



PREVENTING AND FIGHTING EARLY LEAVING
FROM EDUCATION & TRAINING WITH AI

stAI

Act before it happens: Preventing and fighting Early Leaving
from Education and Training with Artificial Intelligence

ELET Risk Factors Desk Research - Cyprus

Author: Emphasys Centre

PROJECT INFORMATION

Project acronym:

stAI

Project title: Act before it happens: Preventing and fighting Early Leaving from Education and Training with Artificial Intelligence

Project N°:2023-1-IS01-KA220-SCH-000157308

Sub-programme or KA:

KA220-SCH - Cooperation partnerships in school Education

Website: www.stai-edu.eu

Consortium:



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION



ARTIFICIAL
INTELLIGENCE
RESEARCH GROUP



Colegiul Național de Artă
Octav Băncilă
Iași



Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them. **Project N°:2023-1-IS01-KA220-SCH-000157308**

Table of Contents

1. ELET - General National Scope	4
1. ELET Risk Factors	5
2.1 Socio-Demographic Factors	5
2.2 Institutional Factors	6
2.3 Education Policies and Practices	7
2.4 Access to Education (Geographic Accessibility, Affordability, and Educational Pathways)	8
2.5 Individual and Family Factors	8
2.6 Community and Societal Factors (Peer Influence, Employment Opportunities, Cultural Attitudes towards Education, Social Support Networks)	9
2.7 Economic Factors	10
2.8 Technology and Digital Divide	11
2.9 Other Risk Factors	12
3. Current Trends, Implications, and Perspectives in Addressing ELET	13
3.1 National public incentives and initiatives regarding preventing ELET	13
3.2 National private incentives and initiatives regarding preventing ELET	14
3.3 Concrete experiences/practices	15
3.4 Main challenges and obstacles to be encountered on ELET	16
3.5 Policy Implications and Recommendations (Policy Analysis, Best Practices and Interventions, and Future Directions for Research and Action)	17
4. References	Error! Bookmark not defined.

1. ELET - General National Scope

Since 2015, the rate of early leaving from education and training (ELET) has been on the rise, particularly impacting foreign-born youth. Cyprus, with one of the EU's highest asylum application-to-inhabitant ratios, faces challenges in integrating asylum seekers into the education system. Notably, the proportion of young people aged 18-34 among recently arrived asylum seekers reached 62% in 2018. The ELET rate, standing at 27.9%, is significantly higher among foreign-born youth compared to the EU average of 21.5%, indicating a deteriorating trend (+1.3 percentage points since 2020). Conversely, native-born early leavers accounted for 3.9% in 2021, contrasting with the EU average of 8.5%.

Urban areas reported the highest proportion of early leavers in 2021 (10.7%), marking a 6.9 percentage point increase from 2015 (3.8%). Approximately two-thirds of early leavers are male. While there are initiatives to support students at risk of dropping out, data collection remains insufficient, primarily relying on school-by-school reporting. Targeted support measures for pupils from migrant backgrounds are facilitated by the European Social Fund (ESF+) through the DRASE+ project 'School and social integration actions'. Additionally, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports aids teachers in managing linguistic and cultural diversity within schools. (Donlevy V. et al., 2019; European Commission, 2021).

1. ELET Risk Factors

2.1 Socio-Demographic Factors

Early leaving from education and training (ELET) in Cyprus is influenced by various factors, contributing to the increasing trend observed since 2015. These risk factors include:

Socioeconomic Status: Individuals from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are more vulnerable to early leaving, as indicated by the high rate of early leavers among foreign-born young people, who often face socioeconomic challenges, including limited access to resources and opportunities.

Integration of Asylum Seekers: Cyprus, with one of the EU's highest asylum application-to-inhabitant ratios, faces difficulties in integrating asylum seekers into the education system. The proportion of young asylum seekers among early leavers is notably high, highlighting the challenges of integrating marginalized groups into education.

Urban Areas: Urban areas report the highest proportion of early leavers, indicating potential environmental factors or social pressures that contribute to disengagement from education and training.

Gender: While early leaving affects both genders, the data suggests that about two-thirds of early leavers are boys, indicating potential gender-specific risk factors influencing dropout rates.

Support Systems: Despite efforts to support students at risk of dropping out, such as integrated projects and early warning systems, challenges remain in terms of data collection and the effectiveness of interventions, suggesting gaps in support systems that could contribute to early leaving.

Socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and cultural background are significant determinants of early leaving from education and training in Cyprus. Among the age groups affected, individuals aged 18-34, notably among recently arrived asylum seekers, are particularly vulnerable. While both genders experience early leaving, boys seem to be more prevalent among early leavers, suggesting potential gender-specific challenges. Socioeconomic disparities also play a crucial role, with foreign-born youth and those from disadvantaged backgrounds facing elevated risks. Ethnicity and cultural background further compound these challenges, with asylum seekers and migrants experiencing difficulties

in education integration, emphasising the need for tailored support measures addressing cultural and linguistic diversity. Overall, these socio-demographic factors intertwine intricately, shaping individuals' educational paths and contributing to the risk of early leaving in Cyprus.

2.2 Institutional Factors

In Cyprus, institutional factors within the education system play a crucial role in influencing early leaving from education and training (ELET). These factors are significant contributors to students' educational experiences and outcomes:

School Environment in Cyprus: The quality of school facilities and resources, including infrastructure, technology, and extracurricular opportunities, impacts students' engagement and overall satisfaction with their learning environment. In Cyprus, ensuring safe, well-equipped, and inclusive school environments is essential for fostering student well-being and reducing the likelihood of early leaving.

School Climate and Culture in Cyprus: The school climate and culture in Cyprus encompass the norms, values, and interpersonal relationships within educational institutions. A positive school climate characterised by mutual respect, support, and a sense of belonging encourages students to remain engaged in their education. Cultivating a culture of inclusivity and academic excellence contributes to creating an environment where students feel motivated and supported to achieve their full potential.

Teacher Quality and Support in Cyprus: The quality of teaching and the support provided by educators are fundamental factors influencing student retention and success. In Cyprus, investing in teacher professional development and providing ongoing support for educators are critical strategies for enhancing teaching effectiveness and promoting positive student outcomes. Cultivating strong teacher-student relationships, personalised instruction, and culturally responsive teaching practices are essential for addressing the diverse needs of students and preventing early leaving.

2.3 Education Policies and Practices

Education policies and practices play a crucial role in shaping the educational landscape and influencing outcomes related to early leaving from education and training (ELET). In Cyprus, several key aspects of education policies and practices are particularly relevant:

Curriculum Relevance in Cyprus: The curriculum plays a central role in determining the content, structure, and delivery of education. In Cyprus, ensuring that the curriculum is relevant, engaging, and aligned with the needs of students and the demands of the modern world is essential. A curriculum that emphasises critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and real-world applications enhances students' motivation and prepares them for future success.

Assessment Methods in Cyprus: Assessment methods used to evaluate student learning and progress significantly impact educational outcomes. In Cyprus, employing diverse and inclusive assessment methods that accommodate different learning styles and abilities is essential. Moving away from traditional standardised testing towards more

authentic and formative assessment practices promotes a holistic understanding of students' abilities and fosters continuous improvement.

Support Services in Cyprus: Access to support services, including academic, social-emotional, and career guidance, is crucial for addressing the diverse needs of students and promoting their well-being and academic success. In Cyprus, providing comprehensive support services that are accessible, culturally responsive, and tailored to individual needs is essential. Investing in early intervention, counselling, and mentoring programmes helps identify and address potential risk factors for early leaving and provides students with the necessary resources and support to overcome challenges and thrive in their educational journey.

2.4 Access to Education (Geographic Accessibility, Affordability, and Educational Pathways)

Access to education in Cyprus encompasses various aspects, such as geographic accessibility, affordability, and the availability of diverse educational pathways. Ensuring that educational institutions are easily accessible across different regions, including rural and remote areas, is vital for promoting equitable access to education. Efforts to improve transportation infrastructure and expand educational facilities in underserved communities can contribute to enhancing geographic accessibility. Additionally, addressing the affordability of education, including tuition fees and associated costs, is crucial for ensuring that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, can access and remain enrolled in educational programmes. Scholarships, financial aid programmes, and other forms of assistance play a pivotal role in alleviating financial barriers and promoting equity in education. Furthermore, offering diverse educational pathways, including academic, technical, and vocational programmes, allows students to pursue their academic and career goals based on their interests and aspirations. Creating clear pathways for educational advancement and facilitating smooth transitions between different levels of education are essential for promoting continuity and encouraging lifelong learning. Overall, prioritising access to education for all students is fundamental for fostering social mobility, empowering individuals, and building a more equitable and prosperous society in Cyprus.

2.5 Individual and Family Factors

Individual and family factors significantly contribute to early leaving from education and training (ELET) in Cyprus. Academic performance and engagement, along with attitudes towards education and training, play pivotal roles in determining whether students remain enrolled or disengage prematurely. Positive attitudes towards education, coupled with active engagement in learning, are associated with lower rates of early leaving, while negative attitudes or academic struggles may increase the likelihood of dropout. Additionally, family dynamics and support greatly influence students'

educational outcomes. Supportive family environments, characterised by parental involvement and encouragement, tend to result in higher academic achievement and decreased dropout rates. Conversely, inadequate familial support or dysfunctional family dynamics may exacerbate challenges for students, impacting their educational journey. Moreover, students' mental health and well-being play a crucial role in their ability to cope with academic stressors and navigate school life effectively. Addressing these individual and family factors requires a holistic approach, encompassing strategies to promote academic engagement, foster positive attitudes, strengthen family support systems, and address students' mental health needs. By addressing these factors comprehensively, Cyprus can work towards reducing early leaving rates and ensuring that all students receive the support necessary to succeed in their educational pursuits.

2.6 Community and Societal Factors (Peer Influence, Employment Opportunities, Cultural Attitudes towards Education, Social Support Networks)

Community and societal factors significantly influence early leaving from education and training (ELET) in Cyprus, encompassing various dimensions that shape students' educational experiences and decisions. These factors include:

Peer Influence: Peers play a crucial role in shaping students' attitudes, behaviours, and academic engagement. Peer pressure, social dynamics, and the influence of friends can impact students' decisions regarding their education. In Cyprus, peer influence may contribute to early leaving if students are influenced by peers who prioritize other activities over academic pursuits or discourage them from staying in school.

Employment Opportunities: The availability of employment opportunities and labour market conditions can influence students' decisions to leave education early in pursuit of work. In Cyprus, economic factors and job prospects may play a significant role in students' choices, particularly for those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds who may perceive immediate employment as a more viable option than continuing their education.

Cultural Attitudes towards Education: Societal attitudes and cultural perceptions regarding the value of education shape individuals' views on the importance of academic attainment. In Cyprus, cultural attitudes towards education may vary, with some communities placing a strong emphasis on academic achievement and others prioritising alternative paths such as vocational training or early entry into the workforce.

Social Support Networks: The presence of supportive social networks, including family, community organisations, and educational institutions, can mitigate the risk of early leaving by providing students with resources, guidance, and encouragement. In Cyprus, strong social support networks may help students overcome challenges and navigate educational obstacles, while the absence of such networks may exacerbate risk factors for early leaving.

2.7 Economic Factors

Economic factors play a significant role in early leaving from education and training (ELET) in Cyprus, influencing students' decisions regarding their educational pathways. These economic factors encompass various aspects that contribute to the risk of early leaving, including:

Labour Market Conditions: The prevailing conditions in the labour market, including unemployment rates, job availability, and economic prospects, significantly impact students' decisions regarding their education. In Cyprus, students may opt to leave education early if they perceive better employment opportunities or immediate financial gains outside of the educational system, particularly if the labour market offers lucrative prospects or if vocational training appears to provide a more direct pathway to employment.

Financial Constraints: Financial barriers, including tuition fees, educational expenses, and the cost of living, can pose significant challenges for students and their families. In Cyprus, financial constraints may force students to prioritise employment over education, especially if they need to contribute to household income or if they lack access to financial assistance or scholarship programmes. Additionally, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may face heightened financial pressures, making it difficult for them to afford continued education.

Economic Stability of Families: The economic stability and resources available within students' families play a crucial role in their ability to pursue education. Families facing economic hardship or instability may struggle to support their children's educational aspirations, leading students to leave education early to alleviate financial burdens or contribute to household income. Moreover, students from families with limited financial resources may face challenges accessing educational materials, transportation, or other necessities, further exacerbating the risk of early leaving.

2.8 Technology and Digital Divide

Technology and the digital divide significantly influence early leaving from education and training (ELET) in Cyprus, affecting students' access to education, digital literacy skills, and online learning opportunities. Disparities in access to technology, including computers, internet connectivity, and digital devices, exacerbate educational inequalities. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds or rural areas may face challenges accessing technology due to limited infrastructure or financial constraints. This lack of access can impact their engagement with online learning platforms and educational resources, potentially leading to disengagement and early leaving.

Moreover, proficiency in digital literacy skills is essential for navigating modern educational environments effectively. In Cyprus, students who lack adequate digital literacy



skills may struggle to engage with online coursework, communicate with peers and educators, or utilize digital resources for learning purposes. Without the necessary skills to navigate digital platforms and technologies, students may become disengaged from education, increasing their susceptibility to early leaving.

Additionally, the availability and quality of online learning opportunities play a crucial role in shaping students' educational experiences and outcomes. The transition to online learning, particularly during periods of remote instruction, may pose challenges for students who lack access to reliable internet connections or digital learning materials. Furthermore, variations in the quality of online instruction and support services can impact students' ability to succeed academically and remain engaged in their studies.

Addressing the technology and digital divide related to ELET in Cyprus requires concerted efforts to bridge gaps in access to technology, enhance digital literacy skills, and improve the quality and accessibility of online learning opportunities. Initiatives aimed at providing students with equitable access to technology, offering digital skills training programs, and enhancing support for online learning can help mitigate the risk of early leaving and ensure that all students have the tools and resources they need to succeed in their education. By addressing these challenges, Cyprus can work towards creating a more inclusive and technologically-empowered educational environment that supports student retention and academic achievement.

2.9 Other Risk Factors

In addition to the factors already discussed, several other risk factors contribute to early leaving from education and training (ELET) in Cyprus:

Language Barriers: Cyprus is a multilingual society, with Greek and Turkish as the official languages. Students from linguistic minority backgrounds or those who are not proficient in the dominant language of instruction may face challenges in accessing educational materials, engaging with peers, and fully participating in classroom activities. Language barriers can impact students' academic performance and sense of belonging, potentially leading to disengagement and early leaving.

Migration and Refugee Challenges: Cyprus faces migration and refugee challenges due to its geographical location and political situation. Refugee and migrant students may encounter difficulties in integrating into the education system, including language barriers, cultural adjustments, and lack of recognition of prior education and qualifications. These challenges can increase the risk of early leaving among refugee and migrant youth, who may struggle to adapt to the new educational environment.

Social Exclusion and Discrimination: Social exclusion and discrimination based on factors such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion, or disability can adversely affect students' educational experiences and outcomes. Students who experience social exclusion or discrimination may face barriers to accessing educational opportunities, receiving support services, or fully participating in school activities. This marginalization can contribute to feelings of alienation, disengagement, and ultimately, early leaving from education and training.

Health and Well-being Issues: Physical and mental health issues, including chronic illnesses, disabilities, mental health disorders, and substance abuse, can impact students' ability to engage in education and maintain academic progress. Cyprus may face challenges in providing adequate support and resources for students with health and well-being issues, leading to increased absenteeism, academic underachievement, and eventual dropout from education and training.

3. Current Trends, Implications, and Perspectives in Addressing ELET

3.1 National public incentives and initiatives regarding preventing ELET

In Cyprus, several national public incentives and initiatives are underway to address and prevent early leaving from education and training (ELET). One prominent trend is the emphasis on inclusive education policies and programs aimed at ensuring equitable access to quality education for all students, regardless of their background or circumstances. The government is implementing targeted interventions to support vulnerable student populations, including migrants, refugees, students with disabilities, and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.

A key initiative is the integration of support measures within the education system to identify and assist students at risk of dropping out early. Early warning systems and support mechanisms are being established in schools to provide timely interventions and support services to students exhibiting signs of disengagement or academic struggles. These initiatives aim to address underlying factors contributing to ELET, such as academic difficulties, social exclusion, and lack of support networks.

Additionally, there is a focus on enhancing the quality and relevance of education through curriculum reforms, teacher training programs, and the promotion of innovative teaching methodologies. Efforts are being made to align educational practices with labor market needs and future skills requirements to enhance students' employability and future prospects. Vocational education and training (VET) programs are being expanded and modernized to provide students with practical skills and qualifications that are valued in the workforce.

Furthermore, there is an emphasis on strengthening collaboration and coordination among stakeholders, including government agencies, schools, community organizations, and employers. Partnerships are being forged to leverage resources, expertise, and best practices in addressing ELET comprehensively. This collaborative approach aims to create a supportive ecosystem that fosters student success and retention throughout their educational journey.

Looking ahead, the perspective is to continue building on these initiatives and fostering a culture of lifelong learning and educational attainment in Cyprus. This entails sustained investment in education, targeted interventions to address systemic barriers, and a commitment to ensuring that every student has the opportunity to fulfill their potential and contribute to the country's social and economic development. By

addressing ELET holistically and proactively, Cyprus aims to create a more inclusive, resilient, and prosperous society for all its citizens.

3.2 National private incentives and initiatives regarding preventing ELET

In addition to national public incentives and initiatives, there are also several private incentives and initiatives in Cyprus aimed at preventing early leaving from education and training (ELET). Private organizations, including non-profit entities, businesses, and community groups, play a significant role in complementing governmental efforts and addressing ELET from various angles.

One prominent private initiative involves corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs implemented by businesses operating in Cyprus. Many companies recognize the importance of investing in education and youth development as part of their CSR strategies. These initiatives often involve partnerships with schools, educational institutions, and non-profit organizations to provide financial support, mentorship programs, internships, and skills development opportunities for students. By engaging with the business community, these programs aim to enhance students' educational experiences, broaden their horizons, and improve their prospects for future employment.

Furthermore, there are private tutoring and supplementary education services available in Cyprus, which cater to students at risk of falling behind academically or disengaging from traditional schooling. Private tutoring centers, online tutoring platforms, and educational support programs offer personalized instruction, remedial classes, and exam preparation courses to help students improve their academic performance and stay on track with their studies. These services complement mainstream education by providing additional support and resources tailored to individual learning needs.

Additionally, philanthropic organizations and charitable foundations in Cyprus allocate funding and resources to initiatives aimed at preventing ELET and supporting marginalized student populations. These organizations may fund scholarships, educational grants, afterschool programs, and extracurricular activities designed to enhance students' academic achievement, socio-emotional well-being, and overall educational experience. By addressing socioeconomic disparities and providing targeted support to underserved communities, these initiatives contribute to reducing the risk of early leaving and promoting educational equity.

3.3 Concrete experiences/practices

Concrete experiences and practices in Cyprus aimed at addressing early leaving from education and training (ELET) include the implementation of targeted support programs for at-risk students, the expansion of vocational and technical education opportunities, and the promotion of inclusive learning environments. Some examples are:

1. Early Warning Systems: Several schools in Cyprus have implemented early warning systems to identify students who are at risk of dropping out. These systems utilize

2. data analysis and monitoring to detect signs of disengagement or academic struggles early on. Once identified, students receive personalized interventions and support services to address their specific needs and challenges.
3. Vocational and Technical Education Programs: Cyprus has expanded vocational and technical education programs to provide alternative pathways for students who may not excel in traditional academic settings. These programs offer practical skills training and hands-on experience in various industries, preparing students for employment opportunities or further education.
4. Inclusive Education Initiatives: Efforts to promote inclusive education practices have been prioritized in Cyprus to ensure that all students, regardless of background or ability, have equal access to education. This includes providing support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, migrants, and those with disabilities to ensure their academic success and inclusion in mainstream classrooms.
5. Partnership and Collaboration: Various partnerships and collaborations have been established between educational institutions, government agencies, and civil society organizations in Cyprus to address the root causes of ELET collaboratively. By pooling resources and expertise, these partnerships aim to implement effective interventions and support systems for students at risk of dropping out.
6. Support Services and Counseling: Cyprus has invested in support services and counseling programs within schools to provide students with emotional, academic, and career guidance. These services aim to address underlying issues that may contribute to dropout, such as mental health challenges, family dynamics, and socio-economic barriers, and provide students with the necessary support to overcome these obstacles and stay engaged in education.

3.4 Main challenges and obstacles to be encountered on ELET

Several challenges and obstacles are encountered in addressing early leaving from education and training (ELET) in Cyprus. Some are indicated below:

1. Socioeconomic Disparities: Cyprus experiences socioeconomic disparities that contribute to educational inequality. Students from low-income families may face financial constraints, lack access to educational resources, and experience instability at home, which can increase their risk of dropping out of school.
2. Language and Cultural Barriers: Cyprus has a diverse population, including migrants and asylum seekers whose first language may not be Greek. Language barriers can impede academic achievement and integration into the education system, leading to higher dropout rates among minority and immigrant students.
3. Integration of Migrant Students: Integrating migrant students into the education system poses challenges related to language acquisition, cultural adaptation,

and social inclusion. Limited support structures and resources for migrant students may exacerbate their vulnerability to dropout.

4. **Limited Access to Support Services:** Despite efforts to implement early warning systems and support mechanisms, access to counseling, mental health services, and academic support remains limited in some areas of Cyprus. Schools may lack resources and trained personnel to adequately address the diverse needs of at-risk students.
5. **Stigma and Discrimination:** Stigma associated with academic underachievement and dropout can negatively impact students' self-esteem and motivation to persist in school. Discrimination based on ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or migrant status may further marginalize vulnerable student populations and contribute to disengagement from education.
6. **Insufficient Vocational and Technical Education Opportunities:** While vocational education and training (VET) programs offer alternative pathways to academic success, there may be insufficient funding, infrastructure, and awareness of VET options among students and parents. Limited access to quality VET programs may restrict opportunities for students interested in pursuing technical or trade careers.
7. **Digital Divide:** Disparities in access to technology and digital literacy skills exacerbate educational inequalities, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when remote learning became prevalent. Students without access to reliable internet connectivity, devices, or technical support may struggle to participate in online learning, leading to disengagement and potential dropout.
8. **Inadequate Data Collection and Monitoring:** Incomplete or outdated data on dropout rates, student demographics, and risk factors hinder evidence-based policymaking and targeted intervention strategies. Improving data collection and monitoring systems is essential for accurately assessing the extent of ELET and identifying effective interventions.

3.5 Policy Implications and Recommendations (Policy Analysis, Best Practices and Interventions, and Future Directions for Research and Action)

Policy implications and recommendations for addressing early leaving from education and training (ELET) in Cyprus encompass various areas, including policy analysis, best practices and interventions, and future directions for research and action. Conducting thorough policy analysis and evaluation of existing initiatives is crucial to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. Investing in early intervention strategies, such as early warning systems and personalized support mechanisms, is essential for identifying and addressing risk factors associated with dropout at an early stage. Promoting inclusive education practices that accommodate the diverse needs of students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, migrants, and students with disabilities, is essential for reducing dropout rates and promoting educational equity. Strengthening vocational and technical education pathways and expanding access to



high-quality vocational programs can provide alternative routes to academic success and improve students' engagement and retention in education. Addressing digital inequities and ensuring equitable access to technology and online learning resources are crucial for mitigating the impact of the digital divide on educational outcomes. Strengthening data collection systems and conducting comprehensive research on the underlying causes and consequences of ELET are essential for informing evidence-based policymaking and targeted interventions. Fostering collaborative partnerships among government agencies, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders is essential for driving collective action and leveraging resources to address ELET effectively.



Interview with teachers

Introduction

In June 2024, Emphasys Centre conducted a focus group with 8 teachers for the purposes of the stAI project.

- **What school level do you teach at?**
The teachers in general teach at various school levels, ranging from primary to secondary education.
- **How long have you been working as a teacher?**
Among them, our experience varies widely. Some of them have been teaching for a few years, while others have been in the profession for decades.
- **How many students does your school have?**
The number of students in their schools varies. Private schools have about 10 students per class with an average of 80 students, however in the public sector the schools the teachers teach at have between 200 to 500 students.
- **Do you enjoy teaching?**
Yes, they all enjoy teaching. It's a rewarding profession where we get to impact young lives positively.
- **Can you describe the student group in your school (immigrants, languages, economic status)?**
The student groups are quite diverse. They have students from various economic backgrounds, and many of their schools have a significant number of immigrant students who speak different languages.

Main Questions

- **In your opinion, what are the main risk factors for school leaving? (for non-compulsory schools)**
The main risk factors for school leaving include lack of engagement, family issues, economic hardships, and language barriers. Some students also leave due to inadequate academic support or personal issues such as mental health challenges.
- **Is school avoidance a problem in your school (for compulsory schools)?**
Yes, school avoidance is a problem in some of their schools.
- **What factors contribute to school avoidance in your opinion?**
Factors mentioned were contributing to school avoidance include

bullying, academic pressure, lack of interest in the curriculum, family problems, and mental health issues.

- **Do you have some kind of evaluation for detecting students at risk for leaving school? (what kind)**

Some teachers answered with now, some responded positively. The ones that responded positively have several evaluation methods, including regular assessments, teacher observations, and counselling services. They also monitor attendance and academic performance closely.

- **Does the transition between different school levels oppose challenges for students? (e.g., intuition requirements, availability, and diversity of schools (access to vocational and academic studies)**

Yes, the transition between different school levels can be challenging. Students may face difficulties adjusting to new environments, higher academic expectations, and choosing between vocational and academic paths.

- **Do you believe teaching practices and education assessment plays a big role in keeping students engaged (and therefore reducing school dropout – how? curriculum)**

The participants were positive about this. 'Absolutely'. Engaging teaching practices and relevant, well-designed curricula are crucial in keeping students interested in their studies. Continuous assessment helps identify struggling students early, allowing for timely intervention.

- **How would you describe communication with families of students, is it important in relation to student dropout (homework yes or no, support)?**

Communication with families is vital. Regular updates and active involvement of parents in their child's education can significantly reduce dropout rates. Parental support with homework and school activities helps build a supportive learning environment.

- **Who are the most vulnerable students? (e.g., mental health, background, minorities, learning difficulties)**

The most vulnerable students are often those with mental health issues, those from minority backgrounds, students with learning difficulties, and those from economically disadvantaged families.

- **What are the main challenges you face as a teacher in your school?**

Main challenges include managing diverse classrooms, addressing the needs of students with varying abilities, lack of resources, and dealing with behavioural issues. Additionally, maintaining student engagement and supporting at-risk students can be demanding.

- **Do you have some kind of support system in your school to assist you facing these challenges? (e.g., school authorities)**

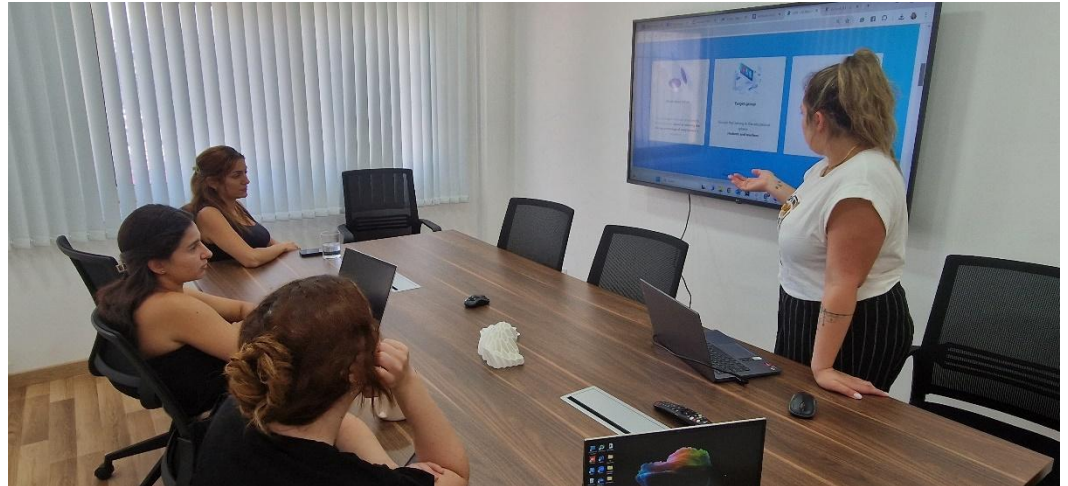
As mentioned previously, the support system includes counselling services, special education programs, and assistance from school authorities. Collaboration with parents and community services also plays a role.

- **Is there something teachers/school authorities can do to reduce those risks?**

Teachers and school authorities can work together to create a more inclusive and supportive school environment. This includes providing professional development for teachers, improving communication with parents, offering targeted interventions for at-risk students, and ensuring that curricula are engaging and relevant to students' lives and future careers.

Photos





Interview with Stakeholders

Between June and July 2024, Emphasys Centre conducted interviews with 5 stakeholders in Cyprus for the purposes of the stAI project.

Roles and Experience:

- **1 Educational NGO Representative:** Vice president of the Cyprus Computer Society with 20+ years of experience
- **1 Head of Training:** Head of Training with 15+ years of experience and training students and adults.
- **3 Educational Researchers:** Researchers with IT, Logistics, Psychology backgrounds with 2, 7, 5 years of experience.

School Dropout Importance:

- **Educational NGO Representative:** Extent to explore - 4, Extent to tackle - 5.
- **Head of Training:** Extent to explore - 5, Extent to tackle - 5.
- **Educational Researchers:** a) Extent to explore - 4, Extent to tackle - 5, b) Extent to explore - 5, Extent to tackle - 4, c) Extent to explore - 5, Extent to tackle - 5.

Primary Causes/Main Risk Factors:

- **Educational NGO Representative:** Socio-economic factors, family issues, and lack of engagement in the curriculum. Vulnerable students are aged 14-18.
- **Head of Training:** Family instability, economic issues, and lack of interest in school. Vulnerable students are aged 14-16.
- **Educational Researchers:** Academic struggles, lack of parental support, socio-economic challenges. Vulnerable students are aged 15-17. Socio-economic disparities, lack of engagement, and mental health issues. Vulnerable students are aged 15-18. Economic hardship, cultural factors, and lack of motivation. Vulnerable students are aged 16-18.

Challenges in Prevention:

- **Educational NGO Representative:** Resource constraints, lack of trained staff, and insufficient parental involvement. Inadequate funding, insufficient training for teachers, lack of student engagement programs.
- **Head of Training:** Inadequate resources, lack of awareness, and insufficient coordination between schools and social services.

- **Educational Researchers:** Limited funding, insufficient training for staff, and lack of parental engagement. Lack of data-driven interventions and insufficient cross-sector collaboration.

Existing Policies/Programs:

- **Educational NGO Representative:** Yes.
- **Head of Training:** Yes.
- **Educational Researchers:** Yes.

Effectiveness of Current Policies:

- **Educational NGO Representative:** Moderately effective. Suggested improvements: increased funding, more training for teachers, collaboration with social services.
- **Head of Training:** Partially effective. Suggested improvements: strengthening community support and increasing funding for educational programs.
- **Educational Researchers:** Somewhat effective. Suggested improvements: greater emphasis on mental health support. Somewhat effective but needs more evidence-based approaches. Suggested improvements: increased research into the causes and solutions of dropout rates.

Regional/Local Level Policy:

- **Educational NGO Representative:** Community mentorship programs
- **Head of Training:** A community-based initiative providing extracurricular activities and homework support.
- **Educational Researchers:** An after-school tutoring program funded by the local government. A local mentorship program connecting students with community leaders. A pilot project in collaboration with local NGOs to support at-risk youth through mentorship and counselling.

Data to Measure Dropout Rate:

- **Educational NGO Representative:** Enrolment records, attendance rates, academic performance data.
- **Head of Training:** Attendance records, academic performance, behavioural reports.

- **Educational Researchers:** Attendance, academic performance, behavioural incidents. School records, surveys, community feedback. Longitudinal studies, student surveys, administrative data from schools.

Data to Predict Early School Leaving:

- **Educational NGO Representative:** Comprehensive data on socio-economic background, attendance, behaviour, and academic performance (standardized and accessible).
- **Head of Training:** Comprehensive data on family background, academic achievements, and attendance (standardized and accessible).
- **Educational Researchers:** Comprehensive data on students' demographics, academic records, and behavioural patterns (standardized and accessible). Comprehensive data on students' socio-economic status, academic performance, and behavioural issues (standardized and accessible). Comprehensive data on academic performance, socio-economic status, and student engagement (standardized and accessible).

Technological Tools:

- **Educational NGO Representative:** Early warning systems.
- **Head of Training:** Digital platforms for monitoring progress and online tutoring.
- **Educational Researchers:** Student information systems to monitor academic and attendance records. Mobile apps and online platforms to engage students and track their progress. Statistical software and data analytics tools to analyse trends and predict dropouts.

Future Role of Technology:

- **Educational NGO Representative:** Enhancing data collection and analysis for targeted interventions.
- **Head of Training:** Real-time monitoring and personalized learning.
- **Educational Researchers:** Enabling personalized learning and better tracking of at-risk students. More personalized learning and better tracking of at-risk students. Enhancing data collection and analysis, enabling more targeted interventions.

Role of AI:

- **Educational NGO Representative:** Identifying at-risk students, providing personalized learning plans.
- **Head of Training:** Enhancing predictive capabilities, personalizing learning experiences.
- **Educational Researchers:** Identifying trends and providing personalized interventions. Predicting dropout risks and offering tailored interventions. Providing predictive analytics and personalized learning pathways. Using AI in early warning systems to significantly reduce dropout rates.

Long-Term Strategies:

- **Educational NGO Representative:** Improving teacher training, fostering community and parental involvement, integrating technology.
- **Head of Training:** Developing comprehensive support networks, enhancing vocational training, leveraging technology.
- **Educational Researchers:** Fostering a supportive school environment, providing diverse learning pathways, involving families more in the educational process. Building strong community partnerships, enhancing student engagement, integrating mental health support into the education system. Implementing comprehensive support systems, enhancing career counselling, integrating technology into education.

4. References

1. Christoforidou, M., and Kyriakides, L. (2021), 'Developing teacher assessment skills: The impact of the dynamic approach to teacher professional development', Studies in Educational Evaluation , 70, 101051, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2021.101051>
2. Cronbach, L. J. (3rd Ed) (1990), Essentials of Psychological Testing New York: Harper & Row.
3. Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation (CERE) <https://enimerosi.moec.gov.cy/archeia/1/ypp13780a>
4. Donlevy, V., Day, L., Andriescu, M., Downes, P., ECORYS, European Commission 2019, Assessment of the implementation of the 2011 Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving, doi 10.2766/599017.
5. EACEA, Eurydice equity report https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/default/files/towards_equity_and_inclusion_in_the_full_report_5.pdf
6. European Commission, EURES, Labour market information: Cyprus, https://ec.europa.eu/eures/public/living-and-working/labour-market-information/labour-market-information-cyprus_en
7. European Commission (2021), Education and Training Monitor — Volume II. Cyprus.
8. European Commission (2022), Press release, 8 July 2022, EU Cohesion Policy: more than €1 billion for Cyprus for economic and social development and a fair green transition in 2021-2027.
9. Ministry of Energy, Commerce and Industry, Minister's press office, 11 March 2021, <https://meci.gov.cy/en/useful-information/minister-press-office/165/?ctype=ar>
10. Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth, Educational materials, Environmental education/Education for environmental sustainability, <https://peeaad.schools.ac.cy/index.php/el/>.
11. Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth, Semestrial assessment, http://www.moec.gov.cy/axiologisi_tetraminon/axiologisi-tetraminon.html#potepoious
12. Ministry of Energy, Commerce and Industry, Minister's press office, Useful information, 13 March 2021.
13. OECD 2021, Net childcare costs in EU countries, Impact on family incomes and work incentives, 2019.
14. YUFE, Young Universities for the Future of Europe <https://yufe.eu/who-we-are/>.