



## Stay@School: Prevention of Early School Leaving

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### Abstract

*One challenge is common to all European countries Educational System: the prevention early school leaving. Teachers are suffering from a lack of skills and competences and, consequently, of motivation in understanding and dealing with pupils at risk of early school leaving. Teachers often are not able to identify with the necessary anticipation the manifesting of the risk factors leading to the early school leaving and the necessary initiatives to tackle the problem.*

*In order to give an effective answer to the needs of the teachers outlined above, the Stay@School project, financed by the Life Long Learning Programme - Leonardo da Vinci Transfer of Innovation Programme, developed the School Inclusion web portal with the aim to provide teachers with the necessary skills and tools to prevent early school leaving.*

### 1 Introduction

Through the Europe 2020 strategy, the European Union plans to support young people and to enable them to fully develop their talents to their own as well as to their economy's and society's benefit. One of the main obstacles to the full achievement of this ambitious objective is the persistent high rate of youngsters leaving school before having completed their compulsory learning pathway and before having achieved a certification that guarantee to them to be competitive within the job market. Despite the several initiatives carried out, still today, about 14% of all pupils drop out of school each year.

Many initiatives both at national and at European level have been and are currently being carried out, in order to better identify the main causes of early school leaving and to plan and implement possible strategic answers to tackle the phenomenon.

One of the main causes having a relevant impact on early school leaving is teachers' lack of skills and competences in understanding and dealing with pupils at risk of early school leaving.

### 2 The Project Objectives

The main objective of the Stay@School project (<http://projects.pixel-online.org/stayatschool/info/>), financed by the European Commission in the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme (Leonardo – Transfer of Innovation), is to promote, develop and foster the use of the School Inclusion Portal (<http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/index.php>) and therefore to provide school teachers with the necessary skills and competences to prevent early school leaving.

The specific objectives of the project are to:

- Provide school teachers with a wide collection of reviews of publications on the issue of early school leaving
- Promote a transnational dialogue between teachers based on the sharing of their experiences on the issue
- Provide school teachers with a selection of training initiatives in Europe addressing the early school leaving phenomenon
- Involve teachers in a blended learning course aiming at developing teachers' competences to: identify students at risk of early school leaving, effectively communicate and deal with them, assess their learning results

### 3 The Main Project Activities

The main activities of the Stay@School Project are:

- Setting Up of Teachers' Network
- Improvement of the School Inclusion Portal
- Training of teachers
- Development of educational materials

#### 3.1 Setting Up of Teachers' Network

The objective of this activity is to involve schools and school teachers in the Stay@School project in order to provide them with all the training resources hosted on the School Inclusion Portal and to give



them the possibility to participate in the online course on the issue of the early school leaving. Schools necessary need to be the main actors of the project as a bottom up approach is a key element in order to develop tools and strategy to solve this issue.

More than 200 teachers are already involved in the project. This level of participation is totally unexpected and not foreseen in the original plans, but it shows not only a great commitment from the partners working in the project, but the great interest of the school teachers: early school leaving is indeed a problem for schools and especially for vocational ones.

The network of school teachers is composed by teachers from Belgium, Italy, Romania and Spain.

The teachers up to now have been involved in the following activities:

- Sharing of their experiences related to the issue of early school leaving. All the shared experiences are available on the School Inclusion Portal ([http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/teachers\\_experience.php](http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/teachers_experience.php)) because teachers can take advantage of methodologies and strategies shared by their colleagues in order to prevent and tackle early school leaving.
- Participation in the blended training course on early school leaving
- Participation in the online discussion on the training modules which is taking place on the portal forum

The teachers during the blended course will also have the opportunity to cooperatively create education and informational materials to prevent and tackle the problem of early school leaving. The material will have, as target groups, both teachers and students.

### 3.2 Improvement of the School Inclusion Portal

The School Inclusion Portal is the main result of the School Inclusion project funded by the European Commission in the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme - Comenius Sub Programme in the period 2007 – 2009. The Stay@School project has the aim to exploit this portal as a useful resource for teachers facing the problem of early school leaving.

After 3 years the School Inclusion Portal required to be updated with new information and improved with new resources according to the needs of the final users.

The **database of reviews of publications** (<http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/documents.php>) has been enriched and almost 300 reviews (in English and in national language). The publications, focusing on the issue of early school leaving, include: literature, reports, data, studies, books, paper articles, online articles. The publications are from Belgium, Greece, Italy, Romania, Spain, United Kingdom). Most of the publication are directly downloadable directly from the project portal and for each of them the description of the contents and a critical analysis are available (See Fig.1).

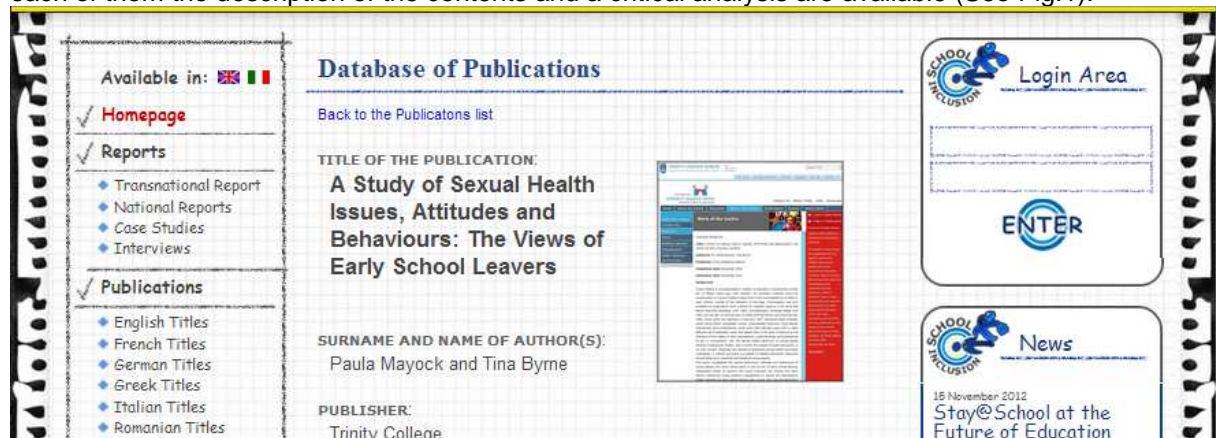


Fig. 1 Example of publication review

The **database of direct experiences** ([http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/teachers\\_experience.php](http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/teachers_experience.php)) has been enriched and more than 100 experiences (in English and in national language) are now available. For all experiences the name of the involved teachers and their contact details are available in order to give the possibility to other teachers to directly contact them and participate in the transnational discussion.

The **database of reviews of training courses for teachers** on the topic of the prevention of early school leaving ([http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/training\\_initiatives.php](http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/training_initiatives.php)) has been created. The database is a useful source of information for teachers, but also for policy makers in the field of



education because, for each training initiative, the strengths and the potential transferability to other contexts have been pointed out.

The **training course** ([http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/training\\_package.php?tr1=EN&tr2=pre](http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/training_package.php?tr1=EN&tr2=pre)) on the prevention of early school leaving have been translated in French, Italian, Romanian and Spanish and the entire web portal is available in Italian and in English

### 3.3 Training of teachers

All teachers involved in the project have the possibility to participate in a blended training course. At national level, two workshops per each one of the five modules are taking place. The first workshop of each module has the aim to present the contents of the online module itself and to guide the teachers through the use of the portal and the participation in the online forum discussion. The aim of the second workshop is to receive the teachers' feedback concerning the module.

During the second workshop organised per each module a virtual meeting takes place in order to share the results of the national face to face workshops and to give the participants the opportunity to exchange their opinions and experiences concerning the School Inclusion Portal training course.

During the participation in the online course the teachers also have the possibility to log in on to the project forum (<http://forum.pixel-online.org/stayatschool/>) and exchange their opinions concerning the training course and the issue of early school leaving. All the discussions are moderated by one of the project partners.

### 3.4 Development of educational materials

The last part of the training activity will foresee the involvement of teachers in hands-on experience, aimed to test the skills and abilities acquired during the course, through the creation of education materials both addressed to teachers and students on the prevention of early school leaving.

These products will be made available in the form of communication material and flexible and easy to use information to prevent and tackle the issue of dropping out of school (such as a booklet, brochure, a multimedia educational module, a short film, etc).

## 4 The Main Project Sources

The sources created in the framework of the School Inclusion project and enriched and improved in the framework of the Stay@School Project are available on the School Inclusion Portal (<http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/>):

### 4.1 National and Transnational Report

From the Report section ([http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/report\\_national.php](http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/report_national.php)) it is possible to access to national reports on the national trends, in five European countries, as far as early school leaving is concerned. Each report identifies both the causes and possible solutions related to the early school leaving issues. Each report also indicates the best national practices and experiences carried out to combat early school leaving.

On the basis of the analysis of the different national reports a transnational report has been produced so as to carry out a comparative analysis of the situation in Europe as far as the problem of early school leaving is concerned. The transnational report also identifies the best European practices for preventing and combating early school leaving. The transnational report is available in English, German, Greek and Italian ([http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/report\\_transnational.php](http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/report_transnational.php)).

### 4.2 Database of Case Studies

A section of the School Inclusion portal ([http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/report\\_casestudies.php](http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/report_casestudies.php)) is dedicated to case studies of early school leaving. The selected case studies focus on the stories of young students who abandoned school before completing compulsory education. Each story is presented with an introductory description followed by an analysis of the causes that led to the school leaving by the student, the approach adopted to face the problem and the solution identified. The cases studies have been identified in Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy and United Kingdom.

### 4.3 Database of Interviews

Another section of the portal is dedicated to interviews ([http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/report\\_interviews.php](http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/report_interviews.php)) made, in five different European countries, to counsellors in charge





of educational policies, school directors, teachers and students dealing with the prevention of early school leaving. The interviewed people are from Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy and United Kingdom.

#### 4.4 Database of Publications

The project portal hosts a database of more than 300 reviews of publications (<http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/documents.php>) on the issue of early school leaving. Policy makers, headmasters, teachers, parents, students can rely on this database in order to understand what is happening in other European countries on this topic. The publications, focusing on the issue of early school leaving, include: literature, reports, data, studies, books, paper articles, online articles. The publications are from Belgium, Greece, Italy, Romania, Spain, United Kingdom). Most of the publication are directly downloadable directly from the project portal and for each of them the description of the contents and a critical analysis are available.

#### 4.5 Database of Teachers Experiences

An important resource of the School Inclusion portal is the section dedicated to the teachers' experiences on early school leaving ([http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/teachers\\_experience.php](http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/teachers_experience.php)). Teachers experiences, in a bottom-up approach, are the starting point for the identification of possible solutions and strategies to tackle this phenomenon. Moreover teachers can take advantage of methodologies and strategies shared by their colleagues in order to prevent and tackle early school leaving.

#### 4.6 Database of Training Initiatives

Training initiatives for school teachers on the prevention of early school leaving is something that is missing in several European countries. A section of the School Inclusion portal is dedicated to collection of reviews of training initiatives ([http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/training\\_initiatives.php](http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/training_initiatives.php)) for teachers on this issue. Each training initiative has been reviewed and analysed pointing out the strengths and the potential transferability to other contexts.

#### 4.7 Training Package

The most important resource of the School Inclusion portal is the training package for school teachers (see Fig. 2) to help them to identify the students at risk of early school leaving and to provide them with the skills to prevent the problem. The training package is available in English, French, Italian, Romanian and Spanish ([http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/training\\_package.php?tr1=EN&tr2=pre](http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/training_package.php?tr1=EN&tr2=pre)).

Fig. 2 The training package

The training package section is divided in 5 modules produced on the basis of the material developed previously (i.e. Database of Documents, National Reports, Transnational Report, Teachers Experiences and Case Studies). The five modules are:

##### Module 1: Identification of Students at Risk

This module aims to help teachers and other educational professionals to identify young people at risk of dropping out of education. The module is based on a small number of case study interviews with young people, parents, teachers, Head teachers, Public Officers and has been produced after



extensive research undertaken in the production of the National Report in the project partner' countries. For the purpose of this module the identification factors to look for which can lead to school 'drop outs' or early course leavers, have been divided into four chapters, educational, personal, family and community.

### **Module 2: Communication**

The second module provides practical proposals on how to facilitate communication with difficult students. This module identifies the best ways to prevent communication difficulties which may lead to a student dropping out from school. The module also offers suggestions on how to deal with students who are at risk of school dropping out, and suggestions on how to react to the first signs of absenteeism. Finally the module offers practical ideas on how to prepare and carry out an effective conversation with young people and their parents as well as on the actions to be taken after this conversation has taken place.

### **Module 3: Teaching methods**

The third module focuses on effective teaching strategies that foster the active involvement of all students in productive educational pathways. The strategies proposed include active teaching and learning, cooperative learning, peer education and the effective application of creativity to education.

### **Module 4: Educational Evaluation and early school leaving prevention**

The fourth module focuses on Evaluation which is a dynamic feature of any educational process. In the case of the early school leaving prevention, evaluation is strongly related to the pupils' needs assessment before their engagement in a learning activity in order to identify in time their learning difficulties. Teachers need to be acquainted with the modern meaning of evaluation, evaluation types and forms, evaluation models, techniques and tools in order to become able to use them effectively in their school classes to achieve, among other educational objectives, the prevention of early school leaving.

### **Module 5: External support and cooperation**

The fifth module examines external resources and supports for teachers and students to help them in the prevention of early school leaving. The module includes an introduction to authentic scenarios for reflection, an exploration of a variety of teacher responses to students in danger of leaving school early, an exploration of the level of risk of particular students, a description of the range of support available to help with the problem and the examination of the different types of support available for students with varying needs.

## **5 Conclusion**

The School Inclusion Portal is an outstanding collection of resources for several target users (policy makers in the field of education, headmasters, teachers, students and parents). The Stay@School project is fostering the use of all the resources in several European countries and the project portal is rising up a great consensus form almost all the users.

## **References**

- [1] School Inclusion Portal: <http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/index.php>



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