School directors and local authorities should be responsible for deploying robust and concrete measures for physical and cultural safety. This includes *implementing effective anti-bullying protocols and actively cultivating a pervasive culture of respect and generalized safety* that could positively influence the entire school community, fostering a strong sense of belonging and well-being.

Establish emotionally secure learning conditions (Safe learning): School directors and pedagogical staff should promote a systemic transition from the pedagogical punitive disciplinary models to a *positive discipline and nonviolent communication approach, prioritizing conversation, and cooperation.*

Support educators' relational capacity (Safe teaching): The Ministry of Education and teacher training institutions should ensure that teachers are appropriately equipped, trained, and supported to foster a protected, inclusive, and emotionally secure classroom atmosphere, recognizing that the quality of teaching is intrinsically linked to the educator's own sense of professional security and well-being. High-quality, warm, and responsive relationships are protective factors that can mitigate external risks (poverty, family instability), thus schools should promote a culture where teachers are encouraged to show genuine interest in a student's psychosocial well-being, rather than just their grades.

3.6.3. Guiding questions for consultation

The following questions can be used to guide the discussion during the consultation workshops with the stakeholders (e.g. decision and policy makers at different geographical level, school directors, representatives of family or teachers associations, education experts, researchers) and the LET'S CARE PMAB, in order to validate the recommendations and support the development of the policy recommendations in the form of white paper.

From Your perspective

- *Are there any other elements or actions that could be integrated in this recommendation?*
- *What specific indicators could be used to measure "School Climate" and "Relational Safety" alongside traditional academic metrics in future policy assessments?*
- *What policy levers (funding models, accountability frameworks, teacher workload regulations) could most effectively support the systemic integration of socio-emotional*

education and positive discipline practices?

- *What role should families and local communities play in reinforcing the Safe Education approach, and what formal structures (e.g., family-school partnerships, community liaison roles) could facilitate this collaboration?*

4. Conclusions

The evidence presented in this Green Paper, drawn from the LET'S CARE desk research, qualitative data collection and Participative Action Research, points to a critical conclusion: Educational success is impossible without relational security.

Early School Leaving (ESL) and underachievement are not merely the failures of individual students: they are the symptoms of educational systems that often fail to provide the necessary "safety" for vulnerable learners to succeed. LET'S CARE research demonstrates that for students facing socioeconomic disadvantage, migration backgrounds, or learning difficulties, the school must function as a **protective factor**. When a school environment is "emotionally cold," punitive, or disconnected from the community, it actively accelerates disengagement.

To meet the EU 2030 targets for ESL incidence, policymakers should move beyond fragmented interventions and adopt the holistic Safe Education approach. The paradigm should shift across four levels:

- **From isolation to ecosystems:** Schools can no longer function in isolation. The prevention of ESL requires **inter-sectoral collaboration**, binding education, health, and social services into a unified support network.
- **From control to Care:** Discipline and classroom management must transition from punitive measures to emotional security, that is the neurobiological prerequisite for cognitive learning.
- **From "teacher performance" to "teacher support":** We cannot demand "Safe Teaching" from professionals who feel unsafe, overburdened, or unsupported. Investing in teacher well-being, reducing bureaucratic loads, and funding Socio-Emotional Education (SEE) training is an investment in student success.
- **From standardization to adaptability:** The system must bend to fit the student, not the reverse. Through differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and the validation of diverse vocational aspirations, we must recognize that there are many paths to a successful life.



The feedback from PMAB and other policy makers will allow the LET'S CARE consortium to transform these recommendations into a White Paper for legislative action, ensuring that every student has access to an education that is not only academically rigorous but emotionally safe and socially supportive.



References

Council of the European Union (2021). *Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021–2030)* (2021/C 66/01). Retrieved from [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226\(01\)\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226(01)))

Education and training monitor 2024 – Comparative report, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/815875>

European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency (2023). *Structural indicators for monitoring education and training systems in Europe 2023 – The teaching profession*. Publications Office of the European Union. Retrieved from <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/849109> EUROSTAT (2024). *Educational attainment statistics*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/edat_ifse_40/default/table?lang=en&category=educ.educ_outc.edatt.edatt1

Gómez Bengoechea, G., Gómez Bengoechea, B., Couso Losada, A., Berastegui Pedro-Viejo, A., & Halty Barrutieta, A. (2024). LET'S CARE Policy paper: economics of early school dropout: impact assessment and policy recommendations. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13735918>

LET'S CARE D2.1 *Literature review on Safe Learning (P1), Safe Teaching (P2), and Safe School (P3)*. [Internal project deliverable].

LET'S CARE D2.3 *Safe Education Theoretical Model*. [Internal project deliverable].

LET'S CARE D3.3 *School Ethnographies*. [Internal project deliverable].

Lores, N., Mateos, E., UBEDA GOMEZ, J., de la Torre Barranco, M., & Pérez Rubio, K. (2025). LET'S CARE Methodological report 1 - Qualitative and collaborative data collection. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15790569>

OECD (2018). *TALIS 2018 Technical Report*. Retrieved from https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/about/programmes/edu/talis/talis2018supportmaterials/TALIS_2018_Technical_Report.pdf

Perpolli, A., Grazioli, D., Maciej, D., Lenartowicz, A., Couso, A., Angelova, I., Lores, N., Mendez, M., Verástegui, M., Vaitiekuniene, J., & Dias, P. (2024). LET'S CARE Policy Scoping Report. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13743215>

Publications Office of the European Union (2024). *The twin challenge of equity and excellence in basic skills in the EU – An EU comparative analysis of the PISA 2022 results*. Retrieved from <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/881521>

Annex - LET'S CARE research and results

1. Statistics on early school leaving and underachievement in Europe

Early school leaving (ESL) and underachievement in Europe represent significant educational challenges, affecting approximately 9.5% of individuals aged 18 to 24 who have exited education without upper secondary qualifications, translating to around 3.1 million early school leavers in the European Union (EU) as of 2023.³⁴

According to the **Early Leavers from Education and Training (ELET)** indicator, which measures the percentage of young people aged between 18 and 24 who are not enrolled in education or training and have not obtained a secondary school diploma, in Europe the average in 2024 is 9.4%³⁵ (the percentage is targeted at less than 9 per cent by 2030, as defined by the target agreed at EU level (resolution 2021/C 66/01)³⁶. Analysing the percentages of partner countries in 2024, Spain and Italy remain above the European average, with 13.0% and 9.8% respectively; followed by Lithuania (8.4%), Bulgaria (8.2%), Portugal (6.6%) and finally Poland (4.1%).

These issues are closely linked to broader socio-economic factors, with students from marginalized backgrounds—such as those living in poverty, with migrant status, or those with different disabilities—disproportionately impacted. An examination of the percentages disaggregated by nationality reveals a profound disadvantage for individuals with a **migrant background**. While the European average for the reporting countries stands at 8.1%, the corresponding figure for children of foreign origin is three times higher, reaching 23.1%. This disparity persists at a high level even among partner countries. Examining the available data in EUROSTAT (2024), Spain and Italy report the most substantial gaps between national citizens (NATs) and individuals of foreign origin. Specifically, Spain records a foreign rate of 29.6% compared to 10.4% for NATs, while Italy shows a rate of 24.3% for foreigners versus 8.5% for NATs. Poland registers a lower yet notable gap, with figures of 12.1% for foreigners and 6.2% for the reporting countries. The disparity also remains significant for individuals with **disabilities**³⁷.

³⁴ Education and training monitor 2024 – Comparative report, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/815875>

³⁵ EUROSTAT, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/edat_lfse_16/default/table?lang=en&category=educ.educ_outc.edatt.edatt1

³⁶ Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), (2021/C 66/01), [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226(01))

³⁷ Education and training monitor 2024– Comparative report .

ESL and ELET not only undermine individual potential but also poses substantial risks for social cohesion and economic stability within societies, making it a notable concern across the continent. The complexity of school dropout is underscored by a multitude of contributing factors, including academic performance, school climate, and systemic challenges. Studies indicate a robust correlation between low academic achievement and dropout rates, with underachievement rates in core subjects like reading and mathematics reaching alarming highs, particularly among disadvantaged groups.³⁸ Furthermore, the consequences of ESL extend beyond personal ramifications, as individuals who leave school early are at a heightened risk of long-term unemployment, social exclusion, and poverty due to their limited educational attainment.³⁹

The **underachievement rates** in core subjects have reached record highs⁴⁰. For reading, the underachievement rate stood at 26.2% in 2022, with only Ireland and Estonia meeting the EU-level target of less than 15% by 2030. Similarly, the rates for mathematics and science are concerning, with underachievement reported at 29.5% and 24.2%, respectively. These figures indicate that while some countries have made strides, the overall trend remains troubling, particularly among disadvantaged socio-economic groups. Specifically analysing the data from partner countries, Bulgaria demonstrates rates of underachievement that significantly surpass the European average. The country registers particularly high percentages of 15-year-olds with insufficient academic proficiency: 53.6% in mathematics, 52.9% in reading, and 48% in science. Despite a decline in performance observed in recent years, Poland still reports the lowest percentages of underachievement among the partner countries: 23% in mathematics, 22.2% in reading, and 18.6% in science. The other partner countries generally show similar percentages, remaining below (albeit marginally) the European average for underachievement. Overall, mathematics remains the subject presenting the greatest difficulty: in Italy, the percentage of 15-year-olds with insufficient proficiency in mathematics is 29.6%, and in Portugal, it is 29.7%. These two figures are the only percentages that slightly exceed the European average.

2. Desk research

Desk research implemented within the LET'S CARE project has generated two core bodies of evidence essential for formulating effective policy recommendations to mitigate early school

³⁸ *The twin challenge of equity and excellence in basic skills in the EU – An EU comparative analysis of the PISA 2022 results*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/881521>

³⁹ EUROSTAT, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/edat_lfse_40/default/table?lang=en&category=educ.educ_outc.edatt.edatt1

⁴⁰ *The twin challenge of equity and excellence in basic skills in the EU – An EU comparative analysis of the PISA 2022 results*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/881521>



leaving (ESL): a systematic literature review on safe educational environments (D2.1) and an economic analysis of ESL and preventative policies (D2.2). These findings establish a powerful relational and economic paradigm for educational success and well-being. Across both studies, the **findings** converge on a relational and systemic understanding of educational success, emphasizing that students' academic achievement, engagement, and well-being are shaped by the quality of interpersonal relationships and the inclusiveness of institutional environments.

- **Safe Learning – parental and peer attachment:** Secure attachments with parents and peers significantly enhance academic motivation, engagement, and performance. Warmth, communication, and autonomy support from parents, alongside peer acceptance and cooperation, reduce the risk of disengagement and early school leaving.
- **Safe Teaching – teacher–student relationships:** Positive, trust-based relationships with teachers are critical predictors of academic success and emotional resilience. Conversely, conflictual or overly controlling teaching dynamics undermine engagement and achievement, underscoring the teacher's role as a relational anchor in the learning process.
- **Safe Schools – school climate:** A supportive and participatory school climate—characterized by trust, inclusion, and collaborative leadership—correlates strongly with improved student outcomes and reduced dropout rates. Institutional cultures that value belonging and professional cooperation foster both academic performance and psychosocial well-being.
- **Economic implications of Early School Leaving:** ESL entails a substantial fiscal and societal cost, as individuals lacking upper secondary education face lower lifetime earnings and higher reliance on welfare systems. Empirical analysis confirms the cost-effectiveness of early, relationally grounded interventions: investments in inclusive education yield high returns by enhancing productivity and social cohesion. Policy analysis further demonstrates that systemic modernization (through digital transformation, coordinated governance, and data-driven targeting of resources) is essential for reducing regional disparities and fostering equitable educational participation. The persistence of ESL is shown to reinforce broader patterns of social exclusion, democratic disengagement, and health inequalities.

3. Desk research for policy scoping

The D6.7 Policy scoping report established a foundation for policy recommendations aimed at preventing early school leaving (ESL) through the LET'S CARE teacher-student attachment-based education model. A comprehensive review of legislative frameworks and school-level practices across six piloting countries (Bulgaria, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, and Spain) highlighted converging priorities for policies aimed at preventing early school leaving and fostering inclusive,

supportive educational environments. The analysis identified structural gaps and actionable strategies aligned with the LET'S CARE pillars of Safe School and Safe Education:

- **Institutionalising school-family partnerships:** All countries recognise parental involvement as a legal right and a cornerstone of educational success, yet implementation remains uneven. Policies should move beyond formal representation to mandate structured collaboration mechanisms, such as parent councils and advisory boards with decision-making roles. National frameworks (e.g., Bulgaria's Inclusive Education Ordinance, Italy's Educational Co-responsibility Pact, Spain's Organic Law 3/2020) provide a basis for codifying shared responsibilities. Best practice suggests embedding family engagement in school governance and allocating resources for systematic communication channels, including digital platforms and scheduled consultations.
- **Formalising parental education programs:** While most legislations allow parental training, only Poland and Spain enforce structured initiatives. To ensure consistency, policies should require schools to deliver accredited parental education programs focused on positive parenting, curriculum understanding, and collaborative goal-setting. Funding streams and clear operational guidelines are essential to overcome current reliance on voluntary or project-based efforts, as seen in Portugal and Italy.
- **Mandatory continuous professional development for teachers:** In-service training is compulsory in Bulgaria, Italy, Lithuania, and Poland, but fragmented in Portugal and Spain. Policies should harmonise requirements by introducing minimum annual training hours linked to career progression, prioritising inclusive pedagogy, socio-emotional learning, and differentiated instruction. National platforms (e.g., Italy's SOFIA system) and regional training centres (e.g., Spain's Centros de Profesores) exemplify scalable models. Incentivising participation through salary increments or certification credits can enhance uptake.
- **Strengthening psycho-pedagogical support structures:** The presence of school-based specialists varies significantly, with Lithuania and Portugal offering comprehensive multidisciplinary teams, while Italy lacks structural provision. Policies should mandate minimum staffing ratios for psychologists, social pedagogues, and special educators, financed through dedicated national or regional budgets. Integration of these professionals into pedagogical councils and individualised education planning processes is critical for early intervention and inclusive practices.
- **Enhancing leadership autonomy and accountability:** School directors are pivotal in operationalising reforms, yet their authority and selection processes differ widely. Policies should standardise leadership training in inclusive education and crisis management, as exemplified by Spain's mandatory management courses. Autonomy frameworks, such as Italy's Decree 275/1999 and Portugal's curricular flexibility provisions, should be reinforced with accountability mechanisms tied to equity and student well-being indicators.



- **Promoting organisational flexibility and participatory governance:** Decentralisation trends in Portugal and Spain illustrate the benefits of granting schools curricular autonomy (up to 25% of instructional time) and fostering participatory bodies (school councils, pedagogical boards). Policies should generalise these practices, ensuring that governance structures include parents, students, and community stakeholders, and that decision-making prioritises inclusive curricula, interdisciplinary learning, and socio-emotional development.

4. Qualitative research and ethnographies

The primary objective of this research was to understand, from both teacher and student perspectives, the mechanisms that either support or hinder the creation of safe, caring, and inclusive school environments. The methodology employed a mixed-qualitative design, strategically combining perspectives for comprehensive insight. Qualitative and collaborative data collection (D3.1), employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to collect the perspectives of multiple educational actors (families, teachers, stakeholders, policymakers, and NEETs (young people not in education, employment, or training)) through in-depth interviews, focus groups, peer observations, and life stories (Photovoice). School Ethnographies (D3.3) used the SMAT technique (Strengths, Mistakes, Aspirations, Threats), a participatory child-centred adaptation of the SWOT model (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats). Conducted through creative workshops with over 110 children aged 4 to 15, SMAT enabled the exploration of pupils' subjective experiences regarding well-being, safety, relationships, and school climate. Both methodologies have privileged participatory and collaborative inquiry, ensuring that the voices of children, families, and educators co-construct the understanding of what constitutes a “safe” and nurturing educational environment. The main **findings** are:

- **Safe relationships as the foundation of learning:** Across all studies, the quality of relationships - between teachers and students, among peers, and between families and schools - emerged as the core determinant of children's emotional security and engagement. Safe and supportive teacher-student relationships foster trust, motivation, and academic persistence, while poor relationships and teacher turnover contribute to disengagement and underachievement.
- **Teachers' well-being and motivation:** The data underscore a strong correlation between teachers' sense of safety and their capacity to create secure environments for students. Teachers who feel respected, supported by the school direction, and recognised for their work are more able to cultivate empathetic and inclusive classrooms. Conversely, burnout, insufficient training in socio-emotional competencies, and inadequate institutional support were identified as barriers to “Safe Teaching”.



- **Family-school partnerships:** Families expressed that children's well-being and academic success depend on close cooperation between schools and parents. They called for improved communication, inclusive school policies, and structural measures such as extended school hours, financial aid, and smaller class sizes. Parents also emphasised the importance of teachers' empathy and emotional competence in building trust.
- **Vulnerability and inequality:** Findings from both adult and child participants revealed how socio-economic disadvantage, migration, and social exclusion increase children's educational vulnerability. In contexts of poverty or ethnic marginalisation, schools often fail to provide sufficient emotional or academic support. NEETs' life stories illustrated that school dropout is rarely a single event but a consequence of cumulative disengagement within unsupportive educational systems.
- **School climate and safe spaces:** Children's perceptions gathered through SMAT workshops showed that a positive school climate - marked by inclusivity, respect for diversity, and socio-emotional learning- directly enhances well-being and learning outcomes. In contrast, schools perceived as unsafe or emotionally cold (notably in some Eastern European contexts) hinder children's sense of belonging. The classroom often emerged as the only "safe space," underscoring the need for school-wide safety and care strategies.
- **Emotional education and holistic development:** Where socio-emotional education was integrated into the curriculum (notably in Portugal and Spain), children reported higher emotional awareness, empathy, and social competence. The data suggest that emotional literacy and reflective practices are key protective factors against disengagement, contributing to both mental health and academic achievement.
- **Children's agency and aspirations:** Both Photovoice and SMAT findings show that when children and young people are empowered to express their views, they reveal nuanced understandings of their environment and articulate strong aspirations for stability, fairness, and recognition. Participation itself becomes a tool of empowerment, fostering self-esteem and social inclusion.

5. Participative process, feedback and policy recommendation co-creation contents

A participatory consultation process has been conducted across the piloting countries (Bulgaria, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Spain, and Portugal) with the primary objective of enhancing dialogue with key educational stakeholders: teachers, school directors, parents, and students. The methodology



employed was the World Cafè technique⁴¹ to facilitate focused group discussions on six core topics: school-family relationships, inclusive education, classroom management, administrative workload, internal school relationships, and engaging teaching strategies. The implementation followed a structured two-phase approach: the initial meetings focused on problem identification within designated subject areas, followed by solution development sessions, with supplementary workshops conducted between phases. There have been organised a total of 37 local events involving 923 persons.

Analysis of the LET'S CARE World Cafès national reports revealed several recurring, high-priority themes and policy suggestions across the participating countries:

- **Strengthening the School-Family Relationship:** A consensus emerged on the critical need to formalize and professionalize the school-family partnership, moving beyond basic communication, for example by enforcing a mutual "Partnership Charter" for School-Family Relations to clearly outline mutual rights, responsibilities, and expected behaviours, emphasizing mutual respect and accountability. Crucially, success hinges less on the quantity of meetings and more on the quality of interaction, demanding funded training for all stakeholders in empathetic communication, active listening, and conflict resolution to overcome barriers like fear of judgment and perceived teacher unavailability. Furthermore, policies should allocate resources for diverse, structured Parent Engagement Programs (e.g., "Parent School" curricula and joint initiatives) and strengthen in-school support systems with accessible psychological and pedagogical expertise to facilitate early intervention, mediate conflicts, and ensure a unified focus on the child's overall well-being
- **Nonviolent communication and positive discipline:** A key area for reform is the school's social-emotional climate, requiring systematic training and a shift in disciplinary practices. There is a widespread recommendation to mandate and fund continuous training for all school staff, students, and parents in empathetic communication, active listening, and conflict resolution. School policies should transition from punitive models to positive discipline approaches, prioritizing conversation, cooperation, and consistent boundary setting over fear-based punishments. Integrating Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and conflict resolution skills into the curriculum across all grade levels is advised to build competencies in emotional regulation and empathy. The presence and accessibility of school psychologists and pedagogical advisors is crucial for emotional support and facilitating discussions among stakeholders.
- **Inclusion of students with disabilities or special needs:** The findings underscore a structural need for increased resources, specialized staff, and pedagogical modernization to achieve genuine inclusion. A consistent demand across Bulgaria, Lithuania, and Poland is for a significant

⁴¹ <https://theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/>

increase in the number of qualified in-school specialists (e.g., psychologists, speech therapists, special pedagogues) and dedicated funding for inclusive education, coupled with reduced class sizes. Compulsory, practical training for all teachers in Universal Design for Learning (UDL), differentiated instruction, and cultural competence is necessary to effectively manage diverse classrooms and combat bias. The Italian experience highlighted the need for greater stability and continuity in the presence of Special Needs Teachers and mandated structured planning hours for support staff in secondary schools.

- **Bureaucracy and non-didactic workload:** The excessive administrative burden on educators is a significant and shared issue undermining instructional quality. Policies should implement immediate and drastic measures to reduce and streamline administrative tasks. This includes digitalizing data, eliminating redundant reporting, and ensuring the focus of educators' time shifts back to direct teaching and student support. Policies should redefine teacher and director roles, prioritizing pedagogical leadership and utilizing dedicated administrative assistants to offload non-didactic duties.
- **Promoting engaging teaching strategies:** The move towards student-centered, dynamic teaching requires both pedagogical training and structural changes. Italian participants were unanimous that emotional availability, empathy, and listening are fundamental to the teacher's professional role and are essential for fostering trust and meeting children's emotional needs. Policies should mandate and fund training in active learning, project-based methods, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to cater to diverse student paces and abilities. Strategies such as mirroring, scaffolding, and modelling should be adopted as foundational, non-directive techniques to position the child as an active explorer and co-constructor of learning. Curricula and assessment should be reformed to enhance relevance and practicality, reducing theoretical overload and integrating real-world relevant content.

6. Summary of the key findings of LET'S CARE researchers

6.1. Relationships and school climate

When children feel safe and emotionally supported, their fears reduce, and their capacity for learning increases. A "safe school" is a place where collaboration, inclusivity, and respectful interactions are promoted significantly impacting on academic performance of all learners, thus preventing disengagement. This includes ensuring all school spaces are perceived as secure from the physical to the psychological point of view.



A positive school climate is a critical protective factor against early school leaving and is defined by strong relational safety. The research shows that a supportive, participatory, and inclusive institutional culture - characterized by trust, cooperation, and collaborative leadership - correlates strongly with improved student outcomes and reduced dropout rates. For students, especially those from vulnerable groups, compromised relational safety (manifesting as poor teacher-pupil relationships or prevalent bullying) serves as a primary trigger for disengagement. A positive climate should foster a strong sense of belonging and well-being among students, which directly supports their educational performance and resilience. Ethnographic findings indicate that where schools are perceived as unsafe or emotionally cold, children's sense of belonging is hindered, often making the classroom the only "safe space".

6.2. The figure and the role of the teacher

Teachers are key relational figures and is fundamental to invest in their comprehensive professional development focusing on socio-emotional support, diversity management, inclusive practices, and conflict resolution skills. Moreover, addressing teacher well-being, motivation, and providing adequate economical resources and time for tutoring activities enhances their capacity to build strong teacher-student bonds and create safe learning environments. Highly motivated and well-trained teachers are a cornerstone of a resilient educational system.

The capacity for "Safe Teaching" is intrinsically linked to the professional and relational capacity of the educator and their institutional support. The data underscores a strong correlation between teachers' sense of safety and their capacity to create secure environments for students. Teachers who feel respected, supported by leadership, and recognized for their work are more able to cultivate empathetic and inclusive classrooms. Conversely, burnout, insufficient training in socio-emotional competencies, and inadequate institutional support were identified as significant barriers. A major systemic challenge undermining instructional quality is the excessive administrative burden and non-didactic workload, which necessitates drastic measures to streamline tasks and refocus educators' time on direct teaching and student support.

6.3. Economic and social determinants of educational disengagement

The risk of ESL is profoundly amplified by socioeconomic and familial vulnerability. Students from households characterized by low income, financial instability, or social disadvantage face a substantially increased probability of dropping out. This is often compounded by factors like the absence of parental support, family crises, or the implicit devaluation of education. Furthermore, statuses such as belonging to an ethnic minority and a migrant background often intersect with



socioeconomic disadvantage, creating systemic barriers and leading to experiences of marginalization. The life stories of NEETs illustrate that school dropout is rarely a single event but a consequence of cumulative disengagement within unsupportive educational systems. ESL entails a substantial fiscal and societal cost, reinforcing broader patterns of social exclusion.

ESL has profound individual and societal economic consequences, including lower employment, reduced income, and increased social exclusion. By ensuring equitable access to quality education and opportunities, the education system directly contributes to reducing poverty and fostering a more socially cohesive and economically resilient society.

6.4. Socio-Emotional Education (SEE) and holistic development

Prioritize SEE in schools leads to greater awareness on inclusion. It helps children develop self-awareness, empathy, conflict resolution skills, and emotional regulation, which are vital for navigating social complexities and building resilience. This approach moves beyond purely academic metrics to foster the development of an individual capable of navigate successfully in diverse contexts. When emotional literacy and reflective practices are integrated into the curriculum, children report higher emotional awareness, empathy, and social competence. This relational focus is essential for educational success, as it begins with secure attachment - the psychological bond that provides a sense of self-worth and confidence, empirically correlated with enhanced emotional regulation and social competence. Key recommendations include systematic, continuous training for all school staff and parents in empathetic communication, active listening, and conflict resolution.

6.5. Inclusive and adaptive learning environments

Rigid, one-size-fits-all educational models contribute to disengagement, particularly for vulnerable students (e.g., those with learning difficulties, migrant backgrounds, or from low socio-economic status). Schools should adapt curricula and teaching methodologies to individual needs, promoting flexibility and diverse learning approaches. This ensures that all children, regardless of their background or challenges, feel valued, included, and have opportunities to succeed, directly combating early school leaving and promoting equitable outcomes. An adaptive learning environment is one that fosters inclusive education by accommodating learner diversity and facilitating active, student-centered pedagogies. The findings highlight a structural need for increased resources, specialized staff (psychologists, special pedagogues), and reduced class sizes to achieve genuine inclusion for students with disabilities or special needs. The move toward dynamic teaching requires both pedagogical training and structural changes. There is a demand for



mandating and funding training in active learning, project-based methods, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to cater to diverse student paces and abilities. Curricula and assessment should also be reformed to enhance relevance and practicality, reducing theoretical overload.

6.6. Family-school partnerships and community engagement

Parental involvement is fundamental for preventing early school leaving and supporting children's academic and emotional development. Inclusive practices, like language support or diverse participation activities, facilitate overcoming of barriers, such as communication difficulties, that prevent parental engagement. There is a critical consensus on the need to formalize and professionalize this partnership, moving beyond basic communication, for example, by enforcing a mutual "Partnership Charter" to outline mutual rights and responsibilities. Success hinges on the quality of interaction, demanding funded training for all stakeholders in empathetic communication and conflict resolution to overcome barriers like fear of judgment. Parents also emphasized the need for teachers' empathy and emotional competence in building trust.

Building strong partnerships with families and the wider community, including third-sector organizations, creates a supportive ecosystem around the child, reinforcing the value of education and ensuring continuity of support beyond school hours.