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Report of the  
ETUCE Closing Conference

# Teacher Unions Preventing Early School Leaving through the Use of ICT in Education

Bratislava, 28-29 November 2013



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Lifelong  
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*Rapport de la conférence de clôture du CSEE:*

*«Eviter l'abandon scolaire précoce grâce à l'utilisation des TIC dans l'éducation» – Bratislava  
28-29 Novembre 2013*

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# 1 Introduction

The closing conference of the project ***Teacher Unions Preventing Early School Leaving through the Use of ICT in Education*** was held in Bratislava on 28-29 November 2013. The conference gathered more than 40 representatives from European teacher trade unions to discuss practical guidelines on how information and communication technologies (ICT) can be used to prevent early school leaving (ESL).



Plenary Session

The **objective of the conference**

was **to discuss and amend the draft practical guidelines** in the context of the project results, which derived from four case studies conducted in Denmark, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Azerbaijan. The final practical guidelines will be presented for adoption to the ETUCE Committee in April 2014.

## 1.1 Project Description

The project seeks to connect the serious issue of early school leaving to the beneficial effects of the use of ICT in education. More specifically, the project’s objectives are to:

Identify ways how the pedagogic use of ICT can help to motivate and (re)attract potential drop-outs back to school.

Analyse how teachers can use ICT to bridge the gap between pupils’ experience at home and what they learn in compulsory education.

Determine the specific skills that teachers need to integrate ICT in class.

Develop concrete guidelines on the innovative use of ICT in education in support of the prevention of early school leaving.

**Susan Flocken, ETUCE project coordinator**, presented how the project’s two topics, early school leaving and the use of information and communication technologies in education, are connected. With regard to early school leaving, Eurostat statistics on ESL have shown that more than six million young people left school in 2009 with only lower secondary education or less. **Early school leaving is connected to the risk of**

**unemployment and less participation in democratic processes.** With regard to ICT, there is a shortage of ICT skills in Europe as the recent PIAAC study (October 2013), among others, has shown. Further empirical evidence suggests that ICT can be a motivator in education. The STEPS Study (2006-2009) showed that ICT has a **positive impact on wider educational goals**, such as students' attendance, behaviours, motivation, attitudes, confidence, and engagement.



The Advisory Group (Roy Leitch, project expert; Hans Laugesen, GL, Denmark (Project coordinator); Nigar Mustafazade, AITUCEW, Azerbaijan; George Koursakov, ESEUR, Russia; Susan Flocken, ETUCE secretariat; Ivan Šoš, OZPŠaV, Slovakia; Eleni Zografaki, OLME, Greece; Maria Arminda Bragança, FNE, Portugal; Bert Imminga, AOb, The Netherlands. Absent: Guntars Catlaks, project expert

This project saw a multinational team working together as an advisory group on a series of case studies in schools and teacher training institutions in Denmark, the Netherlands, Portugal and Azerbaijan. In September 2013, a workshop was conducted to discuss the findings<sup>1</sup> and to draft practical guidelines. The aim of conference in Bratislava was to discuss and amend the final draft of the practical guidelines.

## 1.2 Words of Welcome and Introduction



Walter Dresscher

In his opening speech, **Walter Dresscher, ETUCE vice-president**, welcomed all the conference participants and expressed his gratitude for their engagement with the topic of early school leaving throughout the project. ESL is a serious issue which has an enormous effect on peoples' lives. Early school leavers are more likely to have a lower socio-economic status and to be less active citizens. For this reason, preventing early school leaving has become one of the priorities of the European Commission's working programme. It is the unions' task to work together with the European Commission, employers and member organisations on the topic.

There are many reasons why some young people give up education and training prematurely: learning difficulties, social problems, or a lack of motivation, guidance and support. Looking towards the factors which teacher unions can

<sup>1</sup> The findings of the case studies were analysed and published in the [research report](#) which can be downloaded from the project website [www.elfe-eu.net](http://www.elfe-eu.net).

influence, **ICT proposes new chances to teaching**. Still, teachers find in their daily work that **content made available through ICT does not always correspond to their professional needs and expectations**. This is why teachers need to take the initiative to close this gap between teaching demands and available resources and materials. Only then can teachers make full use of the new resources.

**Vladimír Belovič, Director General of the Section of International Cooperation, European Affairs and Lifelong Learning at the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic**, pointed out that early school leaving is a working issue for EU member states at national and European level. The Slovakian Ministry of Education **worked together with other ministries on the issue to reach the national target of reducing ESL to 6 %**. Whereas Slovakia has successfully met this goal, the **country is challenged by a high rate of youth unemployment**, which figures 25 % at present. All member states should develop strategic documents and tools, for example national systems of qualifications, to proceed towards the common objective.



Vladimír Belovič

In his welcome speech, **Pavel Ondek, President of OZPŠaV** (Slovakian Trade Union of Workers in Education & Science), pointed out that the emerging trend of using ICT in education is also addressed by the new agenda of the European Commission under the name *Opening up Education*. This initiative aims to help schools, teachers and pupils in acquiring digital skills and to promote the availability of open sources in education. **Teacher unions are particularly aware of the social dimension in the use of ICT**. New technologies should be applied in such way that they increase students' interest in school, motivate them and help them to establish a better future.



Pavel Ondek

### 1.3 Statements of the Associate Partners

**Erika Thompson, member of the EFEE secretariat**, explained that ICT can offer endless opportunities for those students with extra needs. For example, the use of multimedia can engage disadvantaged students as it helps to address different learning needs. However, ICT will not make a difference by itself but needs to be embedded in a context of comprehensive programmes. Certainly, **the use of ICT cannot be an alternative to teaching competence or motivating curricula**. While it is the employers' task to provide the necessary tools, teacher unions should make sure that teachers are open to development on the field of ICT in education.

**Nora Kleibel, board member of OBESSU**, emphasised the importance to include the students' perspective when dealing with the complex issue of early school leaving. **Hearing the students' voice is not only important as a part of democracy education in school communities but is also relevant in the context of fostering active**

**citizenship in Europe.** In order to prevent ESL, it is important to reduce the hidden cost of education, ensure the availability of learning tools for all, and **see student diversity as an added value in the education system.** Pedagogies including new technologies and digital content should not reproduce old pedagogy online, but should focus on interactive student-centred learning.

Looking at the use of new technologies in schools, **teaching also needs to be understood as a learning process.** The use of ICT in education is not only a possibility to foster cooperation between teachers and learners but also a great way to link students' interests and activities in their leisure time to what they do in school.

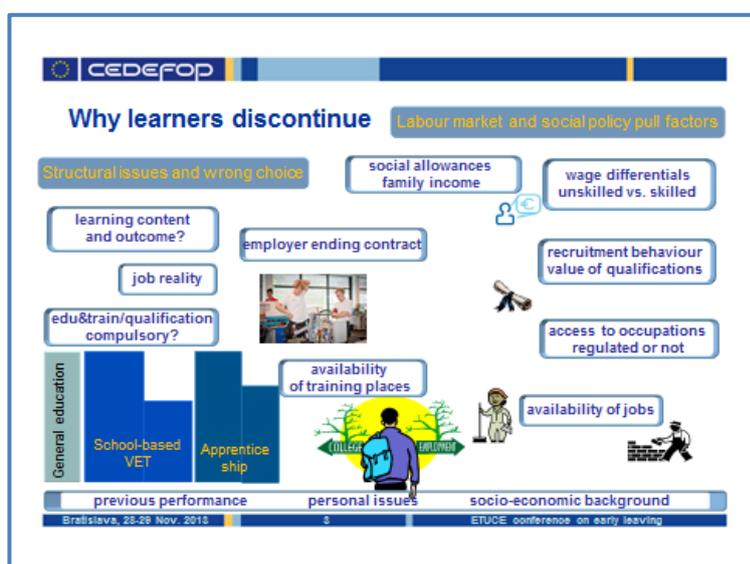
## 2 Achieving the EU 2020 Benchmark on Reducing Early School Leaving

**Eleonora Waltraud Schmid** from the **European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP)** offered an answer to the question of which strategies work to keep young people in (vocational) education.



Eleonora Waltraud Schmid

Generally, people who leave education early have poorer labour market prospects. However, there are variations across Europe and within countries; and the percentages of early school leavers do not necessarily translate into the unemployment percentages. **On average, countries with a strong vocational education and training (VET) system have lower ESL rates,** but there are also countries, e.g. Slovakia and Slovenia, which offer mostly school education and still have low ESL rates.



Presentation Slide: Why Learners Discontinue

Mrs Schmid explained that **early school leaving in secondary education differs greatly from early school leaving in VET.** For this reasons, it is necessary to clearly draw the distinction between early school leavers and drop-outs. The term "early school leaver" is applied in the field of secondary education, where the different ending ages of compulsory education in the member states (16 or 18 years) have to be taken into account. The term "drop-out" generally

refers to those who do not finish the professional training track within VET. The big variety of individual drop-out situations reflects the vast diversity in the field of VET and VET systems. For example, in some countries it is necessary to find a place in an enterprise first before one can take up the apprenticeship. In other countries, the apprentice needs to find a place in an enterprise only after two years of VET training in school. Hence, **the picture of early school leaving is complex across Europe**. Other factors, which affect ESL rates are social allowance, income situation of the family, access to occupations, availability of jobs and wage differences between skilled and unskilled workers.

Mrs Schmid introduced a variety of intervention programmes which are currently implemented in member states in order to prevent early school leaving. **Most countries introduced teaching career management skills in their lower secondary school programme. It is important that pupils are not left on their own at the transition point school-work**. Especially students who are having difficulties are in need of support and cannot be helped by simply putting up an online portal. Other intervention mechanisms range from financial incentives to support enterprises taking on apprentices and working together closely with labour market institutions. Some countries are also active with regard to teacher training.

### 3 Opening Up Education – The Digital Agenda of the EU and the Pedagogic Use of ICT

**Guus Wijngaards, ETUCE representative in the OMC Working Group on ICT**, introduced the work of the Thematic Working Group on ICT in education, which brings together representatives of member states as well as stakeholders in education to deal with existing and new initiatives on ICT in education. At present, the initiative *Opening up Education* aims at making use of the digital revolution in education.



Guus Wijngaards

The European Commission believes that **digital resources reach more learners, personalise education, allow sharing educational materials, broaden the range of educational resources, and reduce costs of educational institutions**, especially with regard to disadvantaged groups. The *Opening up Education* initiative seeks to tackle the problem of unused digital equipment in education at present. Often, digital equipment is not used either because it is not provided or because pupils and teachers lack the skills to use it. Education in Europe needs to keep pace with the digital society and economy in order not to fall behind other regions in the world. Therefore, the European Commission wants to support institutions in all member states to acquire digital skills and learning methods.

The initiative aims at giving organisations, teachers, and learners the opportunity to innovate. Teachers should be able to acquire vast digital competences and to use technology in their teaching; therefore **initial teacher training should put a strong**

**emphasis on digital-supported teaching methods. In order to encourage all teachers, different levels of digital experience should be acknowledged.** As most teachers at primary and secondary level do not consider themselves as 'digitally confident', **teachers should get more training in the use of ICT.** For example, it makes sense to establish pedagogical helpdesks and technical support in each institution, and to foster knowledge exchange between colleagues. If there is a teacher selection process, then schools should make it clear that they expect ICT skills from teachers.

*Opening up Education* also seeks to increase the use of open educational resources (OER), and to support schools with better ICT infrastructures and seize the opportunities of the digital revolution. **Schools need appropriate infrastructure to make use of the technology.**

Teacher unions should encourage discussion about the use of technology in education at school level. **Schools need to be encouraged to find solutions, which are adapted to their institution and its immediate context in society.** Teacher unions should explore ways to support schools on their way to innovate and to acquire digital skills and learning methods.

## 4 Report from OMC Working Group on Early School Leaving



Elzbieta Leszczynska

**Elzbieta Leszczynska, ETUCE representative in the OMC working group on ESL,** reported back from the thematic working group on Early School Leaving of the European Commission. The work of this group has shown that early school leaving is a multifaceted and complex issue.

**As schools and teachers play a crucial role in the process, member states should support them in the prevention of early school leaving.** For this reason, the first of the Key Policy Messages<sup>2</sup> developed in the working group reads "ensure long-term political and financial commitment to reduce ESL and keep it high on the political agenda". Further, the **key policy messages recommend developing and implementing national strategies in all member states, investing in the knowledge base of ESL by e.g. collecting data, and seeking long-term cooperation with different stakeholders.**

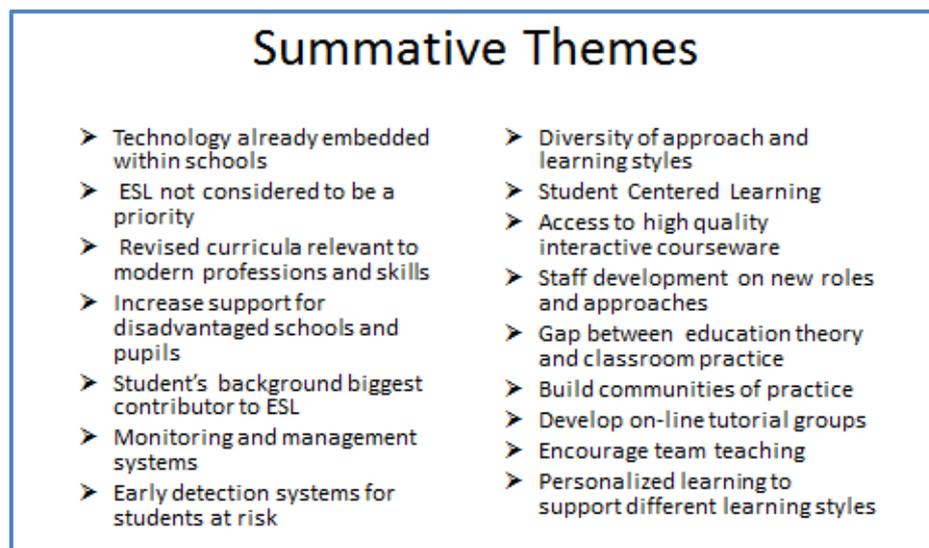
Schools should create a supportive learning environment that focuses on students' needs. For this, they need to be supported by multi-professional teams. As teachers are not very well prepared to deal with early school leaving at present, **it is important to invest in professional initial training and long term development.**

<sup>2</sup> The [final report](#) gathers all the insights gained in the thematic working group and includes the 10 key policy messages.

## 5 Results from the Case Studies

Guntars Catlaks and Roy Leitch, the project's experts, gave an overview on the project's methodology and results.<sup>3</sup> The aim of the study was to identify educational policies and methods on how ICT may be used significantly to impact on early school leaving and to increase educational attainment across the EU. A series of interviews was conducted among representatives from five focus groups; namely, education authorities, education institutions, school management, teaching staff and pupils. A semi-structured interview approach was chosen so as to encourage participants to engage with the panel and to share experiences and perspectives.

The qualitative analysis of the interviews revealed which themes came up in several of the case studies:



Presentation Slide: Summative Themes in the Case Studies

Surprisingly, the themes were brought up consistently by representatives of different focus groups: teachers, students, and education institutions. The themes were further classified into causes and enablers. Such situations or events that have an impact on ESL rates and on education attainment in general were classified as causes. Enablers are actions or outcomes that may provide solutions or remedies for causes of early school leaving.

Looking at causes and enablers, the following observations were made. **Generally, teaching staff was extremely committed to the use of ICT to increase attainment in upper secondary schools and consequently to reduce ESL rates.** However, many of the projects discussed in the interviews were based on individual initiatives and projects were rather experimental than strategic. **This is to say the sustainability and transferability of these projects is uncertain.** Implementing ICT in education to reduce ESL rates needs to be accompanied by pedagogies which fit the approach. ICT can be a

<sup>3</sup> A full account of the case studies' methodology and results can be found in the [research report](#).

starting point for teaching to apply new pedagogies and to become more student-centred. In order to succeed, **strategic barriers related to funding, pedagogical knowledge, support, and staff training need to be overcome**. Initial teacher training should be given priority to support the pedagogic use of ICT. Professional networks can help to exchange best practices and to allow professional development throughout the career.



Working Group Session

## 6 Good Practice Examples

Five schools and teacher training institutions were visited in four countries (Denmark, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Azerbaijan). Five of the visited institutions presented their approach of using ICT for the prevention of early school leaving at the final conference in Bratislava. The following pages give a brief overview of the different approaches that were presented. A more detailed report can be found on the project website [www.elfe-eu.net](http://www.elfe-eu.net).



**Institution:** Noordelijke Hogeschool

- higher education institution which offers teacher education (Bachelor, Master, and Post Graduate)
- implements national policy on ICT use
- ICT facilities
- staff members and students compile an online ICT–Pedagogy portfolio

**Place:** Leeuwarden, The Netherlands

**Contact:** Frank Scholten, Teacher Assistant

**Project:** Students in teacher training have the possibility to choose a student care minor or an ICT minor to spend 50% of their time to work on these subjects in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year. All students prepare a portfolio on ICT pedagogy before they start their final internship in a school. They can practice their skills at myschoolsnetwork, a social media platform for education.



**More:** [Case Study Report](#)  
[myschoolsnetwork](#)



**Hondsrug College**

- secondary school
- 2000 students in lower and upper secondary education
- 156 teachers
- Funded partially by the state and by parents' fees

Emmen, The Netherlands

Kees Versteeg, Headmaster; Marchien Folkerts, German Teacher

Hondsrug College implements an innovative individualized teaching approach based on tablet use. Students and teachers use their tablet on a daily base. It supports them in decreasing administration work, sharing and exchanging information, learning in a personalised way, and analysing learning processes.



[Case Study Report](#)  
[Website](#)



**D. Dinis**

- secondary school
- average age of teachers is 50+
- over 60% of parents are unemployed
- since 2007, the school has risen over 300 places in the national ranking

Lisbon, Portugal

José Antonio de Sousa, Headmaster; Ana Gabriela Freire, Teacher

After the school was remodelled in 2008, every classroom was equipped with a computer and a projector, and a special ICT building was installed. The school started with a small group of ICT teachers to replace the log books by an electronic system, other groups of teachers followed. Students age 16-18 can take part in professional computing courses set up to attract them to school.



[Case Study Report](#)  
[Website](#)



**Institution:** School No. 220

- 1847 students and 186 teachers
- primary and secondary levels (6 – 17 years)
- mixed socio-economic backgrounds
- fully state-funded
- UNESCO school

**Place:** Baku, Azerbaijan

**Contact:** Almaz Asgarova, Headmaster;  
Nahida Huseynova, Teacher

**Project:** All classrooms have computers and projectors and the school is connected to broadband internet. Students at primary level are provided with personal notebooks as part of the project “One Pupil – One Computer”. Teachers are trained in the use of the ‘Education Portal’, ‘Electronic Lesson Management Programme’ (AEL), ‘Electronic School Management Programme’ (ASM), and application of the curriculum.



**More:** [Case Study Report](#)

[Website](#)

**Randers Hf/VUC**

- adult education centre
- 1520 students (750 full time)
- student age ranges from 16 to 80 years, majority between 16 and 25
- completion rate varies between 75% and 85% depending on the courses

Randers, Denmark

Bertel Pedersen, Headmaster;  
Anders Bloch, Teacher

The school is conducting a three-year project (2012-2014) about the pedagogical use of ICT. Teachers are trained in the use of electronic whiteboards, the use of platforms and social media followed by the use of mobile operating systems. The school is supported by researchers from the University of Southern Denmark.



[Case Study Report](#)

[Website](#)

## 7 Results: Draft Practical Guidelines

A set of draft practical guidelines was discussed and amended in two working group sessions. The discussion confirmed that in order to strengthen equity in society, all students and teachers should have access to information and communication technologies which shape societies in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

However, **the economic crisis has broadened the differences in access and availability of technological resources throughout Europe at national and local level.** A representative from Greece reported that resources are withdrawn vastly from education institutions. Due to precarisation pressure, teachers and students cannot compensate for the losses and are forced to economise on those parts of ICT infrastructure (internet access, telephone line) which were standard before the crisis.

In order to stop such deterioration processes, the initiative launched by the European Commission *Opening Up Education* can be an important step to address social inequities in Europe as it aims for making educational resources available for all. **Governments need to invest more in ICT infrastructure in education so that all education institutions have sufficient and regularly updated ICT facilities.** This is particularly important with regard to creating equal opportunities for students from low income backgrounds and protecting them from dropping out of formal education.



Working Group Session

Education institutions should be equipped not only with sufficient ICT infrastructure and technical support staff, but also with a counselling structure to assist students at risk of dropping out of school. Crucially, teaching and non-teaching staff need to be provided with adequate resources and be given time to make full use of the infrastructure. **This is to say that a positive development in the field of using ICT to prevent early school leaving will not take place without systematic investment in education.**

The question of equity is inevitably connected to the question of inclusion. Participants pointed out that **materials should be designed particularly to address students at risk of dropping out of school.** The exchange of experience has shown that ICT resources and materials can be used successfully to include students with learning difficulties and disadvantages.

It is important to develop materials and tools together with students and teachers. Teachers need to have tools which really support them in their pedagogic work; and students should find materials attractive and adapted to their needs. Within the *Opening Up Education* initiative, **teacher unions should follow closely the process of developing**

**educational materials.** Materials need to fit each member state's context in language and content.

Participants stressed the essential role of teachers when introducing blended learning and other forms of online learning. **Teachers need to be responsible to coordinate the pedagogic approach and the selection of materials.** A free selection of educational materials is not always given in Europe, particularly on the field of ICT as regards the selection of hardware and software.

Concerning the use of social media, **teachers and teacher unions should explore carefully the use of social media in the classroom and in school.** As social media form part of many students' daily lives, these tools cannot be neglected in the education institutions all together. **Social media might be used as tools to foster participation and cooperation in the learning process;** however, teacher unions are also aware of the risks that social media can bear, such as cyber-bullying or extended working hours for staff.

Stepping up from education materials to the more general question of pedagogic methods, the discussion showed that **pedagogic practices need to allow for student diversity in order to prevent early school leaving.** For example, in Bulgaria, children of the Roma population are much more likely to drop out of school than other students. **The education system should be free of discrimination and reflect European diversity in its structure and curricula. Curricula should be attractive to learners, make difference possible and allow individuals to work with flexible learning methods.** In this respect, the case studies have proven that ICT can be used to foster more interactive student-centred learning. Further, ICT can reduce the administrative workload in education institutions and raise the quality of teaching, as the use of learning management systems has shown in many educational institutions. In order to convince more teachers of the benefits of ICT, front running teachers using ICT in the classroom should be supported in their efforts to develop and explore new methods.

**The complex nature of the issue of early school leaving suggests that multidisciplinary teamwork is needed to account for its different causes and consequences.** Sharing experience between and within education institutions, among colleagues, parents' organisations and students' organisations, and joining forces with local and regional stakeholders seems crucial for successful ESL prevention. Establishing school and business partnerships may be a specific way to improve the attractiveness of vocational education and training. As the issue of **ESL is connected to society as whole, unions have to work together with parents, students and social welfare organisations in order to raise awareness for early school leaving.**

Finally, **participants stressed the importance of sharing good practices on the use of ICT to prevent early school leaving.** This may happen at local and national level through teacher union publications, but also at European level so as to make good use of the valuable experience gathered in different member states. Schools and teacher training institutions need to cooperate, foster research on the prevention of ESL through ICT, and explore the practical use of ICT in genuine teaching conditions.

## 8 Acronyms

AITUCEW	Independent Trade Union of Education Workers of the Azerbaijan Republic
AOb	Algemene Onderwijsbond (Dutch Education Union)
CEDEFOP	Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
EFEE	European Federation of Education Employers
EI	Education International
ESEUR	Education and Science Employees' Union of Russia
ESL	Early School Leaving
ETUCE	European Trade Union Committee for Education
Eurostat	Statistical Office of the European Communities
FNE	Federação Nacional da Educação (Portuguese Federation of Education)
GL	Gymnasieskolernes Lærerforening (Danish National Union of Upper Secondary School Teachers)
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
OBESSU	Organising Bureau of European Students' Unions
OER	Open Educational Resources
OLME	Federation of Secondary School Teachers of Greece
OMC Working Group	Open Method of Coordination Working Group
OZPŠaV	Slovakian Trade Union of Workers in Education & Science
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
STEPS Study	Study on the Impact of Technology in Primary Schools
VET	Vocational Education and Training

## 9 Publications and Reports

Case Study Reports:

- [Case Study in Denmark](#)
- [Case Study in the Netherlands](#)
- [Case Study in Portugal](#)
- [Case Study in Azerbaijan](#)

[Research Report](#)

[Report from the Workshop](#)

For more information on the project visit the project website: [www.elfe-eu.net](http://www.elfe-eu.net)

## 10 Associated Partners



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