ELET

Early Leaving from Education and Training

The way forward

EARLY LEAVING FROM
EDUCATION AND TRAINING
STRATEGY

THE WAY FORWARD
2023–2030

GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
MINISTRY FOR EDUCATION, SPORT, YOUTH
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
DIRECTORATE FOR RESEARCH, LIFELONG LEARNING AND EMPLOYABILITY

A HOLISTIC AND INCLUSIVE
APPROACH TO TACKLE

EARLY LEAVING FROM EDUCATION AND TRAINING (ELET) IN MALTA

THE WAY FORWARD

2023–2030

Developed in 2021 - Revised in 2022-2023

Early Leaving from Education and Training Unit
Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability
Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation

Foreword by
Hon. Minister Dr Clifton Grima

In 2015, Malta was one of the first EU countries to publish a specific strategy on Early School Leaving (ESL) for students who did not achieve superior secondary level qualifications. The EU recommends that there be such a policy and strategy in every country. More recently, ESL is being referred to as Early Leaving from Education and Training (ELET) in order to be inclusive of not only academic pathways but also vocational ones.

The first national strategy was a major development in Malta in the educational sphere. This strategy contributed to a constant and significant decrease in the number of students who leave education and training with less than an MQF Level 3 qualification.

According to EUROSTAT, Malta's ELET, age group 18-24, was 10.10% in December of 2022. The rate had reached a record high of 33% in December of 2005 and this recent rate is a record low. Malta has been one of the few countries that have constantly decreased the rate during the last years and has consistently been registering a decrease during the last 10 years. Since 2017 Malta registered the largest rate of reduction in ELET of all EU countries. The EU set an EU-level target stipulating that the share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 9% by 2030.

We are looking ahead to enhance our results. "A holistic and inclusive approach to tackle Early Leaving from Education and Training (ELET) in Malta" is our way forward and will take us up to 2030.

Early leaving from education and training is a pressing issue in Europe with considerable costs for individuals and society. For these reasons, fighting ELET is a key element of the Education and Training 2030 Strategic Framework. Tackling ELET remains a top policy priority, hence the constant updating of our holistic strategy.

This National Strategy Policy enhances the base principles: ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promoting lifelong learning; reducing the gaps in educational outcomes between boys and girls and between students attending different schools; decreasing the number of low achievers; raising the bar in literacy, numeracy, and science and technology competence; increasing student achievement; supporting the educational achievement of children at-risk-of-poverty and low socio-economic status; raising the levels of student retention and attainment in further, vocational, and tertiary education and training; and increasing participation in lifelong learning and adult learning.

To effectively implement this strategy, I strongly encourage that a strategic partnership be formed between educational institutions, guardians, communities, policymakers, employers, trade unions, and civil society that runs parallel to the current socio-economic realities. By working together, we will be more successful in tackling the early school leaving issue since, by doing so, we will achieve equity education, social justice, and inclusion.

Foreword by
Permanent Secretary Mr Matthew Vella

The Maltese Education System is heading towards a more person-centred approach and holistic achievement. Students' wellbeing is best achieved when they are placed at the core of the education system.

Nevertheless, students' success is affected by a variety of influences, namely the family, the school, and the community. When these work in tandem to support and guide students, students achieve more. Thus, for improved quality and equity, the impetus of the strategy is the adoption of an integrated approach by sharing the responsibility with other Ministries and stakeholders to implement the family-school-community link programme. This strategy adopts a transformative approach and focuses on the engagement of parents and the community in meaningful and culturally appropriate ways.

Notably, since the development of the first National strategy for the Prevention of Early School Leaving from Education and Training, Malta has witnessed a marked decline in the number of students who leave early from education and training.

In this context, The Early Leaving from Education and Training Unit within the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability aims to consolidate and put forward strategic actions that continue to target the decrease of Early Leaving from Education and Training in Malta. Consequently, and on the bases of extensive evidence-based research, the strategy is composed on three strategic pillars which target prevention, intervention, and compensation measures respectively.

The main emphasis lies within the intervention pillar which promises a solid investment in early years' education leading to a shift from stand-alone initiatives to strong evidence-based programmes. This is complemented by the paradigm shift in the systematic monitoring and evaluation system of its methodology for increased effectiveness.

I am very positive that through this strategic plan which ensures a better collaborative and more integrated approach, Malta will continue to reduce Early Leaving from Education and Training rates and prepare students to become lifelong learners.

AUTHORS

Dr Pamela Marie Spiteri

Alexander Farrugia

CONTRIBUTORS

Joseph Gatt

Ruth Muscat

CONSULTANTS

Dr Eemer Eivers

Dr Paul Downes

Raymond Camilleri

REVIEWERS

Matthew Vella

Patrick Decelis

Michelle Calleja Gafa

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

ALP	Alternative Learning Programme
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CCP	Core Curriculum Programme
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CRC	Cottonera Resource Centre
DLAP	Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes
DLTS	Directorate for Digital Literacy and Transversal Skills
DQSE	Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education
DRLLE	Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability
DSRCMs	Developing Recommendations for Compulsory Measures
EAU	Educational Assessment Unit
ECEC	Early Child Education and Care
ELET	Early Leaving from Education and Training
ELETU	Early Leaving from Education and Training Unit
ESL	Early School Leaving
ESLU	Early School Leaving Unit
EU	European Union
EWS	Early Warning Signs
FCS	Free Childcare Scheme
FES	Foundation for Educational Services
ĠEM16+	Ġużè Ellul Mercer 16+
GCHSS	Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School
HCNs	Heads of College Network

HOD	Head of Department
HoSs	Heads of Schools
HSCL	(in Ireland) Home School Community Liaison
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
IFE	Institute for Education
IMC	Inter-Ministerial Committee
IMU	Information Management Unit
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ITS	Institute for Tourism Studies
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LSE	Learning Support Educator
MAPSSS	Maltese Association of Parents of State School Students
MATSEC	Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate
MCAST	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology
MEYR	Ministry for Education, Sports, Youth, Research and Innovation
MFE	Ministry for Finance and Employment
MFED	Ministry for Education
MLU	Migrants Learners' Unit
MQF	Malta Qualification Framework
MSPC	Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights
MUT	Malta Union of Teachers
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NLA	National Literary Agency
NSO	National Statistics Office
NSSS	National School Support Services

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PMED	Policy Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate
PS	Permanent Secretary
PSCD	Personal, Social and Career Development
QAD	Quality Assurance Department
RCMs	Recommendations
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEC	Secondary Education Certificate
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SRSS	Structural Reform Support Service
UOM	University of Malta
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WSA	Whole-School Approach

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Within the continuous globally changing demographics, research suggests a strong correlation between Early Leaving from Education and Training (ELET) and students' wellbeing at school and their socioeconomic and multicultural background.[1] Consequently, effective research and scientific exploration of the main risks of ELET within Malta's context and beyond have supported the development of this framework in relation to the previous strategy's evaluation.

Tackling ELET risk factors in the initial stages of children's educational journey supports a more inclusive and holistic educational system, which is why this strategy adopts prevention and intervention strategic pillars as the first two actions to tackle ELET. This is why ***Prevention Measure 1*** should be considered as the flagship of the strategy, followed by *Intervention Measures 1 and 3.*

The third pillar entails a series of compensation measures that target post-compulsory education, including adult learning provision, thus aiming for an increase in student enrolment and retention within this sector.

It is therefore imperative that ELET risk factors are monitored during the early stages in order to develop policies and effective systems through the joint intervention of multiple stakeholders thereby providing for an equitable and socially just system.

---

[1] Borg, C., Camilleri, K., Caruana, V., Naudi, M., Vella, M. G., & Raykov, M. (2015). Early school leaving and wellbeing in Malta and beyond: A statistical analysis. President's Foundation for the Social Wellbeing of Society.

Spiteri, P. M. (2023). A Widening Inequality Gap: Reducing Educational Inequalities in Europe by Reaching Out to Students and Families at Risk during a Time of Crisis and Beyond. Education in an Altered World: Pandemic, Crises and Young People Vulnerable to Educational Exclusion, 93

The national holistic and inclusive approach to tackle ELET in Malta consequently endorses strategic actions towards a whole-school approach based on the three pillars (i.e. prevention, intervention, and compensation). ELET should comprise a strategic partnership between educators, educational institutions, families, guardians, communities, policymakers, employers, trade unions, and civil society that runs parallel to the current socioeconomic realities. The strategic actions being proposed are all based on research conducted during the last years through national and European funds secured and developed by the Early Leaving from Education and Training Unit (ELETU) in order to develop the ELET strategy through a bottom-up approach. Mainly, ELETU within the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR) has carried out four major research projects that, together with EU research recommendations, have supported the drafting of this strategy, namely:

1. Recommendations emerging from the Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) project carried out in 2018-2019.[1]

2. Studies of students dropping out of post-secondary institutions in 2017-2020.[2]

3. Annual implementation reports.[3]

4. Feedback and research collected from an international symposium organised in Malta by MEYR in November 2019 (ELET, The Way Forward).[4]

Since its establishment in 2014, the ELETU has always prioritised a solid stakeholder partnership in order to enhance a comprehensive framework for data collection related to ELET that could lead to effective strategy implementation. ELETU was formerly referred to as ESLU. Given that this strategy in line with the National Statistics Office (NSO) and European Union recommendations, endorses ELET rather than Early School Leaving (ESL), the changed unit name reflects this endorsement.

This strategic plan, in line with national research and the European Council recommendations directly addressing the ELET ET2030 target pathways to school success,[5] recommends the reinforcement of the ELETU under the aegis of the Office of the Permanent Secretary of MEYR with the mandate to own and steward responses to the ELET challenge. It will additionally be strategically placed to keep ELETU high on the Ministry's and the Government's agenda to continue lowering the ELET rate and target ELET risk factors.

---

[1] ESLU, MFED. (2019). Centralised Monitoring and Early Identification of Students at Risk of Early School Leaving (ESL): Approaches to ESL prevention. (The project was commissioned by the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) and awarded to the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The report was written by Dr. Eemer Eivers on behalf of IEA.)

[2] ESLU, MFED. (2020). Students Dropping out from Post-Secondary Institutions. Second Study. (Unpublished).

[3] ESLU, MFED. (2020). Recommendations emerging from annual implementation report and evaluative review of strategy. (Unpublished).

[4] ESLU, MFED. (2019). Feedback emerging from an international three-day symposium, 'ELET, The Way Forward'.

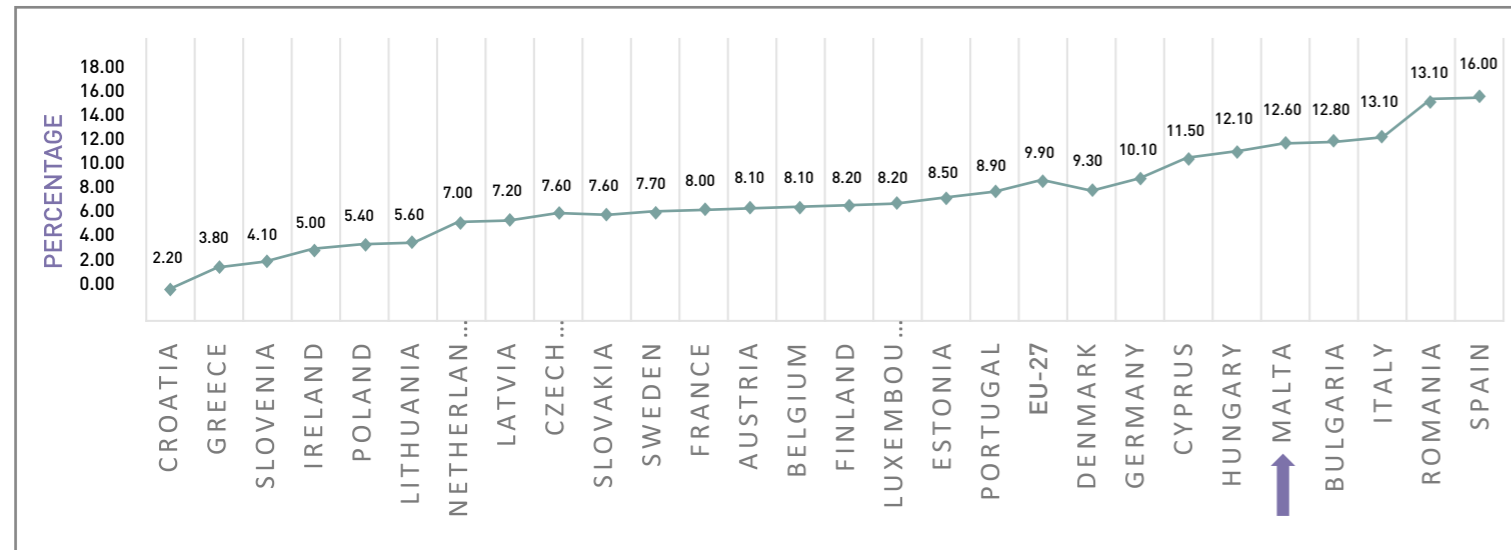[5] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/60390/st14981-en22.pdf

1. BACKGROUND, AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The proportion of ELET among the EU Member States in 2020 ranged from 2.2% in Croatia to 16% in Spain (Figure 1). For statistical purposes, ELET, also referred to as early school leaving (ESL), is defined in Europe as persons aged 18 to 24 years fulfilling the following two conditions:

(a) The highest level of education or training completed is lower secondary education, hence not completing upper secondary education; and

(b) No education or training has been received in the four weeks preceding the survey.[1]

Figure 1: 2020 ELET rates within the EU (Eurostat, 2021)

[1] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Early_leaver_from_education_and_
training#:~:text=For%20Eurostat%20statistical%20purposes%2C%20an,at%20most%20lower%20secondary%20education.

The EU target is to reduce ELET to less than 9% by 2030. The majority of countries collect data and define ELET using national criteria aligned to the two EU conditions. Until November 2021, Malta's ELET rate was officially above 16% for the year 2020. NSO published revised statistics as a result of "the realignment of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) with the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF). The official ELET rate for 2020 was consequently revised to 12.6% (See Figure 2). This revision was necessary to ensure better compliance with European Regulations governing education statistics and improve comparability of results at the European level".[1] Due to this realignment, the ELET percentage rate within Malta now refers to share of persons aged 18-24 who achieved low secondary education or less (ISCED ≤ 2)[2] and are not pursuing further education or training. In line with the EU definition and set criteria, ISCED 0 - 2 implies, as stated by NSO: no schooling, primary education, special schools for disabled, and persons who attained a secondary level education and have less than 2 O-levels or equivalent qualifications.[3]

ELET 'encompasses countries' own definitions of who in the national context is considered to be an early leaver. It includes, for example, countries who refer to young people who leave (or drop out of) school without completing what is considered in the national context as basic education (usually primary and secondary education), as well as those who define early leavers as young people who leave school without an upper secondary school leaving certificate'. For some, the concept of ELET is also important as it more clearly encompasses those who have dropped out of vocational training tracks.[4] (p.3)

This strategy consequently promotes the use of the emerging European term ELET, as opposed to ESL, as ELET is inclusive of Vocational Education and Training (VET) training. In recent years, Malta has embarked on a successful national journey in order to promote VET teaching and learning and cater for the learning needs of all students.

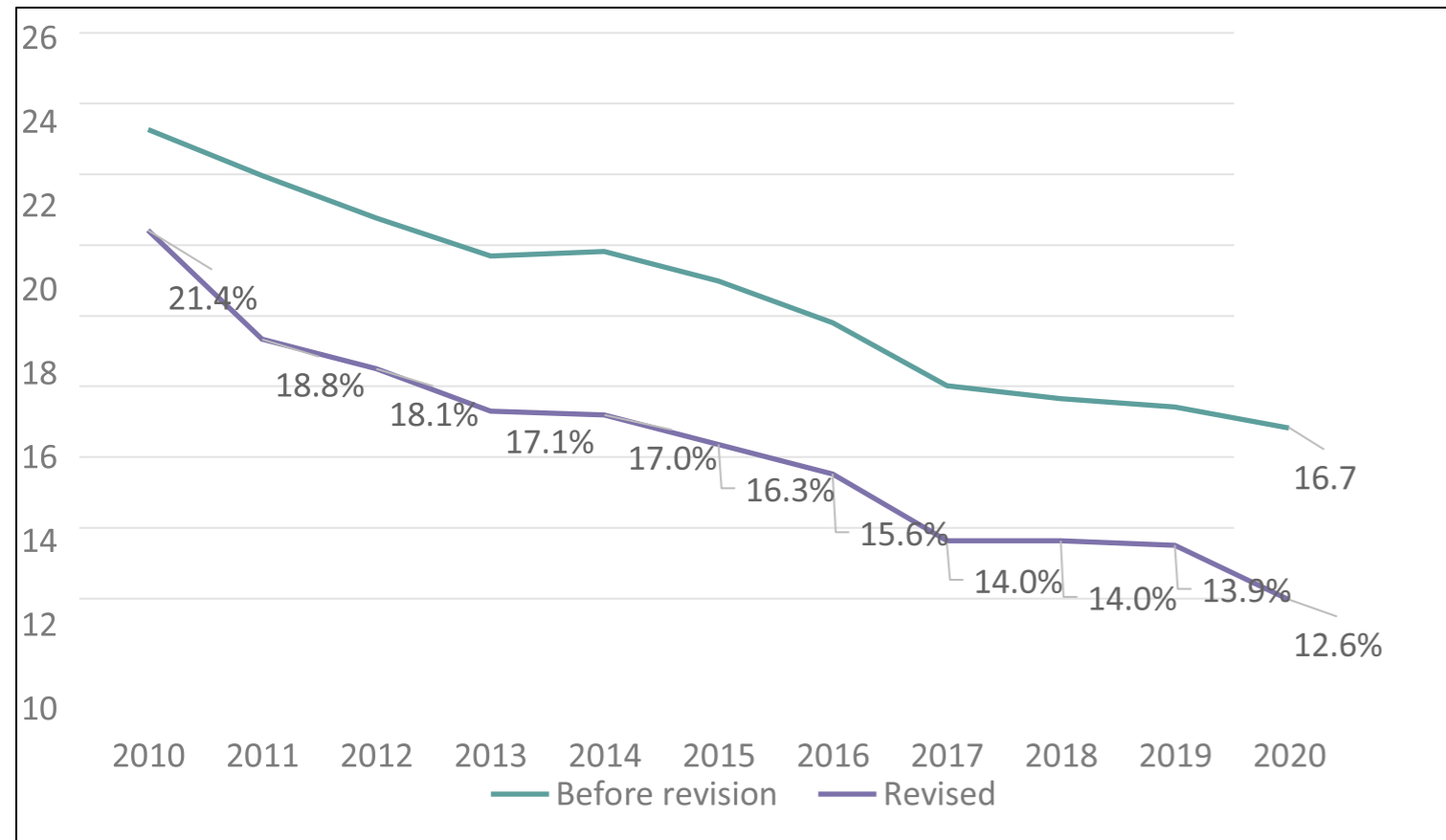[1] Labour Market and Information Society Statistics Unit, 2021, p. 1

[2] Lower secondary education refers to ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) 2011 level 02 for data from 2014 onwards and to ISCED 1997 level 0-3C short for data up to 2013.

[3] Labour Market and Information Society Statistics Unit, 2021, p. 1

[4] Council, E. (2019). Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving. Final Report 2019. Official Journal of European Union.

Figure 2: ELET revised data in Labour Force Survey (LFS) (Source: NSO)[1]

Malta has seen a significant decrease in the number of students who leave education and training with less than an MQF Level 3 qualification. Malta's ELET rate is still considered high compared to some of its EU counterparts, being above 10%. This notwithstanding, Malta has been one of the few countries that has decreased the rate by more than 5% during the last years, and has consistently been registering a decrease during the last 10 years.[1]

Malta's ELET rate currently stands at 10.1% for 2022, and aims to reach the 9% (or lower) EU target by 2030 (Eurostat, 2023).[2]

This is in line with national research and the European Council recommendations directly addressing the ELET ET2030 target pathways to school success.[3] This strategy therefore aims to consolidate and develop strategic actions that continue to target the decrease of ELET in Malta by developing research-based strategic prevention, intervention, and compensation actions for students most at risk of ELET (Figure 3). Given that this strategy was developed through EU recommendations and through multiple national research projects, it aims not only to monitor the implementation of the strategic actions through ELETU, but also to follow up and keep contact with the stakeholders directly involved in the implementation of each strategic action. ELETU will consequently work directly with all stakeholders in order to ensure the monitoring and implementation of each strategic pillar.

In line with the National Educational Strategy, 2024-2030,[4] and with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4,[5] this strategy's objectives are shown in Figure 3. These align with the two main overarching aims:

a. Developing an Early Warning System (EWS) to monitor and target ELET risk indicators

b. Fostering a whole-school approach (WSA) to tackle ELET

---

[1] Council, E. (2019). Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving. Final Report 2019. *Official Journal of European Union.*

[2] The ELET rate is published on an annual basis at European level by Eurostat. NSO provides the data for this rate through the Labour Force Survey on a quarterly basis.

[3] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/60390/st14981-en22.pdf

[4] The Educational Framework is currently being developed through consultation with multiple stakeholders (including educators, parents, students) and expected to be published in 2024.

[5] UNESCO-UIS. (2018). Quick Guide to Education Indicator for SDG4. Available at: http://www.arabcampaignforeducation.org/functions.php?action=files&table=files&ID=441

Figure 3: Strategy Aims and Objectives – Targeting students at risk of ELET

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all - SDG4

1. Review and develop strategies to minimise ELET risk by liaising with multiple stakeholders to set up an early warning system to minimise ELET risk indicators.

2. Develop equity and lifelong learning opportunities for all by fostering a whole-school approach (WSA) to tackle ELET through policy, research, and practice.

3. Ensure inclusive and quality education by developing capabilities and agency for all learners, parents, guardians, and educators

4. Implement socially just opportunities to increase student achievement, retention, and tackle educational disadvantage.

2. STRATEGY OUTLINE FOR PREVENTION, INTERVENTION, AND COMPENSATION PILLARS

Figure 4: 15 strategic actions to reduce ELET in Malta

KEY:

PREVENTION STRATEGIC ACTIONS

INTERVENTION STRATEGIC ACTIONS

COMPENSATION STRATEGIC ACTIONS

A1. Adopt a whole-school approach to parental engagement

A2. Allocation of funds and other learning needs according to school and area social context ELET risk factors

A3. Target literacy access measures for socio-economic status (SES) families and other students presenting ELET risk indicators

A4. Extend Free Childcare Scheme (FCS) to all children

A5. Target aspirations of students at risk of ELET

B1. Monitor, review, follow up, and intervene in the progress of the strategic actions

B2. Increase reading instruction in schools

B3. Adopt a whole-school approach to addressing ELET risk factors (achievement, behaviour, chronic absenteeism, disability, engagement, and family issues)

B4. Eliminate barriers in Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) examinations

B5. Work in line with inclusion strategies

C1. Review post-secondary strategies for student retention and achievement

C2. Increase student enrolment and retention in post-compulsory education

C3. Track and monitor holistically students who exhibit high-risk ELET factors, namely, chronic absenteeism, low achievement, poor engagement, and disability/learning difficulties

C4. Make learning more accessible to all

C5. Re-think and develop a strategy for second chance education

# 3. ELET STRATEGY: STRATEGIC ACTIONS OUTLINED

This strategy outlines fifteen strategic actions, five for each pillar, developed through research projects described above. ELETU within the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability (DRLLE) will review the development of the strategic actions outlined below annually through an implementation report by consulting regularly with each involved stakeholder. Consequently, ELETU might further develop the below strategies through annual feedback obtained from the multiple stakeholders in order to ensure the progress and completion of each strategic measure. Students at risk of ELET can be identified through a number of indicators, as shown in Figure 5. These indicators are the basis of the development of the prevention, intervention, and compensation actions within this strategy.

It is recommended that these ELET indicators are viewed within a wider educational and family unit context. For example, ''Chronic absenteeism'' may also indicate ''chronic health issues'', albeit not exclusive to it. In addition, we point out that physical and mental health disorders are included under "disability" and "behaviour and wellbeing" for the purpose of early identification of risk factors. Bullying (or victim) behaviour and substance or alcohol abuse are included under the "behaviour and wellbeing" risk factor.

"Family disadvantage" is inclusive of socioeconomic disadvantage, unemployment, low disposable income, significant relationship problems including domestic violence, single-parent family with one or more persons with a disability (physical or mental); migrant families; looked-after children (children in care); family members suffering from addictive disorders (alcohol, substance abuse, gambling, social and cultural disadvantage,), and family members in correctional facilities, amongst other considerations. Moreover, "gender" and "health" issues can be said to play a crucial role within each ELET risk factor outlined in figure 5. Consequently, we recommend that these indicators are used as a wide indication but are not exclusive of other risk factors that might emerge.

It is also important to note that more than one risk indicator may be present in the same child and/or at different times throughout the school years. Periodic assessments of students at risk and intensive follow up with appropriate referral and/or interventions within the education system are therefore justified and necessary. The family unit may also need to be supported with social welfare interventions.

Figure 5 ELET risk indicators[1]

---
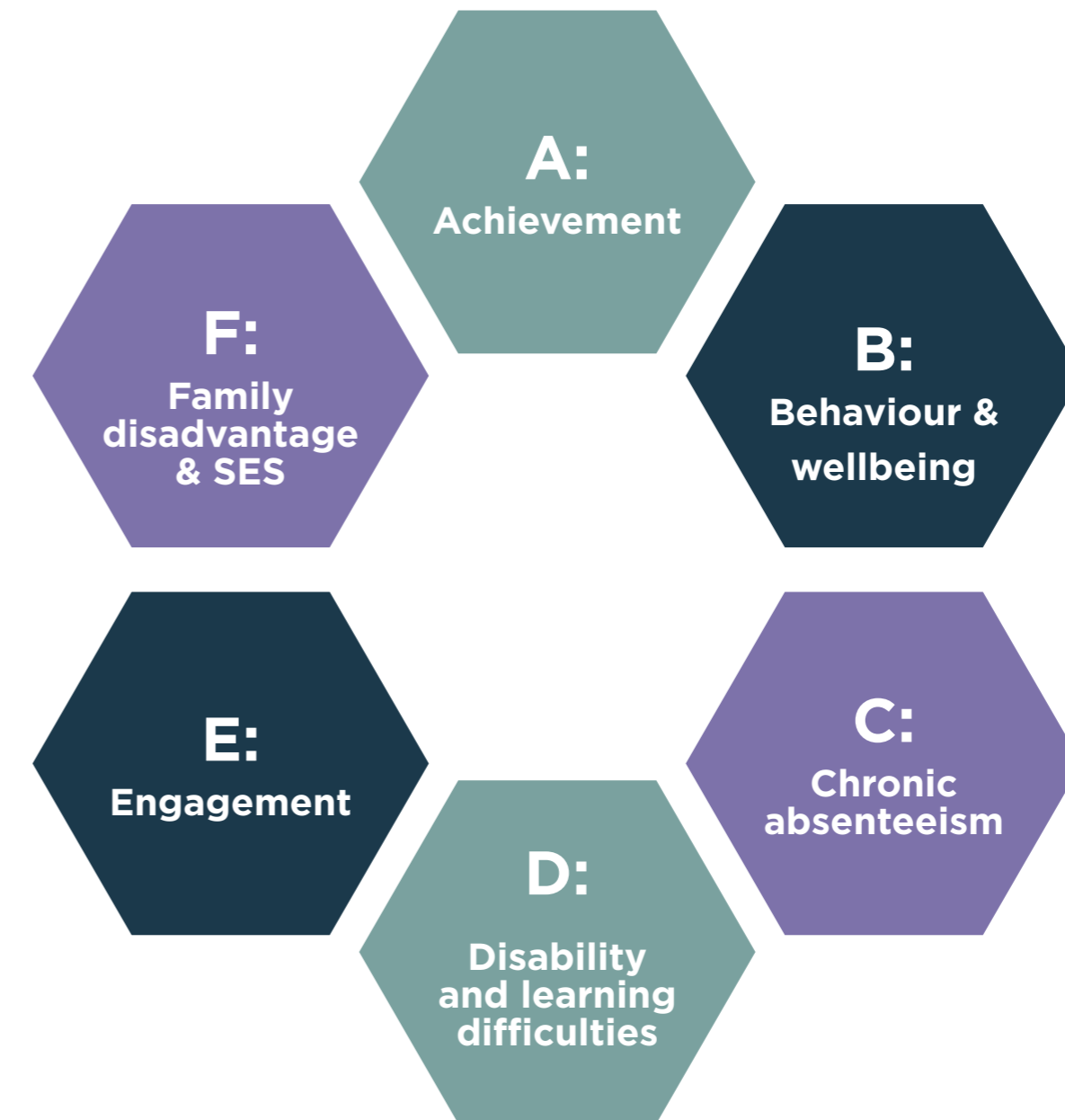
[1] In line with the European Council recommendations directly addressing the ELET ET2030 target pathways to school success, these indicators encourage the development of support for the wellbeing of students, families, and educators and are viewed within a wider context to target individual needs and minority groups at risk of ELET. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/60390/st14981-en22.pdf

3.1 PREVENTION STRATEGIC ACTIONS

PREVENTION *can include any activity designed to prevent the risk of ELET, and can include systemwide or schoolwide measures (e.g. increasing engagement and providing for alternative pathways), as well as targeted measures designed to redress educational disadvantage at an early age (e.g. some of the initiatives provided to low SES families in LEAP centres). Preventative measures often focus on early childhood education and care and structural features of the educational system. However, they can also encompass examination systems (e.g. widening access for students with disability or impairment, allowing bilingual dictionaries for migrant students, increased emphasis on on-going or practical assessments). In Malta, the introduction of the FCS and Secondary Education Applied Certificate (SEAC) are examples of systemwide preventative measures to combat ELET, as are access arrangements for students with certain disabilities offered by the Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate (MATSEC) Examinations Board.*[1]

STRATEGIC MEASURES

- A1. Adopt a whole-school approach to parental engagement

- A2. Allocation of funds and other learning needs according to school and area social context ELET risk factors

- A3. Target literacy access measures for SES families and other students presenting ELET risk indicators

- A4. Extend free FCS to all children

- A5. Target aspirations of students at risk of ELET

[1] ESLU, MFED. (2019). Centralised Monitoring and Early Identification of Students at Risk of Early School Leaving (ESL): Approaches to ESL prevention. (The project was commissioned by the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) and awarded to the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The current report was written by Dr. Eemer Eivers on behalf of IEA, p. 6.)

Prevention Measure 1

A1. Adopt a Whole-School Approach to Parental Engagement

RCM 7.[1] Schools need to further engage parents in their children's education. Ideally, measures to improve engagement should form part of a whole-school approach to target ESL. MEYR should introduce a programme to facilitate parental engagement in schools where a large number of students are at risk of low achievement/ESL. A model such as the Home, School Community Liasion (HSCL) Scheme addresses many of the gaps in the current provision and should thus be considered for introduction in Malta.

RCM 10. Ideally, the Schools as Community Learning Spaces Programme would be integrated with initiatives developed as part of a wider home-school liaison approach.

A1. One approach that needs to be strengthened in Malta is the whole-school, compensatory, and systemwide initiatives. While MEYR endorses whole-school approaches to tackling ELET, the perspective of the contractor and many stakeholders interviewed during the SRSS project is that there is little evidence of the adoption of whole-school approaches within schools or colleges.

Introducing a whole-school approach to ELET prevention and improving student engagement more generally is the way forward, as well as specific initiatives targeting parental engagement and involvement. In the case of schools with a relatively high number of at-risk students, support should include, amongst other factors, facilitation of parental engagement in their children's learning as well as support to educators to develop parental engagement practices and minimise ELET risk factors.

It is well known that parental engagement in their children's education can have positive effects on both student achievement and behaviour, which are both strongly associated with the risk of ELET (e.g. Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Goodall, 2017).

Indeed, Desforges and Abouchaar's (2003) review suggests that variations in parental engagement at primary level have a stronger effect on achievement and behaviour than variations in the quality of school. Engaging parents is also an effective way to narrow the achievement gaps associated with socioeconomic differences (Goodall, 2017).[2]

Short-term strategic actions:

- Evaluate foreign parental engagement programmes that target students at risk of ELET abroad, including the HSCL in Ireland.
- Develop a pilot, whole-school approach programme that targets parental engagement whilst also building a link between school and home, particularly in SES areas and in other areas associated with a high prevalence of ELET risk indicators.
- Employ full-time coordinators or officers for a pilot project to liaise with ELETU, parents, school stakeholders, and psychosocial teams in relation to national and international funds.

Medium-term strategic actions:

- Introduce a pilot project in 2-4 schools using national or EU funds that supports a whole-school approach to parental engagement.
- Develop policy recommendations for a whole-school approach that targets parental engagement, particularly SES families and other students presenting ELET risk indicators, as well as national requirements, and training needs analysis.

Long-term strategic actions:

- Evaluate the pilot project.
- Develop a parental engagement strategy that targets a whole-school approach to parental engagement.

Main Stakeholders in Liaison with ELETU:

DRLLE, MLU, NSSS and School Stakeholders, MAPSSS

---

[1] RCM, Recommendations emerging from the SRSS project. A reference throughout the document is made in relation to the specific recommendations emerging from this research and review of ELET in Malta. Eivers, E. (2019a). Reducing early school leaving in Malta. Ministry of Education and Employment. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.13337.44641

[2] ESLU, MFED. (2019). Centralised Monitoring and Early Identification of Students at Risk of Early School Leaving (ESL): Approaches to ESL prevention. (The project was commissioned by the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) and awarded to the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The report was written by Dr. Eemer Eivers.)

Prevention Measure 2

A2. Allocation of Funds and Other Learning Needs according to School and Area Social Context ELET Risk Factors

RCM 4. MEYR should continue to take the school's social context into account in the allocation of funds to schools. Given the sizeable social context effect evident in Maltese schools, significant additional funds should be available to schools with a high percentage of students from a low SES background.

RCM 22. Consideration should be given to the development by the NSO of an area-based deprivation measure. This could provide an evidence base for targeted funding and interventions, while assisting in bids for funding at national and EU level.

A2. Funding projects and other learning needs, including resources, may stimulate interest and learning in students at risk of early school leaving. In some countries, the central authorities do not track how the additional funding is used since it is at the discretion of schools to decide how best to use the additional funds. As pointed out in the SRSS project, the European Commission's ET2020 Working Group (2015) outlines that whole-school approaches to ELET involve all school staff and all members of the wider school community (i.e. parents, social services, other stakeholders, and the wider community). Furthermore, the organisation of provision may differ from that in schools with relatively few students in need of support. For example, the focus shifts from the individual student receiving long-term support to intensive targeting of students in the early years and a schoolwide re-structuring of the teaching of core skills. This can require additional funds for high-need schools. Recommendation 4 emerging from the SRSS project suggests that MEYR should take the school's social context into account in the allocation of funds to schools.

Given the sizeable social context effect evident in Maltese schools, it is proposed that significant additional funds should be available to schools with a high percentage of students from a low SES background and other students presenting ELET risk indicators. Additionally, Recommendation 22 proposes that consideration should be given to the development by the National Statistics Office of an area-based deprivation measure that could provide an evidence base for targeted funding and interventions, while assisting in bids for funding at national and EU level.[1]

Short-term strategic actions:

- Liaise with NSSS and Heads of College Network (HCN) in relation to Scheme 9 in order to ensure students who are in need are being supported.

- Develop an outreach system with HCNs and the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) Review board in order to develop an ELET action plan that targets ELET risk factors within schools and additional funds and/or needed help to support scheme 9 and other schemes, including learning ones that target disadvantaged students.

- Outreach with school stakeholders to ensure retention of students most at risk (e.g. nurture groups, learning zones, complementary, Core Curriculum Programme (CCP), learning centres, education hub, and Migrant Learners' Unit).

Medium-term strategic actions:

- Liaise with the Ministry for Finance and Employment (MFE), Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights (MSPC), and MEYR regarding funds, budget proposal, and data sharing.

- Liaise with stakeholders in relation to students most at risk so as to develop an action plan that targets imminent risks and needed changes.

Long-term strategic actions:

- Review measures with NCF, HCNs and NSSS to identify and propose needed changes to minimize ELET risk factors in order to increase inclusive practices.

Main Stakeholders in liaison with ELETU:

MFE, MEYR, MSPC, HCNs, NSSS, NSO, MLU, DLAP, NCF

---

[1] ELSU, MFED. (2019). Centralised Monitoring and Early Identification of Students at Risk of Early School Leaving (ESL): Approaches to ESL prevention. (The project was commissioned by the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) and awarded to the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The report was written by Dr. Eemer Eivers.)

Prevention Measure 3

A3. Target Literacy Access Measures for SES Families and other students presenting ELET risk indicators

RCM 8. MEYR should continue to work with the National Literacy Agency (NLA) on targeted measures to improve access to books to children from low-income/education families as early as possible in the child's life. The expansion of the Home Libraries Scheme to more families is one option, supplemented with targeted distribution and support from other sources. Options could include a combined initiative with the MSPC, targeting the parents of infants.

A3. Parental engagement is deemed a pivotal element in its contribution to education. A rise in participation in the National Literacy Agency's programmes and the new parental courses organised by the Institute for Education are evidence that parents are now considered major strategic stakeholders in the attempt to maintain engagement. The National Literacy Agency has developed a number of programmes that involve both students and guardians in after-school programmes, whose main aim is to promote interest in books among children through parental involvement. Literacy and learning should not be hindered by socioeconomic, cultural, racial, ethnic, religious, gender, and sexual differences. While acknowledging that out-of-school factors like poverty and social exclusion affect student achievement, MEYR seeks to improve students' learning experiences by encouraging creativity, critical literacy, entrepreneurship, and innovation at all levels.

The priority areas here are the reduction of the gaps in educational outcomes between boys and girls and between students attending different schools, while decreasing the number of low achievers, raising the bar in literacy, numeracy, and science and technology competence, and increasing student achievement. Support is further targeted for the educational achievement of children at-risk-of-poverty and low socioeconomic status by reducing the relatively high incidence of ELET.

Short-term strategic actions:

• Develop an action plan with the NLA in liaison with their policies, programmes, and ELET.

Medium-term strategic actions:

• Promote NLA's programmes, particularly those that target SES and early reading intervention, such as reading recovery on a national level.

Long-term strategic actions:

• Introduce books through pre-natal sessions, at birth (gifted to mothers), and at Well-Baby Clinics.

• Provide a digital device and other tools for students within compulsory education to increase digital access for all students.

Main Stakeholders in liaison with ELETU:

NLA, MFH, DLAP and DLTS

Prevention Measure 4

A4. Free FCS to All Children

RCM 1.[1] In agreement with MFE, MEYR should continue to extend the FCS to allow access to all children within the target age range. Eligibility should not be restricted to children whose parents are in employment or in education as this prevents access to many of those most in need and most likely to benefit from the FCS.

A4. The importance of quality childcare services which lays the foundations for children's education and character development is a top priority.[1] Childcare centres offer customised services and quality care to all children, especially children at risk of social exclusion. Activities at these centres target all areas of child development, including social, emotional, physical, intellectual, communicative, and creative aspects. The employed professionals are trained to maximise engagement in a safe and enjoyable setting, while offering varied daily programmes that include stimulating play activities.[2]

However, children whose parents are not socioeconomically active or in education are excluded from the Free Childcare Scheme, and have reduced access hours to Klabb 3-16 and Skolasajf, despite being most in need of additional support. Recommendation 1 that emerged from the SRSS project proposes that MEYR should extend the FCS to allow access to all children within the target age range. It is additionally suggested that eligibility should not be restricted to children whose parents are in employment or education as this prevents access to many of those most in need and most likely to benefit from the FCS. MEYR, should continue to

liaise with MFE, Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE), and FES in order to continue developing the Free Childcare Scheme. In Malta, the introduction of the Free Childcare Scheme is an example of systemwide preventative measures to combat ESL, and hence, it should be extended to all children in the target age group.

Short-term strategic actions:

- Liaise with JobsPlus, namely Youth Guarantee and Foundation for Educational Services (FES).

- Liaise with the Ministry for Finance and Employment (MFE) and the Ministry for Education, Sports, Youth, Research and Innovation.

Medium-term strategic actions:

- Liaise with national childcare provision, the literacy agency and other agencies that can provide child and parental engagement programmes to enhance a greater bond between children and parents, as well as parents and educational institutions.

- Ensure child-centred learning through innovative pedagogies.

Long-term strategic actions:

- Seek a budget proposal.

- Research childcare quality in Malta to ensure that the learner is at the centre of a learning programme that keeps the child engaged and happy while learning by liaising with DQSE.

---

[2] Refer to diverse local and EU EY studies: https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2020.1755488; http://www.seepro.eu/English/Home.htm

[3] ESLU, MFED. (2019). Centralised Monitoring and Early Identification of Students at Risk of Early School Leaving (ESL): Approaches to ESL prevention. (The project was commissioned by the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) and awarded to the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The report was written by Dr. Eemer Eivers.)

Main Stakeholders in liaison with ELETU:

JobsPlus, MFE, DQSE and FES

Prevention Measure 5

A5. Target Aspirations of Students at Risk of ELET

RCM 19. Consideration should be given to expanding the 'access' role of the Cottonera Resource Centre (CRC) to complement its work in community outreach. Activities that encourage links between the University of Malta and schools with low SES intakes should be prioritised. In addition, providing on-campus activities to familiarise students with the facilities and make them aware of the possibilities that may arise from school completion and from further education should form part of the expanded role.

A5. The benefits of targeting aspirations of students at risk of ELET are extensive and will help alleviate the limited aspirations typically associated with children coming from a disadvantaged background. This can be done by liaising with third-level institutions and compulsory stakeholders in order to address obstacles in accessing post-compulsory education and in raising aspirations.[1]

Furthermore, a number of European universities have taken measures to become a University of Sanctuary.[2] This initiative recognises the good practice of universities which welcome people seeking sanctuary into their communities and foster a culture of awareness and inclusivity. This fits into a broader City of Sanctuary network based on the principle that university should be a possibility, irrespective of personal history. Similar to general access programmes, it works to make further education a viable aspiration thereby helping with engagement in compulsory education.

Apart from raising awareness of issues faced by asylum seekers, providing access to university facilities, and facilitating links to employers, bursaries are additionally provided for asylum-seeking students. Due to their status, these students may be required to pay sizeable tuition fees and are unable to access student grants or stipends. Universities, either through access programmes or through corporate sponsorship, provide financial and other support to allow asylum seekers to access third-level education. Therefore, MEYR and third-level institutions should consider how to address the obstacles to accessing third-level education faced by asylum seekers.

Medium-term strategic actions:

• Discuss strategies to help disadvantaged children aspire more and to eliminate barriers in accessing post-compulsory education with third-level institutions, NSSS, CRC, HCNs, and DLAP.

• Enhance the collaboration between Personal, Social and Career Development (PSCD) teachers and Career Guidance units to focus on at-risk students and make sure that these receive career guidance services and their aspirations are developed. The aim is to make absolutely certain that these children develop a career objective in their life from as early as possible.

Long-term strategic actions:

• Carry out research on aspirations and students at risk of ELET in order to suggest recommmednations.

---

[1] ESLU, MFED. (2019). Centralised Monitoring and Early Identification of Students at Risk of Early School Leaving (ESL): Approaches to ESL prevention. (The project was commissioned by the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) and awarded to the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The report was written by Dr. Eemer Eivers.)

[2] https://universities.cityofsanctuary.org

Main Stakeholders in liaison with ELETU:

UOM, MCAST, NSSS, ĠEM16+, MLU, DLAP and working groups in compulsory education

3.2 INTERVENTION STRATEGIC ACTIONS

INTERVENTION *includes measures to improve the quality of education, as well as measures providing targeted support for students at risk (e.g. additional support for students with reading difficulties and contact with families where attendance is poor). Schoolwide measures are directed towards all students, but mostly those at risk of dropping out, while student-focused measures draw from early warning systems to holistically support individual students. The close monitoring of student attendance is an example of a schoolwide measure that feeds into more student-focused work carried out by social workers who deal with students flagged as at-risk due to poor attendance.*[1]

STRATEGIC MEASURES

• B1. Monitor, review, follow up, and intervene in the progress of the strategic actions

• B2. Increase reading instruction in schools

• B3. Adopt a whole-school approach to addressing ELET risk factors

• B4. Eliminate barriers in SEC examinations

• B5. Work in line with the inclusion policy and strategy

---

[1] ESLU, MFED. (2019). Centralised Monitoring and Early Identification of Students at Risk of Early School Leaving (ESL): Approaches to ESL prevention. (The project was commissioned by the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) and awarded to the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The report was written by Dr. Eemer Eivers on behalf of IEA, p. 7.)

Intervention Measure 1

B1. Monitor, Review, Follow Up, and Intervene in the Progress of the Strategic Actions

Main RCM. ELETU should liaise with all stakeholders in order to monitor, review, follow up, and intervene in the progress of the strategic actions. Annual evaluations are recommended in order to review each strategic action and ensure its feasible development. Required data needs to be accessible to stakeholders within ELETU in order to monitor and intervene effectively.

B1. Early Leaving from Education and Training is a horizontal phenomenon that cuts across the remit of various ministries. This strategy suggests a comprehensive, wide-ranging, but also cohesive approach towards addressing the issue of ELET in Malta and emphasises gender mainstreaming mainly for data collection, strategic actions, and training provision. Working across structural and organisational borders and parameters in a concerted way will ensure a wide scope of action, while focusing also on obtaining concrete results.

This strategy suggests the consolidation of the ELETU in order to review strategic actions that cater for those aged between 0 to 24, and develop more feasible outreach programmes on ELET within policy and practice within schools.

Short-term strategic actions:

- Disseminate second ELET strategy among all stakeholders.

- Develop ELETU by employing a minimum of three full-time employees and a number of link coordinators within schools within ELETU in order to review and efficiently promote the implementation of the strategy.

- Develop an action plan to ensure a clear timeline for developing actions.

- Liaise with Policy Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate (PMED).

Medium-term strategic actions:

- Review the progress of each action by liaising with the PMED and other stakeholders linked to each strategic action.

- Develop a more feasible data collection process at policy level by liaising with the Information Management Unit (IMU) for a data warehouse project.

Long-term strategic actions:

- Evaluate each strategic action and develop guidelines where necessary.

- Liaise with the research unit and PMED within MEYR.

- Develop recommendations for an updated policy.

Main Stakeholders in liaison with ELETU:

DRLLE, PMED

Intervention Measure 2

B2. Increase Reading Instruction in Schools

RCM 3. MEYR should provide primary schools with new and explicit guidelines about the minimum acceptable amount of time that must be allocated to reading and language instruction. All schools should spend at least 90 minutes per day on language and reading instruction. Schools with many low-achieving students should consider allocating additional time to reading. As the current guidelines and practice on minimum time diverge quite significantly, MEYR should monitor the schools' adherence to the new guidelines.

B2. Literacy is based on a group of cultivated skills that serve as a basis for learning, communication, language use, and social interaction. Literacy ranges from the fundamental ability to read, write, listen, and understand, to higher-level processing skills, where learners are able to deduce, interpret, monitor, and elaborate on learning matter. Since the advent of digital media, the definition of literacy has widened and progressed. Literacy acquisition is not only a cornerstone of academic responsibility, but it is also the basis for future learning and participation in society and employment.

It also allows access to sources of personal empowerment, such as, social interaction and cultural activities. Literacy is a key element for success in education and at the workplace. The correlation between poverty and literacy is well-established. Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) also shows that children from a low socioeconomic status and migration backgrounds are the biggest group among poor readers. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Report (1996) highlights the role of literacy in promoting competitiveness and employment, democracy and social cohesion, and addressing poverty.

Short-term strategic actions:

• Discuss and examine the current situation with stakeholders and create an immediate strategy.

• Develop specific reading guidelines that focus on increased reading allocation time per day for language and reading instruction in schools.

Medium-term strategic actions:

• Implement reading guidelines in schools.

• Monitor reading instruction in schools.

Long-term strategic actions:

• Evaluate the guidelines and strategy.

Main Stakeholders in liaison with ELETU:

QAD, DLCA, NLA, EOs, HCNs, HoSs, EAU and DRLLE

Intervention Measure 3

B3. Adopt a Whole-School Approach to Addressing ELET Risk Factors

(achievement, behaviour, chronic absenteeism, disability, engagement, and family issues)

RCM 6. Attendance needs to be addressed as a whole-school issue, and all staff should be responsible for improving attendance. Greater emphasis is needed on proactive measures to improve overall school rates. Responses to individual non-attendance should be tailored and proportionate, and recourse to legal or punitive options should be a last resort, not a first response.

RCM 14. Given the sizeable number of migrant students in Maltese schools, and the evidence that migrant students in Malta may not feel as engaged with school as their Maltese counterparts, schools should consider how best to improve the integration of migrants.

RCM 17. MEYR should consider a distance or blended learning facility for students who have difficulty attending a mainstream school for reasons unrelated to academic difficulties.

B3. The school is a key actor to tackle early school leaving; however, it cannot work in isolation as there are factors outside the school that influence a learner's level of engagement and success. Therefore, a 'whole-school approach' to early school leaving is needed, where the entire school community (i.e. school leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff, learners, parents, and families) engages in a cohesive, collective, and collaborative action, with strong cooperation with external stakeholders and the community at large. A whole-school approach enables schools to respond adequately to new and complex challenges that schools are facing, linked to increasing diversity in society. Effective leadership and governance is essential.
It is necessary to promote a positive school culture, teamwork, and collaborative practices within the school community. It is further necessary to bring school actors and stakeholders together to ensure educational success and prevent early school leaving. School development and improvement processes should include targets to address the underlying factors of early school leaving. They should additionally involve the entire school community, stakeholders, multi-professional teams, external local services, parents, and families. There needs to be a commitment towards investment for continuous professional development of school leaders, teachers, and other school staff with a focus on awareness of early school leaving processes, and on the competences and skills needed to address educational disadvantage and student disengagement. Ensuring that each child and young person has an equal chance to access, participate, and benefit from high quality and inclusive education is a must. Engaging and

relevant curriculum, together with inspiring and dedicated staff, is the most effective way to prevent early school leaving and social exclusion. All learners and their diverse needs should be at the centre of education. They should be actors of their own learning, surrounded by appropriate support and services. The school should offer a caring, stimulating, and conducive learning environment, and set high expectations for all learners to reach their full potential. Education is a shared responsibility – it must be built on a relationship of mutual trust and cooperation.

Short-term strategic actions:

• Develop an action plan with HCNs, NSSS, MLU and heads of school to target, a whole-school approach to ELET risk factors through ELET focused discussions and data collection.

Medium-term strategic actions:

• Develop data sharing agreements in order to identify, monitor, target and intervene on ELET risk indicators.

• Evaluate the feasibility and implementation of blended learning, specifically for children at risk of ELET due to long-term illness or chronic disease.

• Liaise with the Institute for Education (IFE) to promote and deliver sessions that equip teachers with the necessary skills to adopt a whole-school approach to tackling ELET risk factors.

Long-term strategic actions:

• Evaluate the implementation of inclusive strategies within schools and develop recommendations for any required changes.

• Carry out research with students, parents/guardians, and educators on ELET risk factors within compulsory education.

• Liaise with IFE in order to provide continuous development of educators to be able to understand and work with disadvantaged children and promote knowledge on child-centred learning through innovative pedagogies.

• Provide extensive training in inclusive pedagogy and on how to develop a growth mindset to make sure that every child reaps the full benefits of their time.

• Invest in psychosocial teams working directly with children during their educational journey.

Main Stakeholders in liaison with ELETU:

NSSS, HCNs, HoSs, IFE and QAD

Intervention Measure 4

B4. Eliminate Barriers in SEC Examinations

RCM 2. The requirement that most Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) examinations are completed in English is an unnecessary barrier to certification, particularly for weaker students and for students whose instruction has primarily been through Maltese. For each paper, students should have the option to choose the language in which they take the examination.

RCM 15. MEYR and MATSEC should consider providing a short workshop to school heads and HCNs to encourage mining the data supplied by MATSEC. This could include the identification of subjects that are relative strengths and weaknesses within a school.

RCM 20. MEYR and MATSEC should consider whether providing MATSEC access to existing school datasets could simplify the process of registering for the SEC examinations, reduce MATSEC's workload, and facilitate later registrations. MEYR and MATSEC should further consider the implications of using an opt-out, rather than opt-in, model for SEC registration.

RCM 21. Potential SEC examination candidates should be able to access a short guidebook about SEC only (separate booklet for Matriculation). It should be written in the active voice, while any web pages and email addresses in the guidebook should be hyperlinked, and the main steps in the application process should be covered sequentially.

B4. In order to eliminate barriers in examinations, especially for those learners who are passing through an important transition, whether academic or vocational, examination boards should take into consideration the bilingual nature of our society, and should be more flexible in allowing students to opt for their language of preference when sitting for their examinations. This applies not only to the rising numbers of foreign students, but also to Maltese students who find their 'second' language, either Maltese or English, somewhat challenging. Furthermore, more communication and open dialogue needs to take place between MATSEC and our schools in order to determine what could be the best path towards academic success according to necessity.

Medium-term strategic actions:

• Liaise with the NCF council review board to target barriers to complete Level 3 by liaising with the NCF review board.

• Work for a data sharing agreement that supports data mining in schools to target students at risk of ELET.

• Implement an opt-out model, and discuss current access to school data for a simpler SEC registration process.

• Identify specific problem areas in subjects and discuss the development of assessment and exam questions in both English and Maltese.

• Discuss the possibility of giving students the facility to answer questions in both English and Maltese during assessments and exams in specific problematic subject areas (e.g. story sums in Maths).

Long-term strategic actions:

• Discuss the possibility of introducing SEC exams as a Maltese option for students, particularly for specific subjects like Maths and Science. This must be done in parallel with all other efforts aimed at improving proficiency in the English Language.

Main Stakeholders in liaison with ELETU:

EAU, DLAP, MATSEC, UoM amd MUT

Intervention Measure 5

B5. Work in line with the Inclusive Policy and Strategy

RCM 5. The role and activities of Learning Support Educators (LSEs) and learning support programmes should be evaluated through research practices in order to facilitate the development of whole-school approaches to at-risk students, while fostering student independence and greater inclusion.

B5. Inclusion is deemed a fundamental human right that is pivotal for a society built on equity (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2012). Equity underpins the vision towards a more inclusive educational system and the concept in which inclusion is implemented (Forlin, 2012). Equity within education has two dimensions – fairness and inclusion. An equitable educational system is fair and inclusive and supports learners to reach their learning potential without raising barriers or lowering expectations (Schleicher, 2014). An inclusive policy is an endeavour to achieve no discrimination within educational systems.

Medium-term strategic actions:

• Evaluate current ELET statistics of students who benefitted from the LSE scheme, NLA support programmes, and complementary teaching by liaising with NSO, NSSS, and the Research Unit.

• Discuss with educators, parents, and direct stakeholders to develop a number of alternative strategies, teaching assistants, or a combination of both.

• Liaise with NSSS and the inclusion policy.

Long-term strategic actions:

• Conduct studies on one-to-one support, shared support, out-of-class support, and the relationship with early leaving from education and training.

• Liaise with inclusion policy stakeholders in order to ensure effective quality of training for support within schools (e.g. LSEs and/or teaching assistants and/or support teachers).

• Liaise with course providers to evaluate LSE courses, as well as their development and quality in relation to ELET.

• Develop an action plan to roll out alternative strategies according to research recommendations and action group proposals.

Main Stakeholders in liaison with ELETU:

MUT, NSSS, NSO, HCNs, IFE, Research Unit (DRLLE)

3.3 COMPENSATION STRATEGIC ACTIONS

COMPENSATION *measures refer to initiatives to re-engage students who have disengaged or are in the process of disengaging from the educational system. Measures include second chance programmes, re-integration into mainstream schooling, and targeted individual support.*[1] *In Malta, existing measures include a number of institutions and accredited programmes which emerged from the first strategy for the prevention of early leaving from education and training.*

STRATEGIC MEASURES

• C1. Review post-secondary strategies for student retention and achievement

• C2. Increase student enrolment and retention in post-compulsory education

• C3. Track and monitor holistically students who exhibit high-risk ESL factors, namely, chronic absenteeism, low achievement, poor engagement, and disability/learning difficulties

• C4. Make learning more accessible to all

• C5. Re-think and develop a strategy for second chance education

---

[1] ESLU, MFED. (2019). Centralised Monitoring and Early Identification of Students at Risk of Early School Leaving (ESL): Approaches to ESL prevention. (The project was commissioned by the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) and awarded to the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The report was written by Dr. Eemer Eivers on behalf of IEA, p. 7.)

Compensation Measure 1

C1. Review post-secondary strategies for student retention and achievement

DSRCM 1. Post-secondary institutions and adult learning institutions should share positive strategies that supported them in increasing student enrolment and retention rates and decreasing student dropouts.

C1. Lambert et al. (2004), Murray and Mitchell (2016), Vallejo and Dooly (2013), and a host of other studies confirm that educational reasons for students dropping out include antagonism of the structure and content of the study programme, leading to the students' inclination to change the programme or institution. Finnie et al. (2012) maintain that low achievement may further result in post-secondary education dropouts.[1] Compensation pillars are strategically designed to continue to facilitate access to further and higher education, while consolidating second chance education opportunities and minimising the risk of students dropping out of post-compulsory education. These measures are targeted for post-compulsory education, adult learning provision, and lifelong learning institutions, all of which will be consolidated through this working group. Students in second chance education and further education need to be monitored in order to evaluate the service provision of these programmes and continue to increase student enrolment and retention. Service provision needs to include a holistic perspective that offers a whole-vision approach to learning that provides learner-centred education through efficient student services as well. The working group/s will be set up in order to discuss and evaluate compensation measures, develop strategic plans, and share good practice among stakeholders.

---

[1] Ministry for Education. (2017). A Study Focusing on Students Dropping out from Post-Secondary Institutions 2015-2016. Early School Leaving Unit, Malta.

Short-term strategic actions:

• Consolidate the post-secondary working group in order to support institutions to develop action plans to target dropouts and second chance education.

• Liaise with the NCF review board to review actions in relation to student retention and post-compulsory education.

Medium-term strategic actions:

• Conduct a dropout study on alternative years to share feedback with post-secondary and lifelong learning provision working groups.

• Liaise with working group to increase student enrolment and retention and reduce student dropouts by minimising risk factors, such as increased flexibility of course change, personalised learning, innovative teaching strategies, and guidance/career support (C2, C3, C4, and C5).

• Discuss the possibility of offering a range of modes of delivery of courses, for example part-time (evening) or online (by correspondence).

Long-term strategic actions:

• Implement and evaluate action plans through data-driven research.

Main Stakeholders in liaison with ELETU:

All post-compulsory and adult learning service providers, NCF council review board

Compensation Measure 2

C2. Increase student enrolment and retention in post-compulsory education

DSRCM 2. Post-secondary institutions and adult learning provision should provide students with the possibility of changing subjects until November or December.

C2. Students drop out of post-secondary education for education-related and/or personal reasons. With regard to education-related reasons, Lambert et al. (2004) explain that, oftentimes, these students do not like the programme they are following as it is not 'for them', and feel that the course is not worth following as they only need a few credits, while others wish to change the institution or programme, are not sure of what they want to do, and/or fail to keep up with the workload (Smyth & Hewitson, 2015). For their part, Finnie, Childs and Qiu (2012) assert that post-secondary students drop out due to low achievement. During recent years, discussions have been held with stakeholders hailing from pos-compulsory institutions in order to consolidate the structure revolving around programme and/or subject change, while maintaining flexibility for change that minimises student dropouts. These strategic actions aim to minimise student dropouts for education-related reasons.

Long-term strategic actions:

• Discuss strategies adopted by stakeholders that have tried to extend the timeframe of change of subject and its positive impact.

• Evaluate dropout study and share feedback with post-secondary and lifelong learning provision working groups.

• Implement the necessary developments for change of subject or programme.

• Evaluate and change according to the impact of this strategic action.

Main Stakeholders in liaison with ELETU:

All post-compulsory and adult learning service providers

Compensation Measure 3

C3. Track and Monitor Holistically Students Who Exhibit High-Risk ELET Factors (Figure 5), namely, chronic absenteeism, low achievement, poor engagement, behaviour, wellbeing, family disadvantage, and disability/learning difficulties

DSRCM 3. Post-secondary institutions and adult learning provision should set up an outreach programme of professionals who liaise with management in order to flag, track, and monitor students who are at high risk of dropping out. The outreach programme should consist of professionals such as career advisors, students' advisors, counsellors, youth workers, and learning coaches who seek to provide the right support for difficulties the students might encounter, such as financial or general wellbeing.

C3. Many young people, especially those coming from families who lack significant social capital, have scant information and links to potential workplaces and, thus, they may not give careful thought to their own potential career choices. Consequently, they may not take up the opportunities in school to prepare appropriately for a career path. The need for effective systematic diagnosis, counselling, guidance, and a holistic approach to student services is here being emphasised. Wherever psychosocial human resources are limited or unavailable, post-compulsory institutions should be supported in order to recruit the necessary services as recent studies show that students could benefit greatly from the availability of such services.[1] Despite the efforts currently made by the institutions, there could be more support from MEYR in relation to full-time student services provision and more coordinated liaison between educators, administrators, and student services to identify, as early as possible, students who are at risk of dropping out. Keeping in mind that this vulnerable group of students may lack the disposition to approach the guidance teams themselves, the student services team should continue to collaborate closely with teachers who meet students on a daily basis so that high rates of absenteeism, low academic achievement in assessments, and personal and emotional issues can be referred and timely action could be taken.

[1] Ministry for Education. (2017). A Study Focusing on Students Dropping out from Post-Secondary Institutions 2015-2016. Early School Leaving Unit, Malta.

Long-term strategic actions:

• Discuss what is needed to develop already existing mechanisms into a more effective monitoring, guidance, coaching, and outreach programme.

• Develop a national action plan which also includes needed funds for a monitoring, guidance, coaching, pastoral care, and outreach programme, i.e. Student services within the working groups.

• Implement an effective monitoring and outreach programme in all institutions.

• Evaluate the impact of this programme on student retention.

Main Stakeholders in liaison with ELETU:

All post-compulsory and adult learning service providers

Compensation Measure 4

C4. Make Learning Accessible to All

DSRCM 4a. Introduce the development of blended learning and/or synchronous live sessions for students in order to cater for a larger number of learners.

DSRCM 4b. Introduce the development of blended learning and/or synchronous live sessions for students in order to cater for a larger number of learners.

C4. While COVID-19 has impacted learning in all areas of education, it has also allowed for diverse digital learning strategies and assessment methods to be used during this period. This calls for an evaluation of whether students have benefitted from blended learning and whether this could be extended to a post-COVID era. Distance learning originally began in remote communities in Australia, but has evolved to incorporate digital technology and blended learning in both urban and rural settings. A review by Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia and Jones (2009) found that online and blended learning could provide significant benefits to students at risk of ELET. There are a number of models of blended or distance learning that are characterised by varying amount of time spent in a bricks and mortar school environment, and by whether the programmes are considered complementary or supplementary to formal schooling, or as a separate programme altogether.[1]

Student engagement is multidimensional and includes three components, namely, student behaviour (e.g. participation and attendance), emotional responses (e.g. positive and negative reactions to school, learning, and teachers), and cognitive processes (e.g. commitment to study). It hence needs to be acknowledged that these three dimensions of engagement are interrelated and a necessary precursor to student learning. It is important to consider this interactional perspective because responsibility for engagement and disengagement does not reside only with the individual student, but also with the practices and processes within educational institutions. Educational institutions can directly influence student engagement, at least to some degree. Pastoral care and welfare reflect sensitivity to the students' backgrounds, and are necessary elements to student participation. Positive relationships between students and teachers are deemed crucial, both in retaining students in schools and in re-engaging those who have dropped out. When behavioural and emotional engagement is promoted, students become more willing to attend class and feel more positive about their school environment.

Student efforts and engagement can additionally be enhanced if the course content is related to the students' lives, future study, or work options. Students are more motivated to remain in school if the learning material is interesting and helps them to develop specific skills that they identify as necessitating improvement. Therefore, it is hereby suggested that a student advisory group is set up in all institutions in order to continue to develop teaching and learning processes that are structured, but maintain a flexibility that develops learning programmes in such a way that they are accessible to all, particularly to those most at risk of ELET.[2]

[1] ESLU, MFED. (2019). Centralised Monitoring and Early Identification of Students at Risk of Early School Leaving (ESL): Approaches to ESL prevention. (The project was commissioned by the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) and awarded to the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The report was written by Dr. Eemer Eivers on behalf of IEA.)

[2] Ministry for Education. (2017). A Study Focusing on Students Dropping out from Post-Secondary Institutions 2015-2016. Early School Leaving Unit, Malta.

Short-term strategic actions:

• Evaluate the COVID-19 period digital learning in post-secondary and adult institutions.

• Elicit recommendations for how lessons learnt could be developed post-pandemic in order to cater for more students, including teaching, learning, and assessment strategies.

• Set up a student representative committee and student affairs that should be present at meetings in relation to accessible learning.

Medium-term strategic actions:

• Discuss the possibility of a pilot programme for each post-secondary and adult learning institution that includes blended learning and/or asynchronous learning. The Council of Europe already provides relevant information about Digital Citizen Education Online http://coecourses.online/

• Set up an action plan that is strategically developed for feasible courses or modules.

• Develop an action plan that targets teaching, learning, and assessment strategies that aim for student retention.

Long-term strategic actions:

• Pilot a two-year programme of blended and/or asynchronous sessions for specific modules according to individual institutions' needs.

• Evaluate the pilot project.

Main Stakeholders in liaison with ELETU:

All post-compulsory and adult learning service providers

Compensation Measure 5

C5. Re-Think and Develop a Strategy for Second Chance Education

DSRCM 5. Develop an action plan that evaluates and re-thinks current compensation and second chance education programmes in all post-secondary and adult learning institutions.

C5. Compensation measures need to develop initiatives to re-engage students who have disengaged or are in the process of disengaging from the educational system. Measures include second chance programmes and targeted individual support. In Malta, existing measures include Ġużè Ellul Mercer 16+ (ĠEM16+) as an independent institution, and the MQF Foundation programmes running at the Malta College of Arts Science and Technology (MCAST), Lifelong Learning Centres, Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary, Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS), Alternative Learning Programme Plus (ALP+), Servizz Għożża, Youth.Inc, Embark for Life, and Pathways. Second chance education programmes need to cater for a number of factors correlated with ELET, which is the amalgamation of and connection between education-related, family-related, and personal factors, referred to in literature as 'intersectionality', leading a student to give up on schooling or drop out of post-compulsory education (Downes, 2013, 2014).

Considering the number of second chance education programmes currently in Malta, this strategy proposes the evaluation and consolidation of these measures through a number of strategic actions by mainly investing in professionals that meet students on a daily basis so that high rates of absenteeism, low academic achievement in assessments, and personal and emotional issues can be referred and timely action be taken.

Short-term strategic actions:

• Evaluate current second chance education programmes within the working group.

• Develop an initial working plan for a more inclusive second chance education opportunity within the post-secondary and adult learning institutions that aim to increase lifelong learners and decrease ELET.

• Develop recommendations for a second chance education programme in a number of sectors in order to decrease the ELET rate.

Medium-term strategic actions:

• Develop a plan for the availability of a much wider range of undergraduate courses part-time (evening) or by correspondence / online such that students can study at their own pace whilst able to hold on to a job and thus have financial independence and/or be able to support themselves and/or their family.

Main Stakeholders in liaison with ELETU:

All post-compulsory and adult learning service providers

4. MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF STRATEGY

This National Strategy will be measured annually and analysed according to the identified strategic actions and goals by the ELETU through an action plan and an annual implementation report. This will be reviewed by the PMED. An ELET Committee will be established by MEYR's PS and chaired by a selected member from the committee. Members will include a representative from the ELETU and stakeholders from the three main ELET pillars: Prevention, Intervention, and Compensation. The performance analysis will be using several data collection tools to assess whether the outcomes indicated for each priority area have been achieved within the timeframe indicated. The ELET committee and PMED will support ELETU to develop data-sharing agreements for data collection and analysis feasibility. Data collection should be both at policy and practice level within schools.

Figure 6: Monitoring and Evaluation
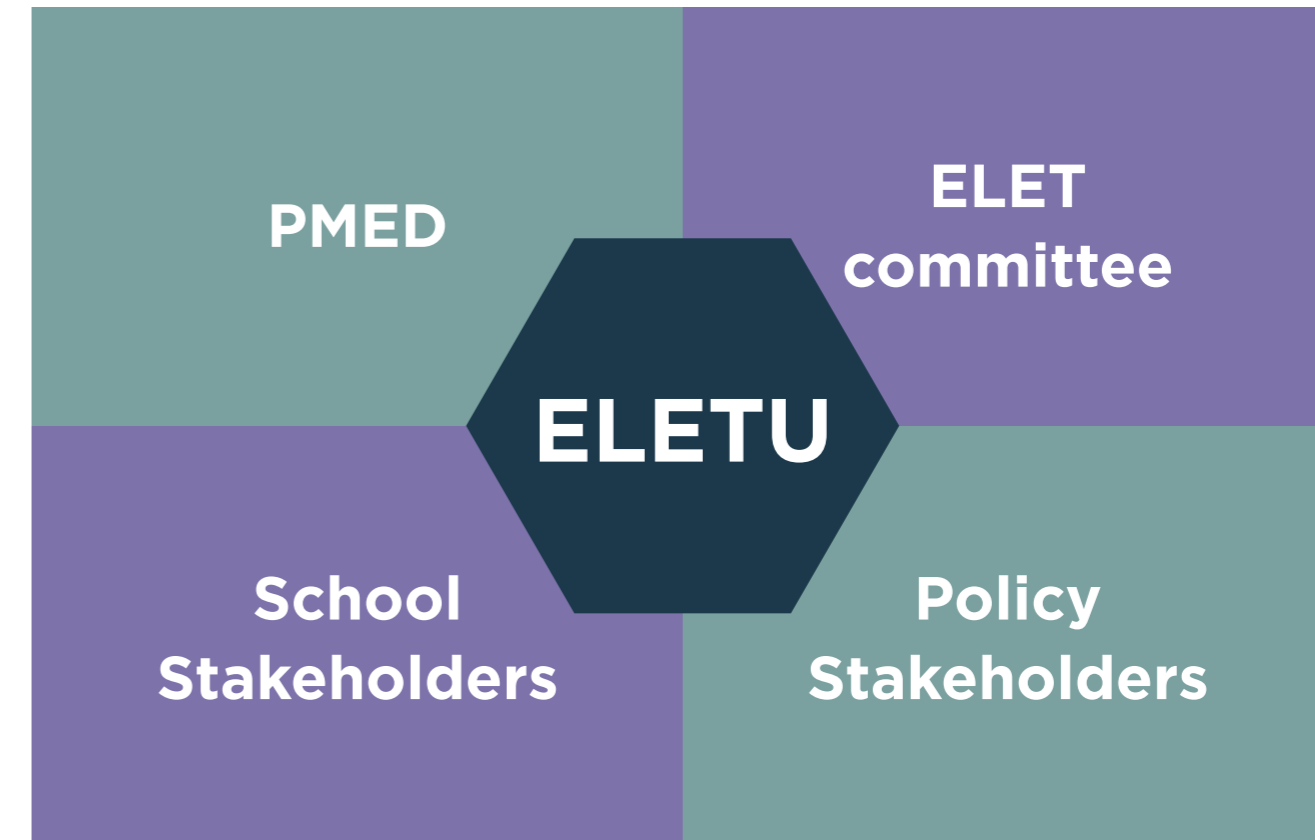
5. ELET: THE WAY FORWARD

Data on the implementation of the *Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta 2014* emphasises extensive effort on a national level in order to decrease this phenomenon and its repercussions. This strategy consequently reinforces many initiatives mentioned in the previous strategy and seeks to promote social integration at all levels.

All educational policies that are related, to varying degrees, to the phenomenon of ELET highlight the necessity of continuous professional development, with particular reference to rising contextual shifts locally and beyond. Educators' professional development, alongside an innovative perception, could empower them to face ELET risk factors and the challenges they face in their everyday practice.

Educators and human resources are an indispensable asset to students' successful retention at school and ELET reduction through a whole-school approach. Psychosocial professionalism is fundamental across the board, in terms of sound multidisciplinary approaches, in order to enhance psychological wellbeing, not exclusive to the classroom environment, but also holistically such as within the home and community. Inter-school transitions are additionally a top priority as they play an important role in student retention within the educational system. A special focus should be given to the number of transitions within compulsory and post-secondary schooling. However, the determining factor remains attainment. In fact, students are at risk of becoming early school leavers due to literacy problems and communication factors due to their lack of proficiency in Maltese and English. Furthermore, initiatives should facilitate transition for students with a statement of needs. Personal coaching that provides pastoral care and career guidance through which students benefit academically needs to be further developed, complementing a hands-on perspective following the introduction of VET subjects and their growing popularity.

Diversity is widening its horizons in terms of physical, intellectual, ethnic, cultural, and gender issues. In fact, diversity may exist even within the local scenario when students at school mix with others coming from different backgrounds. A school ethos should be nurtured, where diversity is widely accepted until it becomes an undisputed commonplace reality. This can be achieved only through an engaging learning experience that is enriching and relevant to one and all alike. Diversity should serve to foster core human values among our students, thus helping them to become responsible active citizens.

The SEAC initiative proposes access to vocational education to a wider range of learners, with a greater range of vocational and applied subjects in order to augment inclusion and diversity in secondary schooling. MEYR 's proposal is based on an equitable quality learning provision in secondary schools that respects all students' multiple intelligences and provides different learning programmes and modes of learning assessments. This evolution is both inclusive and comprehensive, and challenges the current compulsory one-size-fits-all schooling system. The new secondary schooling system includes the provision of general academic education, vocational education and training, as well as applied learning. It aims to expand learning progression through modes of study that lead to qualifications at MQF Level 3, and which in itself is aimed to lower the rate of ELET in Malta.

In conclusion, the way forward of the vision drawn up by ELETU depends largely on this revised strategic plan, but also includes an extensive monitoring system for data collection and analysis in order to push forward the implementation of each strategic action outlined in this strategy. Data on early leaving from Education and Training is presently collected by different departments within and outside MEYR thereby informing future-strategy making and implementation at national, college, or school level. This would entail an on-going process of monitoring for progress and effectiveness, as well as laying the foundations for a better collaborative and more focused approach towards reducing ELET at both local and national level. Efficient monitoring and identification of students at risk of ELET increase the chances of early intervention with the possibility of reengagement.

The accessibility of data by ELETU, with the addition of more human resources, as opposed to the current data collection structure and limited number of stakeholders within ELETU, would be more effective in collecting useful data for early identification through monitoring strategies and sturdy implementation and evaluation of measures. Consequently, systematic measures that combat ELET can increase stakeholder coordination and cooperation as well as ensure the feasibility of implementation of these strategic measures. In conclusion, this strategy presents a clear vision of continuing to develop a socially just education system that aims to minimise ELET risk by developing the capabilities and agency of students and by working with all stakeholders involved in the students' educational journey.

References

Archer, P., & Shortt, F. (2003).
Review of the Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme. Report to the Department of Education and Science. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

Ashbaker, B. Y., & Morgan, J. (2012).
Team players and team managers: Special educators working with paraeducators to support inclusive classrooms. Creative Education, 3(3), 322-327. http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ce.2012.33051

Atkinson, J., Salmond, C., & Crampton, P. (2014).
NZDep2013 Index of Deprivation. Dunedin: University of Otago.

Blatchford, P., Russell, A., & Webster, R. (2012).
Reassessing the impact of teaching assistants: How research challenges practice and policy. Oxon: Routledge.

Brock, M. E., & Carter, E. W. (2013).
A systematic review of paraprofessional-delivered educational practices to improve outcomes for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 38, 211-221. doi:10.1177/154079691303800401

Byrne, D., & Smyth, E. (2010).
No way back? The dynamics of early school leaving. Dublin: Liffey Press.

Cebolla-Boado, H., Radl, J., & Salazar, L. (2017).
Preschool education as the great equalizer? A cross-country study into the sources of inequality in reading competence. Acta Sociologica, 60, 41–60. https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699316654529

Chatzitheochari, S., Parsons, S., & Platt, L. (2016). Doubly disadvantaged? Bullying experiences among disabled children and young people in England. Sociology, 50, 695-713.

Claeys-Kulik, A. -L., & Jørgensen, T. E. (2018).
Universities' strategies and approaches towards diversity, equity and inclusion: examples from across Europe. Brussels: European University Association. Available at: https://eua.eu/resources/publications/311:universities%E2%80%99-strategies-and-approaches-towards-diversity,-equity-and-inclusion.html

Cornell, D., Gregory, A., Huang, F., & Fan, X. (2013).
Perceived prevalence of teasing and bullying predicts high school dropout rates. Journal of Educational Psychology, 105, 138-149.

Department for Education. (2018).
School Workforce in England: November 2017. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/719772/SWFC_MainText.pdf

Department of Education and Skills. (2011).
Literacy and numeracy for learning and life: The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people 2011-2020. Dublin: Government Publications.

Desforges, C., & Abouchaar, A. (2003).
The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievements and adjustment: A literature review (Report RR433). London: Department for Education and Skills.

Douglas, S. N., Chapin, S. E., & Nolan, J. F. (2016).
Special education teachers' experiences supporting and supervising paraeducators: Implications for special and general education settings. Teacher Education and Special Education, 39, 60-74. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/08884064105616443

Downes, P. (2013).
 Developing a Framework and Agenda for Students' Voices in the School System across Europe: From diametric to concentric relational spaces for early school leaving prevention. European Journal of Education, 48(3), 346-362.

Downes, P. (2013b).
Incorporating feedback from 10 cities for the development of a matrix of structural indicators for a systematic approach to parental involvement for early school leaving prevention. In: Gijon Municipality, Spain, meeting of EU URBACT initiative. PREVENT (invited presentation).

Downes, P. (2014).
Towards a differentiated, holistic and systematic approach to parental involvement in Europe for early school leaving prevention. PREVENT, Urbact: Paris.

Downes, P., & Cefai, C. (2016).
How to prevent and tackle bullying and school violence: Evidence and practices for strategies for inclusive and safe schools (NESET II report). Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. doi:10.2766/0799

Eivers, E. (2020).
Reducing early school leaving in Malta. Report for the Ministry of Education and Employment. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341650167_Reducing_early_school_leaving_in_Malta_Report_for_the_Ministry_of_Education_and_Employment

Epstein, J. L. (1992).
School and Community Partnerships. In: M. Alken (Ed.), Encyclopedia of Educational Research (pp. 1139–1151). New York: Macmillan.

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. (2014).
Education for all: Special needs and inclusive education in Malta. External Audit Report. Odense: Author.

European Commission. (2011).
Reducing Early School Leaving. Commission staff working paper. Accompanying document to the proposal for a Council recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving. SEC (2011) 96 final. Available at: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=SEC:2011:0096:FIN:EN:PDF

European Commission ET2020 Working Group. (2015).
A whole school approach to tacking early school leaving: Policy messages. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/experts-groups/2014-2015/school/early-leaving-policy_en.pdf

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (2016).
Structural indicators on achievement in basic skills in Europe – 2016. Eurydice report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (2018).
Structural indicators on achievement in basic skills in Europe – 2018. Eurydice report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (2019).
Integrating students from migrant backgrounds into schools in Europe: National policies and measures. Eurydice report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop. (2014).
Tackling early leaving from education and training in Europe: Strategies, policies and measures. Eurydice and Cedefop report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Evans, M. D. R., Kelley, J., Sikora, K., & Treiman, D. (2010).
Family scholarly culture and educational success: Books and schooling in 27 nations. Research in Social Stratification and Mobility, 28, 171-197. ISSN 0276-5624. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2010.01.002

Falzon, N. (2016). Sensitivity, safety and strength: An inter-agency review of Malta's policy on trans, gender variant and intersex students. MGRM: Mosta.

Farrell, P., Alborz, A., Howes, A., & Pearson, D. (2010).
The impact of teaching assistants on improving pupils' academic achievement in mainstream schools: A review of the literature. Educational Review, 62, 435-448. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2010.486476

Finnie, R., Childs, S., & Qiu, H. (2012).
Patterns of persistence in postsecondary education: New evidence for Ontario. Toronto, Canada: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

Gaffney, H., Farrington, D. P., & Ttofi, M. (2019).
Examining the effectiveness of school-bullying intervention programs globally: A meta-analysis. International Journal of Bullying Prevention, 1, 14-31.

Garcia, J. L., Heckman, J., & Ziff, A. (2017).
Gender differences in the benefits of an influential early childhood program. IZA Discussion Paper No. 10758. Available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2971354

Gatt, S. (2017).
Labour Market Policy Thematic Review 2017: An in-depth analysis of the impact of reforms on inequality MALTA. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Gilleece, L. (2015).
Parental involvement and pupil reading achievement in Ireland: Findings from PIRLS 2011. International Journal of Educational Research, 73, 23-36. doi:10.1016/j.ijer.2015.08.001

Goodall, J. (2017).
Narrowing the achievement gap: Parental engagement with children's learning. London: Routledge.

Grima, G., Camilleri, R., Chircop, S., & Ventura, F. (2005).
MATSEC: Strengthening a National Examination System. Floriana: Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment.

Gustafsson, J. -E., Hansen, K. Y., & Rosén, M. (2013).
Effects of home background on student achievement in reading, mathematics, and science at the fourth grade. In: M. O. Martin & I. V. S. Mullis (Eds.), TIMSS and PIRLS 2011: Relationships Among Reading, Mathematics, and Science Achievement at the Fourth Grade—Implications for Early Learning (pp. 181–287). Chestnut Hill, MA: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, Boston College.

Haase, T., & Pratschke, J. (2017).
The 2016 Pobal HP deprivation index for small areas. Dublin: Author.

Hall, W. (2017). The effectiveness of policy interventions for school bullying: A systematic review. Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research, 8, 45-69.

Heckman, J. J. (2011).
The economics of inequality: The value of early childhood education. American Educator, 35, 31-35.

Higgins, S. (2014, May 21).
Research evidence and effective use of the Pupil Premium. Pupil Premium Conference. Cavendish Conference Centre London.

Higgins, S., Katsipataki, M., Kokotsaki, D., Coleman, R., Major, L. E., & Coe, R. (2013). The Sutton Trust - Education Endowment Foundation Teaching and Learning Toolkit. London: Education Endowment Foundation.

Inchley, J., Eds. (2016).
Growing up unequal: Gender and socioeconomic differences in young people's health and well-being. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: International report from the 2013/2014 survey. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe.

iScoil. (2017). iScoil Annual Report 2016/2017. Dublin: Author.

Katsipataki, M., & Higgins, S. (2016).
What works or what's worked? Evidence from education in the United Kingdom. Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 217, 903-909.

Kellaghan, T., Sloane, K., Alvarez, B., & Bloom, B. S. (1993).
The home environment and school learning. Promoting parental involvement in the education of children. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Palmer, N. A., & Boesen, M. J. (2014).
The 2013 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools. New York, NY: Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network.

Lambert, M., Zeman, K., Allen, M., & Bussière, P. (2004).
Who pursues postsecondary education, who leaves and why: Results from the Youth in Transition Survey. Ottawa, Canada: Culture, Tourism and the Centre for Education Statistics Division.

Launoy, G., Launay, L., Dejardin, O., Bryère, J., & Guillaume, E. (2018). European Deprivation Index: Designed to tackle socioeconomic inequalities in cancer in Europe. European Journal of Public Health, 28, 214. https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/cky213.625

Martin, M., Foy, P., Mullis, I., & O'Dwyer, L. (2013). Effective Schools in Reading, Mathematics, and Science at the Fourth Grade. In: M. O. Martin & I. V. S. Mullis (Eds.), TIMSS and PIRLS 2011: Relationships Among Reading, Mathematics, and Science Achievement at the Fourth Grade—Implications for Early Learning. Chestnut Hill, MA: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, Boston College.

MATSEC. (2018).
Candidates' feedback: MATSEC first/main examination session. Msida: Author. Available at: https://www.um.edu.mt/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/367695/CandidateFeedback2018NewFormat.pdf

McCoy, S., Quail, A., & Smyth, E. (2014).
The effects of school social mix: Unpacking the differences. Irish Educational Studies, 33, 307-330. doi:10.1080/03323315.2014.955746

McGilloway, S., Ni Mhaille, G., Furlong, M., Hyland, L., Leckey, Y., Kelly, P., Bywater, T., Comiskey, C., Lodge, A., O'Neill, D., & Donnelly, M. (2012).
Long-term outcomes of the Incredible Years Parent and Teacher Classroom Management training programmes (Combined 12-month Report). Dublin: Archways.

McNally, S., McCrory, C., Quigley, J., & Murray, A. (2019).
Decomposing the social gradient in children's vocabulary skills at 3 years of age: A mediation analysis using data from a large representative cohort study. Infant Behavior and Development, 57, 101326. ISSN 0163-6383. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infbeh.2019.04.008.

Means, B., Toyama, Y., Murphy, R., Bakia, M., & Jones, K. (2009).
Evaluation of evidenced-based practices in online learning: A meta-analysis and review of online learning studies. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, US Department of Education.

Menesini, E., Nocentini, A., & Palladino, B. E. (2012).
Empowering students against bullying and cyberbullying: Evaluation of an Italian peer-led model. International Journal of Conflict and Violence, 6, 314-320.

Ministry for Education (MFED). (2012).
A National Curriculum Framework for All. Floriana: Author.

Ministry for Education (MFED). (2014a).
A Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving. Floriana: Author.

Ministry for Education (MFED). (2014b).
A National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo 2014-2019. Available at: http://education.gov.mt/en/Documents/Literacy/ENGLISH.pdf

Ministry for Education (MFED). (2016).
PISA 2015: Malta. Floriana: Author.

Ministry for Education (MFED). (2018).
National Homework Policy. Floriana: Author.

Mullis, I. (2013).
Profiles of Achievement Across Reading, Mathematics, and Science at the Fourth Grade. In: M. O. Martin & I. V. S. Mullis (Eds.), TIMSS and PIRLS 2011: Relationships Among Reading, Mathematics, and Science Achievement at the Fourth Grade—Implications for Early Learning (pp. ???). Chestnut Hill, MA: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, Boston College.

Mullis, I., Martin, M. O., Foy, P., & Arora, A. (2012).
TIMSS 2011 international results in mathematics. Chestnut Hill, MA: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, Boston College. Available at: https://timssandpirls.bc.edu/timss2011/downloads/T11_IR_Mathematics_FullBook.pdf

Mullis, I. V. S., Martin, M. O., Foy, P., & Hooper, M. (2017).
PIRLS 2016 international results in reading. Available at: http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2016/international-results/

Murray, S., & Mitchell, J. (2016).
Teaching practices that re-engage early school leavers in further education: An Australian study. Journal of Further and Higher Education, 40, 372-391.

Nairz-Wirth, E., Feldmann, K., & Diexer, B. (2012).
Handlungsempfehlungen für Lehrende, Schulleitung und Eltern zur erfolgreichen Prävention von Schulabsentismus und Schulabbruch. Aufbruch zu einer neuen Schul-kultur. Wien: Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien. Available at: https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/files/esl/downloads/84_Checklist_and_Recommendations_EN.pdf

NCSE. (2018).
Comprehensive review of the Special Needs Assistant scheme: A new school inclusion model to deliver the right supports at the right time to students with additional care needs. Trim, Co. Meath: Author.

Nunnery, J. (1998).
Reform ideology and the locus of development problem in educational restructuring: Enduring lessons from studies of educational innovation. Education and Urban Society, 30, 277-299.

OECD. (2010).
PISA 2009 results: Overcoming social background – Equity in learning opportunities and outcomes (Volume II). Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264091504-en

OECD. (2012).
Equity and quality in education: Supporting disadvantaged students and schools. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264130852-en

OECD. (2016).
PISA 2015 results (Volume II): Policies and practices for successful schools. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en

OECD. (2017).
PISA 2015 results (Volume III): Students' well-being. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264273856-en

Olweus, D. (1992).
Bullying among school children: Intervention and prevention. In: R. D. Peters, R. J. McMahon, & V. L. Quinsey (Eds.), Aggression and Violence Throughout the Lifespan (pp. 100–125). London: Sage.

Roulstone, S., Law, J., Rush, R., Clegg, J., & Peters, T. (2011).
Investigating the role of language in children's early educational outcomes: An analysis of data from the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC). Department for Education, Nottingham.

Shanahan, T. (2001).
Improving reading education for low-income children. In: G. Shiel & U. Ní Dhálaigh (Eds.), Reading Matters: A Fresh Start (pp. 157-165). Dublin: Reading Association of Ireland/National Reading Initiative.

Sharma, U., & Salend, S. J. (2016).
Teaching Assistants in inclusive classrooms: A systematic analysis of the international research. Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 41, 118-134. http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2016v41n8.7

Sharples, J., Webster, R., & Blatchford, P. (2015).
Making best use of teaching assistants. Guidance report. London: Education Endowment Fund. Available at: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/Teaching_Assistants/TA_Guidance_Report_MakingBestUseOfTeachingAssistants-Printable.pdf

Shenderovich, Y., Thurston, A., & Miller, S. (2016).
Cross-age tutoring in kindergarten and elementary school settings: A systematic review and meta-analysis. International Journal of Educational Research, 76, 190-210. ISSN 0883-0355. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2015.03.007

Shiel, G., Kavanagh, L., & Millar, D. (2014).
The 2014 National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics. Volume 1: Performance Report. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

Smith, T., Noble, M., Noble, S., Wright, G., McLennan, D., & Plunkett, E. (2015).
The English Indices of Deprivation 2015: Technical Report. London: Department for Communities and Local Government. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/464485/English_Indices_of_Deprivation_2015_-_Technical-Report.pdf

Smyth, J., & Hewitson, R. (2015).
Critical voices from adolescent 'shape shifters' – Accessing portraits in 'Becoming Educated'. Children's Geographies, 13, 692-706.

Sofroniou, N., Archer, P., & Weir, S. (2004).
An analysis of the association between socioeconomic context, gender and achievement. Irish Journal of Education, 35, 58–72.

Strøm, I., Thoresen, S., Wentzel-Larsen, T., & Dyb, G. (2013).
Violence, bullying and academic achievement: A study of 15-year-old adolescents and their school environment. Child Abuse & Neglect, 37, 243-251. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2012.10.010

Sui-Chu, E. H., & Willms, J. D. (1996).
Effects of parental involvement on eighth-grade achievement. Sociology of Education, 69, 126–141. doi:10.2307/2112802

Ttofi, M., & Farrington, D. (2009).
What works in preventing bullying: Effective elements of anti-bullying programmes. Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research, 1, 13-24.

Vallejo, C., & Dooly, M. (2013).
Early school-leavers and social disadvantage in Spain: From books to bricks and viceversa. European Journal of Education, 48, 390-404.

Van Belle, J. (2016).
Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and its long-term effects on educational and labour market outcomes. Research report. RAND Corporation.

Vitoroulis, I., & Vaillancourt, T. (2015).
Meta-analytic results of ethnic group differences in peer victimization. Aggressive Behaviour, 41, 149-170.

Williams, J., Thornton, M., Morgan, M., Quail, A., Smyth, E., Murphy, D., & O'Mahony, D. (2018).
The lives of 13-year-olds: Growing up in Ireland, national longitudinal study of children in Ireland. Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Working Group on the Future of Post-Secondary Education. (2017).
Report to the Minister for Education and Employment. Floriana: Ministry for Education.

GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
MINISTRY FOR EDUCATION,
SPORT, YOUTH, RESEARCH
AND INNOVATION