



APPLE

eArly warning Platform to Prevent youth from
dropping out of school Education



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PROJECT PARTNERS



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ABSTRACT

Following the thorough empirical research conducted in each partner country of the APPLE project, we have gathered information on the existing situation, including data and statistics about the phenomenon that is the focus of this project: truancy. Through this research study we have been able to better learn about the specific situation in each partner country regarding school dropout, the main objectives of the project and the methodology used which will be presented below.



INTRODUCTION

All the countries that form the consortium of this project have verified and confirmed that there is a high percentage of school dropouts in their respective national contexts. There are different factors that affect absenteeism to a greater or lesser extent, such as economic factors. In the current framework, most of the partner countries see this factor as directly reflected in absenteeism, where early school leaving is more likely to occur on the basis of lower economic status. Another factor may be the sex of the person, as in the case of Portugal, where the drop-out rate is higher in the case of boys. Another example comes from the Republic of North Macedonia and has to do with physical condition or disability. It seems that there is a higher likelihood of dropout due to related conditions and circumstances.

The methodology used by the partners was to distribute questionnaires to teachers, educators, therapists or psychologists who are expected to make use of the courses found in the online platform in the future. Another methodological element that was used by partners was the organisation and implementation of seminars. In this way, educators were taught to identify the factors that can lead to early school leaving.

The goal of the APPLE project is to provide specialised education for the educators who deal with students at risk of drop-out in order to help them learn about the associated risk factors and the early tracking of such students. In addition, thanks to the comprehensive research conducted by each project partner there is a specific course of action suggested in order for stakeholders to know what steps to follow in situations of early school leaving.

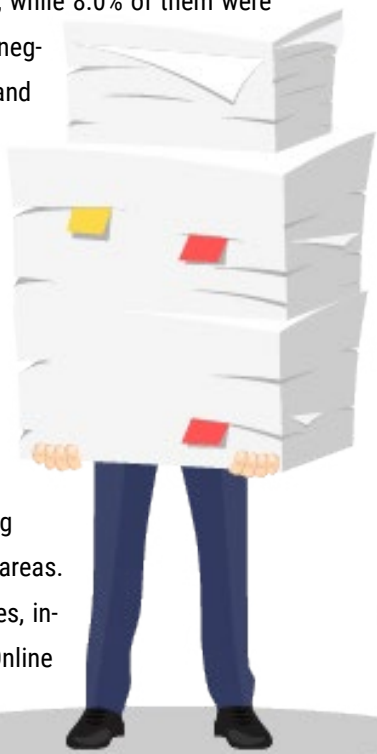
METHODOLOGY

1. Desk Research

During the first phase/step of the Apple project, short-scale research was conducted in each country in order to assess the already existing practices and tools implemented. According to the findings collected by all partners and summarized by KMOP, despite the significant progress made in the area of school integration of young people with vulnerable background and of high-risk profile, Early School Leaving (ESL) remains a pressing concern in countries of the European Union (EU).

According to the latest data released by Eurostat , 9.9% of people between 18-24 years of age in the EU had completed at most a lower secondary education and were not in further education or training (early school leavers). Same source reveals that 11.8% of early leavers from education and training were young men, while 8.0% of them were young women. It goes without saying that ESL has severe negative effects in a number of outcomes, particularly social and economic growth leading to social exclusion and poverty.

In order to combat ESL, the APPLE project aspired to develop innovative guides and an early warning platform, equipping educators, schools and related organisations and authorities with the necessary tools to prevent ESL. Special focus was given at groups at higher risk of early drop-out, such as refugee and migrant children and youth, members of Roma communities or religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities, students with special needs and learning disabilities, students from poor families and deprived rural areas. The project entailed the implementation of several activities, including Capacity Building Seminars for Educators and an Online Early Warning and Early Drop-Out-Tackling Platform.



The goal of the Capacity Building Seminars was to support educators with the necessary skills for the identification of youth at risk of ESL and those seminars took place in the countries of United Kingdom, Greece, Romania, Spain, Republic of North Macedonia and Portugal. The seminars helped educators to enrich their related knowledge and acquire new skills on innovative pedagogical methodologies (i.e., open dialogue, philosophy for children), while they also enabled them to exchange experiences and good practices with peers, expanding their network. As an expected result, educators should be better able to provide timely support to students at risk and their families with the long-term goal of minimizing drop-out rates.

Capacity Building Seminars for educators took place in the APPLE project's partner countries of Greece, Portugal, Republic of North Macedonia, Romania, Spain, and United Kingdom. These seminars were aimed at educating professionals, including teachers, educators, board members and school staff, technicians with functions in associations dealing with young people or school children or people who wanted to learn more about the phenomenon. The training involved one or more sessions which took place online in the zoom platform and lasted for a minimum of 4 hours each. The sessions generally entailed an introduction about partner organisations and the APPLE Project, a description of the ESL phenomenon, the identification of risk factors for ESL, interactive discussions, individual and group exercises and case studies. After completion of the training, participants were asked to give feedback on the training and to compare their skill sets and knowledge with their prior ones.

A total of 176 participants joined the of KMOP in Greece engaged a total of 36 participants, Aproximar in Portugal recruited 57 participants, KMOP branch in the Republic of North Macedonia had 20 individuals participating in the seminars, CPIP in Romania had 23, FyG in Spain recruited 22 educators, and Canary Wharf Consulting from United Kingdom engaged 18 participants.



2. Guide For Educators

The aim of this activity was to gather information at the partner country level regarding the main characteristics of the youngsters at risk of drop out and was envisioned to be used to target the participants at risk of dropping out and their families. To accomplish this task, a document was developed to provide brief guidelines supporting each partner to build a national profile of the youngsters at risk of dropping out. For the purpose of building the profile at the national level, partners followed a step-by-step methodology:

Country	Predominant gender	Age (years)	Problematic school years	Minority groups
UK	Male	14-16	Early years of secondary school	Roma students, Students from families in need in rural areas, Migrants and refugees
Greece	Male	14-16	Secondary education	Roma students, Migrants, Refugees
Spain	Male	14-16	Secondary and post-secondary non-higher education	Roma students, Migrants. Students with learning disabilities
Romania	Female	13-15	Transition to secondary education	Roma students and students from disadvantaged rural areas
Portugal	Male	11-17	Secondary education: 10th, 11th and 12th years of schooling (equivalent to secondary education)	Roma students, Migrants. Students with learning disabilities
North Macedonia	Female	14-16	Transition to secondary education; Transition from 2nd to 3rd cycle	Roma students, students from low-income families, students with learning difficulties and emotional or behavioural disorders

- Step 1.** Analysis of the National Report developed in the IO1;
- Step 2.** Filter the main data of the Literature Review conducted for the National Report (IO1);
- Step 3.** Fill a table using the results obtained during the Empirical Research for the National Report (IO1), in particular, the results from the questionnaires that stakeholders and teachers completed;
- Step 4.** Compare the data obtained in the desk research and results of the questionnaires (e.g., Age, general factors that contribute to early school leaving, etc.) in terms of similarities and differences and fill the profile with the compiled information. All the national information were considered for building the final profile.



Focus Groups with Youth at Risk of Early Leaving

To gather the information within this activity, we used qualitative (focus group and interviews) and quantitative (questionnaires) methodologies. A document was developed including the guidelines for carrying out the focus groups with the students and respective family members/caregivers that could be adjusted by each of the partner having in mind the national characteristics. The guidelines provided instructions, methods, scripts to the interviews, questionnaires, templates for data collection and analysis, participants recruitment, a consent form template for the youngster's guardians and a proposal for the national report structure, so that the partners could gather the information and compile in

the national reports. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions and limitations regarding conducting face-to-face activities, the guidelines included tips for conducting the focus groups and interviews online. Since focus groups have certain procedures that differentiate them from other interviews, some things that should be considered regarding the recruitment of participants, location, duration, interview script, etc were also listed. The collected data and respective analysis and discussion were compiled by each partner in a national report.



Developing a Guide for Educators

The guide was intended to be a useful tool for educators, school boards, as well as policymakers by drawing attention to the early school drop-out phenomenon, focusing on the profiles of young people at risk as well as on the drivers of early school leaving. The guide included specific recommendations and provided practical tips to create solutions to tackle some of the drivers of dropout in a precautionary manner, as well as to make education more attractive to youngsters.

This resource included an early school dropout contextualization at a EU level as well as at the partners country level (UK, Greece, Spain, Romania, Portugal and North Macedonia). The guide also included a step-by-step profile exercise on how to build a profile of youth at risk of early school leaving in the classroom, based on the profile that was created in the context of the Apple project.

The guide focused on selected drivers of dropout based on scientific research, namely the educational factors (school climate & learning environment; differential learning; class

size & student-teacher ratio; school policies & resources; teachers' motivation); personal factors (attendance; behaviour & antisocial behaviour; academic success & grade retention; engagement; disability; ethnicity & diversity; bullying); family influences (household; literacy & educational level; family structure; child-parent relationship); and community and social factors (social & socioeconomic status; settlement & living area; peer influence).

After sharing information on the ESL context, the main drivers that lead youngsters to dropout as well as a profiling example, the guide also provided a set of potential solutions that are widely recognized and empirically proven to be effective in the prevention of this phenomenon, such as:

- **Problem-based learning**
- **Feedback**
- **Cooperative and peer learning**
- **Development of autonomous learners**
- **Assertive communication**
- **Democratic practices**
- **Restorative practices**
- **Social-emotional learning**

Finally, an array of tips that teachers and educators could apply in the classroom in order to make school more attractive to youngsters were included in the guide together with the implementation of the solutions mentioned above. By developing this guide for educators, APPLE aimed to equip educators, schools, educational organizations and authorities with the necessary tools to identify youth at risk of dropping-out and halt early school leaving. Early identification of children and young people at risk of early school leaving and applying solutions to reduce this risk have the potential to enable educators to take action and reduce the risk of dropping out at a wider systemic level.

3. Early Warning Platform

As a final product of the APPLE project, we created an Online Platform for Early Warning for Educators. Education professionals can access the site (<https://www.appleproject.eu/>) and enroll for free on the platform. From there, they have access to several modules that they can attend.

The creation of the platform was based on research conducted by all the partners. It included the latest information and data regarding early school leaving. In the platform, there is also material from all the participating countries from the project's other outputs, including the Capacity Building Seminars for the Educators, the Guide for the Educators and the Support for Policy Reform. In general, the platform aimed to assist educators in recognizing the first signs of early school leavers and support them in every way.

After an introduction on the project, its aims and the general info, participants have access to different modules with theory and activities to implement in the classroom. The first module helped the educators identify the students at risk; it pointed out the various factors affecting them (educational, personal, family, community and social factors). Then, specific steps helped the participants to learn to take action after identifying the phenomenon. Then, the participants had access to the theory and resources that the materials were based on. The next module was about communication, how to prevent truancy and drop out recommendations, early intervention and support in having conversations with pupils and parents. Participants had the chance to experience a case study and then answer a few questions about it. The following module was about the previous experiences students may have in the school environment, how to empower the students and tools to develop the participants' self-reflection. Moving on to the next module, it covered the topic of external support and co-operation. The last one discussed teachers' experience, how they can assist other teachers, and how experience can be used as a guide and a prevention tool.

To summarise, the platform is the best way for the participants to learn about early school leaving, educate themselves, and guide them in identifying the issue as early as possible and ways to deal with it.

4. Maximising project impact

The final output of the APPLE project focused on increasing the impact of the project by bringing the attention of policymakers, research institutions, academia, NGOs and activists on the issue of early school leaving. For that reason, three activities were implemented: i) consultation workshops with education stakeholders, ii) participation in a conference to promote the project, and iii) creation of a white paper.

i) Activity 1: Consultation workshops with stakeholders took place where policymakers were invited to attend the workshops organized. This activity aimed to trigger public discussion on the youth at risk to drop out.

During these workshops, partners presented basic data and the analyses conducted under IO1 to address the issue in a national context. Later, a short presentation of the platform took place and the educational resources produced within the project. At the end of the workshop, the participants had the chance to work in teams and create action plans to tackle early school leaving. A template was given to the groups who then proceeded to work together and create action plans based on what they learnt in the workshops.

ii) Activity 2: The next step was to participate in conferences related to education. The APPLE outcomes were disseminated to the academic community and policymakers by attending and participating in a conference.

One of the project partners (CPIP) participated in EBSN Annual Conference 2021 - Innovation for Resilience – New Approaches to Basic Skills Provision in the Post-COVID Era. (<https://basicskills.eu/ebsn-annual-conference-2021/>).

iii) Activity 3: The last activity of the Output was the creation of this white paper with the collaboration of the whole team and its publication in a scientific journal.

Here, as you saw, we presented every step of the project, the scientific results of the APPLE project, in order to promote it and share the work done within the APPLE framework.

Partners of the APPLE project will also host an Infoday in each participating country to promote the project and let the public know about it. During this Infoday, partners will

present their work, among other prestigious experts in the issue. The event will be open to educators, students, media, NGOs, parents, education stakeholders and anyone interested in early school leaving. After implementing every step, a final conference will be held in Greece, Athens, where all the partners will come together and host the final event of the project.

WHITE PAPER – CONCLUSIONS

When it comes to tackling early school leaving there is not one single approach that works for every situation and each context. If only we look at the factors that influence a student's chances of dropping out, we see that these factors are so many and so diverse that it is not only an issue of the educational system, but rather an issue of society at large. And for this precise reason, the solution to reducing early school leaving must be an integrated one, which not only takes into consideration the many existing factors, but also brings together all key actors in the system.

And this is where the innovation of the APPLE project comes into play. The approach taken in the APPLE project is not only one that applies to an Erasmus+ project of this kind, but it can also be seen from the wider perspective of how we can wisely and efficiently deal with the ESL phenomenon. In other words, the project has not only produced very valuable resources on the topic of ESL, but it also proposes a process that can be successfully replicated by other parties interested in making a difference on the issues of ESL

This means explicitly sharing information about the subject and aiming at providing knowledge and understanding on the subject, which ultimately leads to awareness on the subject. For the purposes of the APPLE project, through capacity building seminars, attention has been given to educators, which are at the forefront of combating the early school leaving phenomenon.

a) Put the topic of ESL on the discussion agenda.

b) Bring into perspective the voice of those that are in need of help

and based on that, tailor guidance for targeted intervention by professionals. The APPLE output in which the Guide for Educators was developed includes material on the profile of young people, drivers of early school leaving and personal stories of young people and their families.

The APPLE Online Early Warning platform is a perfect example of a powerful tool that has potential to reach a wide group of professionals who interact with students daily and who, by definition, are the first ones to recognize and support students at risk of drop out.

c) Develop resources and training for professionals involved in dealing with the early school phenomenon.

d) Create a platform for cooperation and promote sharing and joint efforts of all key actors involved.

In the APPLE project specific attention has been given to the support for policy reform, by bringing together policy makers, researchers, academia, advocacy, and non-governmental educational organisations. The discussions facilitated within national consultation workshops have not only

had the purpose of thoughts and ideas exchanges, but it also led to developing concrete national actions plans to tackle early school leaving in the partner countries.

Early school leaving represents a burning issue across Europe and countries represented in the APPLE project are at different stages in dealing with the phenomenon. The implications of school dropout go beyond the educational system and educational attainment of individuals, with long term consequences at all levels. In this sense, the integrated approach developed within the APPLE project is one of high impact and potential for replication as part of other initiatives related to early school leaving. The APPLE results have a proven transferability and draw on lessons that be shared and disseminated with the wider audience of policy makers and stakeholders beyond the project lifetime.





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