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BASELINE STUDY FOR EARLY DETECTION OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING



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2.1. Transnational report

Baseline study for early detection of early school leaving

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1. About TeSTED

TeSTED project, "Tackling Drop Outs Through Systematic Students Screening", is a funded project by the European Union, Erasmus+ KA2 – Strategic Partnership VET program, that runs between October 2022 and October 2025. Its objective is to encourage innovation through a strong mechanism in the VET environment for early detection and prevention of school dropouts due to socio-economic difficulties, transforming VET providers into a safety net for learners at risk, offering advice and alternative pathways, and ensuring their retention in education and training and their graduation.

It is a well-known fact that many students leave their VET studies, especially during the first years. The fight against VET dropout has been a priority for the EU since 2000 as part of the Lisbon strategy. Despite the progress so far the EU is still away from the target and further progress can only be achieved through a better understanding of the problem and targeted activities. The key point to tackle a problem is the early detection and then its targeted prevention. Usually, learners with vulnerable socioeconomic backgrounds present distress signs before they leave their education and training. If these signs are detected in time, there is more chance of retaining these learners with relatively simple and effective interventions.

The **TeSTED** initiative stands at the forefront of reimagining Vocational Education and Training (VET) to make it more relevant to current and future needs. Through the tools developed by the project, **TeSTED** will help educators with the early detection of potential dropouts and provide them with a service intervention mechanism that will help students with support and consultation thus preventing early dropout rates.

The report is structured as follows:

- The first chapter presents the TeSTED framework, the purpose and results of the Baseline Study for early detection of early school leaving
- The second chapter shows Findings on Desk Research focused on the situation of the partner countries, in which the emphasis is placed on the examples of good practice from Germany
- The third chapter describes Findings on Field Research, from 4 partner countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, and Romania, based on interviews and questionnaires completed by students and teachers, a combined approach that facilitates in-depth analysis of the national context, and a direct insight into the social reality.
- The fourth chapter presents a Transnational Analysis and common situations identified in the 4 countries - Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, and Romania.
- The fifth chapter describes the Conclusions and presents the Recommendations and Priority Areas for the Design of the TeSTED Assessment Tool.

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General Data

This report summarizes Activity 2.1 developed in WP2: Conducting a Baseline Study for the early detection of school dropouts, mainly for students with socioeconomic difficulties. The study is based on quantitative and qualitative research from partner countries and field research, based on interviews and questionnaires completed by students and teachers. This combined approach facilitates an in-depth analysis of the national context, which provides direct insight into the social reality.

For several months, the partners from Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, and Romania conducted their national research, which involved desk review questionnaires and interviews with the project's target groups: VET staff and students from VET centers/schools.

The research objectives have been identified as follows:

- To analyze the current situation of VET dropouts
- To gather valuable statistical and demographic data
- To identify the main reasons why students drop out
- To identify the early signs in students with socioeconomic difficulties
- To identify common patterns
- To develop a common understanding of the needs of the students to prevent dropout

In this context, the target group focuses on students in secondary and post-secondary VET schools who come from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, with different levels of academic preparation, career aspirations, and motivation to learn. Many students at these levels are at critical points of transition in their educational and professional development, facing decisions about further education, training, or entering the workforce.

By targeting students in secondary and post-secondary VET schools to prevent the risk of dropping out and implementing personalized support strategies, educational institutions can empower these students to overcome challenges, stay engaged in their studies, and achieve success in their education and professional.

The research objective focused on identifying the main factors that lead some students, from the target group, in the vocational education and training system, to drop out of school, to create support mechanisms for future students and improve their study experience.

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A general view, the data included in this report are:

Desk research- Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Romania				
Filed research	Teacher's perspective			
	Student's perspective			
Countries	Austria	Bulgaria	Greece	Romania
Interviews	5	6	5	6
Questionnaires	12	17	16	22

The findings of the following report will be utilized to create the main deliverable of Work Package 2, which is the development of an **Assessment Tool for the early detection of probable dropouts**.

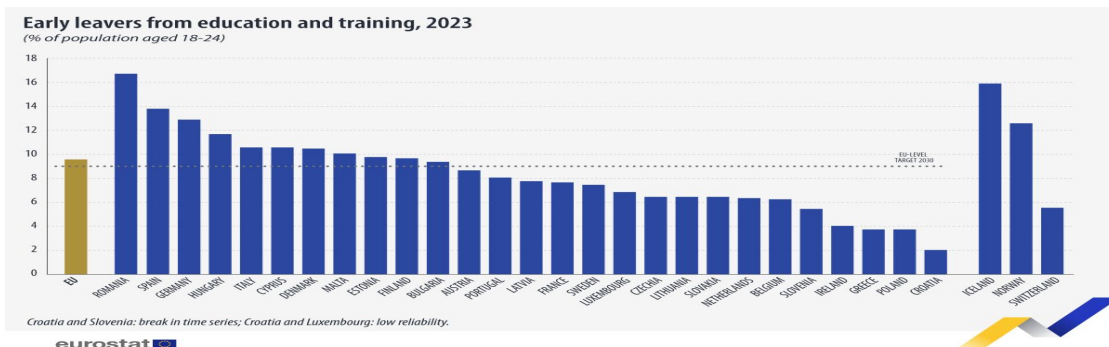
The Assessment Questionnaire can be an extremely beneficial tool for teachers in their efforts to reduce student dropout. By identifying students at high risk of dropping out and providing information about specific risk factors, questionnaires can help teachers implement effective individualized and preventive interventions.

Timeliness of data

In 2023, 9.5 % of 18-24-year-olds in the EU had completed at most a lower secondary education and were not in further education or training (early leavers). The proportion of early leavers from education and training in the EU in 2023 ranged from 2.0 % in Croatia to 16.6 % in Romania, as provided by Eurostat data.

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Socio-economic features are the predictors of ESL as they are connected to equal opportunities in education. Early school dropout is associated with ill health, poverty, social marginalization, and unemployment. Some young individuals discontinue their education and training too soon for a variety of reasons, such as uncertain socioeconomic conditions, personal or family issues, or learning challenges. Other crucial elements include teacher-pupil relationships, school atmosphere, and the structure of the educational system.

2. Findings on desk research

The phenomenon of school dropout in the VET system requires the need to offer valid tools to the VET teachers. Implementing early intervention programs and support systems within VET institutions can help identify students at risk of dropout and provide them with customized assistance, mentoring, and counseling to address their needs. VET teachers play an important role in preventing dropout and ensuring the success of students in vocational education. Therefore, it's essential to provide them with valid tools and support to tackle this issue. Same time VET teachers need specialized training and ongoing professional development to better understand the needs of at-risk students, employ effective teaching strategies, and provide appropriate support and guidance.

Eurydice's study on education and training systems in Europe (2022) analyzed the VET systems of 43 European countries, including Germany, and found that Germany has one of the lowest early school leaving rates in VET (below 6%).

¹ Early-leavers-from-education-and-training-2023

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Early-leavers-from-education-and-training-2023.png>

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It highlighted the following key elements of the VET system in Germany that contribute to reducing dropout:

- The dual education system provides students with practical experience relevant to the labor market, increasing their motivation and satisfaction.
- Career guidance is offered to students from an early age, helping them make informed decisions about their educational and career paths.
- Financial support is available to students from low-income families, removing financial barriers to participating in education.²

2.1 Germany

Germany is considered an example of good practice in reducing early school leaving in VET. Germany's success is due to a combination of factors, including the dual education system, close collaboration with the private sector, individualized student support, and coherent education policies.

Germany boasts a well-established vocational education and training (VET) system that plays a pivotal role in preparing the workforce. This dual system combines classroom learning with hands-on training at companies.³ One of its unique strengths is the involvement of social partners, with clear policy leadership and smooth transitions from school to work. Germany's system emphasizes upskilling, with a focus on advanced vocational exams and Fachschule programs that link training to recognition of prior learning. Furthermore, it offers pathways for VET graduates to access higher education.

Despite its strengths, Germany faces challenges related to dropout rates in vocational education.⁴ Recent data indicates a decline in the attractiveness of upper secondary VET, with more students opting for general higher education programs. While the dual VET system enjoys high employment rates, retaining learners in VET programs has become increasingly challenging.⁵ Demographic changes and the allure of academic education have contributed to this trend. Mismatch problems exist, with companies struggling to find enough apprentices while potential learners remain untapped, particularly among migrants and refugees.

² Structural indicators for monitoring education and training systems in Europe, Eurydice background report, 2022 <file:///C:/Users/cursu/Downloads/structural%20indicators%20for%20monitoring%20education%20and-EC0522293ENN.pdf>

³ CEDEFOP

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/germany-vocational-orientation-young-people-times-social-upheaval>

⁴ Krotz M., Deutscher V., Drop out in VET <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8762988/>

⁵ CEDEFOP, Vocational education and training in Germany https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4184_en.pdf

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Germany has adopted various strategies and initiatives to address these challenges. ⁶The 2020 amendment of the Vocational Training Act aims to promote higher VET by highlighting the equivalence of academic education. It also grants employees the right to access continuing VET (CVET) funding, especially when structural changes affect their careers. Moreover, funding schemes like InnoVET support high-quality cooperation between learning locations and the transfer of knowledge into company practices.⁷

Promoting training for care and nursing occupations is another priority, with measures such as broadening qualifications and introducing remuneration for trainees in healthcare institutions. The VET 4.0⁸ initiative investigates the impact of digitalization on qualifications and competencies, preparing the VET system for digital and ecological transitions.

Lessons learned from Germany's vocational education and training (VET) system offer valuable insights for nations aiming to enhance their own education and workforce development programs.

- **Integration of Social Partners:** Germany's success in VET is closely tied to the integration of social partners, including employers and trade unions, in the design and implementation of the VET which ensures that VET programs align with labor market needs, resulting in a skilled workforce that meets industry demands.
- **Dual System Flexibility:** The flexibility of Germany's dual VET system allows learners to combine classroom education with practical work experience. This adaptability helps individuals make informed career choices, fosters a sense of responsibility, and enables them to develop valuable skills.
- **Promoting Excellence in VET:** Germany's focus on promoting excellence in VET through initiatives like InnoVET and VET 4.0 encourages innovation, knowledge transfer, and quality assurance in vocational education.
- **Addressing Inequality:** Germany's efforts to support disadvantaged groups, such as migrants and refugees, in accessing VET programs serve as a lesson in addressing inequality.

To further address dropout rates effectively, Germany must encourage the transition from postsecondary VET to academic higher education by facilitating credit transfer arrangements.⁹ Better information about preparatory courses for professional exams, along with industry self-regulation, is essential to support student choices. Clear standards for all examinations should be explored to ensure quality.

⁶ Prospect for vocational education in the United States: Lessons from Germany

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED574618.pdf>

⁷ OECD, A Skills beyond schools: Review of Germany

<https://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/ASkillsbeyondSchoolReviewofGermany.pdf>

⁸ BIBB, Vocational education & training 4.0 <https://www.bibb.de/en/25228.php>

⁹ Beckmann, Janina & Wicht, Alexandra & Siembab, Matthias. (2021). Career Compromises and Dropout from Vocational Education and Training in Germany

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351442555_Career_Compromises_and_Dropout_from_Vocational_Education_and_Training_in_Germany

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To keep Fachschulen's workforce skills up-to-date, allowing flexibility in employing part-time teachers from the industry and encouraging full-time teachers to gain industry experience is vital.

Modernizing and adapting VET to digital and ecological transitions remains a priority, as does providing guidance and support to bridge the gap between learners and training places.

The conclusions drawn from the discussions between the partners focused on the examples of good practice identified in Germany, especially the assessment tools used in counseling programs in Germany: tests that measure cognitive abilities or personality traits, interest tests and risk questionnaires school dropout, which evaluates the risk factors for school dropout:

✚ **Jugend stärken** - a federally funded program that provides support to students at risk of dropping out in grades 8-13, that uses individualized assessment tools to identify the specific needs of each student, and provides students with individual and group counseling as well as academic, career, and social support.

✚ **"Kein Abschluss ohne Anschluss" (KAoA)**- a national program that provides support to students at risk of dropping out of school in grades 7-10 and uses a variety of assessment tools, including intelligence tests, personality tests, and attitude questionnaires.

Germany's dual education system, early and individualized career guidance, and financial support for students appear to be key factors contributing to the country's low dropout rate.

2.2. Austria

According to a report by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research¹⁰, the school dropout rate in Austria is higher than the European Union average. The report numbers show that in the school year 2019/20, 8.6 % of students in Austria left school without graduating. The highest dropout rates were found in vocational schools, where the rate was 15.6%. In contrast, the dropout rate in general secondary schools was lower at 3.9%.

¹⁰ Website of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research see
<https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/schule/bef/schulabbruch.html>

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Since then, the situation has improved in some ways, for example, according to a report by Eurostat¹¹, the percentage of early school leavers in Austria was 7.9% in 2020, slightly higher than the EU average of 6.3%. The rate of early school leavers is highest among boys, pupils with a migration background, and pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Several factors contribute to the high dropout rate in Austria.¹² These include lack of support from schools and families, socio-economic factors, and discrimination based on gender, race, cultural background, and religion. In addition, students who experience academic difficulties or feel disconnected from their school community are also at risk of dropping out of school.

To address the problem of school dropouts in Austria, the government has taken various measures, including coaching/counseling¹³ and psychological support programs in schools¹⁴, vocational training programs, and initiatives to improve the overall quality of education. However, more needs to be done to ensure that students from different backgrounds have equal access to education and the resources they need to succeed.

The reasons for dropping out of school in Austria are diverse according to official sources and can include personal and family problems, financial issues, academic difficulties, lack of motivation, and inadequate support systems. The problem of dropping out of school is particularly prevalent among young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, migrant communities, and those with learning difficulties.¹⁵

2.3. Bulgaria

One in ten young people between the ages of 18 and 24 has dropped out of the education system early. This is shown by data from the National Statistical Institute (NSI) about the labor force in Bulgaria in 2022. Young people between the ages of 15 and 29 who are neither studying nor working in 2022 were 15.1% of the total share of unemployed persons¹⁶.

¹¹ Early leavers from education and training, 2024 [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early leavers from education and training](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early_leavers_from_education_and_training)

¹² Early School Leaving – Drop Out in Österreich, 2016 <https://journal.ph-noe.ac.at/index.php/resource/article/download/283/338/1266>

¹³ Jugendcoaching, Bundesministerium Themen: <https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/schule/beratung/psus/jugendcoaching.html>

¹⁴ Psychosocial counselling at and for schools, 2015 <https://www.schulpsychologie.at/15>

¹⁵ Perchinunno, P., Bilancia, M., & Vitale, D. (2021). A statistical analysis of factors affecting higher education dropouts. Social Indicators Research, 156, 341-362.

¹⁶ <https://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/4013-лица-извън-работната-сила-национално-ниво-статистически-райони-области>

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In a world where technology is rapidly developing, the need for quality education for the youth is acute. Dropping out of the school process is a serious prerequisite for falling into the vicious circle of poverty due to a lack of education and a lack of educated people due to poverty. The annual report "Notebook" issued by the National Children's Network states that "a student who drops out has a broken relationship with the school or school community."¹⁷ A child's refusal or inability to attend school is often rooted in broken relationships with the school environment – these youth fail to build a healthy relationship with teachers and peers.

A year ago, the topic of Euro-orphans was raised again - children whose parents work abroad, and who are left to be cared for by relatives and friends. "Transnational family" is the concept in the scientific literature that describes a family whose members live in different countries, but maintain ties with each other, regardless of spatial distance. There are no official statistics on how many Bulgarian families are "transnational". But taking into account the fact that between 1.5 and 2 million Bulgarians reside permanently outside the country, the percentage is likely to be significant. The situation in the villages of the Eastern Rhodopes, the North-West Region, and the North-Central Region is of greatest concern, where the percentage of children left in Bulgaria in the care of relatives and friends exceeds 60%, according to a 2019 study¹⁸. According to it, the typical profile of these families includes Bulgarians from smaller settlements, usually with a secondary education, aged between 25-35, who have 1 or 2 children, most often left to their grandparents. Compared to the socialization of children in a traditional family, socialization in the transnational is often problematic and entails many risks: behavioral, value, health, emotional, etc. Even all the concern and dedication of relatives cannot fully compensate for the absence of father and mother. Although in most cases these children are well provided for materially, thanks to the funds sent by their parents, they face a number of problems, both of a legal and administrative nature - in securing representation, access to health care, education, as well as in psychological and emotional plane. With these children, there is an increased risk of aggressiveness, withdrawal, worsening of success and dropping out of school, abuse of alcohol and psychoactive substances, committing illegal acts, etc.

Distant education increases the risk of children dropping out of the education system prematurely. Without live contact with teachers, students from vulnerable groups not only lose motivation and engagement and fall behind with the learning material but also stop learning and communicating. For these reasons, they are at risk of not returning to school. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture, in 2021, the number of students at risk of dropping out of the educational system in Bulgaria is about 180,000 or 25%¹⁹. If from 2018 to 2020 the average percentage of children covered by the

¹⁷ https://nmd.bg/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Belejnrik2022_web_low_res_compressed-1.pdf

¹⁸ Popova, A., "Deficits in the socialization of children from families of parents working abroad. Doctoral Dissertation". 2019, Sofia: IFS, BAS

¹⁹ <https://web.mon.bg/bg/100669>

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education system increases by about 0.4 percentage points per year, then in 2021 it remains unchanged - on average 5% of children between 5 and 16 years old are not covered age. The percentage of children out of education is highest in the districts of Shumen, Sliven, and Haskovo²⁰.

According to the Situation Analysis and recommendations for basic guidelines for vocational education and training and lifelong learning in Bulgaria within the framework of the preparation of the Operational Program Science and Education for Smart Growth²¹, a key challenge for VET remains the low student retention rate. The performance of VET on this indicator, which is significantly lower than that of general education, continues to deteriorate, which is why the need for special attention to improving retention and completion rates in the VET system is crucial. In VET, the dropout rate is double that observed in secondary general education, while the completion rate is much lower than in general education. This means that the retention rate in the VET system and its internal efficiency are significantly lower than in general education. Since 2010, about 9 percent of students who were enrolled in VET in a given year did not re-enroll the following year. In 2022, nearly 63 percent of all dropouts were from schools located in small towns or villages. The dropout rate over the entire cycle of VET programs is over 21 percent, much higher than in general education, where the dropout rate is 8.5 percent. This means that one out of every five students who enrolled at the beginning of the upper secondary VET/ET course did not stay in school until the end of the program. Of VET students who reach 12th grade, only three out of four (75.5%) complete secondary education (2021). In general education, the graduation rate is almost 20 percentage points higher, at 94.7 percent. In recent years, both dropout and completion rates in VET have deteriorated dramatically, while in general education these rates have improved. Between 2012 and 2022, the proportion of VET students who dropped out increased by 74 percent. During the same period, the general education dropout rate decreased by 28 percentage points. The result is a very substantial difference between dropout rates in general education and VET, whereas in 2012 this difference was still below 2 percentage points. The VET secondary graduation rate has also seen a significant deterioration over the period, from 82.8 percent in 2012 to 75.5 percent in 2022. At the same time, the general education graduation rate has risen from 93.0 to 94.7 percent. As a result, the gap in completion rates between VET and general education has doubled from an (already high) 10.2 percentage points to 20.2 percentage points. National External Assessment exam results as well as Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results show a higher concentration of students with low academic performance in VET schools than in mainstream schools. At the same time, students in VET are expected to study more extensive curricula, as vocational education in Bulgaria covers the curricula of both VET and

²⁰ <https://web.mon.bg/bg/news/4268>

²¹ https://www.eufunds.bg/sites/default/files/uploads/opseig/docs/2021-08/BG_VET_LLL_June_22.pdf

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VET. The combination of complex curricula and low achievement can ultimately lead to discouragement and loss of motivation on the part of students and increase the risk of dropping out.

Ministry of Education according to Law on Pre-school and School Education, Strategy for Educational Work in Pedagogical Institutions, Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities and Strategy for Reducing the Share of Early Leavers from the Education System, studies the reasons for early leaving VET and general education.

Among the most spread possible reasons for some students dropping out are the following:

- **Economic:** unemployment, low incomes, reduced living standards, migration of families;
- **Social:** parental disinterest, contradictions, conflicts, crises in the family:
 - negative impact of the home environment - functional illiteracy; incomplete families, domestic violence;
 - children and students at risk - with inclinations to commit anti-social acts, imposition of strict punishments by parents;
 - influence of risky informal groups or the friendly environment.
- **Educational reasons:** difficulties in learning the learning content, method of assessment, created/learned habits or the lack of them, negative attitude of the participants in the learning process, lack of motivation, a large number of absences, poor discipline, aggression at school, low educational results, relationships at school, inappropriate choice of school or profile. Here we must also include the difficulties in learning the Bulgarian language and the development of full-fledged communication skills in children of foreign origin.
- **Institutional reasons:** insufficiently coordinated approach between different services and specialists at national, local, regional, and school levels.
- **Reasons related to health status:** the risks of premature leaving of students with SEN are related to insufficient preparation of schools for their inclusion.

2.4. Greece

Vocational education in Greece plays a crucial role in preparing students for a wide range of career opportunities and addressing the country's labor market needs. The Greek vocational education and

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training (VET) system combines both theoretical knowledge and practical skills, offering diverse pathways for students to acquire industry-specific expertise.

The VET system in Greece is characterized by a comprehensive and flexible structure, allowing students to choose from a variety of vocational pathways. These pathways often lead to recognized qualifications and certifications that are highly valued by employers. Vocational education is available at different levels, ranging from upper-secondary to post-secondary education, enabling students to enter the workforce directly or progress to higher levels of education if they desire.

One of the primary objectives of vocational education in Greece is to reduce the mismatch between the skills students acquire and the demands of the labor market. The government and educational institutions collaborate closely with industries and employers to design curricula that meet the evolving needs of various sectors. By doing so, vocational education strives to equip students with the knowledge and competencies needed to address the skill gaps and contribute to the country's economic growth.

Moreover, the Greek VET system emphasizes work-based learning opportunities, such as apprenticeships and internships, which allow students to gain hands-on experience in real workplace settings. These practical experiences provide valuable insights into the actual working environment and foster essential soft skills, like teamwork, communication, and problem-solving, complementing the technical competencies acquired in the classroom.

In recent years, the perception of vocational education in Greece has been gradually shifting towards more positive attitudes. As the country faces economic challenges, there has been a growing recognition of the significance of vocational training in cultivating a skilled and adaptable workforce. Emphasizing vocational education as a viable career pathway has become essential in combating youth unemployment and addressing labor market needs efficiently.

To ensure the continuous improvement and effectiveness of vocational education, the Greek government has been investing in educational infrastructure, resources, and teacher training. Furthermore, they have been encouraging greater cooperation between vocational schools and businesses, fostering stronger links between education and the world of work.

Vocational education in Greece is a dynamic and diverse system that provides students with valuable skills and qualifications for successful integration into the labor market. With a focus on work-based learning, collaboration with industries, and efforts to change perceptions, vocational education has the potential to contribute significantly to Greece's economic development by addressing skill gaps and empowering its workforce for the challenges of the future.

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In addition, Greece has seen a huge improvement in the issue of young people dropping out of education. There has been a shift towards post-secondary education for the last 20 years. This shift is fully reflected in the data on dropout, as it has evolved in recent years in Greece, where drop-out rates fell from 14% to 4% in 15 years.

However, dropout rates in vocational education have been a longstanding concern in many countries, including Greece. Vocational education plays a critical role in equipping students with the practical skills and knowledge needed to enter the labor market successfully. However, several challenges have contributed to higher dropout rates in vocational education, impacting the overall effectiveness of the system:

- **Limited Perception of Vocational Education:** Historically, vocational education in Greece has been undervalued compared to academic education. There is a cultural bias towards higher education, leading many students to choose academic tracks over vocational ones. This perception may contribute to the higher dropout rates in vocational education.
- **Economic Factors:** Greece faced an economic crisis that started in 2008 and had significant consequences on the education system. Financial struggles can force students to drop out of school to support their families financially.
- **Lack of Investment:** Vocational education might suffer from a lack of investment in infrastructure, equipment, and training programs. This can affect the quality of education and discourage students from continuing their studies.
- **Mismatch with Labor Market Needs:** The curriculum and programs in vocational education might not align well with the needs of the labor market. This can lead to a lack of motivation among students who may perceive limited job opportunities after graduation.
- **Skills Mismatch:** One of the significant issues contributing to dropout rates in vocational education is the mismatch between the skills acquired through vocational training and the demands of the labor market. If the vocational education system fails to address the evolving needs of industries and businesses, students may perceive limited job prospects, leading to increased dropout rates.
- **Cultural Perceptions:** In Greece, like in some other societies, there has been a traditional preference for academic education over vocational paths. This cultural bias may lead to the stigmatization of vocational education, making students more likely to drop out in pursuit of higher academic degrees, even if those degrees do not align with their interests or aptitudes.
- **Lack of Information and Guidance:** Insufficient access to career guidance and counselling in schools can lead to uninformed decisions about vocational paths. Without proper information about the potential benefits and career opportunities after completing vocational education, students may opt to drop out or choose alternative paths.

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- **Perception of Social Status:** Vocational education has often been associated with lower social status compared to academic education. This perception may impact students' self-esteem and influence their decision to stay in or leave vocational education.
- **Economic Conditions:** Greece has faced economic challenges, particularly during the financial crisis that began in 2008. High unemployment rates and economic instability may discourage students from pursuing vocational education, as they fear that the investment in vocational training may not pay off in terms of stable and fulfilling employment.
- **Transition to Higher Education:** Some students may leave vocational education to pursue higher education, believing that academic degrees offer better career prospects and social status.

Addressing the issue of dropout rates in vocational education is crucial for Greece to improve its workforce's skills and employability. To do so effectively, policymakers and stakeholders need to work on bridging the gap between vocational education and the labor market. This includes enhancing the relevance of vocational programs, promoting the value and prestige of vocational education, providing better career guidance, and creating stronger partnerships between educational institutions and employers.

2.5. Romania

School dropout is a reality of the education system, generating unemployment, economic problems, poverty, and health problems. The reasons that lead young people to drop out of school are both economic and social but also include learning difficulties, the atmosphere in schools, the relationship between teachers and pupils, or the organization and functioning of the education system.

In Romania, the percentage of young people who do not attend any other form of schooling or training is a pressing problem, with around 15% of young people aged 18 to 24 having no more than 8 grades, according to Eurostat data for 2021. The school dropout rate in Romania is twice as high as the European average, at 15.3%, compared to the EU average of 9.7%.²²

The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect the vocational education and training system, even as measures are implemented to transform vocational schools into institutions focused more on dual education to make them more attractive. The number of students in vocational education is relatively high (56.6% in 2020, above the EU average of 48.7%), and due to the reorganization

²² *Data from the Education and Training Monitor 2022 Report of the European Commission*
<https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2022/ro/country-reports/romania.html>

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of the 3-year vocational education since the 2014/2015 school year, a context that has led to a steady increase in the student participation rate from one year to the next.²³

In the school year 2020/2021, the dropout rate has slightly decreased in vocational education, with most of the dropouts coming from the technological field and fewer from the vocational field. With the reorganization of vocational education in 2014/2015, the dropout rate decreased significantly to 2.3% at the end of 2020/2021. A higher percentage of dropouts is observed in the female population compared to the male population. At the same time, the number of repeat students increased considerably in the context in which, in the post-pandemic period, the classic evaluation system was returned.²⁴

In Iasi County, there are 24 technological high schools and technical colleges in the school network, of which 4 are in rural areas and 20 vocational schools in rural and urban areas. Comparing the statistical data of the last three school years for Iasi County, the percentage of non-enrolled students was 0.72% of the total number of students in 2022, while in 2021 it was 0.70% and in 2020 it was 0.72% (695 non-enrolled students in the school year 2021- 2022, 700 students in 2020-2021 and 715 students in 2019-2020).²⁵

It is noted that the number of rural pupils dropping out of school increased from 290 pupils in the school year 2019-2020 to 400 pupils in the school year 2020-2021. The number of rural pupils dropping out of school is higher than in urban areas (400 rural pupils dropped out of school compared to 160 urban pupils).

The main reasons for dropping out are:

- pupils coming from families with parents who have gone abroad;
- pupils coming from Roma families, whether registered or not;
- the poor material situation of the families from which the pupils come;
- Insufficient measures on the part of school management to attract and keep pupils in classes and to control the phenomenon of dropping out.

²³ *Annual reports on the state of pre-university education, Ministry of Education in Romania* <https://edu.ro/rapoarte-publice-periodice>

²⁴ *Report-State-of-pre-university-education-2021-2022*
https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2022/Transparenta/Starea_invatamantului/Raport-Starea-invatamantului-preuniversitar-2021-2022.pdf

²⁵ *The state of pre-university education in Iasi County, school year 2021-2022*
<http://www.isjiasi.ro/index.php/informatii-de-interes-public/buletinul-informativ-legea-544-2001/2675-starea-invatamantului-preuniversitar-iesean-an-scolar-2021-2022>

3. Findings on field research

3.1. Austria

As an apprenticeship center, ipcenter conducted an internal survey with its trainers and volunteer students to gain perspective into the reasons why students may drop out and find out what mechanisms can be used to prevent this problem. An overall nr. of 12 trainers and students (aged between 17-21) were given a questionnaire of 15 and 14 questions respectively to give insight into the issue. The questions were formulated with the help of an internal expert so that biased answers would be avoided. Additionally, the goals of the project as well as the goals of the survey were shared internally, so that the questions could be formulated accordingly. Below, there are both perspectives broken down:

Trainers/Teachers' perspective

The following answers were collected from Trainers/Teachers and advisors directly working with young students. The focus was on staff that has been employed for a longer period of years and/or has experience in socio-pedagogical advising. According to the teacher's and trainers' responses gathered by ipcenter, their school has a protocol/support mechanism in place to prevent dropouts. However, no clear pattern could be identified as to when students tend to drop out of school (80% of answers lead to this conclusion). The factors that teachers felt contributed to dropping out of school were lack of support from the school (60% of answers), wrong expectations from the course (60% of teachers seem to think so), and lack of career prospects for the students (50%). Interestingly, teachers did not think that gender played a role in school dropout rates. To prevent dropouts, teachers suggested the implementation of counseling programs to help students overcome personal problems that might prevent them from attending. Over 60% of teachers would support such initiatives.

Students' perspectives

The aim was to talk to students who are at least in the second semester and/or a bit further in their education. Gender and the focus of their studies did not play a role when conducting these questionnaires. 70% of students involved know someone who has dropped out because of various reasons. From the students' responses, they felt that the factors contributing to dropping out of school were lack of family support (50%), followed by a strong agreement when mentioning lack of student motivation, and discrimination based on race, cultural background, and religion. Additional factors affecting drop-out were: fear/anxiety and physical issues the students deal with. In terms of mechanisms to prevent dropout,

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students mentioned career guidance as a useful tool. Students also recommended counseling programs to help students overcome personal problems that might hinder their class participation. Approximately 70% of students are aware of such services provided by the institute and use them regularly. 50 % of students would wish to have more means of support when confronted with socio-economic problems.

From the responses of teachers and students, it appears that there is no single factor that leads to dropping out of school. Rather, there are a variety of factors that may contribute to a student's decision to leave school early. Therefore, a multifaceted approach to dropout prevention is essential, including counseling programs, career guidance, and family support. By addressing these issues, we can hope to reduce the number of dropouts and give students the resources and support they need to succeed.

Additionally, ipcenter looked at its own data, of course, participants' sign-up and drop-out quota.

Below there is a breakdown of the data by year:

TN:i < 25 years Entries	Total	2020	2021	2022
	<u>5307</u>	<u>1759</u>	<u>1770</u>	<u>1778</u>
TN:i < 25 years Drop-outs	Total	2020	2021	2022
Ended early due to taking up work (positive)	726	197	277	236
Course termination (Drop-Out)	<u>1793</u>	<u>443</u>	<u>666</u>	<u>644</u>
Number of returnees	Total	2020	2021	2022
	129	19	33	71

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The available data was taken from the past three years (from 2020-2022), and it shows various changes in the numbers of persons starting a course as well as people quitting and returning to finish the course.

Some factors that might have influenced the increase in people signing up and finishing courses, therefore reducing the rate of dropping out from 2021-2022, include the pandemic. Everybody had much more time available. People walked away from their jobs or were laid off, and needed a more secure career path. For example, the Austrian gastronomy industry suffered greatly, and it needed to lay off a large number of people. There are people then, in return, start to look for more secure opportunities in terms of jobs/careers and begin additional education²⁶.

Furthermore, people had time to think and plan in those years, especially since the lockdown was longer in Austria as compared to other countries. Young people seek out educational opportunities as it becomes clear that living month to month is not sustainable. A final factor that might have led to people seeking education and remaining/returning to it might have been the rise in costs of living, as it pushed people to seek upskilling opportunities to increase their earning potential.

In summary, data from the last three years showed some changes in the number of people starting, dropping out, or returning to finish their courses. The pandemic has played an important role in these changes as people sought safer career paths and had more time to think and plan during downtime. In addition, the rising cost of living prompted people to further their education and increase their earning potential. These findings suggest that the pandemic has had, and may continue to have, a profound impact on people's career aspirations and educational choices as well as the possibilities of dropping out of such initiatives.

3.2. Bulgaria

Within the study carried out in the framework of the TeSTED project, the team of DAYANA-X Ltd. contacted the following groups of respondents:

- **Own organizational staff**
 - Administrators of VET courses
 - VET trainers in various fields
- **VET teachers and students** in vocational schools as follows:
 - Vocational School on Transportation – Strazhitsa
 - Technical College – Sliven

²⁶ Poledna, S., Rovenskaya, E., Crespo Cuaresma, J., Kaniovski, S., & Miess, M. (2020). Recovery of the Austrian economy following the COVID-19 crisis can take up to three years.

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- Vocational high school of mechano-electrical engineering and electronics – Burgas
- Vocational high school in woodworking – Plovdiv
- Vocational high school on farming and agro-technic - Kamen
- **Trainers in VET centers** are as follows:
 - CATRO Bulgaria – Sofia
 - Uspechen Start – Burgas

The objectives of the survey were to identify important factors leading students in VET schools and centers to cease their studies, as well as to shape support measures for the prevention of future dropouts.

The data has been collected by the following questionnaires:

- Online survey forms
- Questionnaire for VET Teachers/Trainers and Staff

17 responses have been received.

The summarized opinion expressed by the respondents is the following:

- The profile of the respondents was almost equally represented by teachers, trainers, and administrative staff
- The taught subjects were quite different, varying from ICT to health and agriculture
- Experience was above 4 years
- The majority of the respondents do not see dropping out as a problem of their schools
- The same number of respondents had experience with dropouts
- Half of the respondents think that students drop out during the second semester
- There are fields where dropouts have a bigger ratio
- Almost all suggested reasons for dropping out were high-scored
- Other possible reasons are seen to be with personal origin
- More than half of the respondents think that social vulnerability is a cause for dropping out
- almost the same ratio think that disability is not the cause of dropping out
- more than 88% of the respondents think that sex is not a reason for dropping out
- the same ratio of them confirm that they know about prevention protocol in school
- more than 58% of the respondents think that consultancy work could be in favor of preventing dropping out

Questionnaire for current students

- respondents were in different education stages and specialties
- 2/3 of them state that they know students dropped out
- the same ratio of them state that dropping out is not so common in the VET system
- also, the same ratio of respondents say that social vulnerability is a cause for dropping out
- almost 2/3 of respondents think that disability could be a cause for dropping out
- more than 55% say that sex is not a cause for dropping out
- more than 88% of respondents do not know about prevention programs in their schools

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- more than 66% of respondents say that consultancy could play an important role in the prevention of dropping out

Questionnaire for dropped-out students

- respondents were of different ages, education stages, and specialties
- job perspectives were the primary reason for choosing their specialty
- more than 57% say that VET was their choice
- almost 2/3 of respondents point to lack of finances as a reason for dropping out
- just around 28% of respondents said that they have been looking for support but it was not sufficient
- the same ratio says that they have participated in a consultancy program
- more than 71% think that efficient consultancy could play a positive role in the prevention of dropping out
-

Moreover, we collected data through face-to-face interviews:

- **Teachers and trainers**

Two people have been interviewed.

As the main factors for dropping out, they see poor communication with the teacher of a given subject, misunderstanding of the study material, social environment, and friends. Behind student dropout, there are economic, social, ethno-cultural, and health-related factors as well. Prevention plays the most important role in minimizing cases of dropping out. Timely diagnosis and recognition of signs of danger of dropping out of school are a guarantee of successful reintegration of students. It is necessary to work not only with the student but also with his family to prevent dropping out.

- **Parents of students dropping out**

Two people have been interviewed.

They think that signs of dropout appear early enough to be able to react. The intervention must be adequate - in the sense of the specific type of specialist and that it is aimed at the basis of the problem and not at the consequences. Perhaps more timely explanations of what and why is being studied would be more effective. Expectations should be discussed at certain time intervals that correspond to the changed understanding of the future profession and the conditions for its practice.

- **VET Staff**

Two people have been interviewed.

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The respondents pointed out that there is a real risk of students dropping out and it is necessary to take preventive measures to prevent dropout. Such measures should be in the earliest possible stage. Education and training have to be built on the foundations of demand and reality in modern life.

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3.3. Greece

The Institute of Vocational Training AKMI is the largest VET provider in Greece and one of the 7 largest in Europe. It was founded back in 1989 and today is active in 9 cities across Greece (Athens, Piraeus, Thessaloniki, Heraklion, Larissa, Rhodes, Chalkida, Elliniko, Alexandroupoli) representing almost 60% of the total VET sector in the country providing post-secondary education, of EQF levels 3-5. Every year, approximately 18.000 active students are enrolled to study one of the 112 specialties, in more than 380 laboratories in 14 different sectors within more than 37.500 m2 of infrastructure across the country.

In this context, the survey was conducted with learners and VET trainers/staff. Specifically, 16 questionnaires were completed by learners and 11 by trainers/staff (4 trainers and 7 staff). The trainers/staff survey focused on staff because they are the staff who deal with dropouts, thus coming into more direct contact with learners who have dropped out. In addition, it was quite difficult to contact dropouts or parents. This was because dropouts were dropping out for reasons that created a social stigma.

Questionnaire Results from VET Teachers/Trainers and Staff

The survey resulted in 11 questionnaires completed by trainers/staff (4 trainers and 7 staff). This part of the survey focused on staff because they are who deal with dropouts, thus coming into more direct contact with learners who have dropped out. The table below shows the data extracted from the questionnaires with the most frequent responses.

Q1	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q14	Q15
- 4 Trainees - 7 Staff	- 60% at least 4 years - 40% more than 4 years	- 90% No - 10% Yes	- 70% No - 30% Yes	60% no pattern when students drop out	70% Not necessarily	100% Completely agree - Agree	90% Completely agree - Agree	- 70% No - 30% Males	100% Yes	Every choice was selected, but O. and R. were selected from the majority.

In addition to the above results, in question 8, most responses focused on "Lack of financial resources" and "Lack of motivation from the students" (which is linked to professional and financial integration).

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Questionnaire Results from Current Students

16 questionnaires were completed by learners, who were randomly selected to achieve the most unbiased result possible. The table below shows the data extracted from the questionnaires with the most frequent responses.

Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q12	Q14
- 87,5% No - 12,5% Yes	- 87,5% No - 12,5% Yes	81,25% Completely agree - Agree	75% Completely agree - Agree	87,5% No	100% I am not aware	Every choice was selected, but a. and c. were selected by the majority.

In addition to the above results, in question 10, most responses focused on "Lack of financial resources", "Not enough time due to side jobs", and "Students do not see career prospects".

In-depth Interviews with VET Teachers & Staff

The in-depth interviews were completed by 2 employees of the VET, in the administrative area of the organisation with 4 years of experience. However, their experience with dropout cases was fairly limited. The interviews followed the coding process in 3 stages to extract the most important conclusions from the interviewees' input. The table below presents the main conclusions and observations that have been extracted from the interviews.

Results of Exploratory Questions
- Learners face financial difficulties and have to enter the labor market earlier, so they drop out of their studies. - Learners are not motivated and do not have solid career guidance, so they leave their studies to pursue another field of study or career path. - The most visible signs that a learner is about to drop out are poor performance in exams, etc., and absence from classes. - Also, there has been a pattern observed, the older the learner the more difficult it is to drop out of studies because it is a more realized decision.

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- The most common proactive measures available to deal with them are progress updates and discussions with teachers and learner to discuss the causes and, if possible, ways of dealing with them. This is not often the case.
- Applying support systems to address financial constraints.
- Development of motivational initiatives, with a particular focus on professional and economic integration.
- Establishing constant monitoring mechanisms for early detection of possible abandonment.

Results of Conclusions/Recommendations

- Financial difficulties and the need to enter the labor market early are important factors that lead learners to abandon their studies.
- Lack of motivation and inadequate career guidance often push learners to drop out of their studies to pursue alternative fields or career paths.
- Visible signs of potential drop-out include poor performance in examinations and frequent non-attendance at classes.
- Financial barriers are a key challenge, forcing the learners to decide early on to leave their studies to work.
- Proactive measures, including progress updates and conversations, are effective but not consistently implemented.
- A notable pattern suggests that older learners drop out more rarely, suggesting a more deliberate decision-making process.
- Support mechanisms that address financial barriers and motivational initiatives, with a particular focus on professional and economic integration, have a decisive factor in preventing drop-out.

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- Ongoing monitoring mechanisms are important for early detection and intervention to prevent drop-outs.

Summary

Findings from 11 staff questionnaires and 16 learners' questionnaires highlighted issues such as financial barriers and lack of motivation as the main reasons for dropping out. It is worth noting that older learners appeared less likely to drop out, suggesting a more thoughtful decision-making process. Proactive measures, such as progress updates and conversations, were identified but not consistently implemented. A lack of awareness of certain issues among current learners was evident, highlighting the need for targeted measures. In-depth interviews with two experienced staff members highlighted the importance of financial assistance and the role of support mechanisms and motivational initiatives in preventing dropouts. The study concludes that addressing financial challenges, providing solid career guidance, and maintaining ongoing monitoring mechanisms are crucial to reducing student dropout in the vocational education and training sector.

3.4. Romania

From the perspective of the Iasi School Inspectorate, a local authority representing the Romanian Ministry of National Education, school units should identify viable solutions to reduce the phenomenon of early school leaving and carry out, on a constant and sustained basis, counseling activities for students and their parents, in the context of the post-pandemic situation.

USLIP Iasi conducted an analysis study with five vocational and technical schools from Iasi County:

1. College "Vasile Adamachi" Iasi
2. Technical College "Gheorghe Asachi" Iasi
3. Economic High School "Nicolae Iorga", Pascani
4. Technological High School "Mihai Busuioc", Pascani
5. Stolniceni-Prajescu Vocational School

The research objective focused on identifying the main factors that lead some students in the vocational education and training system to drop out of school, to create support mechanisms for future students, and improve their study experience.

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Data and statistics from these schools were collected and analyzed, with the support of school staff and management, by completing two questionnaires and conducting interviews with school principals, VET trainers, technical subject teachers, and teacher trainers:

1. Student questionnaire, *Tackling Dropouts Through Systematic Student Screening*²⁷

12 questionnaires were completed by students from the 5 schools

2. Questionnaire for teachers, *Tackling Dropouts Through Systematic Student Screening*²⁸

10 questionnaires were completed by VET staff from the 5 schools

3. Interviews with VET staff (6 interviews with school principals, trainers, and VET staff)²⁹

From the analysis of the institutional documents of the 5 schools, it appears that the problem of dropout is a major challenge, referring to certain criteria specific to this field: mechanisms to ensure the quality of the educational act, financing mechanisms, adequacy of graduates' skills to the labor market requirements, all these elements related to the lack of insufficient mechanisms on the part of schools to control dropout.³⁰

Dropouts come from certain disadvantaged backgrounds, from single-parent families, with parents living abroad, or from certain social and minority groups. The factors that cause pupils to drop out are also closely linked to the context in which pupils have come to be educated at these schools:

- computerized redistribution to these schools due to low grades in the National Assessment (at the end of 8th grade),
- lack of motivation of the pupils for the specializations to which they were reassigned,
- lack of career prospects for the vocational specializations they are studying
- social perception/public image of vocational education
- poor communication between family and school

Few students choose vocational schools out of passion or internal motivation or for the specializations on offer at these institutions.³¹ Schools that offer attractive specializations, which are sought after by children, do not have great difficulties in this area, but most schools are faced with the problem of

²⁷ *Summary of questionnaires* <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1dbuDRWtTwXrPI4bSa4BzapexrNjQZpXaR7jFddzmzSU/edit#responses>

²⁸ *Summary of questionnaires* https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1UcqAyhndduLKhELfNIGDDO4vzAnqB2yGsoV_roDldVs/edit#responses

²⁹ *Interviews with VET staff*

<https://onedrive.live.com/?authkey=%21AL6UdnY2q1hwhDc&id=9C3387C8A595D828%21834&cid=9C3387C8A595D828>

³⁰ Official data taken from the schools' websites:

Vasile Adamachi College, <https://colegiuladamachi.ro/>, Gheorghe Asachi Technical College, <https://www.colegiulasachi.ro/>, Mihai Busuioc Pascani High School, <https://licmihaiabusuioc.ro/>, Nicolae Iorga Economic High School, <https://lteniorga.ro/>

³¹ *Interview with teacher Bucataru Vladimir, 20/04/2023, Pascani, Mihai Busuioc High School*

<https://onedrive.live.com/?authkey=%21AL6UdnY2q1hwhDc&id=9C3387C8A595D828%21903&cid=9C3387C8A595D828>

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dropping out, a common phenomenon among pupils in technological and vocational education. Pupils in these institutions generally do not see the career prospects or the attractiveness of the specializations offered by the schools, which leads them to take up seasonal employment during their schooling and drop out.³²

The teachers from the five schools, who completed questionnaires and conducted interviews, believe that the following factors play an important role in the dropout problem:

- Lack of financial resources (100%)
- Lack of family support (77%)
- Lack of motivation on the part of students, due to computerized redistribution (55%)
- Students do not see career prospects (44%)³³

As regards the measures that should be taken to encourage pupils not to drop out of school, there are some similarities in the questionnaires completed by pupils and teachers. Both categories consider that the following mechanisms are necessary:

- **Counselling programs to analyze personal problems** that may prevent students from attending classes, such as lack of interest in school, relationships with peers, teenage mothers, death of a parent, or communication difficulties in the family (41.7% of students' responses and 55.6% of teachers' responses).
- **Additional guidance regarding courses and/or exams** (25% of pupils' responses and 55.6% of teachers' responses)
- **Financial support:** several national support programs for pupils in school, social grants, etc. (16.7% of pupils' responses and 33% of teachers' responses)

Teachers in the 5 schools interviewed consider that the following mechanisms/measures to reduce dropout could be useful:

- **More placements/movements in Erasmus+ projects**, which can strengthen the attractiveness of the specializations in which pupils are enrolled.³⁴
- **Involvement of family/parents in educational activities** and the need to show the attractiveness of the chosen field for the future of children.³⁵

³² *Questionnaire for students,*

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1dbuDRWtTwXrPI4bSa4BzapexrNJQZpXaR7jFddzmzSU/edit#responses>

³³ *Questionnaire for teachers,*

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1UcqAyhndduLKhElfNIGDDO4vzAnqB2yGsoV_roDldVs/edit#responses

³⁴ *Interview with Dan Chihaia, 3/04/2023, Vasile Adamachi College Iasi*

<https://onedrive.live.com/?authkey=%21AL6UdnY2q1hwhDc&id=9C3387C8A595D828%21902&cid=9C3387C8A595D828>

³⁵ *Interview with Angela Blagoci, 26/04/2023, Stolniceni Prajescu Vocational School*

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- **Counseling programs** for both pupils and parents³⁶

The challenges for vocational schools are numerous and topical. In the Public Policy Report, "Vocational and Technical Education, Challenges and Development Perspectives", produced by the Institute for Quality of Life Research, Romanian Academy, the focus is on optimizing the education and training system to meet the demands of the labor market, promoting equal access to education and fostering lifelong learning, with an emphasis on combining the two major types of learning - in school and at work.³⁷

In conclusion, the attractiveness of the vocational school system and its relevance to the needs of the beneficiaries are now priorities to be taken into account. Counseling and career guidance services for pupils and parents are extremely important in determining pupils' career paths and counseling should be carried out by specialized staff who apply various tests, systematic observation of pupil behavior over a longer period, or other ways of identifying pupils' development potential to reduce drop-out.

4. Transnational analysis

In general, the studies carried out show that the factors that contribute to school dropout are multiple and can be grouped into several categories such as:

- **demographic and economic factors** (unemployment, low incomes, reduced living standards, migration of families)
- **social factors** (discrimination, social segregation, lack of access to quality education)
- **school factors** (inadequate teaching methods, unfavorable school climate, lack of student involvement)
- **family factors** (poverty, family conflicts, lack of parental support)
- **individual factors** (learning difficulties, mental health problems, lack of motivation).

<https://onedrive.live.com/?authkey=%21AL6UdnY2q1hwhDc&id=9C3387C8A595D828%21906&cid=9C3387C8A595D828>

³⁶ *Interview with Catalina Atudosiei, 20/04/2023, Mihai Busuioc Technological Highschool*

<https://onedrive.live.com/?authkey=%21AL6UdnY2q1hwhDc&id=9C3387C8A595D828%21893&cid=9C3387C8A595D828>

³⁷ *Professional and technical education, challenges and development prospects, Public policy report, Quality of Life Research Institute, 2016*
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/310609289_Invatamantul_profesional_si_tehnic_Provocari_si_perspective_de_dezvoltare

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The research results from the transnational report of the TESTED project show that, in the case of the 4 partner countries, school dropout is a complex problem with multiple causes. The main reasons for dropout identified during the first phase of research can be grouped into two main categories:

1. **The socio-economic and demographic approach:**

- **Economic:** lack of financial resources, low incomes, reduced living standards, migration;
- **Social:** parental disinterest, contradictions, conflicts, and crises in the family;
- **Demographic:** age, gender, ethnicity, social origin, geographic location;

2. **The psychological approach:**

- **Individual reasons:** lack of motivation, the perception of inappropriateness in the school environment, negative attitude of the participants in the learning process, difficulties in learning the learning content, lack of career prospects, inappropriate choice of school or profile.
- **Educational reasons:** a large number of absences, poor discipline, aggression at school, low educational results, and relationships at school.
- **Institutional reasons:** an insufficiently coordinated approach between different services and specialists at national, local, regional, and school levels.
- **Health status:** the risks of premature leaving of students with learning difficulties and mental health problems.

The national reports were analyzed to identify the common risk factors from the 4 countries, factors that were most frequently associated with school dropout. Risk factors that may explain students' intention to drop out of school can be grouped into distinct categories, but they often intersect and influence each other.

The results of this study helped the consortium to identify risk factors, outline priority areas, measure key conditions, and align the questions of the evaluation tool with the project objectives, before starting the design of the TeSTED assessment tool.

- The relevant risk factors selected:

Austria	Lack of motivation for school
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	Lack of career prospects
	Learning difficulties that isolate students and distance them from the school community
	fear/anxiety and physical problems faced by students
	Lack of family support
	Socio-economically disadvantaged environments
Bulgaria	Complex programs in VET education that generate students' lack of motivation
	Low academic performance in VET schools
	Parents' disinterest
	Almost 2/3 of respondents point to lack of finances as the reason for dropping out of studies in Bulgaria
	Difficulties regarding the assimilation of learning content, negative attitude of students in the learning process, and lack of motivation
	The negative impact of the family environment is violence and incomplete families
	Lack of socialization in the "transnational" family in Bulgaria generates risks: behavior, emotions, aggression, substance abuse, illegal acts
	Students who are treated severely by their parents and who have disruptive behavior, by committing antisocial acts
	"Transnational families"
Greece	Lack of financial resources
	Lack of motivation for school
	Limited perception of vocational education
	Cultural perceptions: A traditional preference for academic education over vocational schooling.
	The mismatch between skills acquired by students and labor market requirements
	Learners are not motivated and lack solid career guidance
Romania	Students' lack of motivation for the specializations to which they were assigned by the computer. Few students choose vocational schools out of passion or internal motivation or for the specializations offered at these institutions.

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	Lack of career prospects or the attractiveness of specializations offered by schools leads them to work seasonally during school and drop out of school.
	The student's state of health, bullying, tense relationships between students, and anxiety.
	Students who do not have family support (with parents abroad)
	Rural environment
	Lack of financial resources
	Learning difficulties that generate frustration, failure, and anxiety.

5. Conclusions

Research findings from these five countries shed light on challenges and strategies related to dropout rates in vocational education and training (VET). Although each country has unique circumstances and approaches, summarized in the conclusions, some common themes emerge:

Risk Factor 1	Disadvantaged environments	Austria, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece
Risk Factor 2	Lack of family support	Austria, Bulgaria, Romania
Risk Factor 3	Lack of financial resources	Romania, Bulgaria, Greece
Risk Factor 4	Lack of student motivation	Romania, Austria, Greece, Bulgaria
Risk Factor 5	Lack of career prospects	Romania, Bulgaria, Greece
Risk Factor 6	Inadequate institutional support system	Greece, Bulgaria, Romania

The aim and challenge is to understand these factors in various educational contexts and propose strategies to mitigate them:

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In all five countries, economic and social factors play a significant role in student dropout rates. Economic challenges, such as unemployment and low family incomes, can force students to leave school prematurely (**RF1 & RF3**)

Social factors, including family dynamics and community influences, also contribute to the problem. Ensuring that vulnerable and marginalized populations have equal access to education is essential and can have a significant social impact. (**RF2**)

Student motivation and support systems are central to reducing dropout rates. When students lack motivation or feel disconnected from their schools, they are more likely to leave. The quality of education in VET programs is a critical factor influencing dropout rates. If students perceive that the education they receive does not lead to valuable skills or meaningful job opportunities, they are more likely to drop out. The perception of VET compared to academic education influences dropout rates. In some countries, there is a cultural bias towards higher education, leading many students to choose academic paths over vocational ones. (**RF4 & RF5 & RF6**)

While these factors are prevalent across different countries, their impact can vary based on local contexts. Addressing the multifaceted issue of school dropout requires a comprehensive approach involving economic support, improved school environments, mental health services, and genuine family and community engagement. Tailoring these strategies to fit local contexts will be essential for their success across different countries. By implementing these measures, we can work towards reducing dropout rates and ensuring that more students complete their education, thereby improving their prospects and contributing to societal development.

The profile of the students at risk of dropping out

According to the transnational analysis report, the profile of the students who are at risk of dropping out is as follows:

-  students with no clear career guidance from a VET school
-  students who are not motivated to continue their studies
-  Students whose parents are abroad
-  students who live in disadvantaged communities
-  students with a low economic profile
-  students feel no counseling support from the VET school
-  students who were involved in bullying episodes
-  students with learning difficulties that generate frustration, failure, and anxiety

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Recommendations & Priority Areas for the Design of the TeSTED Assessment Tool

Each student has an individual profile with unique needs; in this context, more tools are needed to customize intervention strategies, monitor progress, and give all students a chance to succeed. Offering flexible learning pathways within the VET system, such as part-time or online courses, apprenticeships, and work-based learning opportunities, can accommodate diverse learning styles and personal circumstances, reducing the probability of dropout.

We therefore aim to create more inclusive and supportive learning environments, ultimately improving outcomes for VET students through useful working tools for teachers, such as the Assessment Tool, which can detect early signs of student distress and identify those at risk of dropping out of school. The main purpose of this dropout risk assessment tool is to identify students who are at risk of leaving school before completing their studies.

The TeSTED assessment tool will focus on specific questions that will assess the student's current psychological state and recognize possible signs of distress due to his socioeconomic difficulties. Early identification of such situations will allow the implementation of targeted interventions to support students to stay in school and complete their studies. The use of such a dropout risk assessment tool would reduce the dropout rate by identifying at-risk students and providing appropriate support, improve the school outcomes of students who receive additional support, and increase their employability.

Risk factors for school dropout become priority areas of intervention in the process of developing an Assessment Tool on school dropout. This is because identifying and understanding these risk factors is crucial to designing effective prevention and intervention strategies to reduce dropout rates.

A dropout assessment tool, therefore, becomes a tool used to assess the likelihood that a student will drop out of school and consists of a series of questions that measure various factors associated with school dropout, such as:

- **Academic factors:** low grades, poor attendance, difficulty with homework, lack of motivation
- **Personal factors:** low self-esteem, lack of social support, family problems, substance abuse
- **School factors:** negative school climate, poor relations with teachers, lack of school activities
- **Economic and socio-demographic factors:** poverty, financial difficulties, the need to work.

The identification and evaluation of risk factors is essential for understanding the causes of school dropout: knowing the factors that increase the probability of school dropout can help identify students at risk and develop effective prevention strategies.

By identifying students who are at risk of dropping out based on their responses to the questionnaire, schools, and other stakeholders can focus their interventions on addressing the specific risk factors that

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are most likely to contribute to dropping out. This targeted approach may be more effective than blanket prevention programs that do not take into account individual student needs.

Thus, the risk factors identified through an assessment tool regarding school dropout can be addressed through certain types of personalized interventions, focused on the student's needs:

- **Academic Interventions:** providing tutoring, after-school programs, and summer school opportunities to help students improve grades and catch up on missed work.
- **Personal Interventions:** providing counseling, mentoring, and social support services to help students develop coping skills, develop self-esteem, and address personal issues.
- **School interventions:** creating a more positive and supportive school climate, improving communication between teachers and students, and offering a variety of extracurricular activities.

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