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## **Reading Early School leaving signals - RESCUE**

# **Transnational Reports Summary**

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## BULGARIA

Data was collected in Bulgaria from primary (interviews) and secondary (national reports) sources. Our analysis aimed to determine the causes and conditions of early school leaving shows that one third of children that drop out of school lives in families where one or two people are unemployed. This is confirmed by teachers, who underline that sometimes families are too poor to afford school costs. In addition, parents of children out of school are usually with little or no education. Parents who have a school qualification often go abroad to find a job. A double problem often arises from this situation. On the one hand, children who stay in Bulgaria usually live with the grandparents, who sometimes have insufficient ability or authority to support children during their school path. On the other, when parents opt for taking their children abroad with them, problems can arise at school as children can find it difficult to deal with the linguistic and cultural requirements of the new situation. Discontinued studies due to migration of the family outside Bulgaria are also a possible factor of ESL.

The country report and the questionnaires highlight some common points that could be considered predictors and causes of ESL. At the top of the list we find that family reasons are the most common factors: discontinued studies due to premature marriage or childbirth, or discontinued studies due to family or parental problems (divorce, drunkenness, violence, etc.) could become serious problems. Face to this, teachers recommend improving collaboration with families as an important goal. In their opinion, families have to be involved in the educational path of their children, so that school could become an additional support for them. Teachers underlined that there's lack of parental supervision and involvement in students' school life. Teacher stress out the need the importance to work closely with families and create a curriculum that could be managed by these students. The reluctance of parents and of child to go to school could be another problem in terms of ESL. This is also connected to the family cultural capital: in fact, some families show a negative attitude towards education, which make them take children out from school. Another problem is the need for care in the home of relatives, friends, etc. As a teacher noted, discontinued studies can be due to the need to take up employment in the household or elsewhere, or to financial problems of the family (lack of funds for maintenance of the family and providing the necessary school clothes, shoes, textbooks, etc.).

Other possible signals of ESL could be: poor performance, prolonged truancy, violation of art. 139 of the Education Act (transfer to another school or expulsion from school), voluntary interruption of

the training, repeated grades, difficulty to understand and speak Bulgarian, as well as other educational reasons.

Bulgarian teachers emphasise the need for change the school curriculum, pinpointing that the school situation put them under additional stress nowadays. School's costs are generally too high, so parents are unable to purchase appropriate books for their children. This can have a negative effect on students and on their motivation for learning and retention in school. Teachers also advocate for a school change, especially with regards to new technologies and interactive teaching methods able to link school to students' real life. To this aim, some of them have organized extracurricular activities, promoting new didactic experiences and collaborating with other practitioners. Teachers also claim for more pedagogical support to be provided in school, as to help them solve educational problems related to ESL. Moreover, in their opinion the lack of connection between the school and the external environment could be solved by creating connection with NGO's and local stakeholders, who can become partner in the fight against ESL.

## ITALY

Italy report highlights some possible factors that can be assumed as contributing to ESL. Evidences were confirmed also by teachers' interviews on this subject. National and international surveys show that ESL is associated to gender, national origin, family's economic and social status. Our analysis confirms these results. Regarding students with a migrant family background, they seem to leave the education system more frequently than the others. The differences among Italian and foreign-born students (but also among second generations students) can be only partly explained by language barriers. One teacher explained that the most challenging situation for her was with Muslim male pupils coming from the Maghreb area, as sometimes they show an ambivalent attitude towards discipline in school. Talking about gender, male students tend to leave the education system earlier than female students: many teachers confirmed that male children can be especially challenging in this regard. Some boys are required by parents to go work to help family, as girls are press to be married. Consequently, efforts should be taken to prevent early marriages by talking with parents and students in collaboration with social and health services. More generally, teacher underline the need to work with parents and create links with them, as this could promote a deeper involvement in children's school path. ESL is often associated also with low household income, parental unemployment, and low level of parental education. Living in a family affected by poverty coupled with parental low educational levels has a negative effect on children school performances and outcomes, thus on their risk of drop-out. To this aim, most teachers add that school curriculum and pedagogy should be changed, as they are scarcely suitable with at risk students that need more concrete activities, less lectures, and more interesting proposal. Teachers see linking with local stakeholders as very useful, as they could become partners in school life and help school enrich the educational offer. The risk of social exclusion is higher for Italian children than for their European peers. This is partly due to the economic crisis, which made the families' economic conditions worse, particularly affecting those families which already were the most disadvantaged. Parents with low levels of education are less likely to invest in education, helping children study and do homework, and encouraging their attendance. They earn less money that those with high levels of education and skilled labour, so their children are deprived as they do not have enough resources to study. As a consequence, family-related factors largely influence the chance of leaving the education system early. For example, living in a large family or in single-parent family affects the disposable income for family members, the availability of parents to support children' education in

terms of economic investments, as well as the time to participate in school life. Moreover, the chance to leave school early in Italy is associated to the geographical area where students live. In most regions, particularly in the South of Italy and the islands, the rates of ESL are very high. Low performances, irregular attendance at school, repeated grades influence students' performances, their school career and investments in education. Teachers interviewed too underlines as possible predictors of ESL learning difficulties, behaviour problems, and problems in socialization. These factors are often intertwined with low socio-economic status, immigrant background, gender, and place of residence, so that the likelihood to leave the educational system becomes higher. Finally, also geographical aspects are concerned: some children live too far from school, which can't be reached by public transport (the only mean they can afford to use).

## MALTA

As the country report emphasises, Early School Leaving in Malta depends very much on the socio-economic and sociocultural factors. In fact, the Maltese economy is highly dependent on the tourism sector, where low-skilled workers are easily finding a job, so the request for specialised competences is limited. Moreover, ESL in Malta is related to the structure of the education system, the labour market conditions, family factors, as well as other specific aspects related to gender, spatial distribution, and individual characteristics. As various researches show, bad relationship between students and teachers could lead to ESL and could be considered a possible cause of it. Early school leaving in Malta could be considered also a problem related to the job requirements, as many industries and factories prove to prefer people with low qualifications. One of the possible reasons could be that entrepreneurs know that they can pay low-skilled workers less than high qualified ones. Also family factors must be considered important where ESL is concerned. Experts on the subject categorize family support, family structure and the relationship between students and their parents as being highly significant in terms of ESL. Parents' ideas and decisions about school are important, especially because many of them tend to disregard school and its values. This may have a negative influence on children's educational career. Studies show that more guidance from home, such as help and supervision in homework, would encourage the majority of school leavers to continue with their studies. Individual characteristics also emerge as an important contribution towards the decision of leaving school early. However, this aspect is difficult to analyse because it is strictly related to the family environment. If we want to summarize the main causes of ESL in Malta, we can say that they can be divided into three main factors:

- individual/social factors, such as individual behaviours (deviancy, engagement, social behaviour) or sociocultural background (previous school experiences, family background, health conditions);
- school factors, as educational structures and resources and/or school practices; and
- systematic factors that are impacting at a macro level.

Preventive measures have been taken to ensure that schooling in Malta responds to student diversity and addresses student needs as from a very young age. For students with a migrant background, who need to acquire a greater sense of belonging, the Cultural Integration Unit within the Ministry

for Education and Employment set up induction, cultural orientation and inclusion programmes addressed to them and their families. Talented students are also promoted by the Directorate for Curriculum Management (DCM), which organises regular activities to reward them. To create a more suitable school for everyone, there has also been a huge investment in digital infrastructure, including interactive whiteboards and a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) platform. Computer tablets were also distributed to students in various state and non-state primary schools. All these interventions contributed to the effort to create a modern and adequate educational path in Maltese schools.



## ROMANIA

ESL situation in Romania, as it emerges from both national reports and questionnaires, shows some shared points with Bulgaria and Italy as well as some differences. The Romanian report highlights that the availability and access of early childhood education and care services is limited, especially in rural areas and for the Roma community. As a consequence, in rural areas the frequency of children who regularly go to school is low. Sometimes parents take children at home to save money, or because they live in a rural area where by public transport is not available. More generally, a high rate of poverty at household level, especially for children and youth living at risk of poverty or economical marginalisation, is a common predictor of ESL. To send children to the school, parents have to spend a sum that is one and a half higher than the one allocated by the State. In short, parents have to pay for supplementary tuition, school supplies, transportation to school, sport and school equipment, and occasionally for refurbishment and maintenance of the school buildings, as well as the payment of private security staff when local budget cannot cover these costs. These “hidden costs” of education create major disadvantages for children coming from poorer families who cannot afford such investment, so contributing to the non-enrolment rate as well as school dropout and ESL. As a consequence, families from an economically disadvantaged background often decide not to send their children at school, pressuring boys to go to work at an early age to help increase family income. Similarly, girls are betrothed at an early age and push to be married before completing the school attendance. Moreover, due to the lack of resources and opportunities, parents often leave the country looking for working abroad. This could be a problem because sometimes children remain in Romania with grandparents or other carers, who are not in the position to support the educational path of children; otherwise they follow the parents, but can find it especially difficult to integrate in school because of linguistic and cultural reasons.

Summarising, the low level of income per family is a very strong predictor of ESL in Romania, as it implies a financial burden to support the collateral costs of education, especially among poor families and disadvantaged one. This could cause low accessibility to education services in remote rural areas, involving children in seasonal employment activities and care for younger siblings. Another important predictor underlined by teacher during interviews is family culture. The educational level of parents (particularly the mother's education) and how the benefits of schooling are perceived by the family are pivotal. Parents from rural areas tend to underrate the school value,

as the early employment of siblings is seen as crucial to sustain the family budget. As a teacher commented, a family with a low level of education will not have the necessary capacity to explain the child why school is important. Another important point stressed out by teachers is the lack of public investment in education, which undermines also the opportunity to develop continuous professional training. In their opinion Romanian school needs a shift, both from a conceptual and practical point of view. Teachers emphasise that resources are needed to change the way teaching is currently done, as more concrete activities and extracurricular opportunities are required. Regarding to this question, poor coordination among key stakeholders at national and local level is a problem, as the educational system lacks multidisciplinary coordination on ESL, both at local and regional/national level. There is a lack of cooperation and knowledge sharing between the specialists from the social and the educational field for early identification of ESL. Practitioners from education and child protection should work together to design an action plan for the children at risk of ESL. As one teacher said, accomplish a good cooperation implies to have public policies to ensure coherence between the educational and social protection systems, so that every child has his rights protected. Other connected problems are the lack of social workers specialised to work as case managers (especially in rural areas); insufficient human resources in the social field; and scarce functionality of the community advisory councils (they activated only on paper, but there is no coordination and a system for reporting or accountability of members who are working voluntarily).



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