Psychosocial support

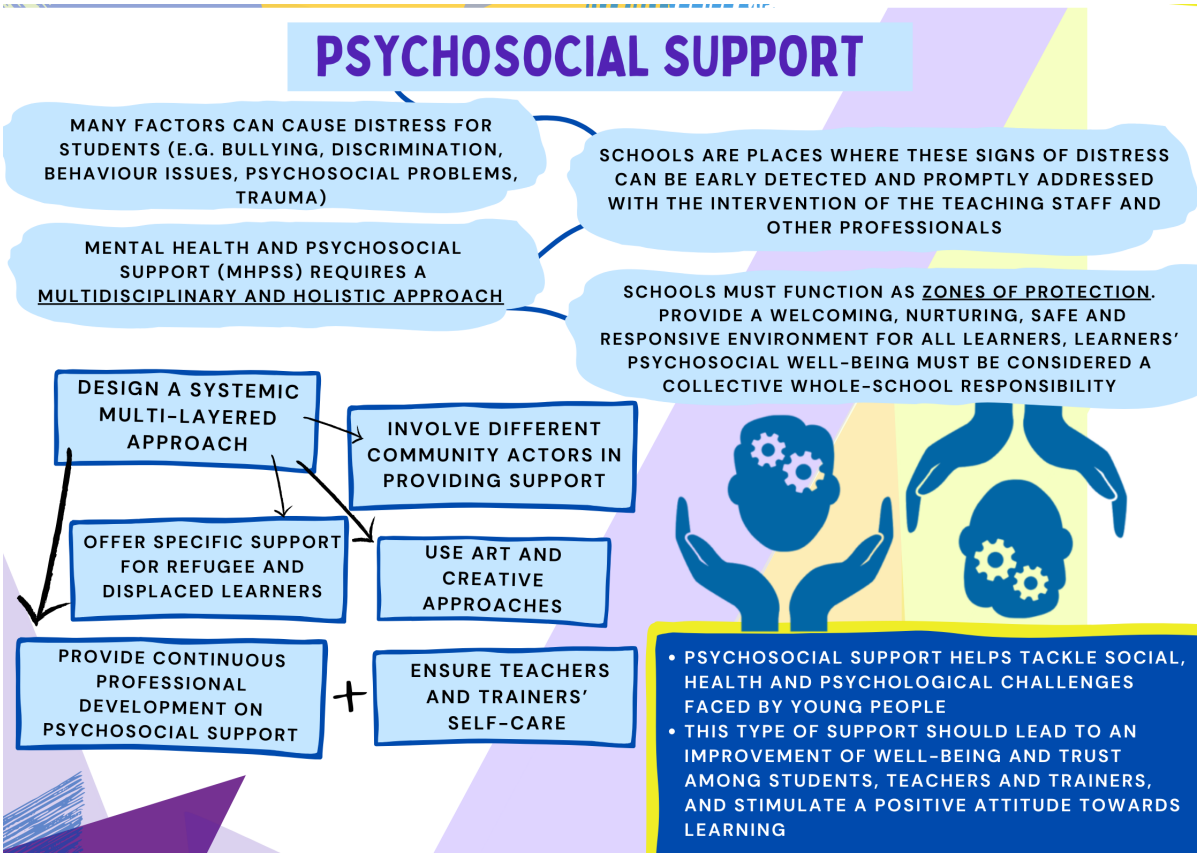
Problem statement

Mental health and well-being are among the first factors influencing students' education trajectory and determine school success or failure.

Early leaving from VET can be caused by health issues, psychosocial problems, or experiences of trauma which are not handled with appropriate care and attention. For this reason, it is important to develop modern methods and approaches to provide students with effective psychosocial support throughout the educational process.

Two recent factors that have strongly impacted on learners' well-being on a larger scale in Europe are Covid-19 and the arrival of many Ukrainian refugees in schools of other European countries. To tackle the profound consequences that these circumstances have left on young people, a multi-layered psychosocial support is needed more than ever, both for students and for teachers and trainers facing such difficult circumstances.

This necessity entails a wide range of further challenges that VET must address, such as how to coordinate psychosocial support at different system levels; how to understand the scale and nature of needs; and how to identify whether these are being met through monitoring and evaluation; how to equip teachers, trainers and other professionals to provide culturally and linguistically meaningful interventions; and how to foster learners' well-being inside and outside the learning environment.



Beneficiaries

Learners at risk of early leaving from education and training
VET students (school-based learning)
Migrants / refugees

Addressing the problem

Building on the forthcoming European guidelines to support the inclusion of displaced Ukrainian students, psychosocial support stands as one of the main pillars to respond to the challenge education and training institutions are facing in integrating both Ukrainian learners and teachers in host countries. To achieve this aim multiple approaches, practices and tools can be adopted, such as social and emotional learning (SEL), resilience-building, trauma-based education, mutual understanding, constructive conflict resolutions. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) requires a multidisciplinary and holistic approach envisaging consistency and coordination of actions.

There are many factors, external and school-related, that can cause distress for a student. Teachers and trainers are often called to confront difficult situations related to bullying and discrimination, to behaviour issues or to adaptation challenges that students might face when settling in a new cultural and linguistic environment. 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. Moreover, based on Cedefop findings, students and their families prefer interventions to be delivered at VET settings (schools and the workplace) rather than in clinics, as these are often more accessible and less stigmatising.

For these interventions to be effective and to provide appropriate psychosocial support, schools must function as zones of protection. VET institutions need to provide a welcoming,

nurturing, safe and responsive environment for all learners, creating a positive and inclusive school climate for each of them. Learners' psychosocial well-being must be considered a collective whole-school responsibility, and teachers and trainers should be well prepared to support all learners to address their academic and behaviour challenges.

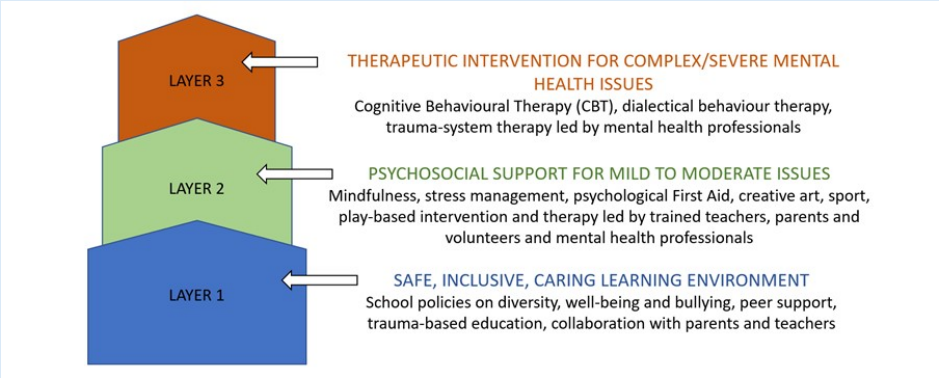
The following tips are given as advice to policy makers and VET practitioners involved in the design and delivery of psychosocial support.

Tip 1: Design a systemic multi-layered approach

Creating a safe and protective school atmosphere which is favourable for students' self-expression and emotional disclosure, can be considered as the first step on which to base further interventions concerning mental health and psychosocial support.

On a second level, moderate issues can be addressed, providing psychological first aid, social and emotional learning (SEL), art and play-based therapy through the action of teachers, trainers, volunteers, parents and professionals.

On the top level, specific complex cases can be addressed through therapeutic interventions carried out by mental health professionals and adopting different kinds of therapy and approaches.



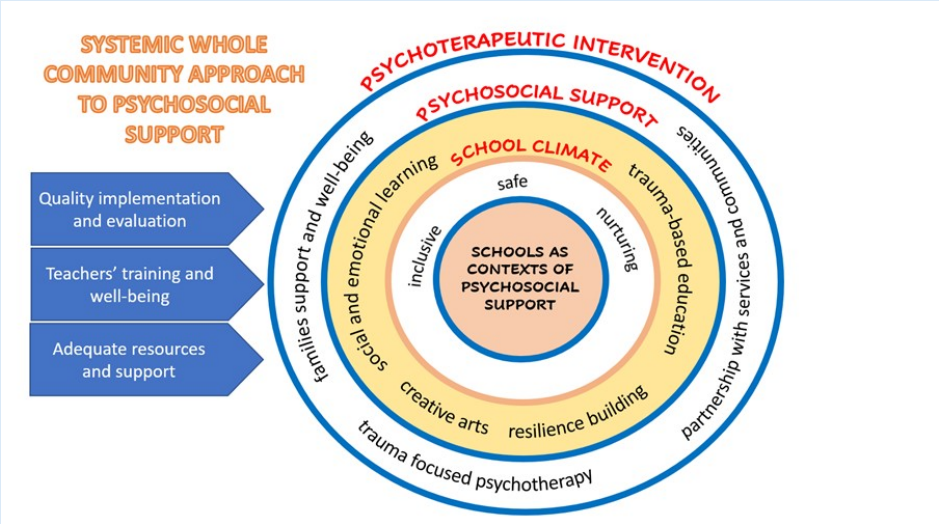
Source: Cedefop based on the presentation held within European Commission's PLA on psychosocial support by Carmel Cefai, University of Malta (Centre for Resilience and Social Emotional Health)

Tip 2: Involve different community actors in providing support

A well-structured cooperation and coordination between students, pedagogical staff, families and mental health experts is necessary to provide efficient support in this field. To achieve this, a whole community approach and the intervention of multi-professional teams in collaboration with school staff are needed to ensure a prompt detection of signals of distress and rapid answers through internal action or referral systems. This approach should follow the principle of community orientation, according to which it is important to consider the whole social environment surrounding the students, including all contexts and people with

whom they interact in and outside the learning environment.

To provide an effective psychosocial support, and especially for learners who are at risk of early leaving, community involvement and coordination among different actors is always beneficial.



Source: ibid.

Tip 3: Provide continuous professional development on psychosocial support

To develop a supportive learning environment, VET teachers and trainers need training on topics such as trauma-informed teaching, social and emotional learning (SEL), recognition of mental health problems, intervention strategies and mostly important how to take care of their own personal well-being.

During such training sessions, VET teachers and trainers can develop knowledge on how students can react to a crisis event and how to discuss an issue of crisis with them, while gaining skills on how to act as pedagogical workers with the aim of rehabilitating students and enhancing their future well-being.

Through professional development on trauma-informed approach for example, 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 its consequences on students; and
- how to respond to it while developing a trauma-sensitive classroom or workplace.

Also, teachers and trainers' burnout is an aspect that should be taken into consideration when addressing psychosocial issues: receiving training on the reasons leading to it (e. g. secondary trauma) and on the methods of recovery and prevention is the first step to be able to provide support to others.

Tip 4: Specific support for refugee and displaced learners

Traumatic events and extreme crisis situations in which a person's life or the one of his/her relatives is threatened, as well as moving to another country and encountering a new social and linguistic context, can be sources of distress for refugee learners.

Based on research findings, such events violate the individual's sense of security and can lead to traumatic stress disorder and psychological consequences which vary from person to person. Trauma can affect students' behaviour and emotions but also their brain development (e.g. difficulties with the language and communication) and body development (e.g. physical overreactions, extreme sensitiveness to light and sound).

The main purpose while offering psychosocial assistance to students who survived a crisis life event, is to promote a stabilisation of their emotional state, acknowledge the normal reaction of the individual to abnormal circumstances, and work towards the activation of processes of self-awareness, self-perception, self-regulation and self-control.

A trauma-informed approach is based on six guiding principles which can be applied both in physical and virtual classrooms:

- *Safety*: all students and staff need to feel physically and psychologically safe in the school environment
- *Trustworthiness and transparency*: between school's administration, staff, students and families
- *Peer support and mutual self-help*: are essential in building trust and empowerment and in establishing safety
- *Collaboration and mutuality*: among all education and training actors to develop a trauma-sensitive school
- *Empowerment, voice, and choice*: every student is unique and each one should be given the opportunity to express their needs and feel heard when these needs are met; and
- *Cultural, historical, and gender issues*: ensure sensitive and responsive teaching and training

Focus should be placed on personal development and positive interaction with the others, while building a positive image of the future. Overall, schools and workplaces should provide a sense of stability and be places in which recently arrived learners can develop a sense of belonging, learn and interact in a positive way.

Tip 5: Counter early leaving from VET through mental health support

Mental health issues can be the source of problems related to school performance and these can depend on externalisation disorders (e. g. disruptive behaviour, attention deficit disorder, oppositional deviant disorder) or internalisation disorders (anxiety and depression). Anxiety and depression are not as noticeable symptoms as disruptive behaviour, but they can have a strong impact on

students' cognitive functioning and academic achievement as students may suffer from reduced memory functions, poor concentration, distractibility, day-time sleepiness and low self-esteem.

To this extent, it is necessary to acknowledge the possibility of using mental health intervention as a tool to prevent early leaving from VET. Emphasis should thus be placed on identifying and treating depressive disorder symptoms to reduce the ill effects and avoid academic underachievement.

Anxiety and depression can be addressed on three different levels of intervention:

- *Universal programmes* covering the whole school population;
- *Selective programmes* targeting groups of students with a higher probability of increased anxiety and depression;
- *Individual programmes* aimed at students in whom a high level of anxiety or depression was observed.

Tip 6: Ensure teachers and trainers' self-care

To be able to intervene and manage learners' issues related to mental health, distress, or psychosocial difficulties, teachers, trainers and other non-pedagogical staff need to be supported themselves and prioritise self-care.
Secondary trauma is a common consequence of caring for others with a history of trauma, therefore it is important to ensure an efficient referral system for which further specific intervention can be easily accessed and teachers' own distress can be promptly addressed.

Tip 7: Art and creative approaches

Through art students may reframe and make new meaning of their personal histories. Creative arts are used with refugee children and adolescents to promote well-being and positive mental health.
Creative approaches can enhance the symbolic expression of feelings and provide space for new narratives of traumatic experiences. An example can be carefully selected drama and role play, which can help young people share their experiences and process their emotions, making sure they are not excessively exposed to unresolved traumatic events they may be reliving through an art approach. Those who do not feel like intervening can safely listen and connect to others' stories. Also, music, dance and movement can help to alleviate symptoms of distress, anxiety and separation.

Expected outcomes

Psychosocial support helps tackle social, health and psychological challenges faced by young people. This should lead to an improvement of well-being and trust among students,

teachers and trainers, and can stimulate a positive attitude towards learning.
The following outcomes can be expected at different levels:

INDIVIDUAL	INSTITUTIONAL	SYSTEM
• Improved well-being • Social / Economic / psychological challenges being tackled • Promote a positive vision of oneself • Positive attitude to learning and education and training • Improved education outcomes • Improved social skills	• Referral systems from schools and workplace to other services are being used • Reduced risk of early leaving due to lack of positive future vision of oneself • Increased support to teachers and trainers to work with learners with complex personal, social and / or family issues • Increased safety in the learning environment	• Interconnected services are being used • System able to meet the needs of all different learners • More inclusive education system

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

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

/ providing individual support to learners and families.

Portugal

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 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

Publications

Mental health as a risk 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, Yurii 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.

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-

EU level

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 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

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

International

Source URL: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/en/tools/vet-toolkit-tackling-early-leaving/intervention-approaches/psychosocial-support