



Psychosocial support

Problem statement

Addressed problem: Psychological and social challenges faced by vulnerable learners

Mental health and well-being are key factors influencing students' educational trajectories and determine school success or failure. Early leaving from VET can be caused by health issues, psychosocial problems, or experiences of trauma, which are often not addressed with appropriate care and attention. Moreover, teachers and trainers frequently confront challenging situations related to bullying, discrimination, behavioural issues, or adaptation difficulties faced by students settling into a new cultural or linguistic environment.

For this reason, it is crucial to develop modern methods and approaches to provide effective psychosocial support to students throughout the educational process.

Recent large-scale events have strongly impacted learners' well-being in Europe. These include the Covid-19 pandemic, the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in European schools, financial crises, and rising wealth inequalities. These circumstances have left profound consequences on young people, teachers, and the wider community. Addressing these challenges requires multi-layered psychosocial support for both learners and educational staff.

Providing such support entails addressing several key challenges in VET, such as:

- Coordinating psychosocial support across different system levels;
- Understanding the scale and nature of learners' needs;
- Monitoring and evaluating whether learners' needs are being met;
- Equipping teachers, trainers, and other professionals to provide culturally and linguistically meaningful interventions;
- Fostering learners' well-being both inside and outside the learning environment.

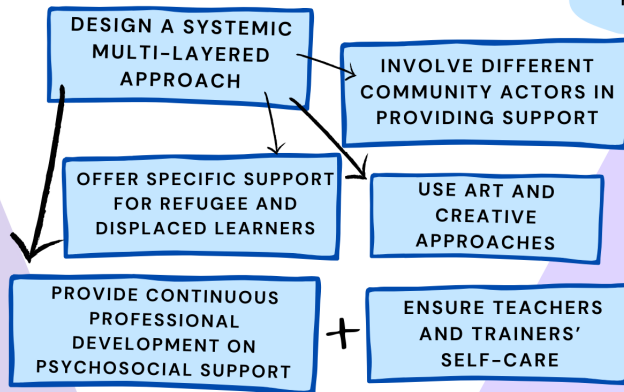
PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

MANY FACTORS CAN CAUSE DISTRESS FOR STUDENTS (E.G. BULLYING, DISCRIMINATION, BEHAVIOUR ISSUES, PSYCHOSOCIAL PROBLEMS, TRAUMA)

SCHOOLS ARE PLACES WHERE THESE SIGNS OF DISTRESS CAN BE EARLY DETECTED AND PROMPTLY ADDRESSED WITH THE INTERVENTION OF THE TEACHING STAFF AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS

MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT (MHPSS) REQUIRES A **MULTIDISCIPLINARY AND HOLISTIC APPROACH**

SCHOOLS MUST FUNCTION AS **ZONES OF PROTECTION**. PROVIDE A WELCOMING, NURTURING, SAFE AND RESPONSIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL LEARNERS, LEARNERS' PSYCHOSOCIAL WELL-BEING MUST BE CONSIDERED A COLLECTIVE WHOLE-SCHOOL RESPONSIBILITY



- PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT HELPS TACKLE SOCIAL, HEALTH AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUNG PEOPLE
- THIS TYPE OF SUPPORT SHOULD LEAD TO AN IMPROVEMENT OF WELL-BEING AND TRUST AMONG STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND TRAINERS, AND STIMULATE A POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS LEARNING

Beneficiaries

- ↳ Learners at risk of early leaving from education and training
- ↳ Learners at transition points and/or uncertain about career aspirations
- ↳ Low-performing learners
- ↳ Migrants / refugees
- ↳ VET students (school-based learning)

Addressing the problem

Tips: How to support learners on a psychosocial level to prevent early leaving?

To provide effective and holistic psychosocial support to learners, multiple approaches, practices, and tools can be adopted, including social and emotional learning (SEL), resilience-building, trauma-informed education, fostering mutual understanding, and constructive conflict resolution. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) requires a multidisciplinary and coordinated approach, ensuring consistency across all actions.

Students may experience distress due to a variety of external and school-related factors. Schools play a crucial role in detecting these early signs and addressing them promptly through the intervention of teaching staff and other professionals. Cedefop research indicates that learners and their families generally prefer interventions delivered within VET settings - such as schools or workplaces - rather than clinics, as these are more accessible and less stigmatizing.

For psychosocial interventions to be effective, schools must function as safe spaces. VET institutions should provide a welcoming, nurturing, and responsive environment that fosters a positive and inclusive school climate. Learners' psychosocial well-being should be treated

as a collective responsibility across the whole school and community. Teachers and trainers must be well prepared to support all learners in addressing both academic and behavioural challenges.

The following tips offer guidance for policy makers and VET practitioners involved in designing and delivering psychosocial support or VET policies. These are based on Cedefop research into successful policies and practices in Europe.

Tip 1: Establish whole school well being policies and prevention frameworks

A successful psychosocial support system in VET begins with a school-wide approach that embeds well-being and mental health into the culture, organisation, and everyday practices of the institution. VET providers should adopt whole-school well-being policies and prevention frameworks that:

- Demonstrate leadership commitment and define clear roles and responsibilities for staff, learners, and partners;
- Promote an inclusive and safe learning climate that values mental health as a core educational objective;
- Coordinate actions across school services, families, and community actors; and
- Systematically monitor well-being indicators to inform prevention and early intervention.

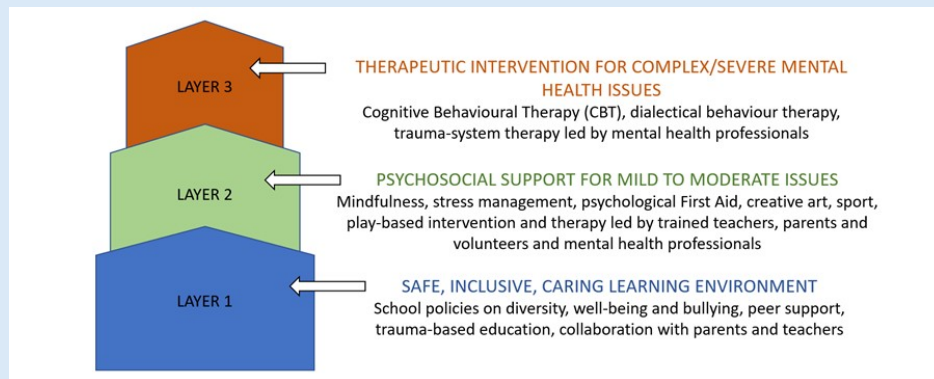
This approach aligns with key EU policy priorities, including the Council Recommendation on Promoting Common Values, Inclusive Education and the European Dimension of Teaching, the EU Pact for Mental Health and Well-Being, and broader EU strategies that call for whole-school mental health promotion, early identification, and prevention. By situating subsequent interventions (multi-layered support, community engagement, teacher training, trauma-sensitive practices, and digital/AI tools) within an overarching framework, schools ensure that psychosocial support is sustainable, coordinated, and impactful across the whole learning community.

Tip 2: Design a systemic multi-layered approach

Creating a safe and protective school environment that supports students' self-expression and emotional disclosure is the first step in developing effective mental health and psychosocial support interventions. Digital dashboards and AI-powered [early warning systems](#) can help schools and teachers monitor well-being indicators - such as attendance patterns, changes in grades, and engagement with school activities - and identify learners in need of support.

At the second level, moderate issues can be addressed through psychological first aid, social and emotional learning (SEL), and art- or play-based therapies. These interventions can be delivered by teachers, trainers, volunteers, parents, or other professionals. SEL programmes can incorporate evidence-based digital apps, allowing students to track moods and feelings and communicate concerns anonymously.

At the highest level, complex cases should be addressed through targeted therapeutic interventions provided by mental health professionals. Secure video-consultation platforms can improve access to mental health services, especially for learners in areas with limited local services or for those facing mobility or stigma-related barriers.

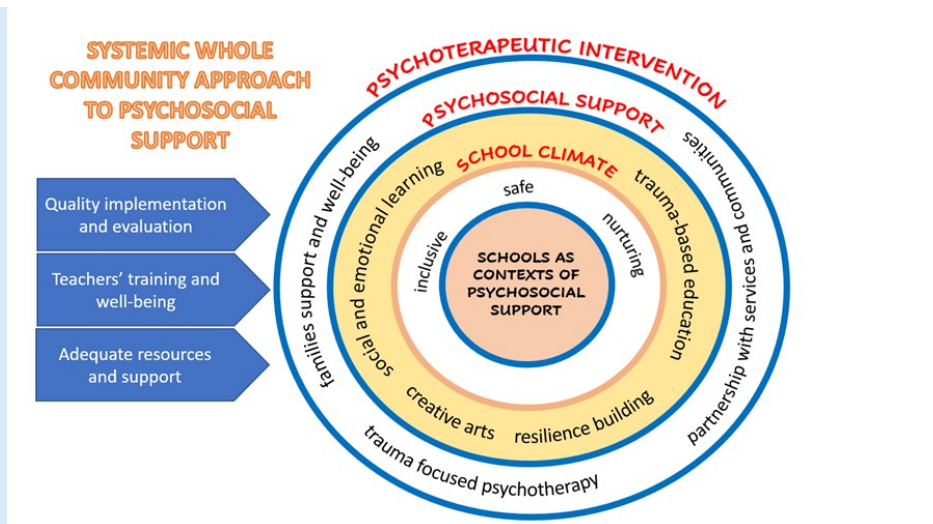


Source: Cedefop adapted from Cefai, C., Simões, C. and Caravita, S. (2021)

Tip 3: Involve diverse community stakeholders in providing support

Effective psychosocial support requires structured cooperation and coordination between students, pedagogical staff, families, and mental health professionals. A [whole-community approach](#), involving multi-professional teams working alongside school staff, ensures that signs of distress are detected early and addressed promptly through internal interventions or referral systems. This approach follows the principle of community orientation, which considers the student's entire social environment - including all contexts and people they interact with both inside and outside the learning setting.

Digital tools can strengthen multi-actor coordination. Case-management platforms accessible to families, teachers, mental health professionals, and social workers keep all stakeholders informed about the student's progress and needs. Secure family-teacher communication apps reduce barriers for family members who cannot attend in-person meetings, while AI-powered 24/7 referral tools can generate suggestions tailored to a student's needs, speeding up response times.



Source: *ibid.*

💡 Tip 4: Provide teachers and trainers with continuing professional development on psychosocial support

To create a supportive learning environment, VET teachers and trainers need ongoing training on topics such as trauma-informed teaching, social and emotional learning (SEL), recognition of mental health issues, and appropriate intervention strategies.

During these training sessions, teachers and trainers can develop knowledge of how students may react to crisis events and learn how to approach such situations effectively. They gain skills to act as pedagogical professionals who support students' rehabilitation and future well-being. AI-driven scenario, crisis, and conflict simulations allow teachers to practice responding to student distress in real-time, within a safe and low-stakes environment. Additionally, digital tools and apps can provide asynchronous training programmes that fit teachers' schedules, increasing participation in continuing professional development (CPD).

Through [professional development](#) focused on trauma-informed approaches, teachers and trainers can learn:

- How to build a learning environment that is sensitive and responsive to trauma and stress;
- How to identify trauma and understand its impact on students;
- How to respond appropriately while maintaining a trauma-sensitive classroom or workplace.

It is also essential to address teachers' and trainers' own well-being (see tip 7). Understanding causes of burnout, including secondary trauma, and learning methods for prevention and recovery are crucial steps that enable educators to provide effective psychosocial support to learners.

Tip 5: Offer tailored support to refugee and displaced learners

Learners accessing [second-chance measures](#) often come from diverse starting points. Traumatic events, extreme crises threatening the learner or their relatives, and relocation to a new country with unfamiliar social and linguistic contexts can all be sources of distress. Such experiences can undermine the individual's sense of security and lead to trauma, with psychological, emotional, cognitive, and physical consequences that vary from person to person. Trauma can affect behaviour, emotions, brain development (e.g., language and communication skills), and physical responses (e.g., heightened sensitivity to light and sound).

The primary goal of psychosocial support for learners who have experienced crises is to stabilize their emotional state, acknowledge that reactions to extreme events are normal, and promote self-awareness, self-perception, self-regulation, and self-control.

A trauma-informed approach can guide support in both physical and virtual classrooms, based on six principles:

- **Safety:** Ensure all students and staff feel physically and psychologically secure.
- **Trustworthiness and transparency:** Maintain open and honest communication among school administration, staff, students, and families.
- **Peer support and solidarity:** Encourage trust, empowerment, and a sense of safety through peer connections.
- **Collaboration and mutuality:** Foster cooperation among all education and training actors to create a trauma-sensitive environment.
- **Empowerment, voice, and choice:** Recognize each student as unique, providing opportunities to express needs and ensuring those needs are addressed.
- **Cultural, historical, and gender responsiveness:** Deliver teaching and training that is sensitive and appropriate to diverse backgrounds.

Focus should be on personal development, positive social interaction, and building a hopeful vision for the future. Schools and workplaces should provide stability and foster a sense of belonging, enabling recently arrived learners to learn, interact, and thrive.

Practical digital tools can further support inclusion:

- AI-powered translation and multilingual communication tools (e.g., real-time speech translation) reduce language barriers and help students feel safe and understood;
- Digital orientation platforms in multiple languages can provide accessible information about schools, training programmes, and local social services;
- Any AI-driven educational content or assessment tools must be culturally sensitive, adapted to the learners' context, and trained on appropriate datasets to prevent bias and discrimination.

Tip 6: Counter early leaving from VET through mental health support

Mental health issues can significantly affect students' school performance. These issues may stem from:

- Externalising disorders – outward-directed behaviours such as disruptive behaviour, attention deficit disorder, or oppositional defiant disorder;
- Internalising disorders – inward-directed disorders affecting emotions, such as anxiety and depression. These are often less visible but can strongly impact cognitive functioning and academic achievement, leading to reduced memory, poor concentration, distractibility, daytime sleepiness, low self-esteem, and decreased motivation.

Acknowledging and addressing mental health problems is essential for preventing early leaving from VET. Particular emphasis should be placed on identifying and treating symptoms of depressive disorders to mitigate negative effects on learning outcomes. AI-enhanced early warning systems can monitor signs of mental health issues and help teaching staff efficiently identify learners in need of support.

Mental health interventions can be implemented at three levels:

- Universal programmes – targeting the entire student population to promote general well-being and resilience.
- Selective programmes – focusing on groups of students with a higher likelihood of experiencing anxiety or depression.
- Individual programmes – tailored for students showing a high level of anxiety or depressive symptoms.

Continuous monitoring of interventions and their outcomes is critical for effectiveness. Digital dashboards (see Tip 1) can centralise real-time information on students' psychosocial status and the interventions applied, enabling timely adjustments and support.

Tip 7: Prioritise teachers' and trainers' well-being

To effectively support learners facing mental health, psychosocial, or distress-related challenges, it is essential that educators are themselves supported and encouraged to prioritise self-care. The Council Recommendation on Promoting Common Values and Inclusive Education underscores that a high-quality, inclusive learning environment is only possible when educators are physically and mentally equipped to model these values.

Pilot findings from Cedefop's European VET Teacher Survey (EVTS) highlight the urgency of this issue: 42% of teachers report anxiety related to their work, 16% experience depression, and around 60% have sleeping difficulties. These figures align with the EU Mental Health Strategy, which calls for a "comprehensive approach" to mental health, including improved psychosocial working conditions in schools to prevent secondary trauma.

Caring for students with complex needs can result in secondary trauma, making timely support for educators critical. Efficient referral systems should be in place to allow staff to access specialised interventions when needed. Digital referral directories listing available programmes and services can make teachers and trainers obtain support quickly.

Daily monitoring of well-being can also be facilitated through digital apps that

allow staff to log challenging situations, track stress and fatigue levels, and receive tailored guidance from professionals.

The EU Pact for Mental Health and Well-being identifies the workplace, including schools, as a key setting for intervention, advocating structural support against burnout and excessive workloads. EVTS findings show that teachers face rising demands: nearly half take on additional tasks due to staff shortages, and over a third (37%) report excessive administrative duties. To reduce burnout, VET teachers can also leverage AI tools to manage routine tasks, freeing time and energy for human-focused activities that require care and intervention.

Finally, teachers and trainers need support in managing learner behaviour and conflict. The EVTS pilot indicates that one in three teachers feels they need to strengthen skills in handling challenging behaviours, including bullying or school violence. Supporting teachers' and trainers' well-being is therefore a fundamental component of a sustainable psychosocial support system for learners.

Tip 8: Take advantage of art and creative approaches

Creative arts can help learners reframe personal histories and develop new meaning from their experiences, making them a valuable tool to promote well-being and positive mental health, especially for refugee and displaced students.

Drama and role-play activities, carefully guided, allow young people to share experiences and process emotions in a safe and controlled environment. It is essential that students are never pushed to revisit traumatic experiences before they feel ready; those who prefer to observe rather than actively participate can still benefit from listening to others' stories.

Music, dance, and movement can also alleviate distress, anxiety, and separation. Digital apps with guided, evidence-based exercises can extend the benefits of these therapies beyond the classroom, enabling students to practice in familiar and safe environments.

AI-assisted creative tools can further support engagement, particularly for students who feel intimidated by traditional art forms or lack access to materials. These tools can provide accessible, personalized, and low-pressure opportunities to explore creative expression.

Tip 9: Strengthen learner voice and co-creation

Effective psychosocial support systems should actively involve learners as partners in the design, implementation, and evaluation of well-being initiatives. Moving beyond a model where learners are passive recipients of support, VET providers should create opportunities for meaningful participation and co-creation.

This can include:

- Involving learners in shaping school well-being policies and activities;
- Establishing peer support systems, such as mentoring schemes or student well-being ambassadors;

- Using anonymous digital feedback tools to regularly capture learners' experiences and needs; and
- Encouraging student participation in school governance and decision-making processes.

By fostering agency and empowerment, this approach strengthens learners' sense of ownership, trust, and engagement with the learning environment. It is particularly beneficial for vulnerable groups, whose voices are often underrepresented.

Tip 10: Ensure continuity of psychosocial support during transitions

Transitions represent critical moments of vulnerability in learners' educational pathways and are often associated with increased risk of disengagement or early leaving. Psychosocial support should therefore be continuous and coordinated across key transition points.

VET providers should:

- Implement structured transition support between educational levels, training pathways, and entry into the labour market;
- Provide mentoring or case coordination to ensure continuity of care;
- Establish "warm handover" mechanisms between institutions and services; and
- Conduct early psychosocial screening and orientation activities at entry points, particularly for newly arrived or returning learners.

Ensuring continuity helps maintain stability, reduces uncertainty, and supports learners in adapting to new environments and expectations.

Tip 11: Integrate career guidance with psychosocial support

In VET contexts, learners' well-being is closely linked to their sense of purpose, motivation, and future orientation. Psychosocial support should therefore be closely connected with [career guidance](#) and [counselling services](#).

This includes:

- Providing career guidance that addresses both emotional and motivational aspects of decision-making;
- Supporting learners in building self-efficacy, confidence, and realistic aspirations;
- Helping learners cope with uncertainty, anxiety, and perceived barriers related to employment prospects; and
- Integrating career development activities within broader well-being programmes.

By aligning psychosocial support with career pathways, VET providers can strengthen learners' engagement and reduce the risk of early leaving linked to

lack of direction or low motivation.

Tip 12: Foster a strong sense of belonging and inclusion

A sense of belonging is a key protective factor for learners' well-being and retention. Beyond ensuring safety, VET institutions should actively cultivate **inclusive environments** where all learners feel valued, respected, and connected.

This can be achieved by:

- Promoting inclusive school cultures that celebrate diversity and mutual respect;
- Implementing anti-bullying and anti-discrimination strategies focused on inclusion and community-building;
- Ensuring representation of diverse cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds in curricula and school activities; and
- Creating safe and supportive spaces for specific groups of learners where needed.

Strengthening belonging enhances learners' emotional security, participation, and commitment to education and training.

Tip 13: Ensure ethical and responsible use of data and AI tools

While digital tools and AI systems offer significant opportunities to enhance psychosocial support, their use must be guided by ethical principles and safeguards to protect learners' rights and well-being.

VET providers should:

- Ensure compliance with data protection and privacy regulations, particularly when handling sensitive psychosocial information;
- Guarantee transparency in how data are collected, used, and shared with stakeholders;
- Monitor and mitigate potential biases in AI systems to avoid discrimination;
- Obtain informed consent from learners and families, where appropriate; and
- Promote trust by clearly communicating the purpose and benefits of data-driven tools.

Ethical and responsible use of technology is essential to maintain trust, ensure fairness, and maximise the effectiveness of psychosocial support interventions

Expected outcomes

Psychosocial support in VET helps address social, health, and psychological challenges faced by young people. It contributes to improved well-being, trust, and resilience among learners, teachers, and trainers, while fostering a positive attitude toward learning and education. Embedding these interventions within a whole-school well-being framework ensures systemic coordination, early prevention, and sustainable impact.

The following outcomes can be expected at different levels:



 INDIVIDUAL	 INSTITUTIONAL	 SYSTEM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved overall well-being and resilience • Challenges related to social, economic, or psychological factors are addressed • Development of a positive self-image and confidence • Positive attitude toward learning, education, and training • Improved educational outcomes and school engagement • Strengthened social and communication skills • Greater access to self-managed digital well-being and mental health tools • Ability to regulate emotions and express oneself through creative and digital tools • Increased sense of empowerment and agency, through the learners' contribution to school initiatives and participation in decision-making • Stronger sense of belonging, inclusion and integration into the school community • Enhanced career readiness and motivation, with clear career goals and support transition points • Ethical and informed digital literacy and understanding of how data is used. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective referral systems from schools and workplaces to other services • Reduced risk of early leaving due to lack of motivation or self-confidence • Increased support for teachers and trainers to work with learners facing complex personal, social, or family challenges • Safer and more inclusive learning environments • Improved monitoring of both student and teacher well-being through shared platforms and digital dashboards • Better-prepared staff through accessible CPD and AI-powered simulations • Reduced teacher and trainer burnout through workload management and digital assistance tools • Enhanced school climate and culture supporting student psychosocial health • Continuity of support during transitions, with structured handover systems • Stronger learner participation mechanisms, with formalised channels for student feedback, peer mentoring, and co-created interventions • Integration of career guidance with psychosocial support, linking well-being to learning pathways and employability • Ethically governed digital systems with structured school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interconnected and multi-stakeholder services for coordinated psychosocial support • Education system able to meet the needs of diverse learners, including refugees and displaced students • More inclusive education and training system across regions and learner groups • Earlier identification of at-risk students through AI-assisted monitoring of behavioural and well-being data • Interoperable digital platforms facilitating secure data sharing among teachers, mental health professionals, families, and other stakeholders • Cost-effective digital programmes and services reaching marginalized, geographically remote, or vulnerable learners • System-wide learner empowerment through frameworks that ensure learners' voices are embedded in decision-making at all levels • Improved transition pathways thanks to regional or national strategies supporting students (e.g., migrants, refugees) • Ethical AI and data governance frameworks with clear rules for responsible monitoring, analytics, and service delivery • Evidence-informed policymaking, with monitoring and evaluation of psychosocial interventions feeding into systemic



Related protective factors



Health and well-being

Related resources

Statistics and data

 Statistics and data

Professionals involved in tackling ELET at school and community level

A variety of professionals play a role in tackling early leaving from education and training (ELET) in Europe: school heads, teachers, career counsellors, psychologists and therapists, social workers, youth workers, nurses, and speech and language specialists. In most countries, school heads and teachers are the key professionals responsible for tackling early leaving.

 Austria
  Belgium
  Bulgaria
  Croatia
  Cyprus
  Czechia
  Denmark

 Estonia
  EU level
  Finland
  France
  Germany
  Greece
  Hungary

 Iceland
  Ireland
  Italy
  Latvia
  Lithuania
  Luxembourg
  Malta

 Netherlands
  Norway
  Poland
  Portugal
  Romania
  Slovakia

 Slovenia
  Spain
  Sweden
  Türkiye
  United Kingdom

Good practices

 Good practice

Foundation Innove, Pathfinder centres (in Estonian: Sihtasutus Innove, Rajaleidja keskused)

In Estonia, Pathfinder centres provide careers information; career counselling; speech therapy; psychological guidance; socio-pedagogical guidance; and special educational guidance.

 **Estonia**

Tools

 Tools

Work Guidelines for EPIS mentors

The Entrepreneurs for social inclusion (EPIS) guidelines, offer support to mentors and educational staff who work with learners or groups of learners at risk, including psychologists, social workers, and other educational staff in school education. The guidelines include a 'how to do' list for intervening / providing individual support to learners and families.

 **Portugal**

 Tools

Online questionnaire 'Risiko Check' and coaching tool 'Counselling profile' in the context of the project Stop Dropout

The EU-funded 'Stop Dropout!' project has developed a 'Counselling Profile' (or personal profile) for use by qualified professionals in fields such as counselling, psychology or human relations. It is a structured interview scheme which can be used to use to guide individuals who are at risk of dropping out.

 **Austria**  **Czechia**  **Germany**

 **Slovenia**

Publications

 Publications


Vocational pedagogies and

 Publications

Mental health as a risk

benefits for learners: practices and challenges in Europe

Cedefop study on vocational pedagogies finds that good communication and high levels of trust between teacher or trainer and learner are important for retention.


Download the report  [here](#)

 **EU level**

factor for ESL: diagnostics, prevention, intervention

There is increasing recognition of the need to recognise the role of mental health in educational processes (including in ESL).

This paper focuses on internalisation problems (e.g. anxiety and depression) and externalisation problems (e.g. aggression), as well as the mechanisms linking them to lower academic achievement and ESL.

Read the publication  [here](#).

 **EU level**

 Publications

Psychosocial support of educational process participants at institutions of vocational education

Iryna Tkachuk, Yuri Lutsenko

The article analyses the scientific sources on the problem of psychosocial help to victims of traumatic events, identifies three main approaches to its implementation.

 **EU level**

 Publications

Beyond academics

Linking teaching practices in Swedish schools to students' achievements and mental health complaints

This research on teaching practices in Swedish schools reveals varying effects of teaching practices on students' academic success and mental well-being. The paper reviews the effects of three different teaching styles, teacher-centred, student-centred, and student-dominated.

 **Sweden**

 Publications

Parental involvement for early school leaving prevention

Report pointing towards a differentiated, holistic, and systemic approach in Europe

This review is based on an analysis of EU Commission and Council documents on early school leaving (ESL) and social

 Publications

UNESCO's book "Safe to learn and thrive"

Report advocating for ending violence in and through education

The book addresses the critical issue of violence in educational settings. It highlights the prevalence and various forms of violence, including physical,

inclusion, a dialogue and ongoing consultation process with the 10 municipalities engaged in the Urbact - PREVENT project and it interrogates international research relevant to this area.

 **Belgium**  **Bulgaria**  **Czechia**

 **Estonia**  **France**  **Germany**

 **Italy**  **Netherlands**  **Spain**

 **Sweden**

sexual, psychological abuse, bullying, and neglect, and their impact on learners and educators.

International

 Publications

AI to Support Neurodivergent Learners in Vocational Education and Training AI

OECD 2026 Report

Drawing on insights from over 50 stakeholder interviews, the report highlights the potential of these technologies to make VET more adaptive, accessible and inclusive.

 **EU level** **International**

 Publications

A systemic, whole-school approach to mental health and well-being in schools in the EU

Overview report

This report reviews international evidence on promoting mental health and well-being and preventing bullying in schools, with the aim of supporting safer, more inclusive learning environments across Europe.

 **EU level**