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Easing transitions along learners' personal pathways throughout life by strengthening connections, preventing learners from leaving early, and supporting re-entrance

Across the OECD and beyond, the social and economic disruptions experienced since 2020 have dramatically affected learners' abilities to smoothly navigate their learning pathways. Traditional progression pathways are also evolving, meaning transitions will become more frequent, non-linear and multi-directional. Looking towards 2023, this chapter proposes options for policy makers to develop strategies for this changing context through: *Strengthening connections in learners' personal learning pathways throughout life* (supporting them to organise these coherently in order to facilitate transitions from one education level, programme or institution to another), *preventing learners from leaving early* (taking measures to reduce school drop-out and increase attainment of at least upper secondary education), and *supporting refugees to re-enter a learning or employment pathway* (in particular, efforts being undertaken by some countries to host immigrant people from Ukraine). Lessons are synthesised into key policy pointers.

In Brief

Easing transitions along learners' personal pathways by strengthening connections, preventing learners from leaving early, and supporting re-entrance

In 2023, countries and economies need to continue efforts to support learners to have greater ownership over what they learn, how they learn, where they learn and when they learn over their lifecycle. Easing people's transitions so they can shape and navigate the different pathways available to them through, and in and out of, education and training over a lifetime is key to this.

Infographic 3.1. Easing transitions along learners' pathways

	Key messages	Emerging policy pointers
Easing transitions throughout learners' pathways by strengthening connections, preventing learners from leaving early, and supporting re-entrance	Stronger connections in learners' personal pathways throughout their lives can make them more resilient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed broader supports to help address longer-term disruptions to transitions • Create the conditions for effective collaboration to increase the longevity of emerging good practices
	Countries need to continue supporting learners at greater risk of leaving early	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor the impact of COVID-19 on ESL through ongoing investigation to identify hidden or delayed developments • Improve the quality and accessibility of data, which is as important as people's ability to use it • Prioritise changing pedagogies, going beyond structural or procedural change
	Supporting refugees to re-enter learning or employment pathways is time-sensitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the impact of system-level policies on refugees to support mid-term integration • Promote broader collaborations to foster more sustainable support for refugees

Key messages emerging from this chapter

1. ***Stronger connections in learners' personal pathways throughout life can make them more resilient.***

The current cohort of students has experienced disruptions whose impact may be felt for years to come. One year into the pandemic, in March 2021, the number of days of school closure experienced on average across the OECD represented roughly 28% of total instruction days over a typical academic year for pre-primary learners and more than 56% for upper secondary learners. These closures have disproportionately affected socio-economically disadvantaged groups, migrants, and those with low skill levels. Within this context, strengthening the connections between institutions, programmes and phases is particularly important for education systems looking to enhance equity in 2023.

It requires not only enhancing the links between pre-existing pathways, but also establishing new connections to allow learners to transition between pathways in new ways and in new directions as their personal contexts, interests and needs evolve throughout life.

Recent policy efforts collected for this analysis reveal that while process-oriented measures to enhance connections in student pathways are common at lower levels of education, structural approaches tend to dominate among higher levels—with some exceptions.

Analysis from recent policy efforts undertaken mostly since 2020 point to some **emerging lessons** that can help governments to strengthen connections in learners' pathways for 2023:

- Embedding broader supports can help address longer-term disruptions to transitions.
- Creating the conditions for effective collaboration can increase the longevity of emerging good practices.

2. Countries need to continue supporting learners at greater risk of leaving early.

Today, upper secondary attainment is considered the minimum qualification for successful participation in the labour market and for integration into society. However, early on in the pandemic, UNESCO estimated that about 24 million learners globally, from pre-primary to university level, were at risk of not going back to education following the disruption of COVID-19. Further research illustrated that after two years of global pandemic, around 147 million students had been unable to access in-person training, making them more vulnerable to disengagement. Meanwhile, the OECD warned that the pandemic could trigger hysteresis among students as the prolonged absence of learning makes it harder for students, particularly the disadvantaged, to re-engage once education returns to normal.

Recent policy efforts identified for this analysis that address early school leaving have focused on comprehensive strategies enhancing co-ordination across regional, national, local and institutional levels, developing early warning systems and providing holistic supports for targeted groups of students.

Analysis from recent policy efforts undertaken mostly since 2020 point to some **emerging lessons** that can help governments to strengthen connections in learners' pathways for 2023:

- Monitoring the impact of COVID-19 on Early School Leaving (ESL) requires ongoing investigation to identify hidden or delayed developments.
- Improving the quality and accessibility of data is as important as people's ability to use it.
- Changing pedagogies is key, and requires going beyond structural or procedural change.

3. Supporting refugees to re-enter learning or employment pathways is time-sensitive.

Russia's large-scale aggression against Ukraine in 2022 has brought about the greatest refugee surge to OECD countries since World War II. In September 2022, it was estimated that 5 million people from Ukraine had fled the country. Host education systems will need to support refugees more holistically to overcome trauma from war and disruption. An important part of this will be to help them re-enter education and employment in their host countries. The relatively well-educated profile of this refugee cohort means that skills and qualifications recognition procedures, and education and training opportunities that seek to quickly enable them to do this, are particularly important.

Analysis from recent policy efforts undertaken mostly since 2020 point to some **emerging lessons** that can help governments to support Ukrainian refugees to re-enter their learning pathway:

- Considering the impact of system-level policies on refugees supports mid-term integration.
- Promoting broader collaborations can foster more sustainable support.

Introduction

In 2022, Russia's large-scale and unprovoked aggression against Ukraine has implications for societies and education systems. High inflation twinned with high energy and food prices are affecting populations worldwide, particularly the most disadvantaged. At the same time, labour market tightness may encourage people to opt for employment over entering or completing education and training programmes while trends in previous downturns suggest many students are likely to defer higher or further education in favour of workplace learning (OECD, 2021^[1]; OECD, 2022^[2]). At a more local level, the war in Ukraine, which is a significant humanitarian crisis, caused a huge displacement of people escaping the war. This created a need in neighbouring and other European countries to rapidly integrate Ukrainian refugees into education and training systems and to recognise their skills and qualifications to facilitate access to training and labour markets.

Across the OECD and beyond, the social and economic disruptions experienced since 2020 have dramatically affected learners' abilities to smoothly navigate their learning pathways. At the height of COVID-19 lockdowns, as institutions across the world closed, everyday instruction was compressed into shorter virtual lessons or remote self-study units, assessment practices were adapted, work-based learning cancelled and many students became at risk of disengagement. The shocks that labour markets experienced with lockdowns caused many people to leave their jobs, sometimes seeking to reskill.

As these disruptions and evolutions continue in 2023, education systems need to enhance efforts to support people to have greater ownership over what they learn, how they learn, where they learn and when they learn over their lifecycle. Ensuring learners can shape and navigate more personal pathways through, and in and out of, education and training over a lifetime is key to this. Without such efforts, learners risk having to delay their transition to the next stage of their learning, finding certain pathways they aspire to unavailable to them, or falling out of education and training entirely. This can be financially and educationally costly to the individual and to society.

Transitions occur when an individual experiences change or moves from a familiar setting to one that is unknown. (OECD, 2017^[3]; QAA Scotland, 2015^[4]). In this sense, learners are full-time 'transitioners'. Vertical transitions happen as learners move between levels and programmes in formal education, or through non-formal and informal education arrangements, to obtain knowledge, skills and abilities that can help them meet individual, labour market and broader societal needs (OECD, 2017^[3]; Reyes-Fournier, 2017^[5]). Horizontal transitions refer to the daily transitions that learners make from an early age between the home and their education settings, or between digital, physical or hybrid environments. Both types of transitions are likely to become more frequent, non-linear and multi-directional, as individuals' and societies' needs and ambitions respond to the changes around them.

All transitions require structural arrangements and processes to help learners navigate them confidently, according to their needs and interests. Strengthening the structural arrangements for lifelong transitions in contexts of disruption and change may include curating a broad but coherent education offer, minimising rates of grade repetition, ensuring permeability between educational tracks, or facilitating flexible entry and exit points (OECD, 2021^[6]). Creating processes that help these structural arrangements to function adequately can entail enhancing collaboration to ensure continuity and consistency in curriculum, pedagogy and learning environments, and support knowledge transfer across different levels of the system (OECD, 2017^[3]; Government of Alberta, 2009^[7]).

This chapter explores three ways in which education systems can support learners to smoothly shape and navigate lifelong transitions by bringing together structural arrangements and processes. These are:

- **Strengthening connections in learners' personal pathways throughout life:** this refers to efforts to reorganise learners' pathways coherently to facilitate transitions from one education level, programme or institution to another.

- **Preventing learners from leaving early:** this involves measures to reduce school drop-out and increase attainment of at least upper secondary education.
- **Supporting refugees to re-enter an education pathway or employment:** in the present context, this refers particularly to efforts being undertaken by some countries to host immigrant students from Ukraine.

For each of these areas, this chapter analyses selected emerging policy initiatives, principally across OECD education systems (see Table 3.1 at the end for the list of policies and practices included in this chapter). As in previous chapters, this analysis leads to some lessons of interest to guide policy makers' efforts in 2023. Lessons are then synthesised into key policy pointers for the longer term.

Stronger connections in learners' personal pathways throughout life can make them more resilient

Previous research and policy analysis undertaken by the Education Policy Outlook revealed that strong coherence between structures, people and processes across education and training institutions, programmes and phases is a key characteristic of responsive and resilient education systems (OECD, 2021^[6]). Developing and implementing policy efforts to clearly connect learners' pathways throughout their lives, so they can shape them according to their evolving contexts, interests and needs, is therefore key work for today's policy makers.

Although in many countries, vaccine rollouts and greater systemic resilience are likely to reduce the impact of future COVID-19 variants on education delivery, the current student cohort has experienced disruptions whose impact may be felt for years to come. One year into the pandemic, in March 2021, the number of days of school closure experienced on average across the OECD represented roughly 28% of total instruction days over a typical academic year for pre-primary learners and over 56% for upper secondary learners (OECD, 2021^[8]). In the immediate term, such closures directly impacted connections, disrupting examinations between secondary and higher education, and impeding transitions into work (OECD, 2021^[9]). In the longer term, despite contingency efforts, learning losses and the impact on well-being and socio-emotional development are likely to complicate pathway connections from the youngest age.

Within this context, strengthening connections in learners' pathways requires action not only to enhance the links between pre-existing pathways and along traditional learning trajectories, but also to establish new connections that make it possible for learners to transition between pathways in new ways and along learning trajectories in new directions. This flexibility needs to be designed in ways that prevent inequities and, instead, help learners reach their potential. As such, and by adopting a learner perspective, education systems can become much more dynamic in the face of the short- and long-term economic and societal changes taking place.

Such efforts are particularly important for education systems looking to enhance equity in 2023. Disruptions disproportionately affect those with low skill levels. For example, in 2021, on average across OECD countries, employment rates for tertiary-educated 25-34 year-olds were 26 percentage points higher than for those who attained below upper secondary education, and unemployment during the pandemic increased much less among those with tertiary education than it did among those with lower levels of attainment (OECD, 2022^[10]). Meanwhile, research from before the pandemic emphasised the additional challenges faced by vulnerable groups—including those from low socio-economic backgrounds, with immigrant or Indigenous backgrounds, and those with special needs—during their transitions within and between learning pathways (OECD, 2017^[3]; OECD, 2019^[11]; Brussino, 2020^[12]).

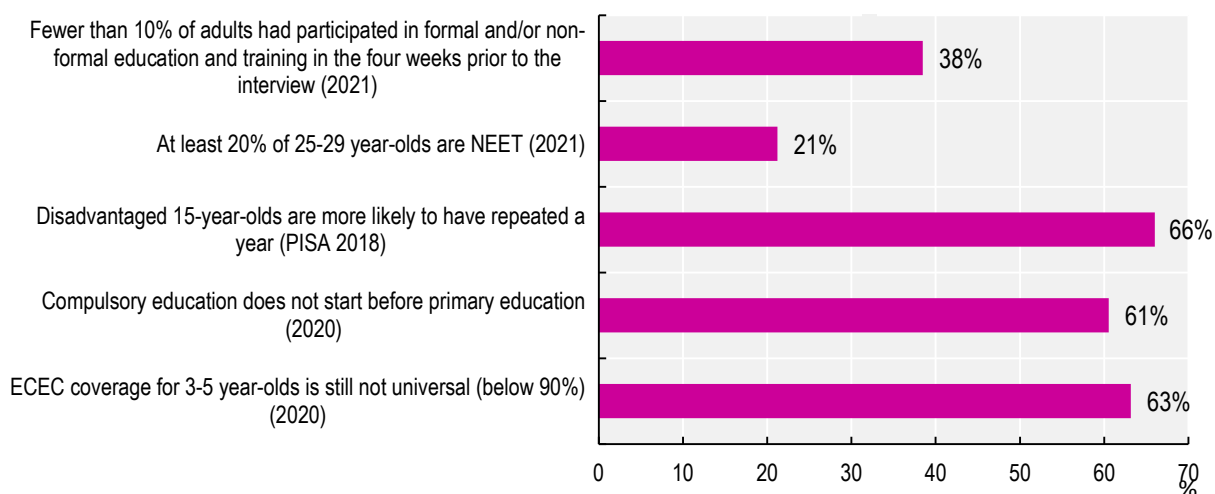
Available data provide insight into some of the structural characteristics that present challenges to better connecting pathways (see Figure 3.1). In over half of countries and economies participating in different OECD surveys, compulsory education coverage from Early Childhood Education and Care was not in

place in 2020, and learners appeared to experience difficulties in transitions at different ages. In 21% of education systems, at least one-fifth of 25-29 year-olds were neither employed nor in education or training in 2020.

More recent OECD data indicate that education systems have been able to prioritise and reprioritise to some extent according to contextual change. Although prior to the pandemic, policy efforts to align ECEC and lower primary education (e.g. curriculum continuity, assessing school readiness) were common across OECD countries, short-term responses to the pandemic made a shift towards strengthening transitions for older ages. In the Special Survey carried out by the OECD/UNESCO-UIS/UNICEF/World Bank in 2021, over half of education systems reported targeting remedial measures at students expecting to sit a national examination to access higher education, while one-third of education systems reported supporting transitions in lower and upper secondary education (OECD/UIS/UNESCO/UNICEF/WB, 2021^[13]; OECD, 2021^[6]).

Figure 3.1. Countries face challenges in securing education transitions throughout learners' lives

Percentage of OECD education systems with available evidence where the following happens



Source: Adapted from OECD (2022^[10]), *Education at a Glance 2022: OECD indicators*, OECD, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/3197152b-en>; OECD (2019^[14]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en>; OECD (2020^[15]) *PISA 2018 Results (Volume V): Effective Policies, Successful Schools*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ca768d40-en>.

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Selected recent policy efforts

Recent policy efforts collected for this analysis reveal that while process-oriented measures to enhance connections along student pathways are common at lower levels of education, structural approaches tend to dominate among higher levels—with some exceptions. The examples indicate that education systems could usefully consider both types of approach in a more complementary way across all levels of education. This section collects some recent experiences to make this happen.

Ongoing efforts to strengthen transitions at lower education levels include many process-oriented measures

Recent policy examples provide an insight into how education systems support learners, professionals and parents within different education levels or settings to establish a common ground on which to co-operate. By doing so, policy makers aim to encourage greater collaboration between these actors, improving the sharing of information about individual learners and the alignment of programme content and structures.

One key structural approach adopted by countries has been to introduce compulsory education before children enter primary school in some education systems, although this progress is uneven. In 2020, this was the case in 16 education systems across the OECD, with most having compulsory education from one year prior to the start of primary school but some having up to three or four years of compulsory pre-primary education. Some 11 countries offer distinct one-year programmes specifically for children in the year before starting primary school designed to help children with the transition from ECEC to primary education (OECD, 2022^[10]).

Norway's Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (2017) sets out national-level expectations for transitions in early childhood education and care (ECEC) while encouraging ownership and adaptation at the local level. An interim implementation evaluation (2021) found that while kindergartens engaged with the requirements to facilitate all transitions (into, within, and out of kindergarten), many of these practices pre-date latest framework plans. Since transitions were regulated in previous framework plans (1996, 2006 and 2011), many kindergartens had already formalised these practices and developed written protocols for collaboration with primary schools, parents, and other relevant partners. For example, the City of Oslo has developed a transition framework to establish good co-operation routines and ensure pedagogical continuity between ECEC and primary school (Homme, Danielsen and Ludvigsen, 2020^[16]). During the COVID-19 pandemic, maintaining such connections remained a priority for staff in kindergartens. For instance, where possible, children transitioning from ECEC to primary school were supported to visit their new school with their kindergarten teachers or parents, although in smaller groups, or at a later date than normal (Directorate of Education of Norway, n.d.^[17]; Directorate of Education of Norway, n.d.^[18]).

ECEC professionals in **New South Wales (Australia)** adapted their practices for the transition into school education in 2021 due to COVID-19 health restrictions. This included developing a digitalised version of the Transition School Statement, which summarises the child's strengths, interests, and approaches to learning in their year before starting school. The statement was designed to ensure continuity of learning by helping the primary teacher understand the child and how best to support their learning as soon as they enter schooling (Government of New South Wales, n.d.^[19]).

New South Wales also produced a set of COVID-19 guidelines for ECEC professionals (2021) (Government of New South Wales, 2022^[20]). In terms of supporting transitions, these highlight the need to consider the impact of disruptions to learning on student well-being and resilience, and to increase the consistency of communication with families to better understand their needs. Families can also provide insights on how children have been learning and behaving during periods where they were absent from ECEC, as well as any concerns about preparing for school. The guidelines suggest new ways in which ECEC professionals can work within their local transition networks—established to promote collaboration and information sharing between ECEC educators, schools, and other relevant stakeholders—in the context of COVID-19. Suggestions include organising collaborative meetings or orientation activities online and clarifying transition procedures early on (Government of New South Wales, n.d.^[19]). A collection of case studies spotlighting how schools have supported students' transitions in unusual circumstances provides further support (Government of New South Wales, n.d.^[21]).

Since the early 2000s, **Japan** has promoted connections between upper secondary schools and tertiary institutions. Programmes such as the Super Science High School (2002) link upper secondary students

with universities and tertiary-level scholars and researchers. Upper secondary schools designated as Super Science High Schools by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) are connected with universities to develop a shared vision of the skills needed for science, technology and innovation, and to enable students to participate in joint research projects. These schools also receive funding from the Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST) to provide for the equipment, training, and instructors required for advanced mathematics and sciences courses. As well as collaborating with higher education, Super Science High Schools share their expertise with neighbouring primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary schools. Some 217 Super Science High Schools were operating throughout the country by 2020. Under the Global Science Campus programme, the Japan Science and Technology Agency selects and supports universities to develop and implement programmes for upper secondary students with strong skills in science and technology (Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST), n.d.^[22]; The Japan News, 2022^[23]; Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST), n.d.^[24]).

Taking inspiration from these programmes, further policy efforts to expand connections between upper secondary and tertiary education are under consideration in the government's upcoming five-year plan for fostering start-ups and entrepreneurship education. Options being reviewed for budgetary requests include initiatives that foster linkages between start-up founders and upper secondary students through seminars and lectures at school. These efforts may be submitted for budget consideration by MEXT as early as 2023.

Countries and economies have also been enhancing flexibility at upper education levels

Recent policy efforts indicate that strengthening connections across upper education levels can also involve providing greater flexibility to the students entering them. This flexibility can involve additional time to complete an education stage, alternative entry paths, or the provision of specific support mechanisms.

One common structural approach across countries in recent years has been to ensure that vocational upper secondary programmes do not close off access to tertiary education. In 2020, 76% of vocational graduates across OECD countries completed a programme that allowed direct access to tertiary education and in 11 countries, all vocational graduates completed such programmes (OECD, 2022^[10]). However, data indicates the importance of process efforts beyond these structural approaches. On average, students who enter a tertiary pathway with a general upper secondary qualification have a higher completion rate at bachelor's level than those who start with a vocational upper secondary qualification (OECD, 2022^[10]). VET pathways need not only to open doors to tertiary education but also to equip vocational students with the skills they will need to succeed in those pathways.

In **Denmark**, emergency measures implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, together with reforms that began in 2015, aim to ensure students' successful transitions into vocational education and training (VET), as well as their progression through the different stages of VET, and to improve completion rates. A revised basic course allows students to try different specialisms before choosing their main pathway, with increased guidance from teaching staff. Previous efforts of this nature have been found to have contributed to students making more realistic and informed choices, with increasing attention to employment and internship opportunities (Denmark's Evaluation Institute, 2022^[25]).

In 2021, the Danish government granted VET providers the freedom to extend the second part of the basic course to offset the potential impact of lockdowns on retention rates and students' progression to the main course. Providers could also give students additional chances to restart the basic course. In a study into the impact of the pandemic on students' learning outcomes and well-being (2022), some 56% of school leaders reported that the 4-week extension to the basic course had a positive impact on student learning outcomes to a great extent, while a further 31% said the measure had improved learning outcomes to some extent. Recognising that student well-being affects students' learning outcomes and attainment, the government also granted providers with funding to implement social and emotional support measures, such as introductory tours and mentoring programmes (Denmark's Evaluation Institute, 2022^[25]). Several

school leaders plan to maintain these support measures to address gaps in students' practical knowledge and co-operation skills.

Through longer-standing reform efforts, Denmark has also strengthened admissions requirements for some VET courses to ensure students have the foundational skills required to succeed and provide a clearer signal to teachers of the skill levels required of students selecting these pathways. For example, Denmark has increased the mathematics and Danish language requirements for some courses, and implemented an overall assessment based on a written test and interview at the VET school for others.

The **French Community of Belgium** has also undertaken significant efforts to strengthen learning transitions, such as through the implementation of comprehensive education from pre-primary education to lower secondary education. The aim of this reform is to provide all learners with a fuller education experience by the end of lower secondary education through a common core curriculum. Implementation started gradually in 2022/23, with the first two years of primary school, to cover up to the third year of lower secondary education by 2028/29. As part of these measures, teachers will no longer systematically outsource remediation; it will take place within the class through personalised support by the teacher, with the help of additional teaching staff (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, 2022^[26]).

In addition, the government started implementing in 2022 a common structure in VET at upper secondary level, through the new Qualifying Education Pathway (PEQ). Through this structure, students will obtain VET qualifications during years 4 to 6 of secondary education, instead of starting from year 5. Individualised follow-up is also intended, for example, through an individual learning dossier, also accessible to parents. This new structure draws from experience gained through a pilot programme implemented in 2013, where certification was unit-based (CPU). The new structure ends the CPU, replacing it by ongoing qualification evaluations to take place throughout the PEQ (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, 2022^[27]; La Ligue de l'Enseignement et de l'Education permanente asbl, 2022^[28]).

In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, several higher education institutions (HEIs) in **Finland** developed more flexible methods for organising admissions. Finland's draft education policy report, submitted to parliament in 2021, includes an objective to clarify the role of the open studies pathway by developing a long-term vision for it. It also recommends that HEIs work with the secondary sector to develop admissions procedures (Government of Finland, n.d.^[29]).

These measures are the culmination of longer-term efforts to smooth transitions to higher education in recent years, with measures aimed at school leavers as well as older learners seeking to change careers or upgrade their skills. These efforts support Finland's goal of achieving a 50% tertiary attainment rate among 25-34 year-olds by 2030 (Government of Finland, n.d.^[29]). Finland's highly selective admissions system has historically meant that large numbers of applicants were rejected annually, contributing to a comparatively elevated age of first-time entry into higher education and delays in young people's entry into the labour market. As such, HEIs agreed to significantly reduce the role of the content-based entrance exams from 2018 and abandon what was previously the most common admissions route—based on combined points from a certificate and entrance exams—replacing it with a certificate-only-based admissions route that emphasises upper secondary qualifications. Quotas for first-time entrants were introduced in 2016. As of 2020, there were two main pathways to higher education—a certificate-based route and a route through entrance exams—with the certificate-based route being slightly larger. Universities of Applied Science (UAS) introduced a common digital entrance exam in 2019, while universities are working together to harmonise entry requirements (OECD, 2020^[30]).

The admissions reform also led to the Alternative Pathway to University project (2019-21), in which 11 HEIs collaborated to develop Finland's existing open university courses as a credible route to higher education. These courses have no admissions requirements, come at a relatively low cost, and allow learners to combine their studies with work and other commitments. The project contributed to an increase in the number of students entering degree programmes via this route, providing learners who may not

otherwise have entered higher education with a viable alternative to the traditional competitive routes (Joutsen et al., 2021^[31]).

Evidence from **Australia** (2022) suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has been a catalyst for innovative and flexible approaches among HEIs to engage, admit and support students from under-represented groups (e.g. those from regional and remote areas, Indigenous students, and those with low socio-economic status). Some institutions intensified digital outreach and marketing campaigns aimed at these key target groups, while others have developed their offer of short courses and certificate programmes aimed at reskilling professionals. A key development was the expansion of alternatives to the competitive Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) system. Some universities developed bridging programmes while others adjusted admissions requirements to account for learning lost during lockdowns. Although these alternative pathways may not always have been developed with key equity groups in mind, their expansion is likely to benefit these groups (Teague et al., 2022^[32]).

Several HEIs also strengthened support mechanisms for vulnerable students, including financial support, transition support for first-year students, and peer and academic mentoring. Some redirected funding from the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP, 2010) to implement these measures. The HEPPP provides funding for programmes that support the transition of students from under-represented groups to higher education and that aim to increase their retention and completion rates. HEIs receive grants based on their share of undergraduate students from the target groups. In response to findings from a 2017 evaluation, the government has aimed to generate evidence on programmes and activities implemented by individual HEIs, as well as the overall impact of the HEPPP (OECD, 2021^[6]). Finally, the evaluation identified a need for more consistent, rigorous and systematic data collection to monitor the impact of measures across a student's tertiary pathway (from pre-access, to entry, to transition out of university) and inform future policy improvements (Robinson et al., 2021^[33]).

Some policy lessons emerge on strengthening connections in learners' pathways for 2023

Recent data and analysis from these and other policy experiences to strengthen connections in learners' pathways as they transition through them offer some lessons to help guide policy makers in 2023.

1. Embedding broader supports can help address longer-term disruptions to transitions.

In recognition of the longer-term repercussions of the pandemic experience on learners of all ages, there is a need to enhance and systemise support mechanisms provided in the early stages of the pandemic to strengthen connections across learners' pathways. Moreover, these supports will need to take account of the full breadth of impact that the pandemic, along with other important shocks and disruptions, have had on learners, beyond learning losses.

- *Recent OECD data indicate that measures introduced in the immediate recovery period will be scaled back during 2022/23. Whereas 21 countries implemented additional psychosocial and mental health support for primary and secondary students in 2021/22, only 13 planned to continue these into 2022/23. Similarly, only 12 planned to provide additional teacher training on mental health and well-being in 2022/23, down from 18 in the previous year (OECD, 2022^[10]).*
- Some 55% of VET teaching professionals surveyed in **Denmark** reported that their students' practical skills were lower than those of previous cohorts after the lockdowns of 2020, with a similar picture emerging in relation to soft skills such as co-operation. These students missed out on the periods of practical learning that will prepare them for life in the workplace, but also on the social interactions that help them work effectively with others in school life and beyond. As was the case in other countries, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have exacerbated some students' more acute mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety. Teachers have called for a renewed focus on strengthening social and professional communities and for the continuation of the

well-being and mentoring initiatives that emerged during the emergency phase of the pandemic to support these students to be ready for the next stages of their training and employment (Denmark's Evaluation Institute, 2022^[25]).

- In **Australia**, experiences of supporting students from unrepresented backgrounds during the emergency phase point to a need to proactively invest in identifying the full breadth of needs of these students as they transition into tertiary institutions, since higher education professionals reported that institutional responses tended to lean on reaction to a perceived need. Achieving this aim involves developing mechanisms to collect and share student data (Teague et al., 2022^[32]).
- 2. Creating the conditions for effective collaboration can increase the longevity of emerging good practices.**

Recent policy efforts to strengthen the connections between students' pathways reflect growing recognition of the importance of professional collaboration. However, many education systems or institutions have evolved in ways that create barriers to collaboration, making such practices resource-intensive for education professionals. Policy makers need to ensure professionals have the time, guidance, and resources to make collaboration a success.

- *Recent OECD data reveal that, of the 14 OECD education systems where the content of compulsory professional development activities is mandated or specified in some way, this usually includes some form of formalised teacher collaboration. For example, at lower secondary level, five education systems reported specifying content related to teamwork for teachers, four mandated training related to communication and co-operation with parents and another four specified activities related to mentoring programmes and/or supports for new teachers. Nevertheless, 17 participating education systems reported having no compulsory professional development requirements in place (OECD, 2022^[10]).*
- Evidence from **Australia** suggests the challenges associated with COVID-19 have highlighted the need for collaborative partnerships within and beyond HEIs to promote disadvantaged students' access to higher education. However, most of the successful access and support initiatives that emerged during the pandemic were organised by a small network of teams, and professionals reported a broader tendency for departments to work in silos. This often led to the duplication of work and a lack of cohesion and connection between staff working towards similar objectives. One identified solution is to develop institutional COVID-response plans that establish what is needed for the access, participation and success of target groups. Such plans could help to ensure different actors within an institution are working towards a co-ordinated response to students' evolving needs (Teague et al., 2022^[32]).
- Evaluation studies from **Finland** highlight the need to ensure sufficient resources to support collaboration between upper secondary schools and HEIs, particularly by supporting smaller general upper secondary institutions. Implementing funding mechanisms that make it profitable for HEIs to collaborate with secondary VET institutions could motivate them to extend this work (Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, 2021^[34]).
- Policy experiences from early education levels could support enhanced action elsewhere in the system. **Japan** established Compulsory Education Schools as a new type of school. These schools integrate elementary and lower secondary education with the aim of achieving coherence between education providers, education activities and school management. Results from an initial evaluation show that this has improved collaboration and reduced anxiety among students moving from primary to secondary education (OECD, 2019^[35]). However, this structural change takes time and involves a considerable resource commitment.
- Countries such as **Slovenia**, **Denmark**, and some schools and municipalities in **Sweden** have appointed transition co-ordinators or organised local co-ordination mechanisms. These dedicated

roles or teams can liaise between professionals in different institutions, support information sharing, or organise collaborative activities (OECD, 2017^[3]).

Countries need to continue supporting learners at greater risk of leaving early

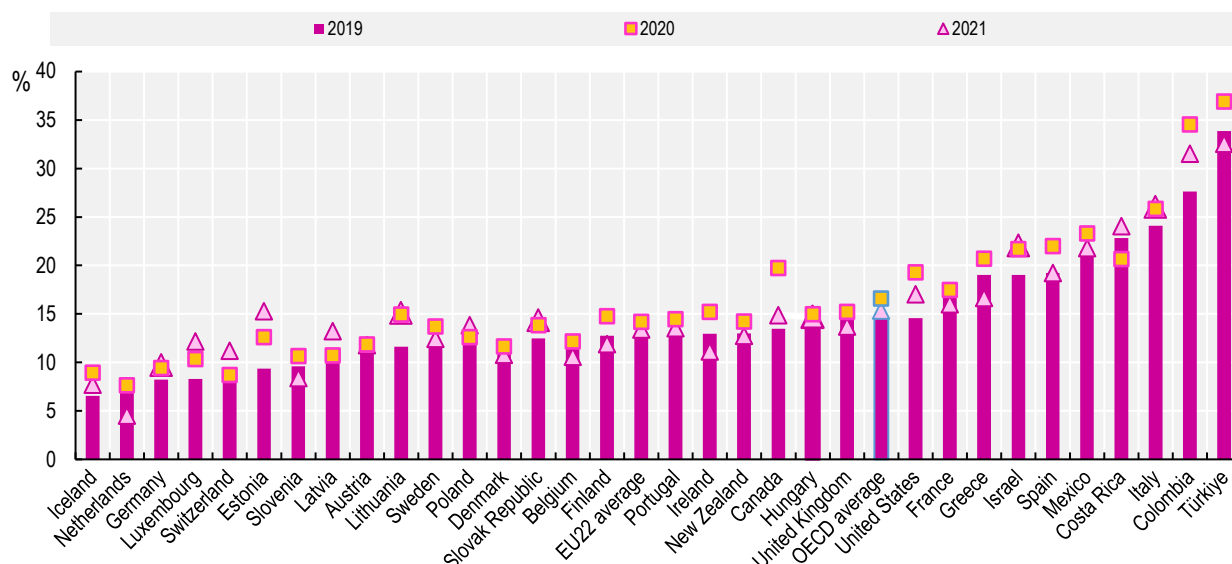
Today, upper secondary attainment is considered the minimum qualification for successful participation in the labour market and for integration into society. Learners who succeed to this level enjoy better employment and financial prospects, better health outcomes and life expectancy, a higher sense of social connectedness, and are more likely to engage in civic life (OECD, 2021^[1]; OECD, 2019^[36]). However, the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic increased the risk of students dropping out of education prematurely. Early on, UNESCO estimated that about 24 million learners globally, from pre-primary to university level, were at risk of not going back to education following the disruption of COVID-19 (UNESCO, 2021^[37]). Further research illustrated that after two years of global pandemic, around 147 million students had been unable to access in-person training, making them more vulnerable to disengagement (UNICEF, 2022^[38]). Meanwhile, the OECD warned that the pandemic could trigger hysteresis among students as the prolonged absence of learning makes it harder for students, particularly the disadvantaged, to re-engage once education returns to normal (OECD, 2020^[39]).

Policy action from before and since the pandemic indicates that measures can be put in place to reduce early school leaving. Indeed, for the period 2008-18, this was reported as a policy priority for 18 education systems across the OECD. Related policy trends included enhancing student guidance, revising qualifications, updating course curricula and increasing participation in STEM-related fields, as well as providing targeted supports to students most at risk of dropping out, such as migrants and refugees (OECD, 2018^[40]).

According to the Special Survey (2021), many education systems introduced targeted measures to promote the return of students from vulnerable groups to education after school closures. Of these, 75% introduced school-based mechanisms to track the return of target populations, 50% leveraged community engagement activities, and around 25% provided financial incentives for at least one vulnerable group (OECD/UIS/UNESCO/UNICEF/WB, 2021^[13]). Such efforts are important: providing earlier and more comprehensive individualised support to students at risk is a more effective and less costly measure than retrospectively reaching out to early school leavers (OECD, 2018^[40]). Although many other factors contribute, data suggest that efforts implemented prior to the pandemic may have contributed to a reduction in the proportion of early leavers.

Recent disruptions may also have contributed to an increase in the share of young people who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET). Between 2019 and 2020, the majority of countries saw an increase in the share of 18–24-year-old NEETs, with some decreases in 2021 (see Figure 3.2). Changes in the share of NEETs were not limited to any one geographic area, with the eight countries whose share of NEETs increased between 2019 and 2021 distributed between Europe or the Americas. This suggests that national-level policies do have a role to play. However, efforts must continue. Between 2019 and 2021 the OECD-average share of NEETs for this age group increased from 14.6% to 15.3% (OECD, 2021^[1]). Furthermore, experiences following the financial crisis of 2008 indicate that there is a certain lag time before the effect of economic disruptions is felt by this group; in addition, younger students disengaging from their learning are not yet captured in this data.

Figure 3.2. The share of 18-24 year-olds who are NEET has decreased somewhat since 2020



Source: Adapted from OECD (2022^[10]), *Education at a Glance 2022: OECD indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/3197152b-en>.

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Selected policy efforts

Recent policy efforts identified for this analysis that address early school leaving have focused on comprehensive strategies enhancing co-ordination across regional, national, local and institutional levels, developing early warning systems, and providing holistic supports for targeted groups of students.

Regional efforts include co-ordination across administrative levels in EU Member States

Recognising the importance of reducing ESL in achieving the Europe 2020 strategy objectives of improving education and training levels and reducing unemployment, EU Member States set the target of reducing the average share of early school leavers to less than 10% by 2020 (Council of the European Union, 2011^[41]). By 2021, the share was 9.7%. The current target is to reduce the average to below 9% by 2030: 18 EU member states have already reached this target, including the Netherlands, Belgium, and Latvia. Their strategies to reduce ESL reflect several of the principles of the European framework for designing evidence-based policies to address ESL (see Box 3.1).

Prior to the pandemic, the **Netherlands** had made considerable progress in reducing ESL: the share of early school leavers fell from 15.1% in 2001 to 7.0% in 2020. A decentralised approach is in place, combining preventative action at the school level, intervention measures at the municipal level, and regional co-operation. Schools and municipalities in 40 regions make joint agreements on ESL measures and produce annual impact assessments to measure progress. These agreements were adjusted to meet new challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic when the share of early school leavers increased. Common measures aim to strengthen guidance efforts for at-risk students, their well-being, and their transitions to the workplace. Municipalities have a statutory duty to combat ESL through the Regional Reporting and Co-ordination (RMC) function. RMC advisors reach out to early school leavers through phone calls, letters, or home visits, and guide them back to education, employment or other activities based on an assessment of their needs. They have access to data from schools and the Public Employment

Service to help them identify young people outside of the system. In addition to collaborating with schools and municipal authorities, they work with social and health organisations to support students with additional personal or mental health needs (Dijkgraaf, 2022^[42]).

The **Flemish Community of Belgium** has updated previously successful initiatives to reduce school drop-out in response to the impact of COVID-19 on ESL rates. The share of early school leavers fell from 12.1% during 2018/19 to 9.4% during 2019/20. However, rates remained disproportionately high among secondary VET students (14%) and male students (12%). The data also points to a relationship between ESL and socio-economic disadvantage, the language learners speak at home, and residing in urban areas. Possible explanations for the overall decline in ESL include a relatively weak labour market in 2020, which made young people less likely to leave education for paid employment. The government has called for further research to understand these trends and has renewed efforts to address ESL (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2022^[43]).

In response to the pandemic, in 2022, the Flemish Education Council and the Social and Economic Council of Flanders were charged with updating the Together Against School Dropout action plan (2016). The Flemish Community's six school drop-out networks are also conducting an analysis of their strengths and weaknesses in this field (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, n.d.^[44]). An 18-month action research project on effective practices for preventing ESL and tackling truancy will inform future policy development and practice at the school level. Drawing on a review of Flemish and international experiences, the project will identify practices to be tested by schools and make concrete recommendations their implementation in different contexts (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2022^[43]). The transition pathway initiative (2022), an early intervention measure aimed at students in secondary VET and technical education who schools have identified as being at risk of drop-out, has also been introduced. The initiative offers students career guidance and personalised training or work-based learning opportunities to help ensure they complete their studies and transition to a sustainable career after leaving secondary education (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, n.d.^[44]).

Drawing on EU frameworks, the Together Against School Dropout action plan identified actions for data collection, co-ordination and collaboration, prevention, intervention, and compensation. Schools are required to develop, implement, and evaluate a student guidance policy to ensure successful transition between grades and education levels. These plans include measures for all learners and targeted measures for those who need additional support (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, n.d.^[45]). As part of the plan, the Flemish government established six school drop-out networks, bringing together local partners from the education, welfare, and work sectors under the guidance of a network co-ordinator. Finally, the government established an Early School Leaving Monitor to track the outcomes, socio-economic characteristics and study progression of early school leavers, and appointed a truancy officer in charge of following up on and evaluating implementation.

In **Latvia** the share of early school leavers fell from 8.7% to 7.2% between 2019 and 2020, although this was followed by a slight increase to 7.3% in 2021 (Eurostat, 2022^[46]). Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the Tackling Early School Leaving (implemented in 2017) has strengthened measures to support teachers and other professionals working with at-risk students and their families in contexts of disruption. This included workshops for inter-professional teams within municipalities and seminars in educational institutions to support the development of preventative measures and develop professional competence in working with at-risk students. In 2021/22, the target group for the project was extended from students in grades 5-12 and grades 10-13 in VET to include students in grades 1-4. This reflects the project's focus on early intervention. Professional development activities focused on strengthening teachers' co-operation with parents, including those of younger learners. This points to some of the lessons learnt in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlighted the important role parents play in supporting learning in the home (Latvian Ministry of Education and Science, 2021^[47]).

Box 3.1. Addressing early school leaving in the European Union: Pathways to School Success

The European Commission launched the Pathways to School Success initiative (2021) to support member states in achieving the EU-level targets on reducing the share of low achievers in PISA reading, mathematics, and science tests to 15% and that of early leavers from education and training to 9% by 2030. These challenges have become more visible in the context of COVID-19, with recent evidence suggesting that the share of underperforming students has increased during the pandemic. Building on lessons from past work, evidence from research, and consultation activities, the initiative combines different instruments to stimulate policy reform. These include policy guidance, peer learning activities, information exchange and best practices, and financial incentives (European Commission, n.d.^[48]; Koehler, Psacharopoulos and Graaf, 2022^[49]).

As part of the initiative, in June 2022, a new framework for the development of policies aimed at addressing early leaving and promoting learners' success was launched. The framework identifies:

- **Key enablers**, such as a clear vision and strong political commitment to address early leaving and underachievement. These should translate into a comprehensive and integrated strategy at the national or regional level based on horizontal co-operation between policy areas (e.g. education, health and employment) and vertical co-operation between different governance levels. Data collection and monitoring—based on quantitative and qualitative data on learners and the factors that affect their outcomes—at the national, regional and local level is another a key enabler.
- **System-level measures** including replacing grade repetition with targeted support and ensuring permeable pathways through the education system.
- **School-level measures** including quality assurance arrangements with clear targets and indicators, and active engagement of parents and families.
- Measures to **support educators**, including promoting communities of practice and networking, as well as professional learning activities that address themes such as well-being and mental health, conflict resolution, and bullying and fighting.
- Measures to **support learners**, such as early identification of difficulties and needs, social and emotional learning, and targeted and individualised support.

Source: European Commission (n.d.^[48]), "Pathways to School Success", *European Education Area: Quality education and training for all*, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/b43aac1a-cc1b-11ec-b6f4-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-260381074> (accessed on 27 July 2022); Koehler, C; Psacharopoulos, G; Graaf, L (2022^[49]), *The impact of COVID-19 on the education of disadvantaged children and the socio-economic consequences thereof*, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Commission, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/787550> (accessed on 27 July 2022); Eurostat (n.d.^[50]), "Education and Training: Policy Context", <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/education-and-training/policy-context> (accessed on 27 July 2022).

The initiative was established in 2017, and involves education institutions, municipalities, and youth-sector organisations in Latvia collaborating to identify young people at risk of drop-out and provide them with personalised support. Teachers develop an individualised support plan for at-risk students based on an assessment of different risk factors. Support could include consultations with municipal specialists to address risk factors or financial support for transport, accommodation, or leisure activities. Municipalities also provide funding to youth-sector organisations to implement projects aimed at increasing the motivation of at-risk students, with young people playing a key role in initiating and implementing these projects. A combined database supports the regular exchange of information on preventative measures and their impact between the state, municipal, and institutional levels. An evaluation (2019) found that training

opportunities helped staff engage with the database and effective protocols were in place to ensure co-operation between the different partners involved at the local level (Latvian Ministry of Education and Science, 2020^[51]).

Many Latin American and Caribbean countries continue relying on early warning systems

In the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region, early warning systems have developed in recent years across a range of countries. During the pandemic and the extensive, prolonged school closures experienced in the region, they have been part of efforts implemented or scaled up by governments to identify students at risk of ESL. Through them, governments have aimed to target interventions that could be mainstreamed in a timely manner (World Bank, 2021^[52]).

In **Chile**, the Early Warning System (SAT, 2019) was developed by the Ministry of Social Development and Family together with the Ministry of Education; its implementation was accelerated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The system uses administrative information about students to identify patterns of conditions that suggest an elevated risk of ESL. Indicators include the socio-economic status of the student, family, peers and wider social environment, and attendance and disciplinary record. The goals of the SAT are twofold: first, it serves to log timely information about students whose situation suggests a higher probability of ESL, in turn drawing the attention of school leaders and staff. Second, it uses this information to guide decisions at multiple levels of the education system aimed at promoting the continuation of studies. Although initially implemented amongst a limited number of schools, a working group on ESL within the Ministry of Education later recommended expanding it to all parts of public education as part of a suite of education proposals aimed, in part, at promoting continuity of study for students at high risk of ESL in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the higher-risk groups identified in the proposal were students excluded from the education system prior to the pandemic, students identified as possible leavers according to the SAT, and enrolled students who had little to no contact with their teachers during the first term (Chilean Ministry of Education, 2020^[53]).

In **Colombia**, the Information system for the monitoring, prevention and analysis of School leaving (SIMPADE) was developed by the Ministry of National Education to monitor, prevent and analyse ESL. The system provides school leaders and their staff with information that can be used to follow students, especially those at greater risk of leaving school, and identify the common causes of ESL. The SIMPADE helped monitor the evolution of school enrolment and ESL during the pandemic (Ministry of Education of Colombia, 2022^[54]). For example, reporting from the SIMPADE and the District Education Secretariat of Bogota (SED) were used to support evidence of a gradual fall in ESL in Bogota between 2018 and 2020, including at the start of the pandemic (Ballén Cifuentes et al., 2021^[55]). International analysis has noted that the complementary information of instruments like the SIMPADE can help to provide a more complete overview of the experience of students and contribute to the planning efforts of the National Committee for the Comprehensive Action Plan for School Harmony (2013), an inter-sectoral effort which aims to promote the development of citizenship, school coexistence and human, sexual and reproductive rights at the national level (World Bank, 2021^[56]).

In a similar vein, the **Costa Rican** Ministry of Education highlighted the importance of early warning in addressing ESL during COVID-19, as the pandemic intensified risk situations for students and increased the likelihood that they leave education prior to finishing. The first phase of Costa Rica's Early Warning System was launched in 2020, focusing on the creation of a national student register to allow for online enrolment and the centralisation of student records (Rivera Pizarro, 2020^[57]; UNESCO, 2021^[58]). This enables the Ministry of Education to trace the file of each student and alert actors at different level of the system—from schools, to school leaders, to regional directors—to take appropriate steps to prevent ESL. Further planned expansion of the system will allow it to register and store data on student performance, attendance, and behaviour (Rivera Pizarro, 2020^[57]). Overall, the system envisages using predictive

algorithms contextualised with complementary information to quickly identify at-risk students and rapidly address emerging issues before they fully develop.

Brazil's School Active Search strategy (2017) relies on municipal-level inter-sectoral collaboration, with state support, to identify, enrol and monitor disengaged students through a free digital platform and phone application. From 2017, the federal government has funded a network of agents to support national implementation. By July 2020, over 3 160 municipalities had adopted the strategy, with over 60 000 students (re)enrolled. In 2020, guidelines were adapted for the COVID-19 context and the platform continued to be a useful real-time tool to track students (OECD, 2021^[59]). These have since been developed into a crisis and emergencies strategy paper for further iterations of the pandemic, as well as natural disasters and other possible emergencies.

National efforts are also underway in other regions to propose holistic approaches

Elsewhere, some efforts at national level emphasise the importance of reaching out to target groups of students in a tailored way that takes a holistic approach to assessing and addressing their needs.

In 2021, **Canada** announced additional funding for its Supports for Student Learning Programme (SSLP) to help ensure that students from key target groups do not face additional challenges because of the pandemic. The SSLP funds programmes that help students with additional barriers to complete secondary education and continue to post-secondary education. This includes Indigenous students, students from minority ethnic backgrounds, students living with disabilities, students from low-income households, and LGBTQ+ students (Government of Canada, 2022^[60]).

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, for example, the nationwide Pathways to Education programme has provided a range of academic, financial, social, and one-to-one supports to help students overcome the additional barriers they face in the current climate to ensure COVID-19 does not lead to an increase in drop-out rates. This includes tutoring and tailored study plans that help young people build successful study habits and stay on track with their learning. Programme staff have also connected students with mentors from different professional fields who provide career guidance and advice (Pathways Canada, 2022^[61]). A recent evaluation (2022) found that the programme had adapted well to the pandemic, with programme staff making regular contact with young people and their families and providing financial support and online resources (Pathways Canada, 2022^[62]). Previous evaluations have highlighted the model's flexible structure—which allows staff to adapt provision to the needs of different target groups—as a key success factor (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019^[63]).

Recent guidelines for **Victoria's (Australia)** School Focused Youth Service (SFYS) draw attention to the possibility that schools may be experiencing higher numbers of students at risk of disengaging from their studies following periods of remote learning in 2021. The programme funds agencies across the state to deliver targeted interventions for primary and secondary students who are currently attending school but who are at risk of disengaging, and provides capacity building for schools to support these students. Common interventions include programmes to address challenging behaviours, team projects to strengthen social and emotional skills and build self-esteem, and targeted programmes aimed at specific cohorts such as young parents. Teachers follow professional development activities tailored to barriers experienced by their students, addressing issues such as how to respond to signs of disengagement and raising awareness of different barriers (State Government of Victoria, 2021^[64]).

SFYS works alongside the Navigator programme (2021) which provides more intensive, holistic support for 12-17-year-olds who have less than 30% school attendance, and who have already received additional support from their school. Navigator providers reach out to young people and their families through phone calls, messages and home visits, and deliver intensive case management based on their needs, referring them to other support services where necessary (State Government of Victoria, 2021^[65]; Victorian Auditor-General's Office, 2022^[66]). Finally, a Staying in Education Dashboard helps schools identify students at risk of disengagement and ESL. This enables school well-being teams to implement school-based

interventions as a first priority or refer students to programmes such as the SFYS or Navigator (State Government of Victoria, 2021^[65]).

Some policy lessons emerge on addressing early leaving for 2023

Recent data and analysis from these and other policy experiences to prevent ESL as learners transition through their education pathways offer some lessons to help guide policy makers in 2023.

1. Monitoring the impact of COVID-19 on ESL requires ongoing investigation to identify hidden or delayed developments.

Although in many countries, the proportion of early school leavers continued to fall throughout 2020 and 2021, short-term measures implemented in the early stages of the pandemic mean that some students' exit may have been delayed, or that those at risk of drop-out have not yet been identified.

- *Recent OECD data indicate that among 25-29 year-olds in 2021, those who had left school prior to attaining an upper secondary qualification were twice as likely to not be in employment, education or training than those who had an upper secondary qualification. Therefore, NEET data can reveal some of the longer-term implications of ESL. By 2021, the share of young adults who are NEET had returned to, or fallen below, pre-COVID levels in about two-thirds of OECD countries. However, longitudinal data reveal the risk of a delayed effect as disruption to learning and disruption to labour markets combine. Following the economic crisis of 2008, the share of unemployed NEET youth peaked in 2013, five years after the initial shock.*
- Research from the **Netherlands** suggests that the cancellation of central examinations during 2020/21 and adjustments to the requirements for progression to the next grade meant that some students who would previously have failed were able to continue their studies but dropped out at a later stage. In this sense, emergency measures may have delayed the point at which some students leave education but did not resolve the underlying issues affecting these students' performance. The pandemic also disrupted admissions and guidance procedures, meaning that some learners may have made poor study choices, making them less likely to complete their course (Dijkgraaf, 2022^[42]). The government has instructed the regions to consider the risk factors identified in their impact assessments. Many have already implemented measures to improve guidance and well-being support for learners.
- Teachers in **Denmark** reported that, while in previous years students left their courses throughout the academic year, issues with early leaving tended to manifest only as schools reopened. A possible explanation for this was that teachers were less likely to monitor early warning signs such as poor attendance during periods of distance learning. Distance learning also made it more difficult to have informal conversations about students' study choices, to assess their exam readiness, or to identify gaps in learning (Denmark's Evaluation Institute, 2022^[25]). This underlines the importance of keeping early warning systems and data collection practices operating. It also points to a need to ensure that any adjustments to assessment or graduation requirements are accompanied by measures to support students who may not have mastered the competencies they need to succeed in their next step.

2. Improving the quality and accessibility of data is as important as people's ability to use it.

Collecting timely and granular data on risk factors that may have intensified needs to be matched with efforts to make it accessible and understandable. Education systems must also strike the balance between protecting sensitive information and providing access to information that supports collaboration.

- *Recent OECD data indicate that data literacy is not commonly identified as a core component of teacher training across OECD education systems. In 2021, 21 of the education systems with available data reported requiring content related to research skills development as part of initial*

teacher education for lower secondary teachers. In comparison, academic subjects, pedagogy and teaching practicum were mandatory in 33 education systems (OECD, 2022^[10]).

- A recent audit of **Victoria's (Australia)** navigator programme points to a need to collect data over time and to link programme participation data to student attendance and achievement records to monitor the medium-term impact of interventions, and to account for a broader range of factors that may indicate that a student is re-engaging with education (Victorian Auditor-General's Office, 2022^[66]).
 - A study from the **Flemish Community of Belgium** highlights some of the challenges involved in identifying students who truant occasionally, since they may combine legitimate absences with more problematic ones. A common challenge identified was that information about truants did not follow the student as they moved between schools or support services, meaning that it often took time to address the underlying causes of truancy. Identified solutions include streamlining and clarifying the processes for recording absences in schools and the optimal conditions for early intervention to ensure consistency and comparability between schools. Experiences also point to a need to strengthen teachers' data literacy to improve the way individual schools address truancy. Achieving greater consistency in data use, along with promoting collaboration through learning networks (especially since collaboration across education levels can facilitate an early intervention approach) are potential solutions (Keppens and Spruyt, 2019^[67]).
 - A solution implemented in **Latvia** involves training educational staff on how to collect, analyse and use data on the risks associated with ESL.
 - In the **Netherlands**, the national government supports local and regional actors by conducting its own research into the causes of ESL and is developing a range of dashboards that aggregate regional-level data (Dijkgraaf, 2022^[42]).
 - In **Brazil**, the School Active Search strategy is accompanied by a freely available, certified, self-study online course for municipal and state level actors. Modules are tailored to the needs of actors with different roles and incorporate a range of multi-media resources (UNDIME et al., 2021^[68]).
- 3. Changing pedagogies is key and requires going beyond structural or procedural change.**

Preparing learners for their next step may require teachers and other professionals to develop their pedagogical practices or acquire new competencies. This will be especially important in the current context, as teaching professionals in many countries seek to mitigate the impact of recent unprecedented disruptions on students' learning and well-being.

- *Recent OECD data indicate that lessons learnt through the adoption of emergency response measures during the pandemic may be helping to facilitate the integration of digital pedagogies in the longer term. In 2022, 75% of countries with available data reported planning to maintain or further develop enhanced provision of digital training for students, although the share was smaller (52%) for those reporting the same for hybrid learning. These efforts need to be evidence-based and 70% of countries reported that they were undertaking studies to evaluate the effectiveness of distance learning strategies during the pandemic (OECD, 2022^[10]).*
- Recent evidence from **Denmark** underlines the relationship between the quality of teaching and learning and the likelihood that learners will remain on their pathway, but suggests that bringing about change in teachers' practices can take longer than implementing structures and procedures. While the structural elements of Denmark's VET reforms had been widely implemented, the evidence suggests there has been less progress towards making teaching more varied, differentiated, and practice-oriented (Slottved et al., 2020^[69]). This aligns with the recommendations of the European Commission's framework (see Box 3.1), which highlights the importance of supporting teachers in providing differentiated instruction and creating learning environments that support at-risk pupils.

Supporting refugees to re-enter learning or employment pathways is time-sensitive

Russia's large-scale aggression against Ukraine in 2022 has focused attention on the importance of providing refugees and migrants of all ages with routes into education and training and helping them adjust to changed circumstances. At international level, this has meant the greatest refugee surge to OECD countries since World War II. In September 2022, it was estimated that 5 million people from Ukraine had fled the country. Although many refugees have settled in neighbouring countries, such as Hungary, Poland and the Slovak Republic, countries such as Germany and the Czech Republic have also welcomed large numbers.

A majority of these refugees are women and children, as Ukraine's mobilisation required men aged 18 to 60 to remain in the country. Many of these children are unaccompanied or separated from their families. In July, organisations tasked with child protection as part of the Ukraine refugee response estimated that hundreds of thousands of child refugees were in unknown locations without residency status, hindering their access to basic social services and education (OECD, 2022^[70]; OECD, 2022^[71]). The specific profile of the Ukrainian refugee population therefore makes the education sector integral to the host countries' response. In addition to providing a sense of security and stability, timely access to education can prevent young learners becoming disengaged from their learning pathways, hence minimising further risks to their future well-being and prospects should they stay in the host country or on their return to Ukraine.

Older displaced learners will also need timely access to education and training opportunities, or qualification recognition processes, that help them transition into further education or the labour market, bridging the gap between qualifications acquired in Ukraine and those recognised in the host country. Identifying and formally recognising the skills and qualifications that refugees bring with them will also be important so that both refugees and host societies can benefit from them. A relatively high share of Ukrainian refugees are tertiary-educated, which could facilitate their adaptation and integration. However, in the shorter term, language barriers and efforts to establish other basic needs may have inhibited their capacity to find jobs that align with their skills and qualifications. Supporting them to participate in education and training opportunities that help them make this transition requires acknowledging that the typical profile of the Ukrainian adult refugee is a tertiary-educated woman, often with accompanying children. This is an important difference from previous refugee crises, such as that experienced in Europe in 2014-17, where refugees were typically lower-educated young men. As such, beyond facilitating the recognition of their skills and qualifications, enabling access for their children to education or childcare services can also facilitate parental integration into the labour market.

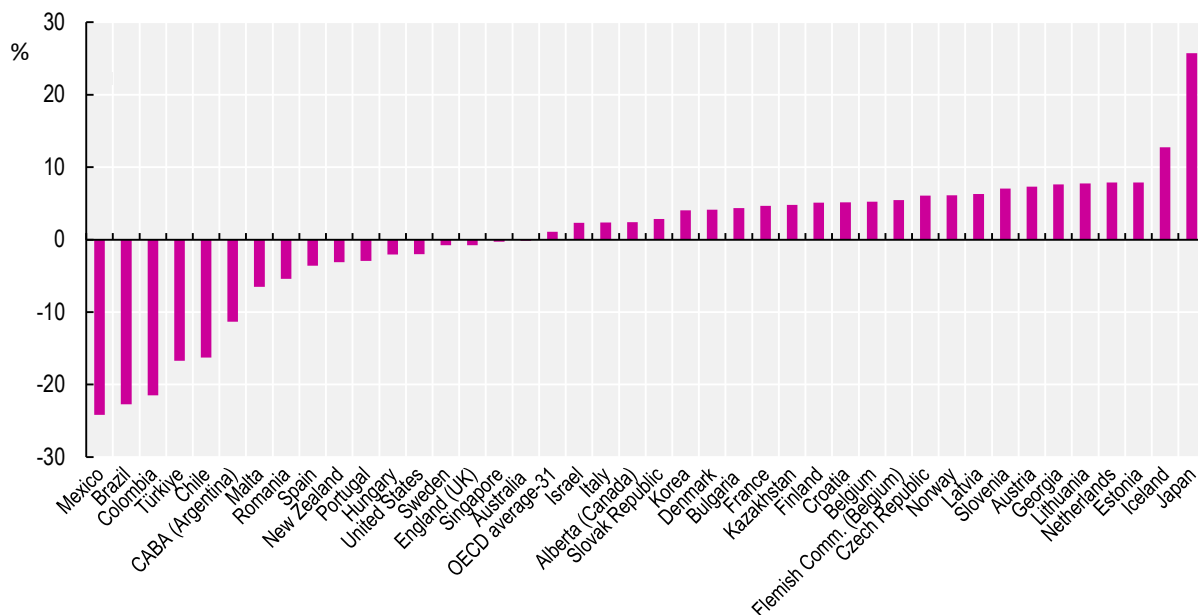
The effective integration of refugees places considerable pressure on public resources, but also on the capacity of actors interacting with refugees on a day-to-day basis. Indeed, an important component of promoting the educational integration of refugee children involves equipping educators with the skills necessary to teach in diverse environments. Figure 3.3 compares the share of teachers in TALIS 2018, who reported a high level of need for professional development in teaching in multicultural or multilingual settings and for whom such training was included in professional development activities, compared to the share of teachers who expressed the same high level of need but for whom such training was not included. On average across countries and economies in this survey, a marginally higher share of teachers reported access to this type of training.

Receiving countries across Europe are implementing emergency measures to provide Ukrainian refugees of all ages with access to education and training and to support educational institutions to meet their needs. This requires an important effort from host countries, notably those with limited experience of integrating refugee learners into their education systems, or who have more limited resources. At the same time, many newly arrived families wishing to return to Ukraine as soon as possible may be less likely to enrol their children in school or to participate in adult learning. Education systems will therefore need to reach out to

these refugees to prevent education rupture and disengagement as families wait to return. The European Commission has recommended that countries develop guidance materials and establish help centres and hotlines to provide information on the education system. Since the situation in Ukraine remains unstable, it is equally important to ensure that short-term measures also support integration over the longer term.

Figure 3.3. Teachers' access to professional development in teaching in a multicultural background or multilingual setting could be enhanced

Teachers who reported a high need for this type of training and receiving it minus teachers who reported a high need for this type of training and not receiving it (TALIS 2018)



Source: OECD (2019^[72]), *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I): Teachers and School Leaders as Lifelong Learners*, TALIS, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1d0bc92a-en>.

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Selected policy efforts

As the war in Ukraine endures, groups of refugees are expected to continue to arrive. To support their efforts to settle despite an uncertain context, host governments will need to provide support to meet complex needs in an accessible way. Furthermore, this support will need to evolve as new challenges emerge, remaining flexible and reactive to help address these in a timely manner. For older youth and adults, support to develop skills that can help them access the labour market will bring mutual benefits for host countries and refugees over the mid-, short and longer term.

Policy efforts include meeting the needs of the whole child

The OECD recommends that education systems in host countries consider holistic approaches to support refugee students. Addressing refugee students' learning needs entails providing them with flexible pathways and an early needs assessment of their language skills (both native and host language) as well as wider skills and well-being needs to inform personalised learning plans. Targeted language support in

both languages matters as well, as does strengthening the capacity of teachers to support the needs of refugee students. Furthermore, host education systems will need to support refugee students more holistically to overcome trauma from war and disruption. This includes providing social and mental health support from early on and ongoing monitoring. Opportunities for identity construction are important as well through, for example, interactions between refugee students and other students, or by involving parents and communities in the integration of refugee students (OECD, 2019^[11]; OECD, 2022^[70]).

Luxembourg aims to facilitate arrivals for families coming from Ukraine by establishing a single point of contact within the Ministry of Education's Department for the Education of Foreign Children (SECAM). The SECAM meets with children and their families to suggest possible schooling options; parents make the final decision. Most students arriving from Ukraine attend newly established English-speaking reception classes in six international public schools. English is the selected language of instruction since students in Ukraine study it from their third year of schooling. Students then transition to a mainstream class at the same school, adding either German or French as an additional language. Parents can choose to send their child to a municipal school, where they will attend induction courses in German or French. Students aged 3-5 can enrol in ECEC programmes provided by local primary schools. The Ministry of Education has recruited English-speaking teachers for the international schools, and Ukrainian-speaking assistants to support teachers and students. The SECAM has a website with resources and information to support teachers in meeting the needs of newly arrived students (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enfance et de la Jeunesse (MENJE), 2018^[73]).

In **Sweden**, a dedicated webpage sets out the procedures for integrating newly arrived students from all countries, while providing specific guidance on supporting Ukrainian learners. Ukrainian learners with a residence permit are not obliged to attend education in Sweden, but municipalities must provide those under 18 with the opportunity to attend if they want to. As such, the National Agency for Education (NAE) and the Swedish Migration Agency organised a series of webinars to support municipalities in planning for the summer and autumn term of 2022. These provided information on reception procedures, forecasts of expected numbers of new arrivals, and examples of good practice. Schools are responsible for carrying out an assessment of new arrivals' previous schooling, as well as their literacy and numeracy skills, within two months of registration, using materials provided by the NAE. Based on this, school principals decide which grade level the student should be placed in and develop an appropriate education plan. A webpage provides information on the Ukrainian education system to support schools in this process (Swedish National Agency for Education [Skolverket], 2022^[74]). As in Luxembourg, some newly arrived students are initially taught in separate introductory classes but must transition to mainstream classes as soon as they develop language proficiency, and at least within two years. The NAE also provides support for the reception of newly arrived children at ECEC level.

Since many new arrivals from Ukraine wish to return home as soon as possible, receiving countries should provide opportunities for learners to maintain their mother tongue or follow subjects in the Ukrainian curriculum (OECD, 2022^[70]). Following the Russian invasion, the **Czech Republic** collaborated with the Ukrainian embassy to provide primary and lower secondary students with distance learning based on the Ukrainian curriculum. This takes place alongside students' gradual integration into mainstream education. Another collaborative project provides textbooks and other teaching materials from Ukraine to participating schools and has established a database to support schools' recruitment of Ukrainian teachers and Czech volunteers (UNESCO, 2022^[75]). In June 2022, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports announced funding for intensive holiday language courses for students arriving from Ukraine to support students' transitions to mainstream education and prevent drop-out. Some 406 of these courses were implemented in the summer of 2022 and could be taken at any time during the day to provide families with greater flexibility (Czech Ministry of Education Youth and Sports, 2022^[76]).

These reception efforts require an important investment from educators catering to refugee students. With this in mind, the **Slovak Republic's** National Institute of Education (SPU) has implemented several measures to support teachers and education institutions in meeting the language and social-emotional

needs of Ukrainian refugee students. This includes a series of webinars and online discussion events that began in March 2022. One webinar, for example, introduced a peer support framework to facilitate the social integration of new arrivals, drawing on experiences from the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic, while a discussion at the end of the 2021/22 school year aimed to support teachers to assess Ukrainian students' learning, taking account of the differences in the two countries' education systems (National Institute for Education in the Slovak Republic, 2022^[77]; National Institute for Education in the Slovak Republic, 2022^[78]; UNESCO, 2022^[79]).

Following an agreement signed in May 2022, SPU is also collaborating with UNICEF in a project aiming to increase institutional capacity for planning, implementing and monitoring the integration of Ukrainian students. The project will provide counselling, support, and professional development to teachers and school leaders, as well as Slovak language training and certification for teachers from Ukraine (Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, 2022^[80]; National Institute for Education in the Slovak Republic, 2022^[81]). **Sweden's** National Agency for Education has also organised professional development activities and produced online resources to support municipalities and teaching professionals to provide education for newly arrived learners from Ukraine.

Recognising previous skills and qualifications can facilitate access to appropriate learning and work opportunities

Although the current cohort of Ukrainian refugees appears to be highly educated, both relative to other refugee populations and to the general Ukrainian population, research suggests that when highly educated refugees are forced to look for work abroad, host markets tend to devalue foreign qualifications, introducing unnecessary barriers to training and work (OECD, 2022^[82]). This system rigidity can have longer-term implications for refugees, their families, and societies, who fail to benefit from refugees' existing available skills, or nurture them into new skills.

In April 2022, the European Commission adopted the *Recommendation on the Recognition of qualifications for people fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine* providing guidance and practical advice to ensure a quick, fair and flexible recognition process for academic and professional purposes. The *Recommendation* calls for member states to quickly adapt existing skills and qualifications recognition to the needs of Ukrainian refugees. Where the minimum training requirements are not met, the recommendation calls for support packages to be provided, such as language courses, supervised practice and considering informal and non-formal skills and competences (European Commission, 2022^[83]).

To support Ukrainian refugees' access to European higher education institutions, guidelines on fast-track recognition of Ukrainian academic qualifications (2022) aim to support the implementation of this recommendation. These include an up-to-date description of Ukraine's education system and detailed information on the types of Ukrainian educational qualifications, along with guidance to help higher education institutions interpret them and verify their authenticity (European Commission, 2022^[84]). In the same way, research by the European Commission indicates that 13 of its Member States have systematically used the Toolkit for the Recognition of Refugees' Qualifications developed by the National Academic Recognition Information Centres of several countries in the region prior to 2022, but updated for the current context. This toolkit includes principles, tools and approaches for the implementation of fair, accessible and transparent recognition procedures (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2022^[85]). In 2022, a country briefing with detailed information on the conflict in Ukraine was added, as well as an online library of resources to support academic and professional institutions to assess educational qualifications from the Ukrainian system.

Experiences from previous crises can help inform new actions in the wake of new crises. In 2022, **Germany** has made efforts to enhance its qualification and skills recognition procedures for refugees to meet the needs of newly arrived Ukrainian refugees. These measures build upon Germany's Recognition Act (2012), which legally entitled all migrants to such procedures, regardless of status. Five years after its

implementation, the number of recognition processes more than doubled to almost 25 000, including a substantial increase for refugees. For the arriving Ukrainian population specifically, over 6 200 recognition procedures had been approved between 2016 and 2020, particularly for sectors with skills shortages, such as health and nursing. In addition, the Federal Employment Agency (BA) also developed the MySkills (2017) computer-assisted tests offered by all Public Employment Services, which also provide feedback and follow-up advice (OECD, 2020^[86]). This platform contains tests for 30 professions in six languages, including Russian. By mid-2022, the national online portal for foreign professional qualifications held information on over 130 Ukrainian professional profiles, including content, duration and the learning locations of the formal training courses. This information was being greatly expanded and supplemented throughout 2022 (Werner et al., 2022^[87]).

In **Latvia**, which has welcomed over 1 300 students into its school system, new legislation introduced in March 2022 facilitates the integration and progression of Ukrainian minors into and through the national education system. Students from grades 1-8 and 10-11 can be transferred to the next class without conditions while students in grades 9 and 12 who pass the relevant examinations will receive an educational certificate, attestation or diploma. Ukrainian refugees under 18 years old are also exempt from having to pass the state examination to access their vocational programme. Latvian universities are opening additional study places to accommodate for refugee students; those who should have sat upper secondary examinations in 2022 before entering tertiary education are exempted from the examinations in Latvia (UNESCO, 2022^[88]).

Providing vocationally oriented support is an important tool to support refugees' integration into the labour market

Evidence collected by the OECD points to the possible benefits of Ukrainian refugees participating in VET programmes, regardless of how long they stay in the host country. Well-designed VET programmes can help those who choose to stay to acquire skills that help them access the labour market. They can also support social integration and language acquisition by giving migrants opportunities to develop their skills in real-world settings. At the same time, the technical skills refugees acquire in VET will be useful for the reconstruction of Ukraine; interruptions to VET during war years means essential skills may subsequently be in short supply.

However, new arrivals may be unfamiliar with VET or its benefits. They may also experience barriers to participation, such as poor language skills or unfamiliarity with different professions or work environments. As such, host countries will need to provide targeted and personalised information and guidance for those arriving from Ukraine. VET transition programmes available in some countries aim to provide language skills and help newcomers build social networks and familiarity with the host country's labour market (OECD, 2022^[89]).

For example, **Germany's** Youth Migration Services (JMD) have adapted their offer of activities to support the social, professional, and educational integration of migrants aged 12-27 in order to meet the needs of those arriving from Ukraine. Their online portal now includes email and chat services in languages such as Russian and English. Face-to-face or online counselling in Ukrainian via a national network of over 500 JMD centres is also available to them, along with training courses and practical support with issues such as finding an apprenticeship (Jugend Migrations Dienste (JMD), n.d.^[90]; Jugend Migrations Dienste (JMD), n.d.^[91]). Those past the age of compulsory schooling can access VET preparation courses, which integrate job-specific language training, specialist knowledge, work-based learning opportunities and personalised support. Participants take part in practical workshop days where they can try different professional pathways to see which best suit their skills and interests at the same time as learning about the structure and content of dual training in that field. Courses are also offered part-time, enabling those with young children to combine training with caring responsibilities. (Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung, n.d.^[92])

For the older population, **Sweden's** fast-track programme provides an example of how countries can support adult migrants' entry into the labour market and training while addressing skills shortages in key sectors. The programme, established in 2015, aims to provide quick routes into employment to newly arrived migrants with skills or experience in fields with labour shortages. It is based on agreements between Sweden's Public Employment Service (PES), employers, and trade unions that help to ensure the programme meets the demands of the labour market. The agreements currently cover 30 skills deficit professions in fields such as teaching, the social sciences, the medical profession, electronics, and carpentry. The PES reviews an applicant's previous skills and designs a pathway that may involve certification and validation of prior experience, work-based learning, language training or tailored professional or academic training.

The latest progress report (Swedish Public Employment Service, 2019^[93]) highlights key factors that contribute to participants' successful transition to training or employment that matches their previous skills, as well as key obstacles. One key success factor was the participation of employers who could offer participants work placements in their field. In many cases, this led to employment. The report also points to the importance of validating prior skills as early in the process as possible, regardless of participants' language level, since this enabled participants to complete professional training alongside language training. Fast-track was implemented during a period where large numbers of refugees were arriving in Sweden, and participation rates have declined in line with the number of new arrivals. In 2021, 332 people started a fast track, of which 170 were women and 162 were men. Compared with October 2017, a total of 5 316 people had started a fast track since January 2016. Of them, 30% were women and 70% were men.

Ukrainian adults benefiting from the EU's Temporary Protection Directive have an immediate right to work in Sweden and can register with the PES to get their competencies mapped. This system benefits employers looking for labour as well as new arrivals seeking to understand which jobs best suit them. As of October 2022, some 2 000 individuals from Ukraine were registered with the Swedish PES (Swedish Public Employment Service, 2022^[94]).

Some policy lessons emerge on supporting refugees to re-enter a learning pathway for 2023

Recent data and analysis from these and other policy experiences to support foreign learners to re-enter an education pathway offer some lessons to help guide policy makers in 2023.

1. Considering the impact of system-level policies on refugees supports mid-term integration.

In the short term, some high-impact policy efforts previously identified by the OECD include providing language instruction, offering high-quality ECEC, reaching out to parents, and supporting teachers to prepare for diverse classrooms. Moving towards the mid-term, governments should be careful to avoid concentrating immigrant or refugee students in the same disadvantaged schools and reconsider how system-level policies (e.g. ability grouping, tracking, grade repetition) may affect integration (OECD, 2015^[95]).

- *Recent OECD data highlight the role funding arrangements may play. In pre-primary education across the OECD, a large share (51%) of initial funds come from regional or local levels of government; this rises to 57% among European Member States (OECD, 2022^[10]). As refugees likely settle in concentrated areas (e.g. border regions, capital regions or regions with pre-existing Ukrainian communities), the pressure on public finances to meet the growing demand for pre-primary education will be disproportionately felt within education systems. Governments may need to reconsider public subsidies of central transfers to alleviate the strain and ensure the youngest Ukrainian refugees can access learning.*

- In **Sweden**, experience from previous refugee waves has brought about some changes to legislation regarding how refugee learners are received in the system, in an effort to reduce the risk of longer-term segregation. Prior to 2016, municipalities could place newly arrived children in separate reception classes for an indefinite period, sometimes reaching up to three years. Through legislation passed in 2016, students are considered as newly arrived for up to 4 years after arrival but cannot be in *preparatory classes* for more than 2 years, and these should be alternated with regular teaching classes. It has been found that shorter immersion periods need to be combined with longer support in regular classes (Crul et al., 2019^[96]).
- At the same time, consideration needs to be given to system-level policies that may disproportionately affect refugees on their arrival in host education systems. In systems with early selection, such as **Germany**, if not supported by timely and sound support to develop language proficiency, refugee students can become over-represented in VET (Crul et al., 2019^[96]).

2. Promoting broader collaborations can foster more sustainable support.

Since February 2022, governments have very rapidly undertaken significant efforts to ensure education continuity for refugee students arriving from Ukraine. Moving forward, strengthening collaboration with different actors—including parents (and particularly mothers, given the profile of the Ukrainian refugee population), employers, or the community at large—to support the transitions of refugee learners will help sustain these efforts over the mid- to longer term.

- *Recent OECD data show that during the COVID-19 pandemic, community mobilisation campaigns to bring primary-upper secondary students back to school were implemented in 8 countries in 2021/22 (OECD, 2022^[10]). With the exception of Latvia, none of these were countries currently experiencing an influx of Ukrainian refugees. However, their experiences may offer valuable lessons for countries looking to implement such measures in 2023.*
- Promoting parental figures as points of contact has been a growing practice in some education systems. In **Germany**, the role of “Neighbourhood Mothers” has extended across the country, with similar programmes also implemented in Denmark and the Netherlands (UNHCR/UNICEF/IOM, 2019^[97]). Through this role, voluntary women from immigrant backgrounds receive training to become contact and resource persons to newly arrived families. In **Denmark**, for example, neighbourhood mothers receive a manual and face-to-face training which address aspects such as the everyday life of children and youth in Danish society (Bydelismødre, n.d.^[98]).
- Broader dialogue and collaboration with employers needs to continue in order to provide more realistic and relevant opportunities for employment or certification in the host country. Experiences from **Sweden** point to some of the obstacles that can prevent refugees and migrants from finding a job that matches their existing qualifications and professional experience. In fields such as teaching, catering, and healthcare, a combination of language barriers, longer qualification periods and a strong labour market meant that some fast-track participants chose employment in less qualified roles (e.g. qualified teachers working as teaching assistants). According to a recent report, participants’ capacity to achieve certification in their field while working in a less qualified role depends on the employers’ commitment and the study opportunities they provide. Policy makers can also create opportunities for part-time study or distance learning to enable newcomers to combine study with work (Swedish Public Employment Service, 2019^[93]).
- **Denmark** launched the longstanding “We Need All Youngsters” campaign (2003-18), with the aim of promoting representation of role models for migrant and refugee children in the education system in Denmark (School Education Gateway, n.d.^[99]; School Education Gateway, n.d.^[100]). Youth aged 13-20 years old from migrant origins and disadvantaged backgrounds were the key target of this initiative, which included activities such as homework cafés, social entrepreneurship activities, educational counselling, or parental engagement activities. As a result of the campaign, most projects were able to reach their targets, and demonstrated an improvement in participants’ social,

personal and education skills. Identified challenges included a need to avoid having too many actors in the same area, so projects do not try to reach out to the same group simultaneously. It was also acknowledged that real change—such as establishing and sustaining youth and parental engagement—takes time.

Policy pointers to move forward

In 2023, as governments continue to face the implications of local and global change and disruption in 2020-2022, undergoing policy efforts provide guidance on steps they could take to strengthen transitions through learners' pathways. Key messages of policy lessons mentioned earlier in this chapter follow below.

Strengthening connections in learners' pathways

1. **Embed broader supports to help address longer-term disruptions to transitions.** In recognition of the longer-term repercussions of the pandemic experience on learners of all ages, policy makers need to enhance and systemise support mechanisms provided in the early stages of the pandemic to strengthen connections across learners' pathways. Moreover, these supports will need to take account of the full breadth of impact that the pandemic has had on learners, beyond learning losses.
2. **Create the conditions for effective collaboration to increase the longevity of emerging good practices.** Recent policy efforts to facilitate students' transitions reflect the growing recognition of the importance of professional collaboration. However, many education systems or institutions have evolved in ways that create barriers to collaboration, making such practices resource-intensive for education professionals. Policy makers need to ensure professionals have the time, guidance, and resources to make collaboration a success.

Preventing learners from leaving early

1. **Monitor the impact of COVID-19 on ESL through ongoing investigation to identify hidden or delayed developments.** Although in many countries, the share of early school leavers continued to fall throughout 2020 and 2021, short-term measures implemented in the early stages of the pandemic mean that some students' exit may have been delayed, or that those at risk of drop-out have not yet been identified. Policy makers need to take into account this hidden or delayed potential ESL.
2. **Improve the quality and accessibility of data, which is as important as people's ability to use it.** The data that is collected is as useful as its accessibility and the capacity of actors to engage with it. Collecting timely and granular data on risk factors needs to be matched with making it accessible and understandable. Education systems must also strike the balance between protecting sensitive information and providing access to information that supports collaboration to prevent ESL.
3. **Prioritise changing pedagogies, going beyond structural or procedural change.** Preparing learners for their next step may require teachers and other professionals to develop their pedagogical practices or acquire new competencies. This will be especially important in the current context, as teaching professionals in many countries seek to mitigate the impact of recent unprecedented disruptions on students' learning and well-being.

Supporting foreign learners to re-enter a learning pathway

1. **Consider the impact of system-level policies on refugees to support mid-term integration.** In the short term, some high-impact policy efforts previously identified by the OECD include providing language instruction, offering high-quality ECEC, reaching out to parents, and supporting teachers to prepare for diverse classrooms. Moving towards the mid-term, governments should be

careful to avoid concentrating immigrant or refugee students in the same disadvantaged schools and reconsider how system-level policies may affect integration.

- Promote broader collaborations to foster more sustainable support to refugees.** Since February 2022, governments have very rapidly undertaken significant efforts to ensure education continuity for refugee students arriving from Ukraine. Moving forward, strengthening collaboration with different actors—including parents (and particularly mothers, given the profile of the Ukrainian refugee population), employers, or the community at large—to support the transitions of refugee learners will help sustain these efforts over the mid- to longer term.

Table 3.1. Selected education policies and practices on easing transitions along learners' personal pathways

<i>Strengthening connections in learners' pathways</i>		
<p>Australia – Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP, 2010); University responses to enhancing equity in the post-COVID landscape (2022)</p> <p>New South Wales (Australia) – Guidance for ECEC professionals to support transitions during COVID-19 (2021)</p>	<p>French Community of Belgium – Common curriculum for primary and lower secondary education (2022); Qualifying Education Pathway (PEQ, 2022)</p> <p>Denmark – VET reforms (2015); Measures to support VET students' transitions following closures (2021)</p> <p>Finland – Higher education admissions reform (2018-20); Alternative Pathway to University (2019-21)</p>	<p>Japan – Compulsory Education Schools (2016); Super Science High School (2002); Global Science Campus (2017); Five-year plan for start-up and entrepreneurship education (2022)</p> <p>Norway – Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (2017)</p>
<i>Preventing learners from leaving early</i>		
<p>Victoria (Australia) – School Focused Youth Service (SFYS, 2013); Navigator (2021)</p> <p>Flemish Community of Belgium – Together Against School Dropout (2016; 2022); Transition Pathway (2022); Action research on early school leaving (2022)</p> <p>Brazil – School Active Search Strategy (2017)</p>	<p>Canada – Additional funding for Supports for Student Learning Programme (SSLP, 2022)</p> <p>Chile – Early Warning System (2019)</p> <p>Colombia – Information System for the Monitoring, Prevention, and Analysis of School Leaving (SIMPADE, 2012); Comprehensive Action Plan of School Harmony (2013)</p>	<p>Costa Rica – Early Warning System (2020)</p> <p>Latvia – Tackling Early School Leaving (2017)</p> <p>Netherlands – Regional approach to addressing early school leaving (2005)</p>
<i>Supporting refugees to re-enter a learning pathway</i>		
<p>Czech Republic – Collaboration with the Ukrainian government to support Ukrainian language and curriculum provision (2022); Intensive holiday language courses for students arriving from Ukraine (2022)</p> <p>Denmark – Neighbourhood Mothers (2008); We Need All Youngsters (2003-18)</p>	<p>European Commission – Recommendation on the Recognition of Qualifications for People fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine; Fast-Track Recognition of Ukrainian Academic Qualifications</p> <p>Germany – Neighbourhood Mothers (2004); Recognition Act (2012); MySkills (2017); VET preparation courses for migrants (2019); Youth Migration Services for arrivals from Ukraine (2022)</p>	<p>Luxembourg – Helpdesk for students and families arriving from Ukraine (2022)</p> <p>Slovak Republic – Measures to support teachers and school leaders in integrating students from Ukraine (2022)</p> <p>Sweden – Fast-track (2015); Measures to support municipalities and schools receiving students from Ukraine (2022)</p>

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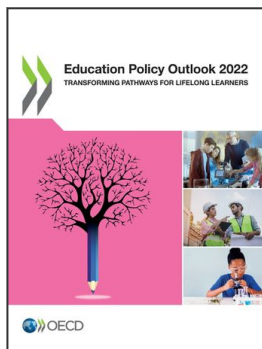
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