

Proposal for an Action Plan to Reduce Early School Leaving in Spain

Early school leaving (ESL) can lead to mounting individual challenges and generate high economic costs to education systems and societies at large. In response, many OECD and EU countries have made the reduction of ESL a policy priority. Spain has made significant progress in reducing ESL in recent years; in 2022, the ESL rate was 13,9% – almost half the points of a decade earlier. Despite this achievement, the average ESL rate in Spain is still well above the European Commission target of 9% and among the highest in the EU and OECD. There are also noteworthy regional disparities within Spain, with rates ranging from 5% to more than 15% across different autonomous communities.

This situation has prompted the Spanish Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (*Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional* or MEFP) to request assistance from the European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM) to support the implementation of its reform agenda geared towards reducing ESL. This request laid the foundation for the 2021-2023 project "Support to tackle early school leaving in Spain", funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument and implemented by the OECD in collaboration with DG REFORM and the MEFP.

Informed by national and international research evidence and good practices, and by the expert contribution of key education stakeholders, the project has identified existing strengths and challenges to address ESL across Spain. These efforts have resulted in the presented proposal for an action plan consisting of "five areas for action" that each include a range of evidence-based and actionable recommendations for a coordinated approach to preventing and addressing ESL in all autonomous communities and in the cities of Ceuta and Melilla.

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Glossary

2022 Organic Law on VET	<i>Ley Orgánica 3/2022, de 31 de marzo, de ordenación e integración de la Formación Profesional</i>	Organic Law 3/2022, 31 March, on the Organisation and Integration of the Vocational Education and Training Offer
ANPE	<i>Sindicato profesional de la Enseñanza Pública</i>	Professional Trade Union for public education
CCOO	<i>Comisiones Obreras</i>	Spanish Trade Union
CEPA	<i>Centros de Educación de Personas Adultas</i>	Adult Education Centres
CEPES	<i>Confederación Empresarial Española de la Economía Social</i>	Federation of Social Economy Entrepreneurs
CERMI	<i>Comité Español de Representantes de Personas con discapacidad</i>	Spanish Committee of representatives for people with disabilities
CONCAPA	<i>Confederación Católica Nacional de Padres de Alumnos</i>	National Catholic Federation of Parents of Students
E2O	<i>Escuelas de Segunda Oportunidad</i>	Second chance schools
EBAU	<i>Evaluación del Bachillerato para el Acceso a la Universidad</i>	Baccalaureate Evaluation for Access to University
ECEC	<i>Educación Infantil</i>	Early childhood education and care
ESL	<i>Abandono Escolar Temprano</i>	Early School Leaving
ESO	<i>Educación Secundaria Obligatoria</i>	Lower secondary (compulsory) education
FAEA	<i>Asociación de Entidades de Educación de Personas Adultas</i>	Adult Education Centres Association
FEDADI	<i>Federación de Asociaciones de Directivos de Centros Educativos Públicos</i>	Federation of associations of Public School Leaders
GESO	<i>Graduado en Educación Secundaria Obligatoria</i>	Lower secondary (compulsory) education diploma
INE	<i>Instituto Nacional de Estadística</i>	National Statistics Institute
INEE	<i>Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa</i>	National Institute for Educational Evaluation
LOMLOE	<i>Ley Orgánica 3/2020, de 29 de diciembre, por la que se modifica la Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación</i>	Organic Law 3/2020, 29 th of December, Amending the Organic Law 2/2006, 3 rd of May, on Education
MEFP	<i>Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional</i>	Ministry of Education and Vocational Training
NEAE	<i>Necesidad Específica de Apoyo Educativo</i>	(students) requiring specific educational support
NEE	<i>Necesidades de Educación Especiales</i>	(students with) special education needs
PDC	<i>Programa de Diversificación Curricular</i>	Curricular diversification programme
PROA+	<i>Programa para la orientación, avance y enriquecimiento educativo</i>	Programme for Educational Orientation, Advancement and Enrichment
PRTR	<i>Plan de Recuperación, Transformación y Resiliencia</i>	Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan
PTSC	<i>Profesor técnico de servicios a la comunidad</i>	Teacher with specialised training in and responsibilities for social and community work
UAO	<i>Unidades de Acompañamiento y Orientación</i>	Support and Guidance Service Units
VET	<i>Formación Profesional</i>	Vocational Education and Training

Why an action plan to reduce early school leaving and why now?

Young people who leave school early risk social exclusion as they often face challenges in finding and keeping a job, and are consequently prone to long-term social and economic disadvantage (OECD, 2016^[1]; OECD, 2021^[2]; OECD, 2021^[3]). In addition to individual challenges (e.g. job insecurity, discouragement to participate in the labour market, personal health, self-worth), large numbers of early school leavers also represent high economic costs (as a result of high youth unemployment and poverty rates) and a growing risk of an increasingly divided society (OECD, 2016^[1]; Freeman and Simonsen, 2015^[4]; Gitschthaler and Nairz-Wirth, 2018^[5]). In response, many OECD and EU countries have made the reduction of early school leaving (ESL) a policy priority. A guiding policy framework in the EU context is the Strategic Framework for Education and Training of the European Union (ET2020), updated with the 2021 Council Resolution, which calls for the reduction of ESL in all member states to below 9% by 2030 (Council of the European Union, 2021^[6]).

In line with the EU definition, the Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE), and therefore this report, define ESL as people aged 18 to 24 who have not completed upper secondary education and who are not participating in any type of studies or training, so their highest educational level is, at most, lower secondary education (INE, n.d.^[7]).

Spain has made significant progress in reducing ESL in recent years; in 2022, the ESL rate in Spain was 13,9% – almost half the percentage points of a decade earlier. Despite this achievement, the average ESL rate in Spain is still well above the ET2020 target and among the highest in the EU and OECD. There are also noteworthy regional disparities within Spain, with ESL rates ranging from 5% to more than 15% across autonomous communities. Evidence shows that reducing ESL becomes more challenging as the proportion of early school leavers declines and requires more complex and targeted solutions to help those alienated from education and training (European Commission, 2013^[8]). All in all, the high number of early school leavers and substantial regional and local differences continue to represent a major challenge for many of Spain's young people, its education system and society at large.

This situation has prompted the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (*Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional* or MEFP) of Spain to request assistance from the European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM), to support the implementation of its reform agenda geared towards reducing ESL across Spain's autonomous communities and in the cities of Ceuta and Melilla. This request laid the foundation for the project "Support to tackle early school leaving in Spain", which was initiated in 2021, funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument and implemented by the OECD in collaboration with DG REFORM and the MEFP.

The project aimed to better enable and equip Spanish national and regional authorities to implement effective measures to reduce ESL, resulting in the formulation of an evidence-informed action plan and a coordinated approach to preventing and addressing ESL in all autonomous communities and in the cities of Ceuta and Melilla.

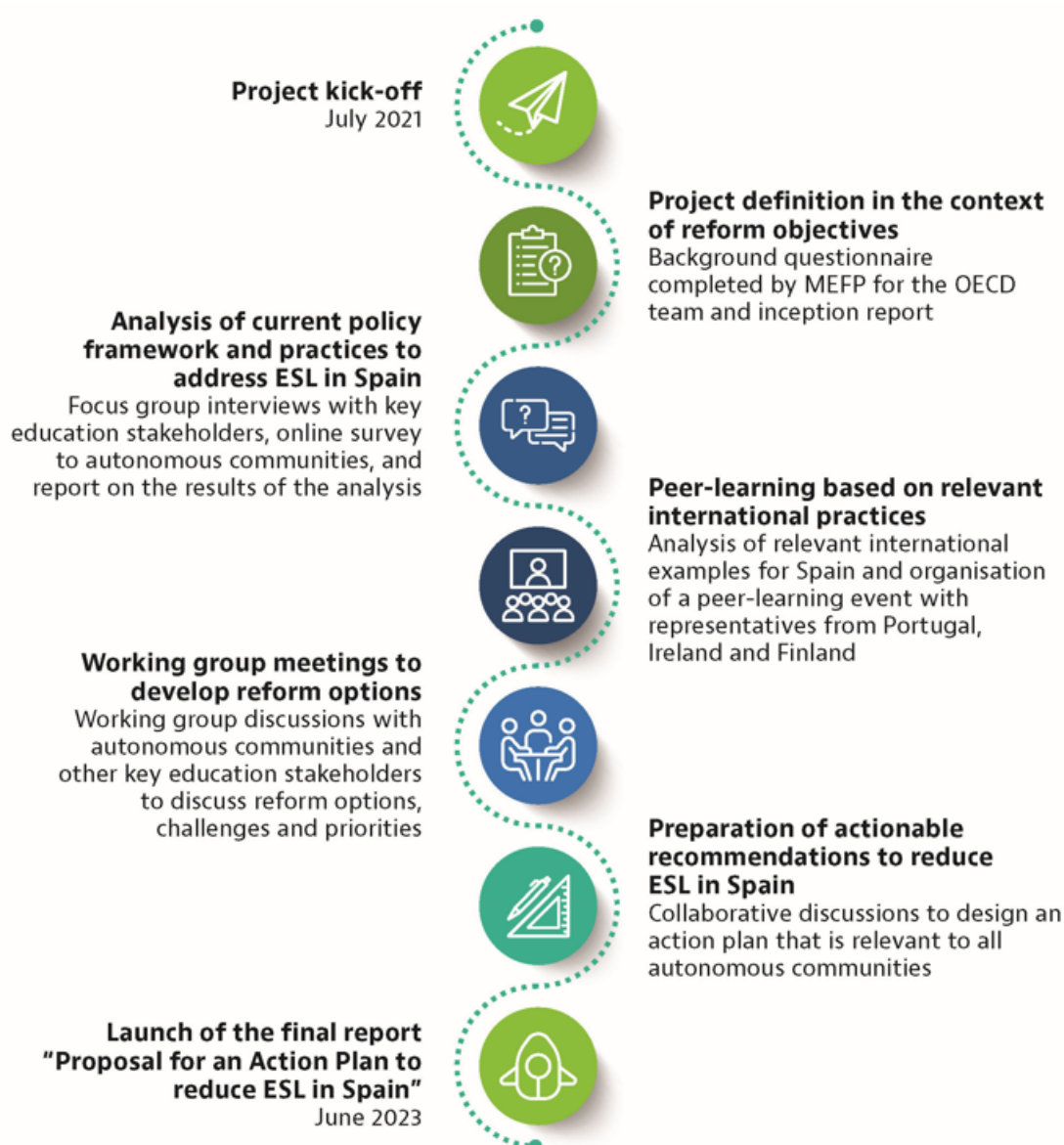
The project objectives were for:

- Authorities to **gain a shared understanding of the critical policy actions to address ESL** in Spain and related good practices.
- Authorities and stakeholders to **identify concrete and evidence-based policy reform options**.
- Authorities to complete the **design of an action plan to prevent and address ESL**, with technical assistance provided by the OECD team.

Overview of the project

The project implemented a series of interrelated diagnostic activities including a strong stakeholder engagement process with representatives of the education authorities from the autonomous communities and other stakeholders (Figure 1). A Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) was established, consisting of representatives from Spanish education organisations and networks to serve as a consultative platform throughout the project. The list of representatives from the SAG and an overview of all stakeholder engagement activities is provided in 1Annex A. Informed by national and international research evidence, good practices, and the contribution from the education authorities of the autonomous communities, the diagnosis has identified existing strengths that Spain can build on, as well as gaps and challenges to be further addressed. These efforts have resulted in the presented proposal for an action plan to reduce ESL in all autonomous communities and in the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla.

Figure 1. Project overview

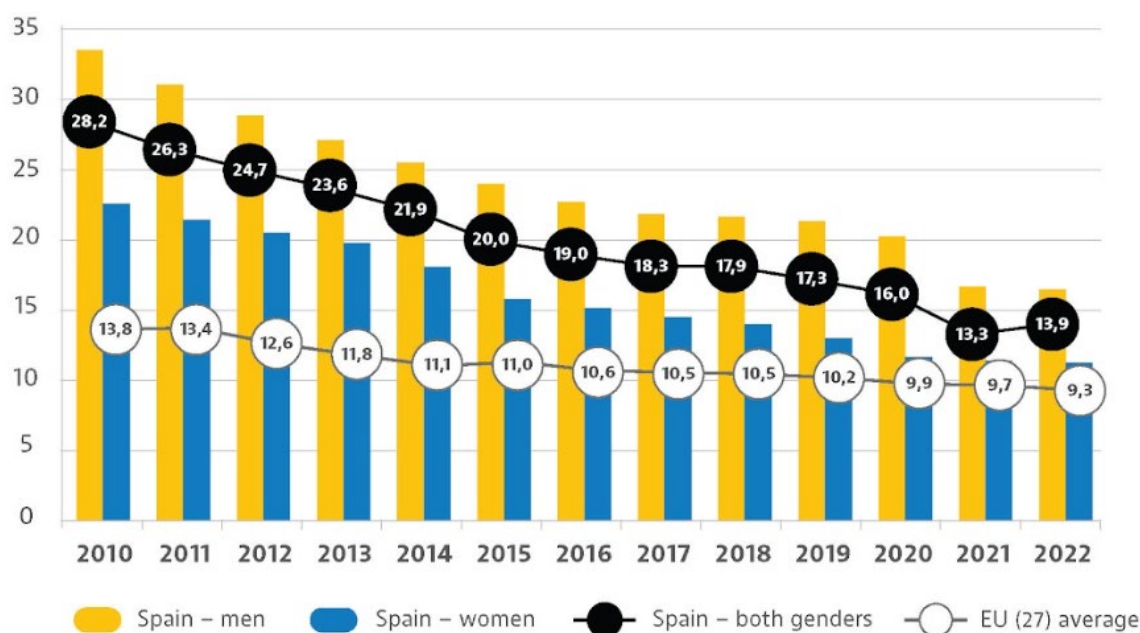


Early school leaving in Spain – progress made and contributing factors

Early school leaving in Spain

During the last decade Spain has shown remarkable progress in reducing ESL (13,9% in 2022). That said, it still has one of the highest ESL rates among OECD and EU countries, with significant differences between men and women (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Early school leaving rates in Spain and in the EU, 2010-2022 (in%)



Source: Adapted from (MEFP, 2023^[9]) and (Eurostat, 2023^[10]).

Furthermore, while several autonomous communities have already reached the ET2020 objective of an ESL rate below 9% (the Basque Country, Cantabria and Navarra), others are still far from achieving this objective (Figure 3). These include six autonomous communities with ESL rates above 15%, Castilla-La Mancha, Andalusia, Valencian Community, Catalonia, the Balearic Islands, Region of Murcia, and the city of Ceuta.

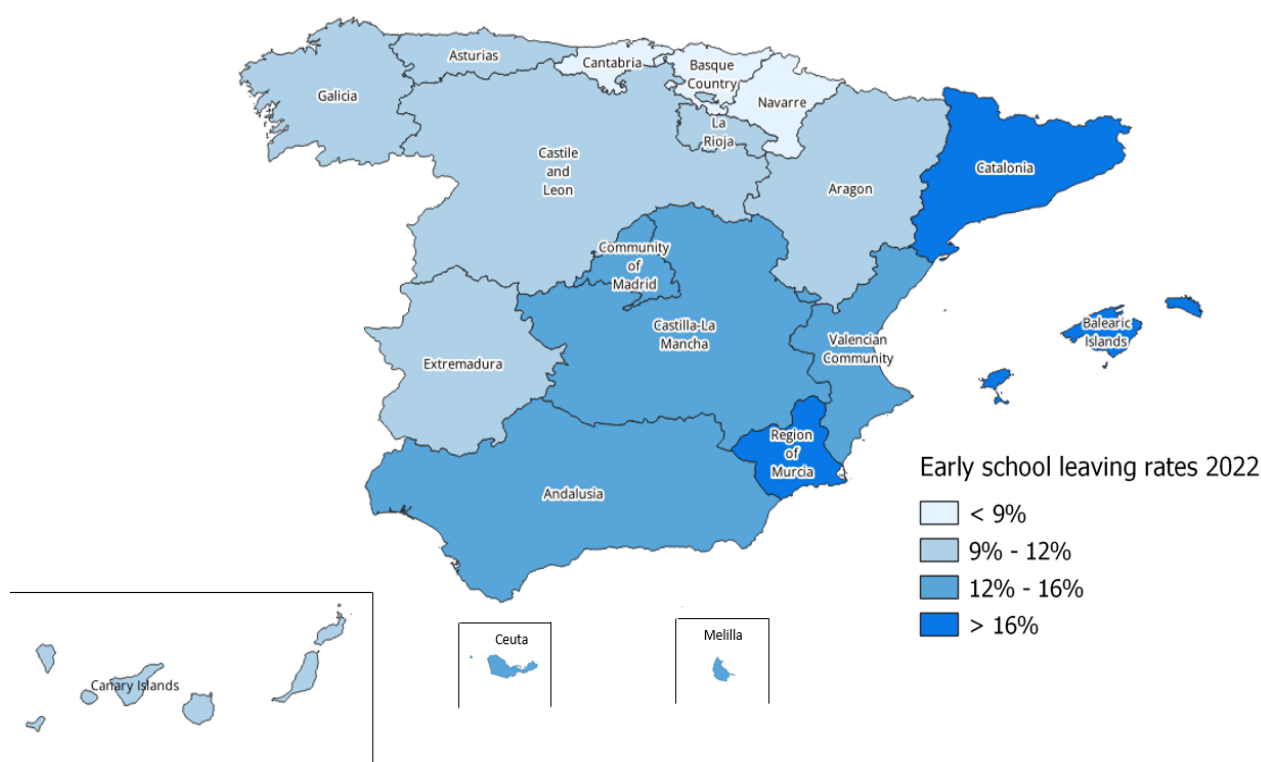
High ESL is also reflected in poor educational attainment. In 2021, 28% of young adults (25-34 year-olds) in Spain had left school without an upper secondary qualification, well above the OECD average of 14% (OECD, 2022^[11]). In the same year, the percentage of young adults who had completed compulsory secondary education (lower secondary) and was still studying was 61.2%, compared to 71% in OECD countries and 74.4% in the EU (OECD, 2022^[11]).

The evidence available suggests several “pressure points” where students seem at greater risk of early school leaving (Figure 4). Pressure points tend to occur towards the end of lower secondary education, when students reach the age of 16, and education stops being compulsory. For example, from the students completing the (lower secondary) Basic-level VET programme in 2019, 61.8% continued into the Intermediate level VET programme and 1.2% continued into the general upper secondary education programme. More than a third of students (36%), however, did not continue their schooling (Valdés and Sancho Gargallo, 2022^[12]). Furthermore, a 2019 survey showed that from all students that had completed lower secondary education in the school year 2013/14, 95.9% continued formal education (in general upper

secondary or VET programmes). Among these students, two years later, in the 2016/17 school year, 83.4% remained in the education system (INE, 2020^[13]).

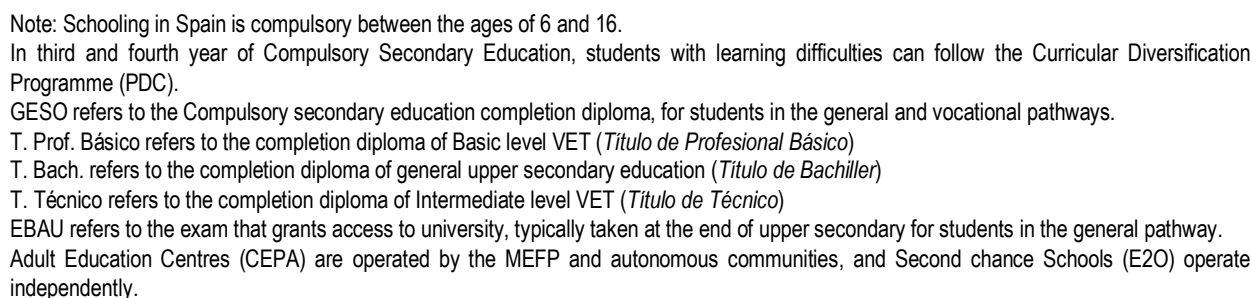
As will be elaborated below, recent measures by the Government, including the Organic Laws 3/2020 on Education (*Ley Orgánica, por la que se modifica la Ley Orgánica de la Educación* or LOMLOE) and the 3/2022 on Vocational Education (*Ley Orgánica de Ordenación e Integración de la Formación Profesional*), aim to provide more curricular flexibility and adaptable study pathways to help ensure students stay and succeed in school. Students struggling in lower secondary Years 3 and 4 can follow the Curricular Diversification Programme (*Programas de Diversificación Curricular*, or PDC) which offers an adapted programme with grouped and fewer subject courses, allowing for a more individualised and practical approach to learning. Starting from the third year of lower secondary, students can also enrol in the Basic-level VET programme, which is increasingly seen as an alternative to leaving school early (Moso et al., 2022^[14]). Completing either pathway results in obtaining the Compulsory Secondary Education completion diploma, known as the GESO (*Graduado en Educación Secundaria Obligatoria*) and so the possibility to progress to all upper secondary education pathways (general upper secondary or Intermediate level VET). There is no standardised examination for students to complete upper secondary education. Those who successfully pass all courses receive a diploma attesting completion of upper secondary. Students who wish to pursue a tertiary education can sit the EBAU examination (*Evaluación del Bachillerato para el Acceso a la Universidad*). Passing this exam provides access to university studies (see Figure 4).

Figure 3. Early school leaving rates in Spain by autonomous communities, 2022



Note: The autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla have been scaled up for purposes of readability and practicality.

Source: Adapted from (MEFP, 2023^[9]) "Abandono temprano de la educación-formación por comunidad autónoma, sexo y periodo" [Early leaving from education and training by autonomous community, gender and time period], Educabase (database), <http://estadisticas.mecd.gob.es/EducaDynPx/educabase/index.htm?type=pcaxis&path=/laborales/epa/aban&file=pcaxis&l=s0> (accessed on 20 March 2023)



The factors influencing ESL are various and contribute to a cumulative process of students disengaging with learning and school (European Commission, 2013^[8]; Gubbels, van der Put and Assink, 2019^[15]). Drawing from the international literature and findings from Spain, these factors can be divided in three groups – individual factors, factors resulting from education policies and practices, and macro-economic and social factors – of which an overview is provided below.

Research evidence shows that, at the individual level, student performance is often found to be one of the most important predictors for a student to leave school early, as low grades signal lower preparation to progress through the educational system (Chung and Lee, 2019_[16]; Freeman and Simonsen, 2015_[41]).

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women: 16.5% and 11.2% respectively in 2022, compared to EU averages of 11.4% and 7.5 % (Figure 3) (MEFP, 2023^[9]; Ruiz-Valenzuela and Moltalban Castilla, 2022^[17]).

The evidence also shows that students' socio-economic status and family environment, including parents' level of education, immigration background, ethnicity and knowledge of the language of instruction also exert an influence on ESL (Bianchi et al., 2021^[18]; Sani, 2017^[19]; Cohen Goldner and Epstein, 2014^[20]; De Witte et al., 2013^[21]). Students with an immigrant background tend to be more at risk of ESL as they are more likely to possess the set of characteristics that are normally associated to ESL behaviour (such as having a low socio-economic status, or lack of knowledge of the language of instruction) (OECD, 2023^[22]; Soler et al., 2021^[23]; van der Graaf et al., 2019^[24]; Hippe and Jakubowski, 2022^[25]). In Spain, ESL is much higher among youth living in households from the lowest two income quintiles (Soler et al., 2021^[23]). In 2021, students whose mothers' highest level of education was primary education were ten times more likely to leave school early, compared to students whose mothers had completed a tertiary education (ESL rate 31.8% and 2.5% respectively) (Soler et al., 2021^[23]; MEFP, 2022^[26]). For youth from the Roma community, 6 out of 10 young people do not successfully complete compulsory education (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2013^[27]).

Factors resulting from education policies and practices

Education policies and structures (such as those on school choice, tracking, resourcing) and the school environment also influence the decisions and motivation of young people to continue with their education and training (Chung and Lee, 2019^[16]; Freeman and Simonsen, 2015^[4]; OECD, 2012^[28]). School segregation decreases opportunities for children to learn and interact with peers from different socio-economic, cultural or ethnic backgrounds, which can weaken social cohesion. There is evidence that in Spain socio-economic school segregation also harms achievement both for native-born and foreign-born students (Ferrer and Gortázar, 2021^[29]; Murillo and Belavi, 2021^[30]), and as such increases the risk of ESL (OECD, forthcoming^[31]).

Grade repetition and absenteeism are often found to be predictors of ESL (Manacorda, 2012^[32]; van der Graaf et al., 2019^[24]; Ikeda and García, 2014^[33]; Smerillo et al., 2018^[34]; OECD, 2023^[22]); a finding that has triggered several OECD and EU countries to take explicit policy measures to reduce these (European Union, 2015^[35]). In terms of student absenteeism, OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment, PISA 2018 showed that 29.6% of 15-year-olds in Spain reported they had skipped a whole day of school at least once in the two weeks prior to participating in the student assessment, compared to an OECD average of 21.3 % (OECD, 2019^[36]). In addition, Spain has one of the highest shares of grade repeaters in the OECD, especially in lower secondary (OECD, 2019^[37]) (Figure 5). Grade repetition has been found to lower students' motivation and attainment expectations, hinder school performance, lead to ESL and increase education costs. It can also contribute to maintaining inequalities in the education system and later in the labour market (OECD, 2012^[28]; Ikeda and García, 2014^[33]).

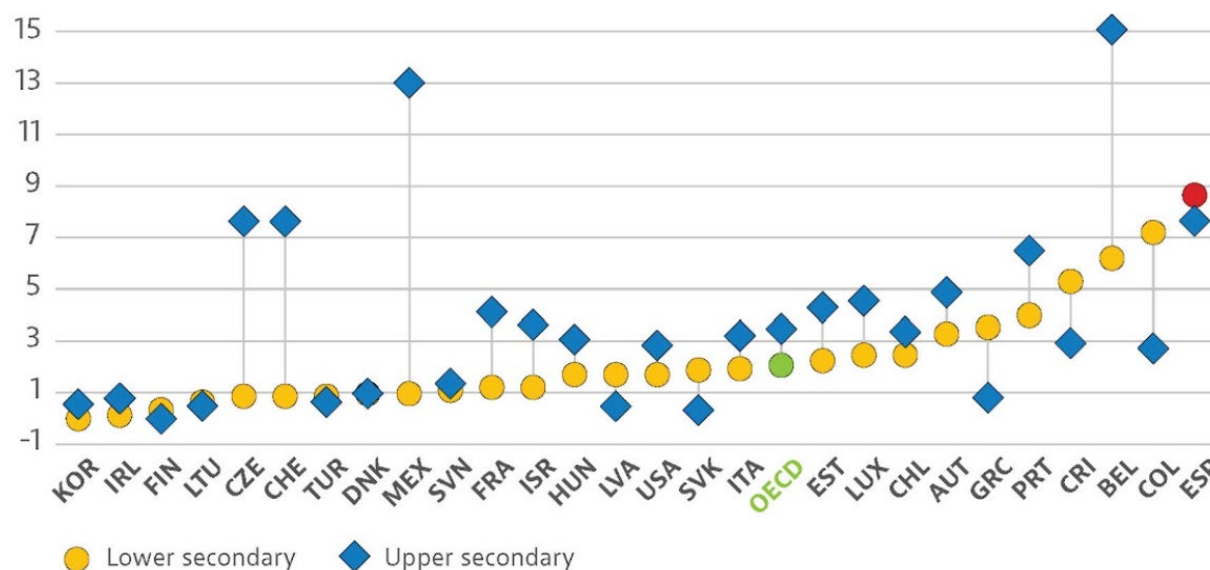
The school environment and the relationship students have with their teachers can also influence ESL (van der Graaf et al., 2019^[24]). The evidence points to the importance of supporting the development of students' well-being at the school level, as well as educators' capacity to manage and support diverse students and foster inclusion in the classroom and school, including their capacity to diagnose learning difficulties early on and respond with early interventions (OECD, 2023^[22]) – a challenge also for Spain that will be discussed below.

Furthermore, quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) has many benefits including supporting children's social and emotional well-being, lowering risks of school dropout and even contributing to higher learning and employment outcomes later in life (UNICEF, 2019^[38]; OECD, 2017^[39]). The availability of flexible academic and vocational tracks, and extra-curricular activities can also positively influence students' learning, motivation and sense of engagement with school (van der Graaf et al., 2019^[24]; OECD,

2022^[40]; European Union, 2015^[35]). On the other hand, a lack of flexible pathways and a relatively weak VET system that responds poorly to labour market needs can lead to higher rates of ESL (European Commission et al., 2014^[41]). As will be expanded below, there is a need for better matching VET programmes with labour market needs in Spain and for incentivising companies to participate in VET programmes. Education systems should be designed in a way that gives those at risk of ESL flexible learning pathways to either stay in education or to return to it at a later stage.

Figure 5. Spain has the highest share of repeaters in the OECD

% of repeaters in lower and upper secondary education (2020)



Note: For some countries (CZE, CHE, MEX and BEL) the 2020 data suggests high percentages of repeaters due to the COVID-19 pandemic compared to previous years.

Source: Adapted from (OECD, 2023^[42]) "Enrolment by gender, programme orientation, mode of study and type of institution: Repeaters", OECD.Stat: Education at a Glance (database), <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=113473> (accessed 05 May 2023)

Macro-economic and social factors

Finally, international research shows that macro-economic and social factors such as economic downturns or changes in minimum wages can also play their part in discouraging or encouraging young people to remain or return to education and training (European Commission, 2013^[8]; van der Graaf et al., 2019^[24]). High unemployment (youth) rates can also be associated with lower ESL as they increase the cost of leaving education (De Witte et al., 2013^[21]). Spain has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the OECD, at around 30% in January 2023, three times the OECD average of 11%. There are also wide regional differences, with unemployment rates around 20% in Catalonia and the Basque Country and above 35% in Andalusia, Extremadura, and Asturias (OECD, forthcoming^[31]). However, high unemployment rates do not necessarily correlate with low ESL rates in all autonomous communities (Figure 3), suggesting other factors may be at play.

Furthermore, some studies indicate that the increasing importance of certain economic sectors, such as construction and tourism, is related to a higher prevalence of ESL across Spain, and especially in the Mediterranean regions (Amer, 2011^[43]; López Martínez, Reverte Ginés and Palacios Manzano, 2016^[44]). Economic reasons, either the need to look for work or other family needs are the most frequent factors forcing young people to leave education (González-Anleo et al., 2020^[45]; Soler et al., 2021^[23]).

In sum, although schools play an important role they cannot and should not work in isolation. Reducing ESL involves addressing its causes related to education at the system level and at early entrance into the labour market, as well as targeting specific high-risk groups at the individual level so that the socio-economic status of students and their families and local communities do not hinder them in realising their full potential (OECD, 2023^[22]; OECD, 2021^[2]; European Union, 2022^[46]).

Existing policies, programmes and governance arrangements in Spain: building on strengths and responding to challenges

The Spanish Government and the autonomous communities have in the last decades designed and implemented many regulations, policies and programmes to prevent and address ESL. This action plan builds on these to respond to remaining challenges and identified gaps. Two recent organic laws are of particular relevance as they (among others) provide directives that contribute to supporting the reduction of ESL.

The Organic Law 3/2020 on Education (LOMLOE) (see Box 1) came into force in January 2021 (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2020^[47]). This law acknowledges the best interests of children and youth and places their rights among the guiding principles of the system. It promotes gender equality, encourages the continuous improvement of schools and individualised learning, gives a central role to the development of digital competences, and recognises the importance of education for sustainable development. The LOMLOE aims to increase educational and training opportunities for all, improving educational results and early detection mechanisms, limiting grade repetition, avoiding segregation, promoting alternative educational measures, fostering inclusion, giving recognition to early childhood care and education, and reinforcing school autonomy (Eurydice, 2023^[48]; Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2020^[47]). Through these reform measures, the LOMLOE is expected to contribute to reducing ESL.

In support of the LOMLOE, in January 2022 the Government opened an ongoing national debate (MEFP, 2022^[49]) on the improvement of the teaching profession in Spain. The proposals for reform focus on the following topics: initial training; continuous training; access to the teaching profession; and career development. The outcomes of this debate will inform a new regulatory framework as part of the implementation of the LOMLOE. While the national debate has focused on teachers primarily, it would seem vital to expand and emphasise also the support for the professionalisation of school leadership teams, as will be further discussed below.

The second key law is the Organic Law 3/2022 on the Organisation and Integration of the Professional and Vocational Training Offer (hereafter referred to as the 2022 Organic Law on VET) (see Box 1). This law, approved in March 2022, establishes a single, accreditable and flexible offer of vocational training with a lifelong learning perspective. It integrates the former VET programmes of the educational system (then under the responsibility of MEFP) and the VET programmes of the employment system (formerly under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs) into a single education and training system under the responsibility of the MEFP. The law encourages the development of a modular and flexible training offer and allows students to carry out a greater share of their training in companies, expanding the dual education principle. In addition, lifelong learning is facilitated through the accreditation of skills of any type of training and at any age, and as such is expected to contribute to raising the attractiveness of VET and giving more choice/opportunity for students to stay in or come back to education and training.

Box 1. Two recent laws that support the reduction of early school leaving in Spain

2020 Education Law (*Ley Orgánica por la que se modifica la Ley Orgánica de Educación* or LOMLOE)

The Organic Law Amending the Organic Law of Education, or LOMLOE, came into force in January 2021 and is to be fully implemented by the end of the 2023/24 school year. The LOMLOE seeks to achieve better educational performance through equity, inclusion and excellence. It is based on five pillars, including children's rights, the promotion of gender equality, continuous improvement of schools and individualised learning, the development of digital competences and education for sustainable development. Of particular interest (to preventing and addressing ESL), the law promotes the following measures:

Accessibility and equality of opportunity

The law intends to progressively increase the number of public places in the first cycle of early childhood education and care (ECEC). Priority of access is given to students at risk of poverty or social inclusion. The law also guarantees inclusive and non-discriminatory access to public and publicly subsidised private schools and adequate and equal distribution of students requiring specific additional support. Autonomous communities should manage their own school allocation policies, which should aim to reduce school segregation.

Organisation of education pathways and orientation

Tracks, subject hierarchy and compulsory end-of-stage tests are eliminated in lower secondary education. Students who successfully complete the Curricular Diversification Programme or Basic-level VET also receive the end of lower secondary completion diploma (GESO), giving them access to any upper secondary education pathway. The law aims for greater social recognition of VET, making it more flexible and with the view of increasing enrolments.

At the end of the 2nd and 4th years of lower secondary education, each student should receive educational orientation and career guidance on the most suitable training path for them. Academic and professional orientation must include a gender perspective.

Grade repetition

Grade repetition should be exceptional, and only adopted after having exhausted all available support and mitigation measures. Students may repeat the same year only once and a maximum of two times throughout compulsory education.

Competency-based learning

The law promotes a shift from content learning to a flexible and open competency-based learning model based on the transversal development of cognitive, social and emotional skills. Special emphasis is to be given to technological and digital competence, entrepreneurship, and critical thinking. It allows for subjects to be grouped into areas to improve student learning processes. New curriculums for primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education have been approved in March 2022.

Organic Law 3/2022 on the Organisation and Integration of the Vocational Education and Training offer (2022 Organic Law on VET)

The 2020 Plan for the Modernisation of Vocational Training aims to integrate Vocational Education and Training (VET) into a single system under the MEFP. The Plan also aims at regular public-private collaboration, the validation of procedures of professional competences of the active population, flexible

vocational education plans and a reappraisal of vocational education options. The new VET law is the first milestone of the Plan; it introduces a single, integrated system of professional education. The new model is based on three pillars: VET provision, validation of prior learning and career guidance.

VET provision

The system is designed to be flexible, to offer education options at any age and for people with diverse educational backgrounds. Education is to be cumulative, certifiable and accreditable, and is based on a range of courses varying in length and depth, from units of micro-training to vocational education, specialisation courses and dual education. The reform foresees pathways up to tertiary education in every level of instruction, aiming at eliminating dead ends in the system.

Validation of prior learning

The new system facilitates the accreditation of skills acquired through professional experience and will cover all competences taught in the system. The system will be linked to training and will involve companies in the accreditation process.

Career guidance

The General Strategy for Career Guidance of the Vocational Education System aims to incorporate career guidance into the education and validation processes, to offer customised advice to all parties involved in the system. It focuses on delivering effective educational pathways to acquire desired competences.

Source: (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2020^[47]), *Ley Orgánica 3/2020, de 29 de diciembre, por la que se modifica la Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación*, www.boe.es/eli/es/lo/2020/12/29/3/con, accessed 20 April 2023

(Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2022^[50]), *Ley Orgánica 3/2022, de 31 de marzo, de ordenación e integración de la Formación Profesional*, www.boe.es/eli/es/lo/2022/03/31/3, accessed 20 April 2023

(Cedefop, 2022^[51]), *Spain: VET revolution. Setting the pace for a new model for vocational education and training*, www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/spain-vet-revolution, accessed 20 April 2023

(Eurydice, 2023^[52]), *National reforms in school education, Spain* www.eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/spain/national-reforms-school-education, accessed 20 April 2023

Dedicated funding is ensured through the 2021-2026 national Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan (*Plan de Recuperación, Transformación, y Resiliencia*, or PRTR) for Spain that has been funded through the European Union's NextGenerationEU instrument and seeks to reinforce Spain's post-COVID-19 recovery and its economic and social resilience. The PRTR (among others) supports the realisation of a more flexible and inclusive education system that adapts to the needs of each student from early childhood education and care to lifelong learning. The plan's actions in Component 20: "Strategic Plan to Promote Vocational Training" and Component 21: "Modernisation and digitisation of the educational system" seek to support the reduction of ESL and grade repetition rates, improve the link between educational attainment and labour market needs, and provide additional support to the most vulnerable students. In concrete terms, the plan serves to expand, until the end of 2024, some of the major programmes carried out by the MEFP that are described in Box 2.

Furthermore, the MEFP and the autonomous communities are jointly implementing two territorial cooperation programmes (see Box 2) that respond to the objectives defined in the PRTR and the organic laws described above and target ESL. The first is the Programme for Educational Orientation, Advancement and Enrichment, known as "PROA+", which seeks to improve school success and guarantee the retention of students in publicly-funded schools in which there is a high percentage (at least 30%) of educationally vulnerable students. The second is the Support and Guidance Service Units (UAO) programme that supports students at risk of repeating grades or leaving school through targeted

pedagogical and psychological guidance. The UAO complements PROA+ and other existing local programmes specifically aimed at promoting school success of the most vulnerable students.

The Spanish education system is decentralised, meaning that educational competences are shared between the General State Administration i.e. the MEFP and the education authorities of the autonomous communities (Departments for Education). The MEFP executes the general guidelines of the Government on education policy and regulates the basic elements or aspects of the system. Regional education authorities develop their regulations and have executive and administrative competences for managing the education system in their own territory. Schools have pedagogical, organisational and managerial autonomy for their resources (Eurydice, 2023^[48]).

Box 2. Two main territorial cooperation programmes for reducing early school leaving in Spain

Programme for Educational Orientation, Advancement and Enrichment (2021-24)

In 2021, Spain launched the Programme for Educational Orientation, Advancement and Enrichment, or “PROA+”, a major initiative that is aimed at improving school success and promoting student retention in public-funded schools with at least 30% of “educationally vulnerable” students. An educationally vulnerable student is understood in a broad sense, encompassing students with basic needs (e.g. food, housing), and those who lack access to educational resources (e.g. digital equipment, school supplies, extra-curricular activities). It can also include students with disabilities or learning difficulties, gifted students, and newcomer students.

Funds are allocated each year to the autonomous communities on the basis of a funding formula consisting of the following indicators: education level of the population aged 25-64; net enrolment rate of 15-year-olds; and population distribution, weighted by the number of students from preschool to upper secondary levels.

Each autonomous community sets its criteria to identify and distribute the funds to schools considered to have at least 30% of “educationally vulnerable” students and/or located in rural or isolated areas. Funds can be used for additional resources, development of teaching and learning practices, as well as on the provision of supplementary teaching staff to support students.

This programme has a total budget of EUR 360 million for the period 2021-2024 and is co-funded by the MEFP and the European Union’s NextGenerationEU instrument.

The Support and Guidance Service Units (2021-24)

The Support and Guidance Service Units (UAO) programme was launched by the MEFP in 2021. In collaboration with and complementary to existing support services available locally, the UAO reinforces guidance and support to students at primary through upper secondary levels.

The UAO supports students at risk of grade repetition and ESL through a coordinated approach. It includes reinforced tutoring, educational orientation and career guidance, and promotes evidence-informed decision making based on student trajectories. It also aims to strengthen the collaboration between schools and families, giving them the tools and resources to be further involved in their children’s education.

As with the PROA+ programme, funds are allocated to autonomous communities who then distribute these to selected public-funded schools, with priority to those that are considered “educationally vulnerable” and/or located in rural or isolated areas. In this case, the criteria used to allocate funds to autonomous communities are population distribution; education level of the population aged 25-64

years; number of students enrolled in primary through upper secondary education; and the ESL rate in the autonomous community.

The programme is funded by the European Union's NextGenerationEU instrument and has a total budget of Euro 124 million over three school years (i.e. from 2021 to 2024). The UAO programme thus complements PROA+ programme and other existing programmes, specifically aimed at promoting the success of the most vulnerable students.

Source: (MEFP, n.d.^[53]) *Programas de Cooperación Territorial PROA+ 2021-2023*, www.educacionyfp.gob.es/mc/sgctie/cooperacion-territorial/programas-cooperacion/proa/proa-21-23, accessed 20 April 2023.

In this decentralised system, most schooling and funding decisions such as education spending, class size, and school infrastructure are made at the regional level. For example, in 2020, the autonomous communities administered 97% of public spending on non-university education¹ (MEFP, 2023^[54]). This means that regional governments are primarily responsible for both the policy design process (i.e. they adapt national laws in their territories and develop their own legislation) and their implementation, including those dedicated to supporting ESL.

In addition to the national and joint efforts described above, most of the autonomous communities have also designed and implemented their own policies and programmes, including some related to ESL. Financial and human resources are increasingly mobilised towards schools that are in most need of support and have a high proportion of vulnerable students, as for the PROA+ and UAO programmes described above. The variety of programmes across autonomous communities offers a rich and diverse set of experiences from which lessons can be learnt. The decentralised system of Spain guarantees these programmes are designed and implemented closer to the daily operations of schools, allowing for adaptation to specific realities – a strength of the system.

Available information on these programmes is variable however, and there is sometimes a lack of alignment between national and regional priorities. In addition, the analysis of the responses to the questionnaire that the OECD team sent to the autonomous communities for completion at the start of the project (Annex A) showed that many of the regional programmes target schools and their student populations, but few also focus on other actors such as families, social services and employers. Furthermore, a lack of sustained funding or changes in the political priorities of regional governments have often limited the continuity of these programmes. Finally, both national and regional-level programmes have seldom been monitored and evaluated, which has hampered Spain in learning from “what works” and what does not, and as such for making timely corrective measures and informing the development of future ESL policies and programmes.

The section below further examines the system's strengths and challenges for preventing and addressing ESL in Spain.

¹ Public spending on education amounted around 59.6 billion EUR in 2021 (8% higher than the previous year), reaching 4.9% of GDP. Total expenses from the MEFP and the educational administrations of the autonomous communities amounted around 39.97 billion EUR for non-university education. If adding non-university scholarships and grants, spending reached around 41.41 billion EUR of which 97% corresponds to the autonomous communities (MEFP, 2023^[54]).

Building on the system's strengths and responding to challenges for preventing and addressing early school leaving

Agreeing on common definitions and aligning policy instruments

Although several of the ESL programmes in Spain target “vulnerable schools” – which is a strength to build on – a common definition and measurement of what makes a school vulnerable is lacking across the country. Different interpretations between the autonomous communities challenge equitable resource allocation to schools across different parts of the country. This has resulted in different capacities of schools and local authorities in responding to the individual learning needs of students and addressing ESL. In response, stakeholders participating in the working group meetings (Annex A) proposed the development of a common “vulnerable school index” for the equitable allocation of resources to schools according to their (objective and measurable) needs. Drawing from the international peer-learning event that was organised as part of this project in June 2022, Spain could look towards the example of Ireland, who established a similar index as part of its Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme to prioritise the provision of support to schools with the highest level of disadvantage and to systematically ensure that resources are allocated relative to the level of disadvantage (Ireland Department of Education, 2022^[55]).

In addition, stakeholders noted that while school registers for collecting student data already exist and are well-established in most of the autonomous communities, these often lack information on students' background, individual learning needs and progress on which to base a diagnosis for support. Also, the IT systems and tools used vary across school systems and autonomous communities, resulting in information getting lost as students change schools or regions. This hinders the continuity of tailored support to students and can enhance the chances of them leaving school.

Another challenge expressed by the autonomous community representatives during working group meetings were the variable definitions of key terms across autonomous communities. For example, “school absenteeism” has no clear and commonly accepted definition and measurement, giving it scarce visibility in national statistics. Autonomous communities have developed early detection systems for school absenteeism through decrees and absenteeism commissions, but a gap is still perceived between these policies and school practice, with the need to count on more homogeneous definitions and more clear and updated response protocols. It is also considered necessary to identify student disengagement in the classroom, as it can be associated with ESL (Lamote et al., 2013^[56]; Tarabini et al., 2018^[57]).

Furthermore, there is no common understanding and measurement in the Spanish context of the terms “students requiring specific educational support” (*Necesidad Específica de Apoyo Educativo*, NEAE) and within that, “students with special education needs” (*Necesidades de Educación Especiales*, NEE) i.e. students with disabilities. As a result, the proportion of students requiring specific educational support (NEAE), for example, varies widely between regions, from 21.6% in Navarra to 3.9% in Aragon in 2020/21. This makes comparisons between regions very difficult and challenges the equitable allocation of resources and support to schools across different parts of the country (MEFP, 2022^[58]).

In response, the MEFP and autonomous communities, under the mandate of the Sectoral Conference for Education², have been working on the development of common definitions for “student absenteeism”, “students requiring specific educational support” and “students with special education needs”. This is a positive development, also as these are known factors of influence on ESL. Reaching common definitions

² The Sectoral Conference for Education is the body for cooperation in educational policy between the MEFP and the education authorities of the autonomous communities, which aims to achieve maximum coherence and integration of the education system.

and measurements on these concepts would support the equitable allocation of resources and support to schools across different regions.

Supporting educators and specialised professionals

The evidence shows there is a need for further and sustained investment in developing educators' capacity to deal with diversity in the classroom and supporting student's learning and well-being needs. As discussed in the 2021 OECD Economic Survey of Spain (OECD, 2021^[59]), Spanish teachers face job instability and need further professional development. In 2020, around a third (33%) of secondary teachers were on a fixed-term contract (OECD average of 18%) and 27% were on contracts shorter than one year; thereby impairing the ability of schools to form stable teams (OECD, 2019^[60]; OECD, forthcoming^[31]), which are vital for developing the capacity to identify, prevent and address ESL. This in part depends on teachers and other professionals' ability to establish positive relationships with their students "to get to know them" and identify those at risk of leaving school.

Furthermore, the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey, TALIS 2018 showed that only 48% of lower secondary teachers reported having been trained in content, pedagogy and classroom practice of the subjects they teach during initial teacher education, which is well below the 79% mean at the OECD level. The share of those having received said training, however, was considerably higher for teachers who have been teaching for 5 or less years (68%), which shows progress made in strengthening initial teacher education and/or investments in professional development (OECD, 2019^[61]). TALIS 2018 also showed that lower secondary teachers in Spain felt that, following the completion of initial teacher education, they were significantly less well prepared for teaching students with diverse levels and needs than their colleagues in other OECD countries – only 28% reported they felt "well prepared" or "very well prepared", compared with an OECD average of 44% (OECD, 2019^[61]).

Part of the challenge may also lie in the recruitment and selection processes of aspiring teachers. Currently, universities do not consider applicants' socio-emotional skills, and the selection process for teachers to enter the civil service emphasise accumulation of knowledge over pedagogical skills and socio-emotional competencies (Fernández Morante, de Pro Bueno and Sanz Arazuri, 2020^[62]). Teacher recruitment and selection into the profession should also ensure profiles better represent the diversity of the student population (Brussino, 2021^[63]; Cerna et al., 2021^[64]) – an area for further policy attention in Spain.

Spain has made substantial investments in harnessing the potential of digital technologies to enhance teaching and student learning in recent years. These efforts are important also as digitalisation offers an opportunity to provide direct, tailored, and flexible support to students at risk (Cerna et al., 2021^[64]; OECD, forthcoming^[31]). Current examples include the LOMLOE and other Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan reforms and investments, many of which encourage the uses and applications of digital technologies for teaching and student learning, and the professional development of teachers. Across the OECD countries, developing advanced ICT skills is one area in which teachers say that they need more training. TALIS 2018 showed that only 36% of teachers in Spain report that they feel "well prepared" or "very well prepared" for the use of ICT for teaching (OECD average 43%), as part of their initial teacher education. That said, 68% reported that it has been included in their recent professional development activities (above the OECD average of 60%) (OECD, 2019^[61]). These investments in the professional development of teachers' digital skills are important to draw the full benefits that digitalisation of teaching and student learning can offer.

Furthermore, it is important that student assessments are reliable, appropriate, and unbiased and sensitive to the needs of particular student groups, such as students whose mother tongue is not the language of instruction and students with special educational needs (Reardon et al., 2018^[65]; Binkley et al., 2011^[66];

OECD, 2013^[67]). To increase equity and fairness in student assessments, teacher training should focus on ensuring that teachers are aware of the cultural and linguistic aspects of learning and assessment.

In addition, the LOMLOE gives stronger autonomy to schools. This provides further impetus for investing in school leaders' and leadership teams' capacities, as they have a key role to play in preventing ESL. They need to be able to analyse and assess their context, to include diversity and inclusion perspectives, and to promote a positive school culture, teamwork and collaborative practices within the school community to ensure educational success (OECD, 2018^[68]; European Union, 2015^[35]). The evidence suggests further investments in school leaders' capacity are warranted, as was also noted by the stakeholders during working group meetings. In addition, during the working group meetings several stakeholders noted the limited financial benefits (over teaching) and heavy workload of school leaders that are believed to negatively influence the supply of candidates, and ultimately the establishment of a high-quality school leadership workforce.

The working group discussions also revealed concerns about the (limited) quantity, types and roles of specialised professionals (e.g. guidance counsellors, social workers and school psychologists) that give supplementary support to schools, students and their families. The provision of school counsellors for example varies across schools in Spain, whereas the support they provide can be vital helping students at risk of leaving school understand their strengths, study options and employment prospects (European Union, 2015^[35]). During the working group meeting, stakeholders noted their concerns about some schools – often vulnerable schools – having insufficient numbers of support staff to provide counselling, educational orientation and career guidance, as well as other specialised professionals to ensure that students learning needs are met.

Promoting policies for equity and early school leaving

Grade repetition, as mentioned above, is often a strong predictor of ESL – and rates remain high in Spain (see Figure 5). Moreover, the share of disadvantaged students who repeat is one of the highest in the OECD (OECD, 2019^[37]). Grade repetition has been recognised to negatively impact student learning outcomes, leading to demotivation, and educational disaffection and abandonment. It raises concerns for equity and inclusion in education, in addition to being costly for the student, the education system and society (OECD, 2023^[22]). The recently adopted LOMLOE establishes the exceptionality of grade repetition, to be adopted only after having exhausted various support measures. Students may stay in the same course only once and a maximum of two times throughout compulsory education. The working group meetings showed strong support for this measure among representatives from the MEFP, autonomous communities and other education stakeholders.

However, changing what stakeholders referred to as a “repetition culture” is likely to take time and considerable effort. There is still a widely shared view among educators, parents and society at large that repeating a year is beneficial for students' learning and that easing grade promotion contributes to lowering the quality and the general level of education. Stakeholders noted the need for raising awareness on the negative effects of grade repetition for students (e.g. lower student performance, demotivation and ESL) and costs for education systems and society (e.g. the costs for providing an additional year of education and society in delaying a student's entry into the labour market by at least one year) and the benefits of effective alternatives such as early intervention. International examples from countries such as Finland and Portugal have shown that early intervention, with additional instructions for at-risk students and with active involvement of local authorities and parents, can be effective in lowering repetition rates (OECD, 2021^[69]; General Direction of Education of Portugal, 2021^[70]; Välijärvi and Sahlberg, 2008^[71]).

In Spain many schools operate on an intensive, morning-centred schedule (Ferrero, Gortázar and Martínez, 2022^[72]). Close to 47% of households pay for extra-curricular classes for their children, more than half of which corresponds to support classes for curricular subjects in the case of lower-income households (Martínez and Moreno, 2023^[73]). Several OECD countries, like Denmark and Portugal have

moved to full-day, flexible systems coupled with increased provision of school cafeterias and extra-curricular activities (Radinger and Boeskens, 2021^[74]). Spain could consider following a similar approach because of the benefits this may bring, in particular to disadvantaged students. Spending more time in school has been shown to increase graduation rates, and to improve learning and other social and behavioural indicators (Wu, 2020^[75]; Seidlitz and Zierow, 2020^[76]). Research tends to support that these benefits are more pronounced for disadvantaged students (Radinger and Boeskens, 2021^[74]).

Furthermore, evidence shows that many Spanish students pursue VET and higher education courses/degrees with poor employment prospects, and/or end up holding jobs after graduation for which they are over-qualified. Close to 40% of 15- to 34-year-olds report that their highest level of education did not help them in their current job, one of the highest rates in the EU (OECD, forthcoming^[31]). Among upper secondary graduates, the reported rate of mismatch is higher for graduates from general programmes than for graduates of vocational ones (51.9% vs 37.6%) (Boto-García and Escalonilla, 2022^[77]). Despite labour market shortages in professions that require STEM-related skills, enrolment in technical VET programmes remains low. Career guidance that incorporates detailed information on employment prospects and wages by field of study can help reduce skills mismatches, ease school-to-work transitions and prevent ESL (European Commission, 2013^[8]). The working group discussions however revealed that a comprehensive approach to educational orientation and career guidance is often lacking in schools, and that school counsellors need to be reinforced in terms of their numbers and expertise.

International research evidence also shows that student allocation and school choice policies can exacerbate inequities if not carefully designed, as is also the case in Spain. In Spain school allocation policies vary across autonomous communities. Students are typically assigned to a school based on proximity or a geographical zone determined by the autonomous communities. Families can generally choose their schools, and in case of over-demand, different point systems can operate (related to proximity, income levels, siblings, alumni, etc.). The LOMLOE mandates the education authorities of the autonomous communities to ensure that admission regulations do not lead to segregation, and to implement compensatory measures in areas or schools where there is concentration of vulnerable students.

However, socio-economically disadvantaged students and those from immigrant backgrounds tend to be grouped in the same schools; thereby further exacerbating inequalities and the vulnerability of these schools and students since the support and resources do not always match the additional needs. In addition, in Spain the share of poor students in publicly subsidised private schools is less than half of public schools (Zancajo, Verger and Fontdevila, 2022^[78]). This can be partly due to economic barriers, as these schools tend to charge additional fees, often hidden in the form of “voluntary” contributions covering extra-curricular activities, digital materials and others (CEAPA - CICAIE, 2022^[79]), or the allocation of discretionary points, based on attendance to expensive early childhood education and care programmes or alumni affiliations for example. Furthermore, newcomer students arriving in Spain during the school year are also allocated to schools with available places, often being disadvantaged or vulnerable schools. This adds to the segregation between students and some schools having high concentrations of disadvantaged students (Givord, 2019^[80]).

As noted by some stakeholders during the working group meetings further measures may be needed to review school allocation policies and school choice and ensure a more heterogeneous distribution of students across schools (OECD, 2023^[22]; OECD, 2017^[81]; OECD, 2019^[82]).

On another note, public spending on early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Spain is currently significantly below the OECD average (OECD, 2021^[83]). This is particularly significant when considering that investing in ECEC has been shown to be effective in reducing ESL, especially among socio-economically disadvantaged children (OECD, 2017^[84]; OECD, 2011^[85]). As noted in the 2021 OECD Economic Survey of Spain, almost a quarter of low-income households reported that they would like to use formal childcare but could not afford it (OECD, 2021^[59]). The LOMLOE responds to this as it brings the first

cycle of ECEC (0-3 years of age) within the education system and prioritises access to young people at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan allocates funds for the development of ECEC, including the creation of 65 000 new childcare places, with priority given to children aged 1 and 2 years. These are welcome reforms, but it is important to secure funding beyond the end of plan's duration (i.e. 2026) (OECD, forthcoming^[31]).

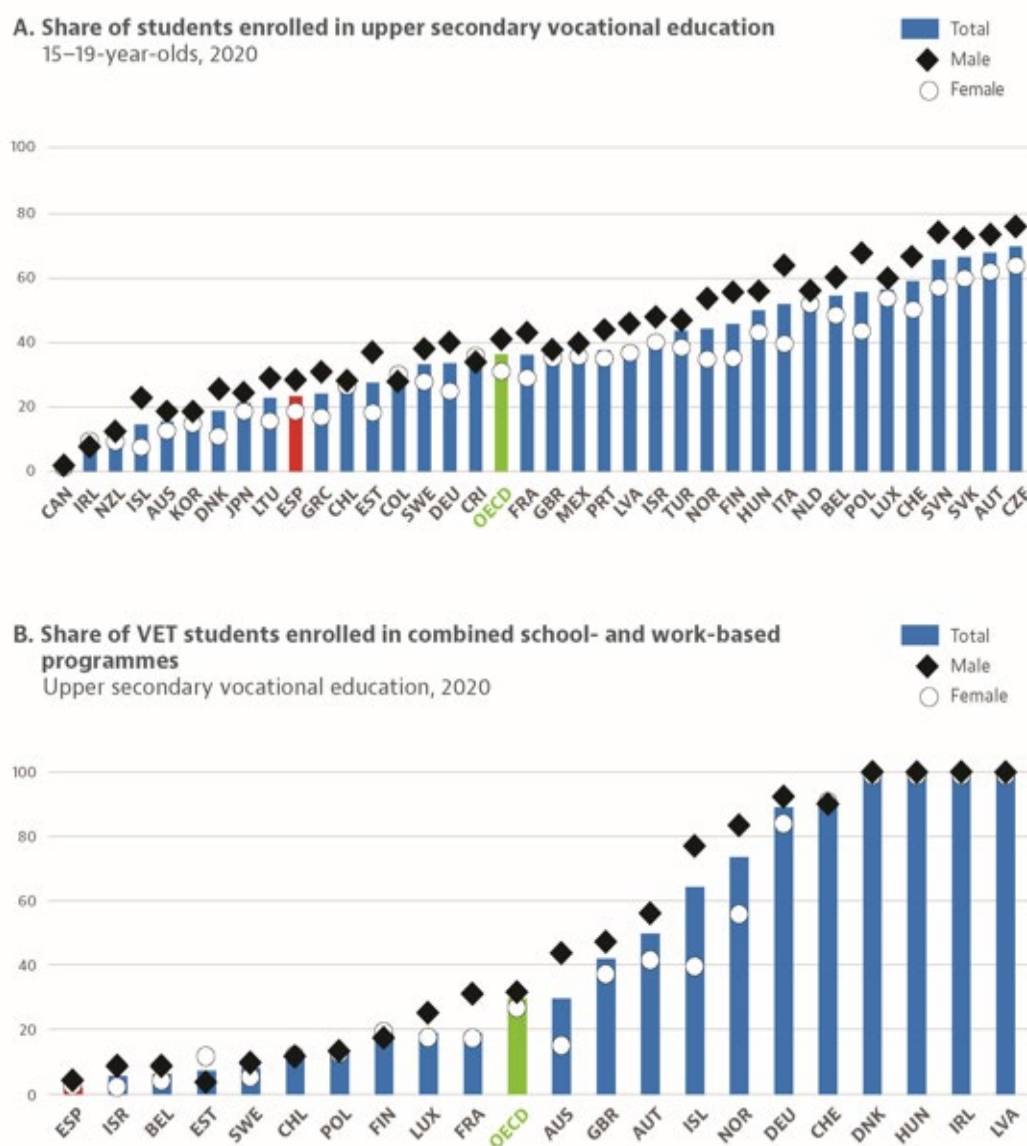
Promoting curricular flexibility and alternative pathways

Offering a diverse choice of study programmes, disciplinary subjects and study pathways can have considerable impact on the extent to which education systems are able to accommodate students' abilities, interests and backgrounds (Cerna et al., 2021^[64]). Creating flexible and alternative pathways can help prevent and address ESL (European Commission, 2013^[8]).

As mentioned earlier, through recent measures such as the Curricular Diversification Programme (PDC), the removal of compulsory end-of-stage tests in lower secondary education and prospect to obtain the GESO degree after successful completion of the PDC or Basic-level VET (see Figure 4) students are offered more curricular flexibility and adaptable pathways than before. These are promising measures that are likely to positively influence students' learning and motivation and contribute to reducing ESL in lower secondary.

Spain has low rates of students enrolled in secondary level VET when compared to other OECD countries (Figure 6) with an education and training offer that is insufficient and unequally distributed in certain areas, limiting students' choices (Fundació Bofill, 2022^[86]; OECD, 2021^[83]). In response, Spain is introducing greater flexibility in VET training pathways, a modular approach, extension of dual education, and an increased VET offer through the recent 2022 Organic Law on VET (see Box 1). This law is an important measure for strengthening the VET system and is to play a key role in facilitating alternative learning pathways and re-entry into education and training for early school leavers and others.

Figure 6. Enrolments in upper secondary vocational education (2020)



Source: Adapted from (OECD, 2023^[42]) “Enrolment by gender, programme orientation, mode of study and type of institution: Share of vocational students in combined school- and work-based programmes”, OECD.Stat: Education at a Glance (database), <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?QueryId=113473> (accessed 05 May 2023)

VET is considered a measure to address ESL, because many early school leavers from both general and vocational education choose VET when they return to school (European Commission, 2013^[8]). VET programmes can also be an attractive option for young people who are eager to leave the school benches for at least part-time and enter the labour market earlier (OECD, 2019^[87]).

As mentioned above, a key challenge is the alignment of fields of specialisation chosen by upper secondary and tertiary students and the needs of the labour market. Despite labour market shortages in professionals that require STEM-related skills, enrolment in technical VET programmes remains low. Working group discussions highlighted the importance of strengthening educational orientation and career guidance in

schools, improving the matching of VET programmes to the demands of the labour market, and promoting these among students.

In response to these and other challenges the Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan sets out to create 245,000 new places in vocational training, linked to fields of specialisation demanded by the labour market. The law expects that all VET programmes will be dual education programmes, with the development of two systems: one general and one intensive, varying the duration of training in the company, the contribution of the company to the content of the training, and the existence or not of a labour contract with the company³. The law is aimed to bring greater flexibility in learning pathways and efforts to enhance the quality and relevance of VET, including by giving a greater emphasis on work-based learning and other competency-based pedagogies that are expected to make VET more attractive and reduce the risk of students leaving school.

However, the effective implementation of the law will also depend on companies' involvement and on the coordination and shared responsibilities between teachers (in schools) and trainers (in companies). It will need to ensure sufficient incentives for companies to participate. Currently, mostly larger companies participate in VET, while in several sectors the bulk of economic activity is made up of small-to-medium size companies. For example, in 2022, 91.8% of the construction sector was made up of small-to-medium companies. In the case of industry this figure was 64.4% (Ministerio de Industria, Comercio y Turismo, 2023^[88]). Therefore, and as set out by the law, involving smaller companies in dual programmes is a priority for Spain. Collaboration between companies to provide training to teachers or to share managerial duties, as is done in Austria or Germany, could help more Spanish small- and medium-sized companies to join the VET system by reducing the financial and administrative costs of participation through economies of scale (OECD, 2022^[89]). The law supports such collaborations, but further measures could be explored to enhance the involvement of small- and medium-sized companies in dual programmes. For example, if tax incentives or subsidies for the participation of companies in VET are to be introduced, as has been done in many OECD countries, these should be targeted to small- and medium-sized companies and their effectiveness should be continuously evaluated (OECD, forthcoming^[31]).

In working group discussions, stakeholders also shared their concerns regarding the timetabling of VET programmes. In some schools, VET classes are offered only in the afternoons, while general secondary programmes are prioritised in the morning shifts. This is believed to negatively influence students' motivation, contribute to segregation of students and add to the stigmatisation of VET. The working group discussions also pointed to the issue that some students struggle to complete the Intermediate level VET programme in the two years period. This in part is because some students take on part-time jobs which causes them to fall behind in their learning and being made to repeat. This risks them getting demotivated and dropping out.

The MEFP and autonomous communities also noted the need to continue promoting participation in second chance education and re-engagement programmes. A challenge lies in the fragmented information available on these programmes, and partly because of this, the limited awareness among young people and adults of such opportunities for re-entry into education and training.

Adult Education Centres are accredited by the MEFP and support adults who have left school early, with a possibility to take a test to obtain the lower secondary education completion diploma (i.e. the GESO diploma) for example. However, these centres often accommodate more mature adults, and do not attract the age group of 18 to 24-year-old school leavers. In parallel, the network of second chance schools (*Escuelas de segunda oportunidad*, E2O) aims to offer an integral and individual response to younger early school leavers (15 to 29-year-olds), through a range of learning methods. However, these non-

³ The obligation to sign a labour contract has been differed to December 2028. In the interim, an alternate training contract (from six months to three years) as stated in the Statute of Workers Law will be used (Consejo Económico y Social España, 2023^[100])

governmental organisations are few and operate in parallel to the official school system. They are often not recognised by formal education and training providers, nor by the education authorities of the autonomous communities.

Enhancing collaboration and promoting monitoring and evaluation

There is scope for further collaboration between different autonomous communities and the central level, for more systematic monitoring and evaluation and sharing of data and knowledge on “what works” (and what doesn’t) to inform policies and programmes aimed at preventing and addressing ESL. The project working group discussions showed there is much to be gained from the sharing of good practices between the MEFP, the education authorities of the autonomous communities and other stakeholders. Similarly, there was a recognition of the potential to further strengthen the exchange of information within the autonomous communities (i.e. between the autonomous community and local authorities). For example, there would seem to be much to learn from the experiences of local authorities in supporting schools by mobilising other public services (i.e. health services, youth services, social services, etc.) and the community at large, to deal with issues beyond what schools have the relevant expertise and mandate for. The knowledge gained and issues raised from these regional level meetings with local authorities could feed into the national level discussions between the MEFP and autonomous communities to support future actions on the prevention and addressing of ESL.

Furthermore, while laws and policy programmes sometimes include monitoring and evaluation requirements, these are not always carried out in Spain (OECD, forthcoming^[31]). A lack of an evaluation culture has hampered Spain in learning from “what works”, taking timely corrective measures and informing policy dialogue and ESL programming. Spain already has well-established bodies, such as the National Institute for Educational Evaluation (INEE) of the MEFP that could be reinforced to take on a role in conducting and providing support in the evaluation of educational policies and programmes and helping ensure that lessons learnt feed into policy making and programming.

In addition, research evidence shows that school evaluation – both external school evaluation and school self-evaluation – and improvement planning can play a key role in ensuring the effectiveness of school-level interventions to support diversity, inclusion and equity in education, and thereby in the prevention of ESL (Cerna et al., 2021^[64]; European Union, 2015^[35]; OECD, 2013^[67]). In Spain, several autonomous communities, normally through their bodies for evaluation and educational quality, have developed guidelines and other resources to support schools in their self-evaluation and improvement planning. In general, the school management is responsible for the coordination of the self-evaluation process and the Inspectorate undertakes advisory or supervisory tasks. Each autonomous community is responsible for the design and implementation of the mechanisms for the external evaluation of the schools within its territory and can establish its own self-evaluation model (Eurydice, 2023^[90]). External evaluations in Spain are undertaken annually, which limits their scope, while in many OECD countries external evaluation cycles are longer, i.e. a school is externally evaluated once every 3 to 5 years (OECD, 2013^[67]).

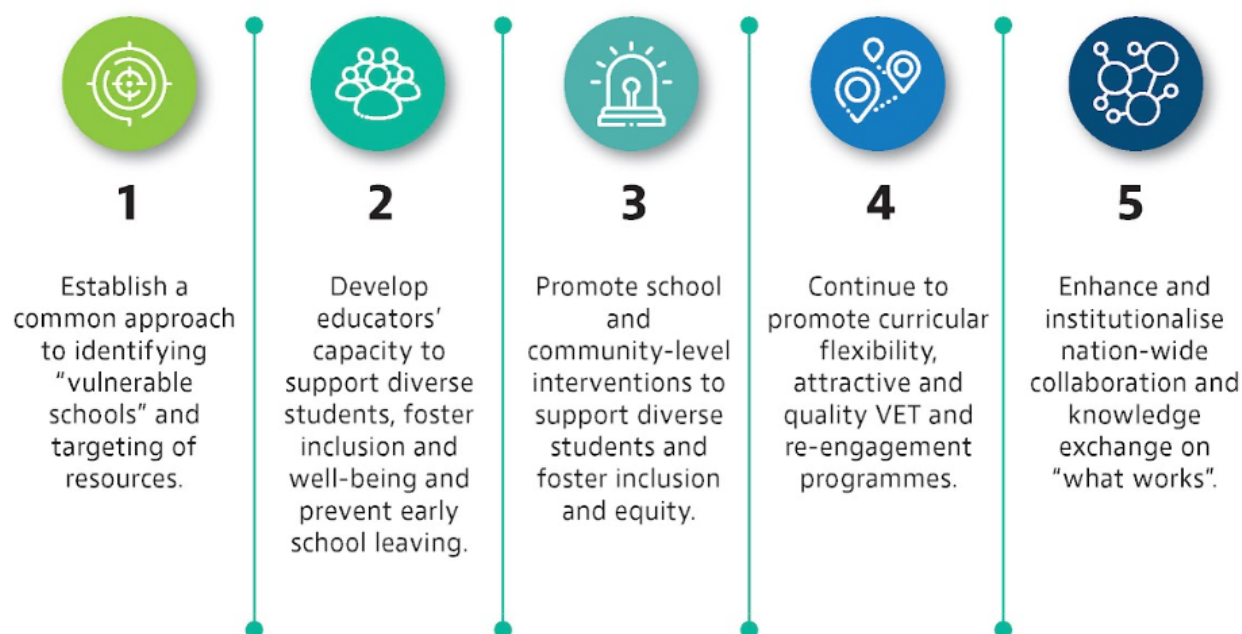
The working group discussions revealed an interest in reviewing the roles and ways of working of education inspectorates. Recognising the potential of school self-evaluation and improvement planning for preventing and addressing ESL, the MEFP and autonomous communities could give further priority to school evaluations, knowledge exchange, and sharing of good practices and collaboration.

Five areas for action

This project consisted of a series of interrelated diagnostic activities, including an examination of national and international practices of reducing ESL, and a strong stakeholder engagement process (Figure 1; Annex A). This has supported the identification of strengths and challenges for addressing ESL in Spain.

It has also resulted in the proposal of **an action plan consisting of five areas for action. Each area includes a range of evidence-based and actionable recommendations for a coordinated approach** to preventing and addressing ESL in all autonomous communities and in the cities of Ceuta and Melilla.

Figure 7. Five areas for action



Area for action 1: Establish a common approach to identifying “vulnerable schools” and targeting of resources

Preventing and addressing ESL requires resources to be equitably allocated to schools according to their needs. Several of the ESL programmes in Spain target “vulnerable schools” – which is a clear strength to build on. Stakeholders however recognised the benefits of developing a common approach to identifying and targeting of resources to these schools based on a shared definition and measurement of a “vulnerable school”. Such an approach could build on the momentum generated and experiences gained through the PROA+ programme, including the identification of schools where at least a certain percentage of the students are considered vulnerable students. That said, some resources could also be targeted to schools falling just below the threshold and that may not be officially labelled as “vulnerable schools”, but where vulnerable students may still receive the necessary additional support.

The proposal is for developing and piloting a common “school vulnerability index” consisting of a core component, with common indicators across all autonomous communities, and an optional discretionary component through which autonomous communities could factor in additional indicators. Whereas the core component would try to limit regional disparities in the allocation of resources to schools, the optional component still offers some flexibility to the autonomous communities to respond to local circumstances. The MEFP, in collaboration with the education authorities of the autonomous communities, as well as educational guidance services, competent social and health services (including the Sectoral Committee for Education, the Interterritorial Council of the National Health System and the Ministry of Social Rights and 2030 Agenda) should work together to design this index. School leadership teams should also be involved in the definition of key indicators and piloting the index.

Based on the school vulnerability index, multiple needs-based actions could be implemented at the school level to improve student learning and well-being, recognising that some policies and programmes might need to target specific groups of students and their parents. These could include, among others, providing additional resources or support to vulnerable students and their families (e.g. meal vouchers, books, or transportation support for disadvantaged students and those in remote areas), organising learning groups of different sizes (e.g. smaller groups for students with special education needs), offering additional classes (e.g. homework support or remedial classes) or adjusting learning time. Some children may for example benefit from longer classes (e.g. gifted children) while others might benefit from extra classes as part of the regular curriculum (e.g. language classes for immigrant students) (see Area for action 3).

Schools would benefit from guidance and support from the MEFP and the autonomous communities on the correct and effective use of the grant funding for supporting student learning and preventing ESL. Case studies could further inform and inspire schools to learn from good practices (see Area for action 5).

For such targeted grant funding to work, a rigorous analysis of the student population in schools is needed, based on reliable and comparable data. Therefore, Spain should continue ongoing efforts to establish common definitions and measurements for “student absenteeism” and “students requiring specific educational support”, and within that “student with special education needs” for these indicators to be included in the school vulnerability index. An option to consider is also to define and measure the notion of “student disengagement”.

Recommendations

1.1. Develop a “school vulnerability index” that is comparable across Spain and can be used for identifying and targeting of resources to schools (e.g. through the PROA+ programme). The MEFP, education authorities of autonomous communities and other stakeholders could work together to develop a “school vulnerability index” divided into two components: **i) a core component, with common indicators across all autonomous communities**, and **ii) a discretionary component that gives autonomous communities the option of including additional indicators to respond to local circumstances**.

- Drawing from local and international examples, the index could include some of the indicators below:
 - Socio-economic, cultural and geographic data (e.g. socio-economic status of the school's surrounding area, schools situated in remote areas, highest level of education completed by parents, grants and allowances, language spoken at home, data identifying specific at-risk groups (e.g. students from the Roma community, immigrant students, etc.);
 - Educational indicators on grade repetition, absenteeism, student performance, students requiring specific educational support, students with special education needs and/or dropout rates;

- Process indicators on applied educational measures (e.g. students in the Curricular Diversification Programme, Basic-level VET programme);
 - Results indicators (e.g. graduation rates from lower secondary, upper secondary, both general and VET pathways).
 - The MEFP, autonomous communities, and relevant stakeholders should **establish a working group to design and oversee the piloting of the school vulnerability index** before adopting it for implementation in all autonomous communities. **Involving local authorities and school leadership teams in the development and piloting of the index could improve its relevance and sense of ownership by schools.** The piloting could start with computer-based simulations to further refine the index and estimate the additional resources that vulnerable schools would receive. In due time, this index could possibly be (partially) integrated to the basic school funding formula.
 - **Provide schools with guidance and support on the school vulnerability index and on the effective use of the grant funding.** The piloting of the school vulnerability index and matched grant funding could include the trialling of guidelines, an information website, a helpdesk, and possibly other resources. Case studies on “good practices” could serve to inform and inspire schools. These could also support the targeting of policies and programmes to specific groups, also recognising that not all schools are vulnerable in the same way (e.g. remote schools might need support for transportation, while schools with high immigrant population might benefit from language remedial classes).
- 1.2. Building on existing practices and lessons learnt, continue working towards a common approach to school-level data collection and management, and to support the sharing of these comparable data between schools, local authorities, autonomous communities and MEFP to prevent and address ESL.**
- The MEFP and the autonomous communities should **continue the initiated discussions to work towards a common early warning system on students at risk of early school leaving**, building on existing practices, and student identification number and registers currently available in most of the autonomous communities (e.g. the RALC students register in Catalonia or the STILUS in Castile and León). Most of the information on students’ characteristics is collected at the time of school enrolment but should be regularly updated and complemented with information on students’ performance and behaviour. This information needs to be reflected in the digital student record and (within legal parameters) should be made accessible to all education administrations in case of a student changing schools.
 - The MEFP and autonomous communities should **continue ongoing efforts to establish common definitions and measurements for “student absenteeism”, “students requiring specific educational support”, and “student with special education needs”** for these indicators to be included in the school vulnerability index. An option to consider is to also define and measure the notion of “student disengagement”.
 - **In the medium term, the MEFP and the autonomous communities should consider establishing a common IT platform that interconnects regional registers and brings together the relevant data and information on vulnerable young people** (e.g. individual learning plans, student performance). Such a platform with easily accessible and up-to-date data and information could be useful for ensuring more efficient continuation and tailored support to students that transition to another school, as could it facilitate the re-entry of young people into education and training.

These data and information, for example visualised through GIS⁴ maps and/or dashboards, could be accessed and updated at all times by authorised professionals (e.g. school leadership, teachers, tutors), respecting data protection and confidentiality regulations. One way of avoiding administrative burden and ensuring its relevance and user-friendliness is to involve these “key users” in the development of the platform.

The project working group discussions showed a general recognition among the MEFP, autonomous communities and other stakeholders that school-level data collection, as well as the management and sharing of data between schools, local authorities, autonomous communities and MEFP needs to be improved. For example, a student moving to another local authority or autonomous community often generates challenges in data and information transfer; thereby risking continuation of support for students’ individual learning needs. Furthermore, it will be necessary to find the right balance between the quantity and quality of the collected data and the administrative burden it can generate for schools (e.g. in terms of data collection and reporting).

Area for action 2: Develop educators’ capacity to support diverse students, foster inclusion and well-being and prevent early school leaving

Efforts to improve inclusion in education and helping all students succeed depend on well-skilled and well-supported teachers, school leadership teams and other professionals. They need to have an in-depth understanding of the underlying reasons for ESL, its triggers, early warning signs, as well as have the competences and skills to address educational disadvantage and student disengagement (European Union, 2015^[35]; Brussino, 2021^[63]).

This starts with initial teacher education to adequately prepare new teachers to respond to various student learning needs and backgrounds. This includes ensuring that new teachers are sensitive to cultural and linguistic aspects of learning and assessment. Responding to concerns raised during the working group discussions and other evidence available, Spain should consider further examining the need for reviewing initial teacher education to better prepare teachers to manage diversity in the classroom, respond to diverse learning needs and ensure inclusive assessment practices and avoid assessment biases. Furthermore, Spain could follow the examples of the Netherlands and Finland (OECD, 2016^[91]) to review the criteria and processes for entry into initial teacher education, including a focus on socio-emotional skills (e.g. empathy, trust, open-mindedness and stress resistance). This would reflect the complex nature of teaching and would be particularly relevant as socio-emotional skills for students are part of the new school curriculums. In a similar vein, the selection process for teachers to enter the civil service places subject knowledge over pedagogical competences (Fernández Morante, de Pro Bueno and Sanz Arazuri, 2020^[62]). Project working group discussions also pointed to need for encouraging people from diverse backgrounds to enter the education profession. This could for example be done through the promotion of positive role models and tailored communication campaigns after examining the potential misconceptions about entering the profession.

Continued investments in professional development for educators already in the profession are also essential. Spain has made substantial investments in harnessing the potential of digital technologies to enhance teaching and student learning in recent years, including through the LOMLOE, and the current Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan. A dedicated website⁵ already gathers information on available resources for teachers, families, and students. Digitalisation can offer an opportunity to provide

⁴ GIS = Geographic information system.

⁵ [Education Resources for Online Learning](https://www.intef.es), www.intef.es

tailored and flexible support to students at risk, and Spain should continue with these important investments.

High-quality professional development should also be provided to teachers on managing diversity and responding to students' learning needs – prioritising those working in vulnerable schools to allocate grant funding (see Area for action 1).

Furthermore, to increase equity and fairness in student assessments, initial teacher training and continuous professional development should focus on ensuring that teachers are sensitive to cultural and linguistic aspects of learning and assessment.

The LOMLOE also gives stronger autonomy to schools, providing impetus for investing in school leadership teams' capacities, as was noted by several stakeholders during the working group meetings. School leaders have a vital role to play in analysing their context, including diversity and inclusion perspectives into evaluation processes, with particular reference to school self-evaluation and improvement planning, and strengthening ties with the whole school community (OECD, 2018^[68]; Cerna et al., 2021^[64]). In addition to raising the attractiveness and reviewing the roles and responsibilities of school leadership, sustained investments in developing capacity to take on tasks that prevent and address ESL seem warranted. Again, prioritisation of vulnerable schools and the use of grant funding (see Area for action 1) should be considered for this purpose.

Furthermore, “tutor teachers”, who are assigned to a specific class or group of students to provide them with educational support and guidance, also play a significant role in understanding students' backgrounds and situations. They are an essential liaison between schools and families and should be given the necessary tools to adequately identify and support at risk students.

Finally, supporting diverse students and fostering inclusion relies not only on teachers and school leaders, but also on the availability and professionalisation of non-teaching support staff and services. Success in tackling ESL will depend on having the right numbers of specialised professionals (e.g. tutors, guidance counsellors, social workers, school psychologists) to support schools in responding to all students' learning and other needs.

Recommendations

2.1 Recruitment and selection processes of teachers should be reviewed to ensure they have the competences and skills to manage diverse students and respond to their learning needs:

- **Review the admission criteria and selection processes of students upon entry into initial teacher education.** Following the examples of countries such as the Netherlands and Finland, Spain could consider reviewing admission criteria and selection processes to also include socio-emotional skills that may better reflect the complex nature of teaching.
- Similarly, **review the selection process when entering the teaching profession** giving greater weight in entrance tests to future teachers' motivation, socio-emotional skills and attitude, as well as to teamwork capacity rather than on strictly subject knowledge. The performance achieved during the internship period of the initial training (Practicum) should also be better assessed in these selection procedures.
- **Encourage people from diverse backgrounds to enter the education profession**, through the **promotion of positive role models** and **tailored communication campaigns** after examining the potential misconceptions about entering the education profession.

- Responding to the concerns raised during the working group meetings, **consider examining whether there is a need for reviewing initial teacher education programmes to better prepare teachers for managing diversity in the classroom.** If indeed pursued, this examination may look at the emphasis placed on aspects related to the socio-emotional skills development of students, teamwork with colleagues in and across school boundaries and the preparation in the use of different teaching and (inclusive) assessment strategies and use of digital technologies in teaching. These strategies may include differentiated teaching; small group approaches; remedial teaching; project-based learning; and the flexible use of a range of assessment practices that suit different student needs.

2.2. Promote high-quality continuous professional development for all teachers, and especially tutor teachers, to manage diversity in the classroom and respond to individual learning needs.

Prioritisation of teachers in vulnerable schools should be considered. The proposed vulnerable school index and matched grant funding could support such prioritisation (see Area for action 1). This could allow for different incentives for participating in professional development courses and activities, including fees and substitution cover.

- Spain should further **improve teachers' (and especially tutors') capacity to identify students at risk of dropping out and address their learning needs.** This is particularly pertinent for VET where these pathways attract a high share of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Professional development offerings could emphasise practical advice on understanding why students are absent from school, identifying students with emotional or psychological problems that can lead to a high risk of disengagement if not properly addressed, and on improving student motivation and their attendance rates.
- **Continue ongoing efforts to invest in developing teachers' skills for utilising digital technologies for teaching and student learning.**
- **Invest in the professional development of teachers to shift to competency-based learning and assessment strategies, including the development of their skills for using inclusive assessment practices and avoiding assessment biases** – recognising that these shifts may take time.

2.3. Continue investing in the professionalisation and development of school leaders' skills and of school governance to ensure inclusion and equity practices address diversity in schools.

- **The recruitment process of school leadership teams should be reviewed** with emphasis on educational leadership, as well as on management and administrative skills. Selection criteria must be clearly defined, in accordance with the model established by Spanish regulation (i.e. leadership and management skills, innovation capacity, knowledge of administrative and budget procedures)/
- In addition, the limited financial benefits (over teaching) are believed to negatively influence the supply of candidates and the establishment of a high-quality school leadership workforce. **There should be an effort to increase the relative attractiveness of salaries and career development opportunities for school leaders.** Such incentives could be larger in vulnerable schools to attract the much-needed high-quality leadership to these schools.
- **Invest in the continuous professional development of school leaders, prioritising those working in vulnerable schools.** This entails developing school leaders' skills to manage diversity, equity and inclusion, and include these perspectives into school self-evaluation processes and the preparation of school development plans in collective efforts with the whole school community. School leaders should also be equipped with the necessary know-how to

foster a positive school climate and improve students' sense of belonging (see Area for action 3).

2.4 The project working group meetings revealed widely shared concerns about the quantity and quality of specialised professionals (e.g. career guidance counsellors, education counsellors, social workers and school psychologists, etc.) that give supplementary support to schools, students, and their families, and the **need for examining options to improve the overall distribution of these professionals across schools. Therefore, Spain should consider using research to:**

- **Assess and map the current concentration of specialised professionals (by area/region and school type), including their profiles, roles and responsibilities and capacity of school guidance teams in terms of their competences and time devoted to supporting students,** and the number of students and schools they cover.
- **Examine options to improve the overall distribution of these specialised professionals across schools.** The study could also explore the motivations and reasons of staff for working in a particular school/area, and willingness to move and/or (also) work in another school, subject to certain conditions.

The findings of these studies should be used to inform future policies and programmes, with the National Institute for Educational Evaluation of the MEFP playing a key role in supporting further evaluations that allow for working towards optimising the workforce (see Area for action 5).

Area for action 3: Promote school and community-level interventions to support diverse students and foster inclusion and equity

At the school-level, different interventions can be leveraged to support diverse students, foster inclusion, equity, and well-being, and reduce the chances of students dropping out (OECD, 2023^[22]). Interventions may include matching resources within schools to meet individual learning needs, reducing grade repetition, limiting school segregation, early intervention, strengthening educational orientation and career guidance, expanding access to quality ECEC, and strengthening the collaboration between schools, parents and local communities.

The proposed school vulnerability index and matched targeting of resources to schools (see Area for action 1) could be used for supporting school-level interventions that respond to different students' learning needs. These could include, among others, providing additional support to vulnerable students and their families, organising learning groups of different sizes, offering additional classes (e.g. homework- or remedial classes) or expanding learning time.

The latter relates to the practice of many schools in Spain operating on an intensive, morning-centred schedule, prompting parents to pay for extra-curricular classes. Spain could consider following the example of OECD countries such as Denmark and Portugal that have moved to full-day, flexible systems to extend learning time. These initiatives have been coupled with increased provision of school cafeterias and extra-curricular activities (Radinger and Boeskens, 2021^[74]). Spain could consider following a similar approach because of the benefits this may bring in particular to disadvantaged students. A feasible transition would require investment in subsidies for meals and school infrastructure, adequate compensation for school staff, etc. (Ferrero, Gortázar and Martínez, 2022^[72]). Again, the proposed school vulnerability index and matched grant funding could be used to promote and support schools in making the transition to extend the learning time for students.

Furthermore, although the LOMLOE caps the number of times students can repeat a grade, working group participants noted that changing the “repetition culture” is likely to take time and effort. Raising further awareness on the negative effects of grade repetition for students and its costs to education systems and

society, as well as on the benefits of pursuing effective alternatives, such as early intervention strategies, is vital in this. Spain may look towards the examples of countries such as Finland and Portugal that have shown that early intervention can be effective in lowering repetition rates (OECD, 2021^[69]; General Direction of Education of Portugal, 2021^[70]; Välijärvi and Sahlberg, 2008^[71]). To implement this, Spain could use the school vulnerability index to identify students at risk and take preventive action as early as possible. A key strength identified for Portugal's strategy to prevent grade repetition and school leaving for example is the focus on local level decision making. Schools develop improvement plans based on their learners' needs, working with key partners such as parents and local authorities (OECD, 2021^[69]).

International research evidence also shows that student allocation and school choice policies can exacerbate inequities if not carefully designed. The LOMLOE sets out to reduce school segregation and should ensure strict enforcement of the regulations forbidding the charging of hidden fees for example. In addition, Spain could consider reviewing its school allocation policies through "controlled choice" measures by reserving a share of places for students of disadvantaged backgrounds or by using a lottery to assign places in schools in high demand (OECD, 2019^[82]). It could also consider national examples such as from Catalonia where several municipalities have merged catchment areas and adjusted the traditional school choice approach of pairing schools and neighborhoods to reduce school segregation (Bonal, 2019^[92]). Spain could also establish dedicated offices at the local level to make it easier for parents to obtain information about school admissions (Ferrer and Gortázar, 2021^[29]).

Additionally, educational orientation and career guidance can serve as powerful means to help reduce ESL. The project working group meetings revealed that a comprehensive approach to educational orientation and career guidance is lacking in some schools and regions. In addition to supporting schools to ensure they have sufficient and competent guidance counsellors (see Area for action 2), Spain may look towards the examples of the United Kingdom and New Zealand where the "Inspiring the Future" programme uses digital technologies for schools to connect at scale with people in work. In addition, building on initiatives already happening in Spain and following the example of countries such as France and Malta, schools and local authorities, could establish a one-week job-shadowing experience in local administrations and businesses for lower secondary students to reflect on their professional interests and future orientation. Spain could also consider further incorporating subjects related to world of work and career guidance in the curriculum, as it currently only appears at the end of 4th grade lower secondary, as an option. In Finland for example students aged 13 to 16 must complete 76 hours of careers education (OECD, n.d.^[93]).

Furthermore, the LOMLOE and Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan (PRTR) bring positive reforms and investment in early childhood education and care (ECEC) which has shown to effectively reduce ESL, especially among socio-economically disadvantaged children (OECD, 2017^[84]; OECD, 2011^[85]). Funding and efforts to expand access to quality ECEC should continue beyond the PRTR ending in 2026 (OECD, forthcoming^[31]).

Finally, school leaders have a vital role to play in analysing the school context, to foster a positive school climate and improve students' sense of belonging and to purposefully include diversity and inclusion perspectives into evaluation processes, with reference to school self-evaluation and improvement planning. Spain should invest in developing school leaders' (and tutors') capacity for establishing and maintaining strong collaborations with parents and the school community (see Area for action 2). Actions like the ones undertaken with the Roma community in Spain, through the *Promociona* programme (Fundación Secretariado Gitano; MEFP, 2022^[94]), Ireland's Partnership Schools Programme (National Parents Council - Primary, 2023^[95]) or getting parents involved through parent-school meetings as has been explored in France (Avvisati et al., 2013^[96]), may serve as source of inspiration and offer the necessary practical guidance.

Recommendations

3.1 Continue and expand efforts to reduce student grade repetition, including:

- As stated in the LOMLOE, **schools should take exhaustive measures to support students at risk of repeating a school year**, including through a personalised plan and by offering support such as remedial classes and tutoring. **Vulnerable schools should be encouraged to use the grant funding to help operationalise such support measures.**
- Reducing grade repetition rates also **requires a gradual modification of assessment and evaluation systems** in line with the actions proposed in the LOMLOE to improve educational success, such as the removal of numerical marking system, evaluation by competencies, and repetition an exceptional measure. This includes building teachers' skills for developing and using inclusive assessment practices and avoiding assessment biases (see Area for action 2).
- **Spain could implement a national communication campaign to raise awareness on the negative effects of grade repetition** for students (lower student performance, demotivation and early school leaving) and costs for school systems and society (costs to society of providing an additional year of education and delaying that student's entry into the labour market) **and the benefits of more effective alternatives, such as early intervention measures.**
- **Consider using the school vulnerability index to identify students at risk and develop early intervention strategies.** Schools not identified as a "vulnerable" through the index should also recognise vulnerable students present in their schools.

3.2 The MEFP and autonomous communities should consider **reviewing school choice and allocation policies for public schools and the publicly subsidised private schools** to ensure students are distributed in a more heterogenous manner across schools to reduce school segregation. This could include exploring:

- **A "controlled school choice policy"**, based on a reserved share of places in oversubscribed schools for students of disadvantaged backgrounds to keep a diverse profile of students, or the use of **a lottery system to assign places in schools in high demand, and/or other (regional) examples of alternative policies that have shown to be effective in reducing school segregation.** This may also require further limiting the ability of public and publicly subsidised private schools to select students in admission processes based on certain criteria, as is done in some autonomous communities.
- Options for the **better allocation of newcomer students arriving throughout the school year across different schools.** To facilitate the implementation of such a policy, it may be necessary to also provide disadvantaged students with transportation and living expenses support, in the form of vouchers or a public transportation card for example.
- Consider establishing **dedicated offices at the local level** to make it easier for parents to obtain information about school admissions, like the municipal schooling offices in Catalonia.

3.3. Strengthen the provision of educational counsellors, educational orientation and career guidance in schools

- **Schools identified as "vulnerable" should be encouraged to use the matched grant funding to ensure they have enough competent educational counsellors to meet student needs.** This guidance and support should be provided on an individualised basis from an early stage. This should be systematic and not be limited to transitions between educational stages.

- Considering the skills mismatches and high rates of early school leavers, **Spain could consider further incorporating subjects related to the world of work and career guidance in the lower secondary school curriculum**, as it currently only appears as optional in the 4th year.
- Further measures could be considered to support schools, including:
 - Building on national and international examples **schools and local authorities could collaborate to establish a one-week work experience** in local administrations and businesses, for lower secondary students to reflect on their professional interests and future orientation.
 - Considering the **use of online technologies** for schools to connect at scale with people in work, as done in the United Kingdom and New Zealand.

3.4. Continue efforts to foster a positive school climate and strengthen the collaboration between schools, parents, and local communities.

- **Spain should invest in developing school leadership teams' skills to manage diversity, equity and inclusion, and foster a positive school climate and improve students' sense of belonging – both requiring strong collaborations with tutors, parents and the larger school community** (see Area for action 2). This could include developing school leader networks and case studies on good practices to serve as sources of inspiration and offer practical guidance.

Area for action 4: Continue to promote curricular flexibility, attractive and quality vocational education and training (VET) and re-engagement programmes

In recent years, Spain has introduced several measures to enhance the curricular flexibility and adaptability of its educational pathways. These are important for accommodating students' abilities, interests and backgrounds (Cerna et al., 2021^[64]) and addressing ESL (European Commission, 2013^[8]). To ensure that the reforms brought by the LOMLOE and the new curriculums approved in March 2022 are implemented, much will depend on the investments made in developing the skills and maintaining the motivation of teachers and trainers. A move to a competency-based learning model and grouping subjects into areas are important shifts but call for sustained investment in developing teachers' skills (see Area for action 2).

In addition, vulnerable schools could be encouraged to offer further curricular flexibility and innovate teaching and student learning by making use of the proposed matched grant funding (see Area for action 1) to offer students opportunities for additional remedial classes or extra-curricular activities for example. The funds could also be used for putting in practice alternative and/or complementary pedagogical strategies, such as team teaching or online learning in response to students' learning needs.

The 2022 Organic Law on VET promotes important measures that are expected to make VET more flexible and attractive, reducing the risk of students leaving school early. As enrolment in VET remains low, there is a need for further awareness raising on these programmes and better aligning both the supply of VET programmes and students' study choices with actual labour market needs (OECD, 2021^[97]). Further strengthening the career guidance in schools at all levels (see Area for action 3) could help raise awareness on the quality and relevance of VET programmes and help de-stigmatise VET. The effective implementation of the law will also depend on companies' willingness to participate in the provision of VET. Spain could consider tax incentives or subsidies for the participation of companies in VET, targeting small- and medium-sized companies. Several countries, like Austria and the Netherlands, have abandoned tax incentives in recent years in favour of direct subsidies to reduce inefficiencies and reach companies that

need the support the most (OECD, forthcoming^[31]). Targeted communication to companies on the possibility and procedures of such measures will be essential for their success.

Several stakeholders also raised concerns about the timetabling of VET programmes. Where needed, schools should be encouraged to explore arrangements with local authorities, autonomous communities and companies to allow for VET classes to take place in morning shifts. This could also be a particular point of attention for education inspectors (see Area for action 5). The working group discussions also highlighted that some students struggle to complete the Intermediate level VET programme in two years. Consideration should be given to making the programme more flexible, for example by spreading out courses over three years and/or by offering a part-time or seasonal modality to accommodate for occupations (such as tourism and agriculture) that vary in intensity throughout the year (e.g. with most of the learning happening in low seasons).

There is a need to further promote second chance education and re-engagement programmes. Information on these programmes is fragmented, and education and local authorities should raise awareness among young adults on opportunities for re-entry into education and training. Adult Education Centres which often deliver classes in regular high schools during evening hours, find it difficult to engage young adults (18- to 24-year-olds). Spain should consider examining options for making Adult Education Centres more attractive to re-engage young early school leavers (by looking at the timing of courses, pedagogical approach, etc.). For this Spain may look into international examples such as France's *micro-lycées* (Onisep, 2022^[98]) to attract those in the 16-to-24-year age group. Furthermore, although Second chance schools (E2O) attract young people who have left school, they operate in parallel to the education system. These schools could be accredited to provide micro-training courses for example, which are less resource intensive than Basic- and Intermediate level VET programmes and recognised by education authorities.

Recommendations

4.1 Building on earlier reforms, the LOMLOE promotes greater **curricular flexibility and a shift to a competency-based learning model to better respond to the learning needs of diverse students and allow those with greater difficulty to regain self-confidence**. Making these important shifts in teaching and learning a reality (among others) **calls for sustained investments in developing teachers' skills, so also beyond the implementation period of the LOMLOE** (see Area for action 2).

In addition, **vulnerable schools should be encouraged, where needed, to offer further curricular flexibility and innovate teaching and learning by making use of the proposed matched grant funding** (see Area for action 1) to offer students opportunities for job-shadowing, additional remedial classes or extra-curricular activities for example. The funds could also be used for putting in practice (alternative, complementary) pedagogical strategies such as one-to-one teaching, team teaching or online learning in response to students' learning needs.

4.2 Spain should continue with the implementation of measures set out under the 2022 Organic Law on VET. To support the reform, during the four-year period for its regulatory development and implementation, MEFP and autonomous communities could also:

- **Consider implementing a national awareness campaign on the quality and relevance of VET programmes, directed at potential students and their families, and companies.** This effort will also benefit from updating, clarifying and increasing visibility of VET programmes, learning pathways and certifications available in each autonomous community. The existing

dedicated website (www.todofp.es) should be regularly updated and made more user friendly for young people, parents, partner companies and education staff and counsellors.

- **Consider providing tax incentives or direct subsidies for companies to participate in VET, prioritising small- and medium-sized companies.** The MEFP should continuously measure the effectiveness of these mechanisms. Targeted communication to companies on the possibility and processes of such measures will be essential for their success.
- **Enhance the flexibility of the Intermediate level VET programme,** for example by spreading out classes over more time for students to complete the programme (e.g. three years) and/or by offering a part-time or seasonal modality.
- **Encourage schools to reconsider the timetabling of VET classes as it can contribute to segregation among students and stigmatisation of VET.** Where needed, arrangements with local authorities, communities and companies could be explored to overcome the lack of spaces in schools.

4.3 Continue promoting participation in re-engagement programmes for early school leavers.

- The autonomous communities and local authorities should continue to work together and where possible expand their efforts to **raise awareness on and disseminate information on Adult Education Centres (CEPA) and Second chance schools (E2O) in the territory, including through the provision of a website (or webpage on the MEFP website) to provide information on all re-engagement options and programmes, under a single access point.**
- **Examine ways to (re-)engage early leavers that do not have the GESO diploma into basic-level VET programmes.** This could be through a specific modality that focuses on dual training, and for which MEFP could explore (i.e. pilot) providing financial incentives (through dedicated grants or conditional cash transfers) for participating students.
- **Examine options for making Adult Education Centres more attractive for re-engaging young early school leavers** (by looking at the timing of courses, pedagogical approach, etc.). **Pursue, in collaboration with the Second chance schools (E2O) organisation, the accreditation of second chance schools that provide quality training.** To that effect, education and employment administrations could give greater recognition to the work carried out by second chance accredited schools by providing them with support to deliver high-quality accredited training, to ensure the stability of their trainers and staff. The provision of accredited training could focus, at least initially, on formal micro-training credentials, which are comparatively less intensive than Basic- and Intermediate level VET programmes and recognised by education authorities.

Area for action 5: Enhance and institutionalise nation-wide collaboration and knowledge exchange on “what works”

The project working group meetings showed both the potential and interest among the MEFP, autonomous communities and other stakeholders for further collaboration and sharing of data and knowledge on “what works” (and what doesn’t) to inform policies and programmes aimed at preventing and addressing ESL. Building on the momentum gained through this project, there was a recognition of the potential and interest in further strengthening the exchange of information at the regional level. The knowledge gained and issues raised during meetings between the autonomous communities and local authorities could feed into the central level discussions between the MEFP and autonomous communities to support monitoring and evaluation, and the planning of future actions for reducing ESL. For example, there would seem much to

learn from the experiences of local authorities in supporting schools by mobilising other public services and the community at large, to prevent and address ESL.

As part of these efforts, Spain could also consider establishing a common digital platform or website that brings together relevant information on ESL to support planning, monitoring and evaluation at all levels of the system. The platform could include an overview of current and upcoming programmes, evaluations, good practices and case studies of ESL (-related) policies and programmes, and other practical resources such as the proposed guidelines for the effective use of the grant funding for vulnerable schools (see Area for action 1).

Furthermore, in line with the LOMLOE, Spain should make the systematic monitoring and evaluations an integrated (mandatory) part of all education policies and programmes. The inclusion of mid-term and ex-post evaluations could allow for identifying and learning from “what works” – and what does not – and thereby inform future ESL policies and programmes. Ex-ante evaluations or pilot studies should be systematically promoted to examine alternative solutions and modifications prior to scaling up. In addition, monitoring and research on students’ educational trajectories and transitions into work could allow for exploring key policy questions that will inform future policies and programming. It could also allow for better targeting of policies and programmes to certain student groups (e.g. immigrant students, those from the Roma community, students in remote areas, or students with special education needs). Spain already has well-established bodies, such as the National Institute for Educational Evaluation (INEE) of the MEFP and regional evaluation bodies that could be reinforced to take on a role in conducting and providing support in the evaluation of educational policies and programmes and help ensure that lessons effectively learnt are shared and feed into policy making and programming.

In addition, external school evaluation, as well as school self-evaluation and improvement planning can play a key role in ensuring the effectiveness of school-level interventions to support diversity, inclusion and equity in education, and thereby in the prevention of ESL (Cerna et al., 2021^[64]; European Union, 2015^[35]; OECD, 2013^[67]). Recognising this potential and acknowledging there is scope for further strengthening and better embedding these processes in many schools across Spain, the MEFP and autonomous communities could make this a priority for further knowledge exchange. These discussions could be enriched by drawing from the experiences of other EU and OECD countries to support the autonomous communities in the further strengthening of school self-evaluation and planning, and external evaluations, with particular reference to the reduction of ESL. Following the example of Ireland and the Netherlands, the education inspectorates of the autonomous communities could consider exploring and piloting a risk-based assessment approach using the school vulnerability index (see 31970992Area for action 1) for prioritising schools for external evaluations and follow up actions; thereby collecting valuable information on the policies and practices of vulnerable schools in preventing and addressing ESL. These could be used to inform and support other (vulnerable) schools.

Recommendations

5.1 Building on the momentum gained through this project, continue the sharing of data and knowledge, and collaboration between the MEFP and autonomous communities to reduce ESL. Spain could:

- **Continue organising regular meetings (e.g. quarterly or bi-annual) at the central level to discuss progress on the implementation of this action plan and other important matters** such as the cross-sectoral collaboration of public services (e.g. health, social services, municipalities) concerned with the prevention and addressing of ESL; the sharing of findings of

programme evaluations and “good practices”; or jointly collaborate on the design of new programmes that are aimed at reducing ESL.

- **Organise similar meetings at the regional level to promote peer learning and collaboration, monitor the implementation of programmes, and support the design of future policies and programmes.** The knowledge shared and issues raised between the local authorities and autonomous community could feed into the central level discussions between the MEFP and autonomous communities to support monitoring and evaluation, and planning of future actions for the prevention and addressing of ESL.
- **Consider establishing a common digital platform or website that brings together relevant information on ESL to support planning, monitoring and evaluation at all levels of the system.** The platform could include (among others) an overview of current and upcoming programmes, programme evaluations, an overview of good practices and case studies of ESL (related) policies and programmes, and other practical resources such as the proposed guidelines for the effective use of the grant funding for vulnerable schools (see Area for action 1).

5.2 Promote and institutionalise a monitoring and evaluation culture to inform policy and programme development.

School evaluation

- **The MEFP and autonomous communities should consider sharing knowledge and good practices on the implementation of school self-evaluation and development planning and external evaluations** because of their potential for ensuring the effectiveness of school-level interventions to support diversity, inclusion and equity in education, and thereby in the prevention of ESL.
- Following the example of several OECD countries such as Ireland and the Netherlands, **the education inspectorates of the autonomous communities could consider exploring and piloting a risk-based assessment approach using the school vulnerability index to prioritise schools in which to conduct external evaluations that will allow for identifying strengths and good practices, as well as areas for further improvement and follow up actions;** thereby collecting valuable information on the policies and practices of vulnerable schools in preventing and addressing ESL that could be used to inform and support others.

Policy evaluation

- In line with the LOMLOE, **make the systematic monitoring and evaluations an integrated (mandatory) part of all education policies and programmes.** Systematic monitoring and evaluation should be part of the design of any new policy or programme. The inclusion of mid-term and ex-post evaluations could help identify and learn from “what works” – and what does not – and thereby inform future ESL policies and programmes. Ex-ante evaluations or pilot studies should be systematically promoted to examine alternative solutions and modifications prior to deciding on scaling up.
- **Monitor and research students’ educational trajectories from primary through upper secondary (in all pathways) and transition into work to explore key policy questions** such as “when are students leaving school?” and “what factors influence students leaving school early?”. This information will help inform policies and programmes to prevent and address ESL.
- **Continue institutionalising an evaluation culture by:**

- **reinforcing the role and responsibilities of the National Institute for Educational Evaluation (INEE) of the MEFP by creating a policy evaluation unit.** For example, specialised staff could be dedicated to conducting and/or providing support in the evaluation of (selected) educational policies and programmes. Its services could be offered to the autonomous communities and other educational actors that request it.
- **collaborating with the Institute for the Evaluation of Public Policies, and with the evaluation bodies of the autonomous communities.**

This would ensure lessons learnt feed into policy making and programming, including by systematically collecting and disseminating evaluations and “good practices” of ESL (related) policies and programmes.

Proposal for an Action plan

The text below presents the actors involved and timeframe (prioritisation) for implementing each of the recommendations. The prioritisation is given shape through a scale of four categories described below and is based on the foreseen impact of the recommendations, their urgency and sequencing in relation to other recommended actions.

	Purple	Highest priority
	Orange	High priority
	Yellow	Medium priority
	Green	Lower priority

Recommendations	Actors involved	Timeframe (priorities)
1. Establish a common approach to identifying “vulnerable schools” and targeting of resources		
1.1 Develop a “school vulnerability index” that is comparable across Spain and can be used for identifying and targeting support to schools		
Develop a school vulnerability index that includes i) a core component, with common indicators across all autonomous communities and ii) a discretionary component to respond to local circumstances.	Lead agencies: Sectoral Conference for Education MEFP Other partners involved: Autonomous communities	
Establish a working group to design and oversee the piloting of the “school vulnerability index”.	MEFP Sectoral Conference for Education Autonomous communities Local authorities	
Provide schools with guidance and support to understand the vulnerability index and on the effective use of grant funding.	MEFP Autonomous communities School leaders	
1.2 Continue working towards a common approach to school-level data management		
Continue the initiated discussions to work towards a common approach to school-level data management and early warning system on students at risk of early school leaving.	MEFP Sectoral Conference for Education Autonomous communities School leaders and teachers	
Continue ongoing efforts to establish common definitions and measurements for “student	MEFP Sectoral Conference for Education	

absenteeism”, “student disengagement”, “students requiring specific educational support”, and “students with special education needs”.	Autonomous communities	
Consider establishing a common IT platform that interconnects regional registers and brings together the relevant anonymized data and information on vulnerable young people.	MEFP Autonomous Communities School leaders, teachers, tutors	
2. Develop capacity of educators’ capacity to manage diverse students, foster inclusion and prevent early school leaving		
2.1 Enhance the recruitment and selection processes of teachers to ensure they have the competences and skills to manage diverse students and respond to their learning needs		
Review the admission criteria and selection process of students accessing initial teacher education degrees and the selection process to enter the teaching profession, giving more weight to socio-emotional skills and to the Practicum.	MEFP Ministry of Universities Autonomous communities	
Encourage people from diverse backgrounds to enter the education profession, through the promotion of positive role models and tailored communication campaigns.	MEFP Ministry of Universities Autonomous communities	
Consider reviewing initial teacher education programmes to better prepare teachers for managing diversity in the classroom.	MEFP Ministry of Universities Autonomous communities Universities	
2.2 Promote high-quality professional development for all teachers, including those in VET pathways and prioritising those in vulnerable schools		
Improve teachers’ (and especially tutor teachers’) capacity, through training, to identify and support students at risk of dropping out and address their learning needs.	MEFP Autonomous communities Universities School leaders, teachers, and tutors	
Continue ongoing efforts to invest in developing teachers’ skills for utilising ICT for teaching and learning.	MEFP Autonomous Communities Universities School leaders, teachers, and tutors	
Invest in the professional development of teachers to shift to competency-based learning strategies and use of inclusive assessment strategies.	MEFP Autonomous communities School leaders, teachers, and tutors	
2.3 Continue investing in the professionalisation and development of school leaders’ skills and school governance		
- Review the recruitment process of school leadership teams and consider increasing the relative attractiveness of salaries and career development opportunities for school leaders. - Continue investing in the continuous professional development of school leaders, prioritising those working in vulnerable schools.	MEFP Autonomous communities	
2.4 Examine the current distribution and profiles of specialised support professionals in schools		
Conduct a study to assess and map current concentration (by area/region and type of school) and the profiles, roles and responsibilities and capacity of specialised support professionals.	MEFP Autonomous communities	

Examine options to improve the overall distribution of these human resources across schools, using the findings to inform future policies and programmes.		
3. Promote early school-level interventions to support diverse students, and foster inclusion, equity and well-being, paying special attention to transitions between educational stages		
3.1 Continue and expand efforts to reduce grade repetition		
Support schools to take exhaustive measures for supporting students at risk of repeating a year, encouraging them to use grant funding to operationalise support.	MEFP Autonomous communities School leaders and teachers	
Support the gradual modification of assessment and evaluation systems.	MEFP Autonomous communities School leaders and teachers	
Consider the implementation of a national communication campaign to raise awareness on the inefficiency and costliness of grade repetition, and the benefits of more effective alternatives.	MEFP	
Consider using the school vulnerability index to identify students at risk and develop early intervention strategies.	MEFP Autonomous communities Sectoral Conference on Education	
3.2 Review school choice and student allocation policies to reduce the socio-economic segregation of students		
Consider establishing a “controlled school choice” policy for public schools and publicly subsidised private schools, through reserved places and/or a lottery system.	MEFP Autonomous communities	
Consider options for better allocating newcomer students to schools, providing them with specific support.		
Consider further promoting the establishment of dedicated offices at the local level to provide information for parents about school admissions.		
3.3 Strengthen the provision of educational counsellors, including for educational orientation and career guidance in schools		
Using the proposed vulnerable school index, match grant funding to ensure primary and secondary schools have sufficient educational orientation and career guidance provision.	MEFP Autonomous communities	
Consider further incorporating career guidance in the lower secondary school curriculum and promoting early exposure to the world of work, through job-shadowing programmes and use of online technologies.	MEFP Autonomous communities Schools	
3.4 Continue efforts to foster a positive school climate and strengthen collaboration between schools, parents and local communities		
Encourage, through dedicated training and good practices, school leadership teams to manage diversity, equity and inclusion, and foster initiatives to establish and maintain strong collaborations with parents and local communities.	MEFP Autonomous communities School leaders Local authorities School communities	
Continue to promote curricular flexibility, attractive and quality vocational education and training (VET) and re-engagement programmes		

4.1 Continue to encourage curricular flexibility and learning measures that respond to the needs of diverse students

Support (through sustained professional development) school leaders and teachers to make use of curricular flexibility and competency-based learning measures in the classroom.	MEFP Autonomous communities School leaders	
Encourage vulnerable schools to make use of the proposed vulnerability index to match funding to offer flexible learning and put into practice alternative pedagogical strategies.	Teachers	

4.2 Continue with the implementation measures set out under the new 2022 Organic Law on VET

Consider implementing a national awareness campaign on the quality and relevance of VET programmes and update the www.todofp.es website.	MEFP Autonomous communities Companies involved in VET VET schools and training centres Students and teachers involved in VET	
Consider providing tax incentives or direct subsidies for companies to participate in VET, targeting in priority small- and medium-sized companies, and provide targeted communication tools and materials for those wishing to participate.	Government of Spain Autonomous communities (Small and medium- sized) companies Consejo Económico y Social	
Support schools to enhance the flexibility of the Intermediate level VET programme, by spreading out classes and/or offering part-time or seasonal modalities to study.	MEFP Autonomous communities Municipalities Schools	
Encourage schools to reconsider the timetabling of VET classes, following the example of schools offering VET during the day and online	Education authorities Companies involved in VET Schools and training centres	

4.3 Continue promoting participation in re-engagement programmes for early school leavers

Raise awareness on and disseminate information on Adult Education Centres and Second chance schools in the territory, including through the provision of a dedicated webpage giving a single access point	MEFP Autonomous communities Local authorities Training centres	
Examine ways to (re-)engage early leavers that do not have the GESO diploma into basic-level VET programmes, through financial incentives for example	MEFP	
Examine options for making Adult Education Centres more attractive for re-engaging young early school leavers.	MEFP Autonomous communities Adult education centres	
Consider accreditation of second chance schools that provide quality training, and options for them to provide micro-trainings.	MEFP Autonomous communities Second-chance schools (E2O) organisation	

Enhance and institutionalise nation-wide collaboration and knowledge exchange on “what works”

5.1 Continue the collaboration, sharing of data and knowledge and peer exchange between the MEFP and autonomous communities to reduce ESL

Continue organising regular (quarterly or bi-annual) meetings at the central level to discuss progress on the implementation of this action plan, and other matters related to ESL.	MEFP	
	Autonomous communities Sectoral Conference for Education	
Organise similar meetings at the regional level (i.e. within autonomous communities) to promote peer learning and collaboration, to monitor implementation of actions, and to support the design of future policies and programmes.	Autonomous communities	
	Municipalities Schools (including school community) Social and other local services and organisations	
Establish a common digital platform or website that brings together relevant information on ESL actions and programmes to support planning, monitoring, and evaluation at all levels of the system.	MEFP	
	Autonomous communities Sectoral Conference for Education	

5.2 Promote and institutionalise a monitoring and evaluation culture to inform policy and programme development

Consider sharing knowledge and good practices on the implementation of school self-evaluation and development planning and external evaluations.	MEFP Autonomous communities	
	Schools Services of the Education Inspectorate	
Consider exploring and piloting a risk-assessment approach – using the school vulnerability index – to prioritise schools for conducting external evaluations and follow up actions.	MEFP Autonomous communities Services of the Education Inspectorate	
	School leaders	
Make the systematic monitoring and evaluation of policies an integrated (mandatory) part of all education policies and programmes.	MEFP Autonomous communities INEE Services of the Education Inspectorate	
Monitor and research students' educational trajectories from primary through upper secondary, and as they transition into work.	MEFP Autonomous communities, including evaluation bodies	
	Schools	
Continue to institutionalise an evaluation culture by reinforcing the role and responsibilities of the National Institute for Educational Evaluation (INEE) and consider the creation of a specialist policy evaluation unit, as well as by collaborating with the Institute for the Evaluation of Public Policies and the evaluation bodies of the autonomous communities.	MEFP	
	Institute for the Evaluation of Public Policies Evaluation bodies of the autonomous communities	

Implementing Education Policies: Supporting Effective Change in Education

This document was prepared by the Implementing Education Policies Project team. The OECD project *Implementing Policies: Supporting Effective Change in Education* offers peer-learning and tailored support for countries and jurisdictions to help them achieve success in the implementation of their policies and reforms in school education. The tailored support consists of three complementary strands of work that target countries' and jurisdictions' needs: policy and implementation assessment, strategic advice and implementation seminars.



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Annex A. Stakeholder engagement processes

Throughout the project, the OECD project team, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MEFP) and DG REFORM, organised several engagement activities to involve and include the views of key education stakeholders and the education authorities of the autonomous communities. An overview of the different activities is presented in Table A1. The research tools, meeting agendas and lists of stakeholders participating in each activity are presented in the remainder of the Annex.

Table A.1. Overview of stakeholder engagement activities throughout the project

Stakeholder engagement activity	Timeframe
<i>Stakeholder meetings and focus groups interviews</i>	
Stakeholder Advisory Group	November 2021 - June 2023
Focus groups interviews with key stakeholders	December 2021 - January 2022
Questionnaire to Autonomous Communities	February 2022 - March 2022
<i>Peer-learning event and workshops</i>	
International peer-learning event	June 2022
Working group discussions	September 2022 - November 2022

Stakeholder meetings and focus group interviews

Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) meetings for regular consultations

A consultative advisory group, made up of key education stakeholders in Spain was constituted at the start of the project. Its members were identified in collaboration with the MEFP and DG REFORM and met regularly throughout the project (November 2021 to June 2023) to feed and enrich discussions, project activities and reports. Table A.2 gives an overview of the institutions and representatives that made up the SAG.

Table A.2. Stakeholder Advisory Group members

Institution
High Commissioner for Child Poverty <i>Alto Comisionado contra la Pobreza Infantil</i>
Adult Education Centres Association <i>Asociación de Entidades de Educación para Adultos (FAEA)</i>
Sectoral Conference for Education <i>Conferencia Sectorial de Educación</i>
State School Council <i>Consejo Escolar del Estado</i>
General Council for Social Work <i>Consejo General del Trabajo Social</i>
Federation of Public School Leaders <i>Federación de directores de escuelas del sector público (FEDADI)</i>
Programme for Educational Orientation, Advancement and Enrichment

Programa para la Orientación, Avance y Enriquecimiento Educativo (PROA+)

Network for Second Chance Schools

Red de Escuelas de Segunda Oportunidad

General Secretariate for Vocational Education and Training

Secretaría general de Formación Profesional

Focus group interviews with key education stakeholders

Following a preliminary desk-based analysis of ESL policies in Spain conducted in September-November 2021, the OECD project team carried out semi-structured interviews and focus groups to uncover stakeholders' views on key challenges and potential approaches to tackling ESL in Spain.

Table A.3 provides an overview of the education stakeholders and organisations interviewed by the OECD team between December 2021 and January 2022. The MEFP and the SAG provided advice on the stakeholders to interview. Four groups were devised: i) research institutions, foundations and NGOs; ii) students, including those who had left their studies or were in second chance programmes; iii) school leaders, teachers and parents; iv) other stakeholders, including social workers and teacher unions. Each group had a maximum of eight participants and the OECD team was divided in two when there were more than six participants. All focus group discussions were conducted in Spanish.

Table A.3. Overview of focus group discussions held by the OECD project team

Group 1: Research Institutions, foundations, and NGOs - 13 December 2022 (in-person)
Comité Español de Representantes de Personas con discapacidad (CERMI)
Cruz Roja
Alto Comisionado contra la pobreza infantil
Fundación COTEC
Fundación Tomillo
Fundació Bofill
Fundación Bertelsmann
Fundación ESE
Save the Children
Secretariado Gitano
Group 2: Students, including students who left their studies and were in second chance education - 10 January 2022 (in-person)
Seven young people, aged 17-22
Group 3: School leaders, teachers and parents - 11 January 2022 (online)
Asociación Rumiñahui
Confederación Católica Nacional de Padres de Alumnos (CONCAPA)
Federación de Asociaciones de Directivos de Centros Educativos Públicos (FEDADI)
Group 4: Other stakeholders, including social workers and teacher unions - 12 January 2022 (online)
Sindicato profesional de la Enseñanza pública (ANPE)
Comisiones Obreras (CCOO)
Confederación Empresarial Española de la Economía Social (CEPES)
Consejo General Trabajo Social
Corporación Mondragón
Asociación de Entidades de Educación de Personas Adultas (FAEA)

Participants were invited to share their views on priorities for an action plan, and how they could contribute to its implementation. Questions related to the core dimensions of the OECD policy framework for implementation. Different interview schedules were used for adult and student groups. Table A4 shows an example of non-exhaustive questions that were used for groups 1, 3 and 4. Table A5 shows an example

of non-exhaustive questions that were used in group 2 with youth. All interviews were conducted in Spanish.

Table A.4. Focus group interview schedule for groups 1, 3 and 4

Background questions:
What is your role in the institution or organisation?
What parts of a future action plan to address early school leaving (ESL) are or would be most relevant to your work?
Are you familiar or have participated in other programmes to tackle ESL? If yes, briefly elaborate on your experience.
Designing an effective and properly coordinated action plan:
What specific policies, programmes or actions do you consider to be necessary to develop an effective and coordinated plan to tackle ESL in Spain? For example:
Type of action (preventive or corrective)
Target population (gender, socio-economic status, origin, school performance, etc.)
What are the priority areas where the efforts of all education authorities should coincide to achieve this objective at the national, regional, local and school levels? For example: funding, school autonomy, support for teachers, curriculum adaptation.
Inclusive stakeholder engagement:
What would you consider to be your specific roles and responsibilities in an action plan to address ESL?
Are there any interactive forums or processes to implement protocols, or will it be necessary to create new ones to work with the actors involved in implementing such a plan?
Conducive context: applying the LOMLOE within the action plan
What areas of educational policy would be affected by such a plan (e.g., teacher professional development, evaluation, funding, etc.)?
What needs to be done to achieve alignment of the different actions taken at the national, regional and local levels and facilitate cooperation between the various actors, as well as with other type of policies?
Currently, do you consider that you and your team have the appropriate skills or capacity to play a role in the implementation of the action plan to address ESL?

Table A.5. Focus group interview schedule for group 2

Discussing early school leaving in Spain and personal experience
Why do you think young people leave school early in Spain?
Briefly explain the issues you have encountered in your educational journey. If possible, say:
What do you value most from your educational experience to date?
What do you value the least?
What have you done as a result?
What does school mean to you?
How do you assess the actions undertaken by your teachers, school, family and close environment?
Are teachers prepared to address student diversity?
Are teachers prepared to understand adolescent behaviour?
Have you been given derogatory labels by teachers?
What motivates you to keep on studying? To stop studying?
What type of career guidance activities have you participated in?

For those who apply, what was your experience with:

Being placed in the “*Programa de Diversificación Curricular*”?

Having repeated a grade?

Being placed in the non-bilingual classes?

Questionnaire to autonomous communities on existing policies and programmes to tackle early school leaving

The OECD team, in coordination with the MEFP and DG REFORM designed an online questionnaire to collect updated and detailed information on existing policies and programmes to tackle ESL in the seventeen autonomous communities and the two autonomous cities. The questionnaire had twenty-eight questions that covered the following aspects: i) current practices at regional level and information/evaluation of outcomes; ii) obstacles for the effective implementation of ESL policies; iii) good practices at regional level; and iv) areas for improvement.

The questionnaire (reproduced in Table A6) was developed on LimeSurvey and available for respondents from 8 February 2022 to 31 March 2022. All autonomous communities, as well as the two autonomous cities responded to the questionnaire.

Table A.6. Questionnaire to autonomous communities

Section A: General information
A1: Welcome, please complete the following information
Name:
Role:
Institution:
Autonomous community/city:
Section B: On the design of programmes to reduce ESL: characteristics
B1: Programme start and duration
B2: Target population
B3: Specific objective(s)
B4: Participants
B5: Programme activities and actions
B6: Programme results
B7: Total and/or annual budget
Section D: On the design of programmes to reduce ESL: responsibilities
D1: Ministry of Education and Vocational Training
D2: Autonomous Community
D3: Municipalities
D4: School
D5: Other
Section E: On the involvement of stakeholders: participation
E1: Name all the relevant stakeholders involved in programmes to tackle ESL in your autonomous community and explain their specific responsibilities (for example: parents, unions, NGOs)
Section F: On the involvement of stakeholders: organisation
F1: How were stakeholders invited or selected
F2: Decision-making processes
F3: Accountability mechanisms
Section G: On the conducive context to develop existing programmes to tackle ESL
G1: Please explain if necessary to coordinate actions at different levels of government (national, regional, local) to carry out programmes, and how this was undertaken. If coordination did not occur, or was not necessary, please explain the reasons for this
G2: Please indicate if the stakeholders involved in programmes to reduce ESL in your autonomous community have

required specific training. If so, please explain what it consisted of

G3: Please explain the communication strategy that was used to inform on the actions and results of the programmes to tackle ESL in your autonomous community. If no communication strategy is being undertaken, please explain the reasons for this

Peer-learning event and workshops

International peer-learning event to learn from and discuss good practices

On 16 June 2022, the OECD, MEFP and DG REFORM team organised a peer-learning event to discuss international relevant practices with experts from Finland, Portugal and Ireland. The objective of the event was to give Spanish authorities and key education stakeholders the opportunity to learn from and discuss the experiences of other countries regarding policies to reduce ESL.

The event aimed to:

- Identify critical elements for the design of policies and instruments to reduce ESL from a systematic/national perspective based on the experience of Ireland, Portugal and Finland
- Discuss the main challenges for the implementation of ESL policies that respond to regional needs based on the experiences of Ireland, Finland and Portugal
- Reflect, together with international experts, the OECD team, the European Commission and the authorities of the autonomous communities, what elements of these countries' experiences can be applied to Spain.

Table A7 presents the agenda for the event, which was organised at the MEFP premises in Madrid.

Table A.7. International peer-learning event agenda (16 June 2022)

Time	Topic and speakers
8:30 – 9:00	Participant registration
9:00 – 9:30	Welcome and introductory remarks • Director General of Evaluation and Territorial Cooperation, Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MEFP) • Policy Officer, Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support, European Commission • Head of the Policy Advice and Implementation Division, Directorate for Education and Skills, OECD
9:30 – 10:45	Session 1: The case of Ireland <i>Presenters:</i> • Representatives from the Irish Department of Education <i>Moderator:</i> representative from the OECD
10:45 – 12:00	Session 2: The case of Portugal <i>Presenter:</i> • Deputy General Director at the Portuguese Ministry of Education <i>Moderator:</i> representative from the European Commission
12:00 – 12:40	Coffee break
12:40 – 14:40	Session 3: The case of Finland and presentation of other country case studies <i>Presenters:</i> • Advisor at the Finnish Ministry of Education • OECD external expert supporting the project <i>Moderator:</i> representative from the OECD
14:40-15:00	Closing remarks
15:00	Lunch at the MEFP premises

Working group discussions with autonomous communities to design an action plan

From September to November 2022, working group sessions were organised online with representatives from different autonomous communities and other education stakeholders. The list of participants in these sessions is available in Table A10.

The objectives of these sessions were to work collaboratively to (i) learn from the practical experience of different autonomous communities; (ii) discuss and elaborate concrete proposals for an Action plan; (iii) propose criteria to assess the effects of the options selected. The following three thematic working groups were organised:

- Group 1: Equity and well-being
- Group 2: Curricular flexibility and alternative training pathways
- Group 3: Generation of data and evaluation of policies and actions

Six sessions (two per group) were held online throughout September-October 2022. Table A8 presents the calendar and topics of these sessions.

Table A.8. Calendar and discussion topics for sessions 1 and 2 (September – October 2022)

	Group 1: Equity and well-being	Group 2: Curricular flexibility and alternative training pathways	Group 3: Data generation, information processing and evaluation of policies and actions
Session 1: Presentations and discussion on current practices and priorities	26 September 2022 9:00 – 11:00 am	27 September 2022 9:00 – 11:00 am	28 September 2022 9:00 – 11:00 am
Session 2: Technical discussion, identification of proposals and concrete actions	17 October 2022 9:00 – 11:00 am With presentation from: Fundación COTEC para la Innovación	18 October 2022 9:00 – 11:00 am With presentation from: Fundació Bofill	19 October 2022 9:00 – 11:00 am With presentation from: Subdirecció de Estadística MEFP

On 2 November 2022, the OECD team, in collaboration with the MEFP and DG REFORM, organised working group sessions in hybrid format, with in-person participation in Madrid as well as online. This session built on previous ones to define concrete measures for consideration in the action plan recommendations. The three thematic groups were further divided into three sub-sessions running in parallel, allowing for small group conversations. Table A9 presents the agenda of the full-day event.

Table A.9. Agenda and discussion topics for session 3 (2 November 2022)

Time	Topic		
9:30 – 10:00	Participant registration and welcome		
Group 1 – Equity and well-being			
10:00 – 11:30 <i>Parallel sessions</i>	Group 1A: How to best support teachers and educators to deal with diversity and inclusion?	Group 1B: How to reinforce school guidance and teaching of socio-emotional skills?	Group 1C: How to promote collaboration at the school and institutional levels?
11:30 – 12:00	Coffee break		
Group 2 – Curricular flexibility and alternative training pathways			

12:00 – 13:30 Parallel sessions	Group 2A: How to further develop curricular flexibility?	Group 2B: What can different training pathways and diverse offer bring?	Group 2C: How to implement better communication mechanisms with students and their families, and avoid segregation?
Group 3 – Data generation, information processing and evaluation of policies and actions			
13:30 – 15:00 Parallel sessions	Group 3A: What should be included in the development of a common “vulnerability index”?	Group 3B: How can platforms, protocols, and early detection mechanisms be improved?	Group 3C: What needs to change in the evaluation culture and how can the inspectorate’s role be developed?
15:00 – 16:15	Lunch break		
16:15 – 17:00	Plenary session: priorities and next steps to develop the action plan recommendations		

Finally, Table A10 shows the exhaustive list of participants in online and in-person working group sessions combined. This includes representatives from the autonomous communities and other education bodies and organisations. Participants are listed per group and in alphabetical order.

Table A.10. List of autonomous communities and other stakeholders who participated in the working group discussions

Group 1: Equity and well-being	Group 2: Curricular flexibility and alternative training pathways	Group 3: Data generation, information processing and evaluation of policies and actions
Autonomous communities		
Andalusia Aragon Asturias Balearic Islands Canary Islands Cantabria Castile and León Castilla-La Mancha Catalonia Valencian Community Extremadura Galicia Madrid Community Region of Murcia Foral Community of Navarre Basque Country The Rioja	Andalusia Aragon Balearic Islands Canary Islands Cantabria Castile and León Castilla-La Mancha Catalonia Valencian Community Extremadura Galicia Madrid Community Region of Murcia Foral Community of Navarre The Rioja	Andalusia Aragon Balearic Islands Canary Islands Cantabria Castilla-La Mancha Catalonia Valencian Community Extremadura Galicia Madrid Community Region of Murcia Foral Community of Navarre The Rioja
Other education stakeholders		
CCOO Teaching Union Conference of Deans of Education (University of the Balearic Islands) European Commission-DG REFORM Faculties of Education General Council of Social Work General Secretary for Vocational Training High Commissioner for Child Poverty Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MEFP) Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Programme for Orientation, Advancement and Educational	CCOO Teaching Union Conference of Deans of Education (University of the Balearic Islands) European Commission – DG REFORM General Secretary for Vocational Training of the MEFP High Commissioner for Child Poverty MEFP OECD PROA+ Spanish Association of Second Chance Schools State School Council	European Commission – DG REFORM General Secretary for Statistics and Studies of the MEFP MEFP National Institute for Educational Evaluation (INEE) OECD PROA+ State School Council

Enrichment (PROA+) Spanish Association of Second Chance Schools State School Council		
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