



**Guide on the application of
non-formal education methodologies
in the promotion of a positive school
transition and the prevention of
absenteeism and early school leaving**

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Authors:

Ayuda en Acción: Beatriz Pacheco y Marta Maqueda

L'Albero della Vita Foundation: Giuliana Graditi

IES Las Lomas: Montserrat Pérez



Design and layout:

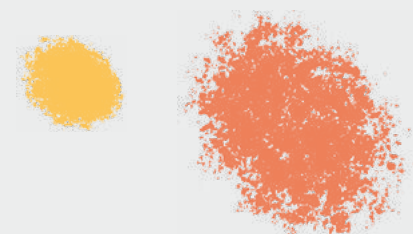
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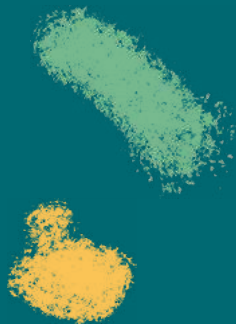
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INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

Educational transition, also known as school transition, marks a crucial milestone in the educational trajectory of each student. It is a complex process that requires attention and care to ensure a smooth and positive transition between educational stages. This methodological guide is part of the results generated by the Erasmus+ project "*Continuing is winning against early school leaving*", (project number 2022-1-ES01-KA201-SCH-000083535)⁽¹⁾ funded by the Spanish Service for the Internationalization of Education - *SEPIE*, and whose main objective is to provide education professionals with a solid theoretical and conceptual framework to address this transition using non-formal education techniques, especially in contexts of socioeconomic vulnerability.

In this guide, we dive into the understanding of educational transition from both a theoretical and practical perspective, analyzing the existing bibliography and theory on the subject, and drawing conclusions from the workshops carried out within the framework of the Project, in which different key actors analyze, reflect and generate value proposals on the problems and challenges of this stage. We explore the educational context of Spain and Italy, identifying the keys and characteristics of a positive transition, as well as the main challenges and difficulties faced by students in this process.

We recognize the diversity of actors involved, from teachers and families to social entities and public administration, all of which play a key role in supporting a successful transition.

In addition, we delve into the world of non-formal education and its application in the educational transition process. We define what we mean by non-formal education in this context and explore various methodologies that can be employed, such as the active participation of students, families and teachers, as well as innovative practices in school and community work. We highlight the benefits of incorporating these methodologies in the educational environment to facilitate a positive transition between educational stages.

To this end, we present concrete examples of good practices in the use of non-formal education methodologies, analyzing cases such as the one of the secondary school Las Lomas and the Fundación Ayuda en Acción in the North Zone of Alicante (Spain), as well as the L'Albero della Vita Foundation and its intervention in the 13th District of Palermo (Italy), in addition to presenting the map of experiences that have been worked on during the Project.

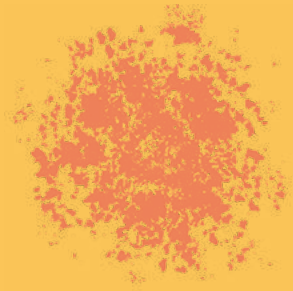
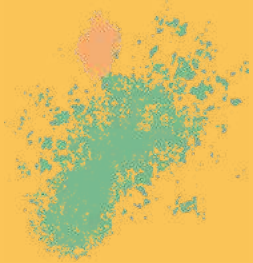
All these examples demonstrate how non-formal education methodologies can be effectively implemented in formal educational contexts to improve the experience of students during transition. The guide ends with conclusions and final reflections that offer important keys to keep in mind for all actors involved in the educational transition process.

Finally, it is our hope that this guide will serve as a valuable tool for education professionals and any professional interested in promoting a successful and enriching educational transition for all students.



2

IMPLEMENTATION CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES



IMPLEMENTATION CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

The project has been developed mainly in two cities: Alicante (in Spain) and Palermo (in Italy). Both areas of implementation share a complicated socio-economic context that implies consequences in the form of difficulties and challenges for their population.

In the case of Alicante (Spain), the project has been developed in the North Zone of Alicante, which comprises six neighborhoods located in the north of the city such as Virgen del Remedio, Colonia Requena, Juan XXIII, Virgen del Carmen, Las Cuatrocientas Viviendas and Sidi Infi-Nou Alacant, which present a similar socio-economic situation, with insufficient and deficient infrastructures, and a shortage of green or cultural areas.

In the North Zone of Alicante, the population is distinguished by its strong cultural diversity, where the Arab community and the gypsy ethnic group are predominant. In terms of families, there is a progressive change from traditional models towards more diverse structures, with a notable increase in single-parent families or families headed by a single mother, often as a result of death, separation or traumatic divorce.

Adverse circumstances such as divorces related to gender violence, the marginalization of parents due to alcohol or other substance addictions, gambling problems within the family environment, as well as the prolonged absence of family members due to deportations or jobs that require being away from home for long periods of time, are common situations that generate family issues. In addition, many of these families face difficulties in accessing stable employment and are forced to accept precarious jobs, sometimes relying on state aid or local associations. This makes it difficult for them to meet basic expenses such as electricity or hot water, which can be unaffordable at certain times.

In the educational sphere, schools have high rates of student absenteeism, which leads to a curriculum gap within the class itself, frustration among absent students when they attend school, greater efforts by teachers to address this problem, and, in the medium term, an increase in early school dropout rates among these students.

In the case of Palermo (Italy), the project was developed in district 13, which includes 11 neighborhoods, located in the northern part of

the city: Arenella, Montepellegrino, Acquasanta, Pallavicino, Partanna-Mondello, S.Filippo Neri (ZEN), Resuttana -S. Lorenzo, Sferracavallo, Tommaso Natale- S. Ambrogio. The neighborhoods share a disadvantaged socio-economic situation, a high crime rate, a lack of infrastructure and services, and a lack of access to educational, sports and recreational opportunities.

The low literacy rate of parents contributes to the difficulty of finding employment, many families are unemployed or have difficulties in accessing stable jobs with the consequent inability to support the basic expenses of family life and depend on State and local associations for assistance. There are many families with multiple problems whose members, due to gender violence, violence witnessed in the environment, pathological addictions, the breakdown of the family unit, the presence of a family member under house arrest or in prison, present psychological, social and physical complexities.

This socio-economic context can hinder the educational process of children and adolescents, specifically creating significant barriers to a successful educational transition, increasing the risk of school absenteeism and contributing to early school leaving. Addressing these issues, therefore, requires a comprehensive approach that recognizes and addresses the specific challenges faced by socio-economically vulnerable families and communities.



Education system in Spain and Italy

In Europe, education systems differ from country to country. As this guide reflects the experience of two countries, Spain and Italy, it is convenient to take a closer look at how the educational system of each of them is shaped, and, especially, of compulsory education.



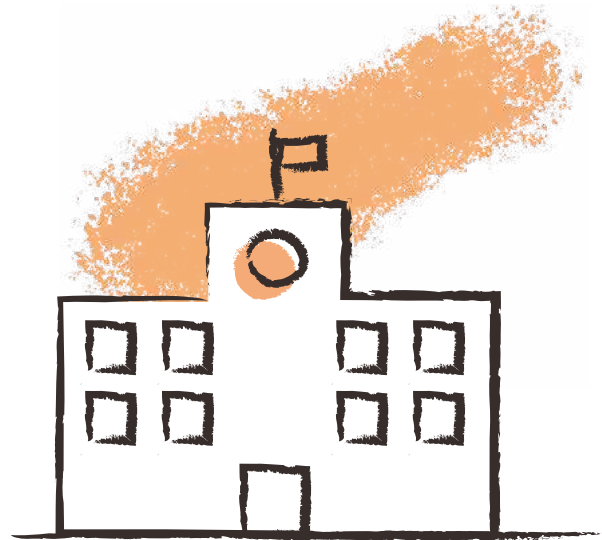
Compulsory education is understood as the time required for compulsory educational attendance for all students, regulated by law and generally linked to an age. The starting age is the official age at which students begin compulsory education and the ending age is usually the age at which students should have completed the compulsory levels of education; this is when continuity in the education system ceases to be compulsory and becomes voluntary. According to a European Commission report, compulsory education generally covers primary and secondary school, although in some countries it may also include preschool.

Both the Spanish and Italian education systems have different stages and schooling is compulsory from 6 to 15/16 years of age. In both countries there are public, private and subsidized schools (in Spain) or parity schools (in Italy). This project will focus on public schools, as the schools and institutes that have participated are classified within this category.

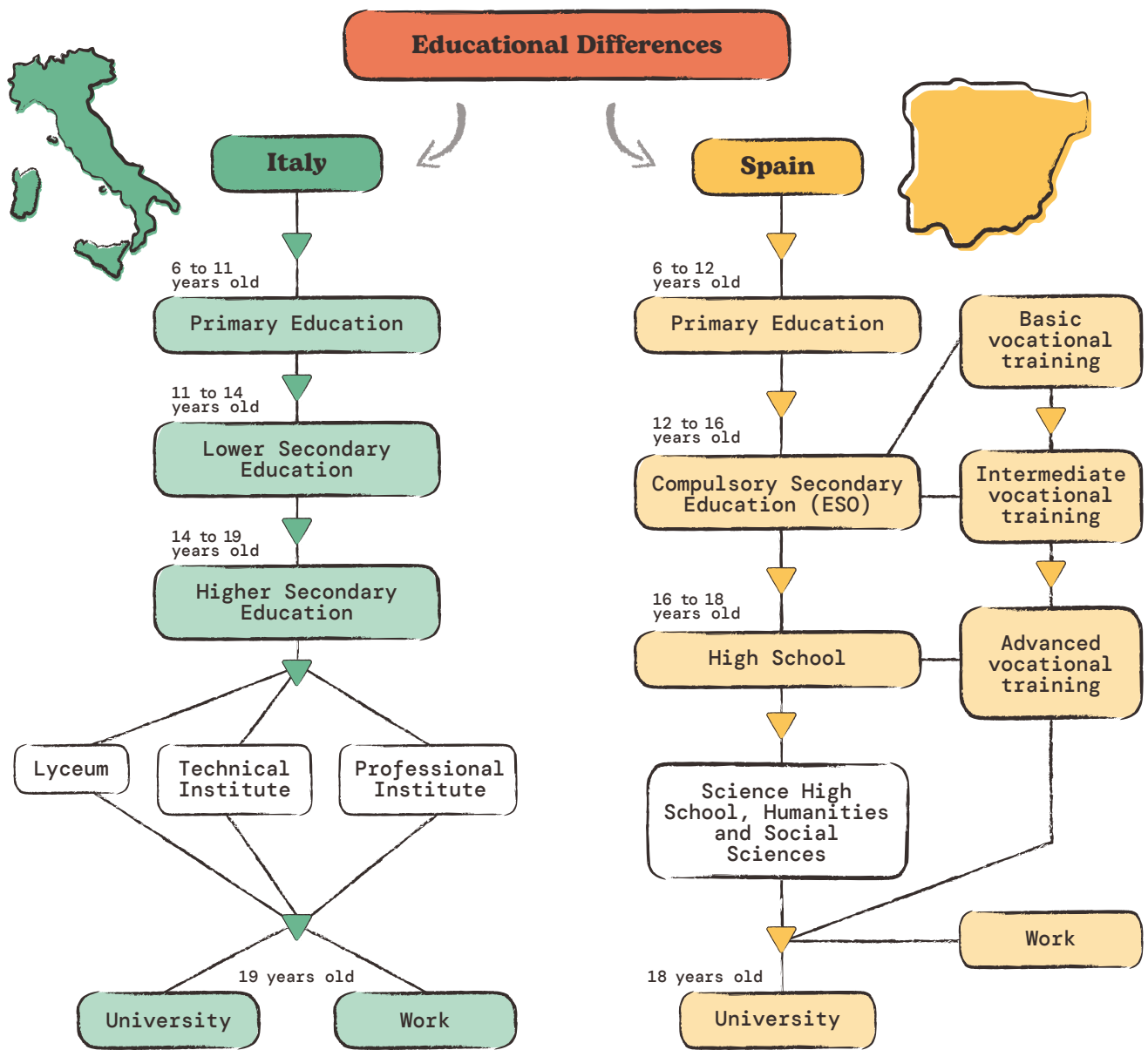
Admission to public schools is regulated by different criteria such as proximity to the family home or the annual income of the family unit, among others. Once students have successfully completed primary school, they move on to secondary school. Each primary school has a secondary school attached to it, to which its students will be automatically transferred, although this can be modified if they wish, by requesting a transfer to a different school. As this is a project on primary-secondary educational transition, we will focus on these two stages.

Primary schools in Spain are part of the compulsory education system and have six different academic years that will normally

run from the ages of six to twelve (from first to sixth grade). In most schools, students attend preschool education from age 3 (pre-school) to age 6. Compulsory Secondary School is the compulsory school education that goes from approximately age 12 (after finishing primary school) to age 16. Once a student is 16 years old, he/she can decide whether to continue in the educational system or not, since he/she is of legal age to work. Upon successful completion of secondary school, the student obtains a high school diploma; this certificate recognizes that they have successfully passed all subjects and if they want to continue their education, they can choose whether they want to go on to intermediate vocational training or to the high school (bachillerato, in Spanish).



In Italy, compulsory education also begins at age 6 and ends at age 16. However, unlike Spain, primary education lasts five years, from age 6 to 11. After these five compulsory primary school years, they move on to First Grade Secondary School (Lower Secondary Education), which lasts from 11 to 14 years of age. Once they have passed this stage, they begin Second Grade Secondary Education (Higher Secondary Education), which runs from 14 to 19 years of age. At the age of 14, students are given the option to choose, according to their interests and objectives, which type of school to attend in order to continue their education process, choosing between high school, technical institute or professional institute.

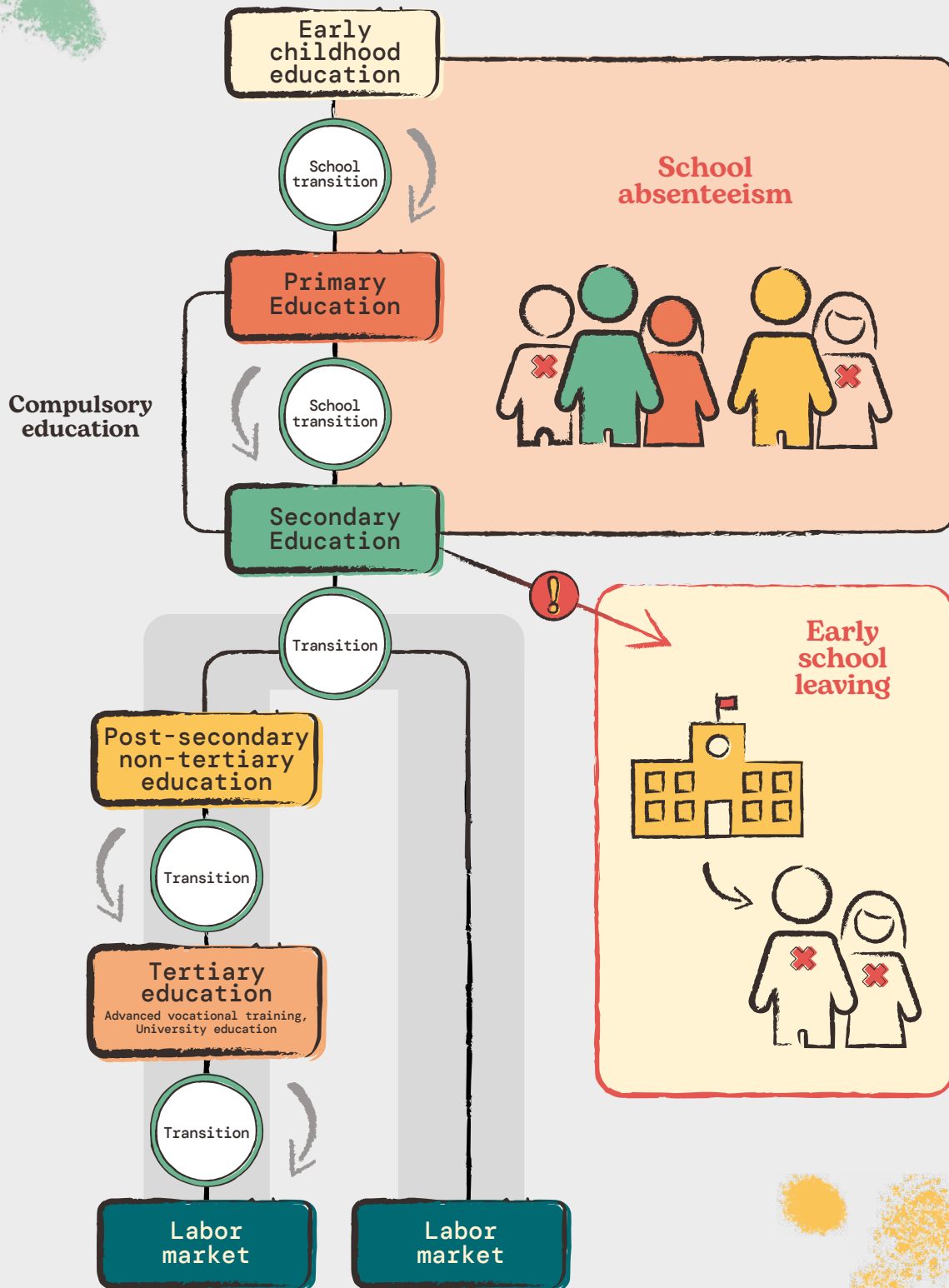


School absenteeism, early school leaving and educational transition. Link between concepts

School absenteeism, early school leaving and educational transition are three closely related concepts. Firstly, school absenteeism is a multicausal and complex phenomenon that can occur throughout the educational process and that, if maintained over time, is an indicator of early school leaving, especially in terms of school motivation, school performance and attachment to the educational process. Secondly, early school leaving usually occurs at higher stages of the educational process. It is a multicausal phenomenon, like school absenteeism, and in general terms it is usually the consequence of a failed educational process.

Both concepts have a clearly negative character, while school transition is a process of change that occurs in the academic life of students. The phenomenon has neither a positive nor a negative connotation, in itself. But it is a key moment in which students may face significant challenges, such as adapting to a new school environment, facing greater academic and social demands, and establishing new relationships with peers and teachers. This transition can be a time when the risk of absenteeism and dropping out of school increases, especially if students do not receive adequate support during this transition stage and/or live in a reality that makes it difficult for them to adapt to a new environment.

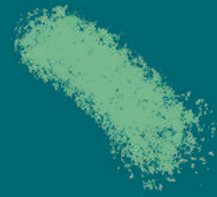
EDUCATIONAL PROCESS



The three concepts are discussed individually below.

3

EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING



EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING



Early school leaving: percentage of the population aged 18 to 24 years that has not completed the 2nd stage of Secondary Education and does not continue with any type of education-training.

According to data extracted from the report: "Panorama de la educación" of the Ministry of Education of the Government of Spain, which is based on data from the OECD's Education at a Glance 2023 ⁽²⁾ the percentage of early school leavers in the countries of the European Union (EU27) in the year 2022 will be 9.6%. While percentages above the European average are found in 10 countries of the European Union (EU27) ⁽³⁾: Germany, Bulgaria, Denmark, Spain, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Malta, and Romania.

According to the analysis provided by ISTAT (National Institute of Statistics) in the report "Noi Italia 2023" ⁽⁴⁾, in 2022, the proportion of young people (18-24 years old) who drop out of school prematurely is 11.5%. This value, as in Spain (13.9%), exceeds the European average, and has a higher incidence in boys than in girls. However, it is necessary to take into account the territorial perspective, since these values increase within the countries themselves depending on the territory. In southern Italy, the incidence is 15.1%, and in the Valencian Community it is 14.3%.

Despite its importance, there is still a significant percentage of young people who leave education without obtaining this qualification, and in Spain this percentage is 27%, above the OECD average of 14%. The level of education is a fundamental factor for the economic development of the population, given that, at the OECD level, it is observed that unemployment rates are lower and salaries are higher for those with an upper secondary vocational training degree or higher educational levels, compared to those with a general secondary education degree.

In relation to the primary-secondary transition and persistence in the education system, it is observed that in Spain schooling in early childhood education is high, with high enrollment rates from an early age. However, challenges persist in the completion of educational programs at later ages.

According to the report "Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators 2021" ⁽⁵⁾ for Spain and Italy, there are significant differences in the origin of the student population. In Italy, almost half of the students in infant, primary and first years of secondary education come from families of migrant origin (49.2%), while in Spain this proportion is more balanced, with 37.2% of students of migrant origin and 36.8% of native students. However, in later stages of secondary and post-secondary non-university education, Italy shows a higher proportion of native students (43.6%) compared to those of migrant origin (37.5%), while in Spain this trend is reversed, with 32.1% of migrant students and 21% of native students. As for tertiary education, in both countries natives outnumber students of migrant origin in percentage terms: in Spain, 41.8% versus 31.1%, and in Italy, 21.3% versus 13.3%. These data suggest possible disparities in terms of access to and participation in advanced education between these two population groups in each country, which may be due to several factors, such as differences in access to higher education, linguistic or cultural barriers, and socio-economic opportunities.

In Spain, there has been a significant decrease in the dropout rate over the last 10 years (in 2012 it was 24.7%, while in 2022 it was reduced to 13.9%). However, it is important to note that the dropout rate among the foreign population is considerably higher than among the Spanish population. In 2022, the dropout rate among the migrant population was 30.3%, more than double the rate among the Spanish population, which was 11.6%.

The difference in early school leaving between students from families with fewer resources and those with more resources is significant, being 7.5 times in terms of dropout and 5.5 times in terms of grade repetition ⁽⁶⁾. In addition, it is observed that half of those who grew up in families with a basic level of education do not manage to surpass that same level of education, and two thirds do not reach a higher level of education. On the other hand, those whose parents have a higher level of education are more likely to progress in their studies, since three out of four go on to higher education ⁽⁶⁾.

The role of the family's socio-economic status is essential, as it has a decisive influence on early school leaving. Very high dropout rates

are observed in families where the parents have a lower educational and professional level. For example, 22.7% of young people whose parents have at most a high school diploma drop out early, while dropout rates are much lower (5.9% and 2.3%) in cases where parents have an upper secondary or higher education diploma, respectively. This socio-economic disparity is also reflected in grade repetition rates, which helps to explain the high dropout rate in Spain up to the age of 15 (28.7%), almost three times the OECD average (11%)⁽⁶⁾.

The Ministry of Education of the Government of Spain, the OECD and the European Commission in the document *Proposals for an action plan to reduce early school leaving in Spain*⁽⁷⁾ present 15 recommendations and 44 proposals divided into five areas of action:

- 1 Establish a common approach to identify "vulnerable schools" and allocate resources.
- 2 Develop teacher capacity to support diverse learners, promote inclusion and well-being, and prevent early school leaving.
- 3 Promote school- and community-level interventions to support diverse learners and promote inclusion and equity.
- 4 Continue to promote curricular flexibility, attractive and quality vocational training and school re-entry programs.
- 5 Promote and institutionalize national collaboration and knowledge sharing on "what works".

The OECD report⁽⁸⁾ highlights the importance of implementing school- and community-level interventions to support student diversity, promote inclusion and equity, and reduce early school leaving rates. These interventions can include adapting existing school resources to meet individual learning needs, reducing grade repetition rates, limiting school segregation, implementing early interventions, strengthening school and career guidance, expanding access to quality early childhood education, and strengthening collaboration between schools, parents and local communities.



The proposed school vulnerability index and the corresponding allocation of resources to schools could be used to support these interventions, thus allowing the different learning needs of students to be addressed. These actions could include additional support for vulnerable students and their families, the creation of learning groups of different sizes, the provision of additional classes such as homework support or remedial classes, and the extension of learning time.



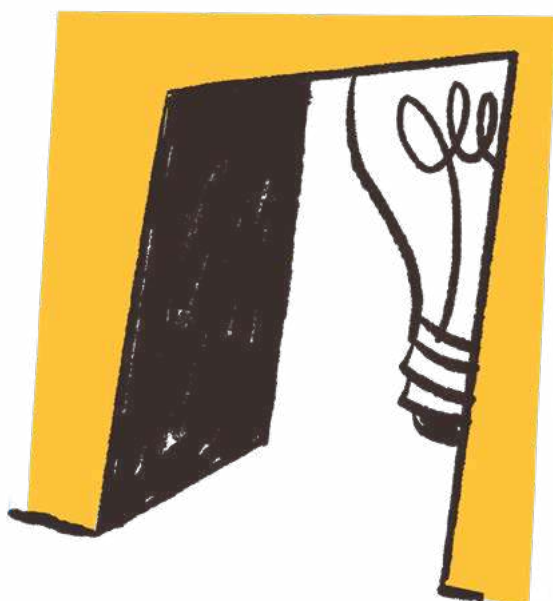
The OECD report presents a series of concrete recommendations and proposals to reduce early school leaving:

1 Continuing and expanding efforts to reduce student grade repetition is suggested. This implies that schools take comprehensive measures to support students at risk of repeating a grade, such as developing a personalized plan and offering tutoring and remedial classes. In addition, a gradual modification of the evaluation and grading systems is proposed, including the elimination of the numerical grading system and evaluation by competencies.

2 A review of student admission and school choice policies is recommended to ensure a more heterogeneous distribution of students among schools and reduce school segregation. This could involve the implementation of a "*controlled school choice policy*" and options for a better allocation of new students throughout the school year.

3 Academic and vocational guidance counselors should be strengthened in schools, ensuring that schools identified as "*vulnerable*" have sufficient professionals from the relevant guidance services. In addition, the possibility of incorporating subjects related to the labor market and career guidance in the curriculum of compulsory secondary education is also suggested.

4 Continuing efforts to foster a positive school climate and strengthen collaboration between schools, parents and local communities is recommended. This involves investing in developing the skills of school leadership teams to manage diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as fostering a positive school climate and improving students' sense of belonging. This could include the creation of networks of school leaders and the development of case studies that capture good practices to serve as a source of inspiration and provide practical guidance.



A key indicator of early school leaving risk is prior school absenteeism.



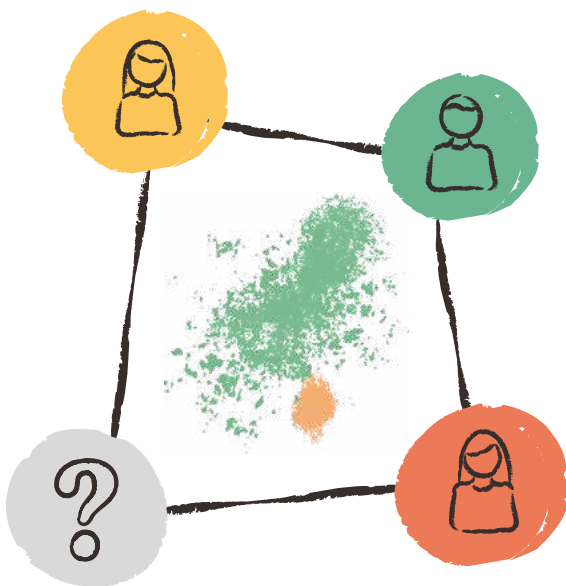
SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM



SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM

Schools, as part of the community, play a crucial role in developing a sense of belonging and creating an environment conducive to learning ⁽⁹⁾. During the pandemic, school closures highlighted the importance of face-to-face learning and social interaction, underscoring the need to preserve physical spaces dedicated to learning to ensure educational continuity ⁽¹⁰⁾. In addition, a favorable school climate, characterized by supportive and trusting relationships, is essential to promote students' well-being and maximize their ability to learn, and is the cornerstone of resilient education systems ^(11,12,13); on the other hand, non-attendance or tardiness to school may be due to a lack of a sense of belonging to the school ^(14,15,16). School absenteeism and tardiness can have adverse effects on the student as an individual and also on the learning environment of the school as a whole: interrupted instruction contributes to an overall negative school climate ⁽¹⁷⁾.

However, school absenteeism is a complex phenomenon and in order to understand its causes, consequences and initiatives to reduce it, it is important to establish the concepts and how to evaluate them.



School absenteeism is defined as the lack of regular attendance of students at school. This lack of attendance may be due to a variety of situations and causes. In order to contextualize and establish the basis for the concepts that will be dealt with throughout the guide, the classification given by García⁽¹⁸⁾ is adopted, which establishes 5 levels of absenteeism according to the frequency of absences:

▶ OCCASIONAL OR SPORADIC ABSENTEEISM

Occasional or sporadic absenteeism, of low frequency, does not show continuity. It occurs when there are **less than 10%** of monthly absences.

▶ MODERATE ABSENTEEISM

Moderate absenteeism is regular and of higher frequency. It occurs when absences are **between 10% and 15%** during a month.

▶ REGULAR ABSENTEEISM

Regular absenteeism has absences **between 25% and 50%** during a month.

▶ PROLONGED ABSENTEEISM

Prolonged absenteeism is unexcused absences of **between 50% and 75%**.

▶ CHRONIC OR TOTAL ABSENTEEISM

Chronic or total absenteeism is **absences of more than 75%** of class sessions during a month. It includes students who have stopped attending school, in practice being early school leavers.

We can speak of school absenteeism when students are physically absent from school and this may be related to existing economic, social and cultural inequalities, as well as to "absentee behaviors" linked to compulsory schooling that affect unmotivated young people. This disengagement from school generally affects young people from the most vulnerable social sectors, although not exclusively. It is a "new school phenomenon intrinsically linked to the extension of compulsory schooling that forces a fraction of young people between the ages of 14 and 16 to remain in school, regardless of their interests and expectations, and requires schools to rethink their methods and pedagogical organization in order to respond to the needs of this new student profile"¹⁸.

There are several factors that contribute to and highlight the complexity of the problem: individual, academic, social and school ^(19,20,21,22,23,24,25). **While the consequences for both students and society are:**



Academic difficulties and learning delays.



Increased risk of early school leaving.



Difficulties in finding future employment.



Negative impact on students' mental health and emotional well-being.



Social and economic costs to society.

At the data level, the study: "The importance of school absenteeism in educational performance" by García and Weiss ⁽²⁶⁾ concludes that one in five students who participated in the PISA 2018 study missed school occasionally, i.e., one or two days in the two weeks prior to the study. Moreover, one in 15 students did so more frequently, three or more days. Regarding Spain and Italy, 23.2% and 39.8% of young people, respectively, were absent from school for one or two days in the last two weeks, and 6.5% and 17%, respectively, were absent for three or

more days. These rates are considered high in comparison with other countries and compared to the average.

Absenteeism is associated with lower academic outcomes, achievement difficulties, and reduced educational aspirations ⁽²⁷⁾. Compared with students who regularly attend class and arrive on time, those who are consistently absent tend to manifest more negative attitudes toward school and may experience anxiety or depression ⁽²⁸⁾. In addition, these students are more likely to engage in risky behaviors, such as drug or alcohol abuse, as well as antisocial or self-injurious behaviors ⁽²⁹⁾. Recurrent and pervasive school absenteeism is detrimental to the overall school climate and may be an early warning sign of school dropout ⁽²⁸⁾.

Ultimately, lack of regular school attendance can result in academic difficulties, an increased risk of early school leaving and a decrease in future employment opportunities. In addition, school absenteeism can have a negative impact on students' mental health and emotional well-being, as well as on the overall school climate. This phenomenon not only affects the individuals involved, but also carries significant social and economic costs for society as a whole. School transition is a critical point in school continuity, since successful school transition can prevent absenteeism and early school leaving.

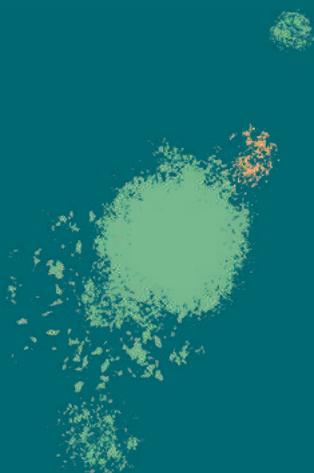
The data collected suggest that absenteeism is a widespread problem, with a considerable proportion of students missing school on an occasional or chronic basis. This highlights the urgency of addressing this problem in a comprehensive manner, recognizing the complexity of its causes and consequences.



Therefore, as we have seen, it is necessary to adopt holistic approaches that recognize the interconnection of individual, academic, social and school factors that influence the student's participation and commitment to his or her educational process. Understanding school absenteeism, its causes and consequences, as well as the importance of educational transition in preventing it and favoring permanence in the educational system in the future, is fundamental.

5

**THE PRIMARY-SECONDARY
TRANSITION AS A
CRUCIAL MOMENT IN
THE CONTINUITY OF THE
EDUCATIONAL PROCESS**



THE PRIMARY-SECONDARY TRANSITION AS A CRUCIAL MOMENT IN THE CONTINUITY OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

Characteristics of a positive educational transition

A positive educational transition, whether from primary to secondary school or between any other educational level, involves a combination of factors that contribute to the well-being and success of students in their new academic stage.

Below, we present the characteristics that we believe a positive transition should contain, considering that each student may experience this process differently and that there are very different realities and contexts that must be taken into account.

1 *Academic adaptation*

The student shows good academic performance, appropriate to his or her age and grade level, and demonstrates proficiency in key subjects. In addition, he/she is comfortable with the workload and academic expectations presented by the new educational stage. Another characteristic is that he/she is able to effectively use appropriate study and organizational skills to manage the demands of his/her new reality.

2 *Social and emotional development*

The student has integrated well into the new school environment and has established positive relationships with students and teachers. Likewise, he/she actively participates in the various activities promoted by his/her school, which demonstrates a sense of belonging. Finally, he/she shows confidence and security when facing the social and emotional challenges of the new stage in which he/she finds him/herself.

3 *Overall well-being*

The student shows a positive attitude towards school, demonstrating interest in learning and participating in the activities of the school. He/she communicates openly about his/her experiences and seeks help or support when needed. In addition, he/she experiences a healthy balance between his/her school life and free time.

4 *Family and school support*

The family is involved in the student's school life and provides emotional support and accompaniment throughout the process.

The school provides a supportive environment that includes guidance programs, counseling resources and a positive school culture that actively seeks inclusion and participation of all students. Another indicator that shows a positive transition is that there is open and collaborative communication between families, teachers and students to address any problems or concerns that may arise.

5 *Achievements and celebrations*

The student reaches significant milestones, such as passing subjects, improving grades, achieving participation in the educational community or reaching personal goals. The transition is celebrated as a success, whether through school ceremonies, recognition of individual achievements or family celebrations.

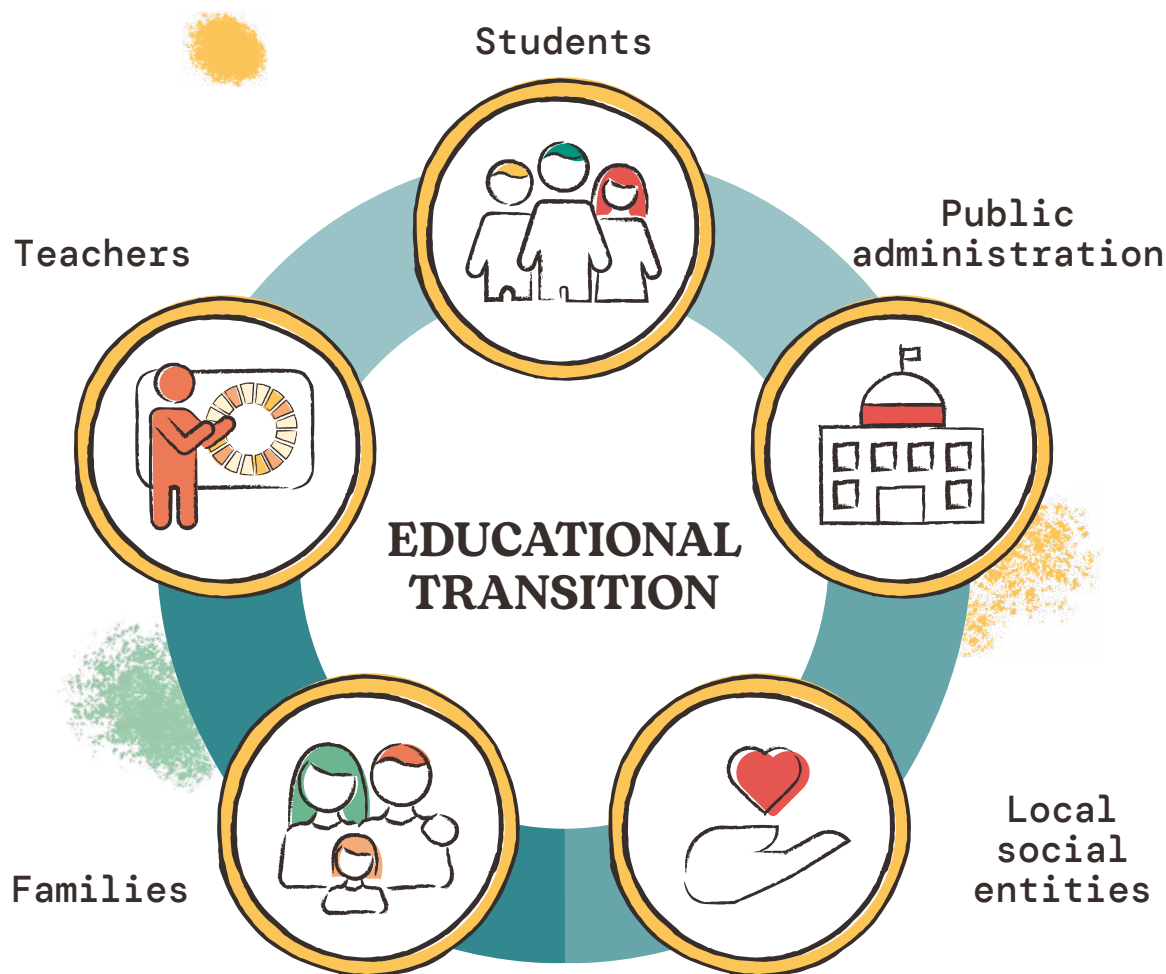


Ultimately, a positive transition from primary to secondary education is based on the student's overall well-being, ability to adapt to the new environment, and academic and social success.

Key actors involved

Educational transition is a process in which several actors play key roles in ensuring a positive experience. In addition, they have a series of rights, duties and responsibilities that we will reflect on throughout this guide. During the Project, we have been able to work with many of them, having the opportunity to listen to different voices and giving rise to reflections of interest from different perspectives. As we

mentioned, there are different actors and it would not be possible to address them all in depth in this Guide. Therefore, we are going to focus on those who we consider to have the greatest capacity to influence the transition process and the prevention of early school leaving in contexts of social vulnerability and who have actively participated in the Project through the workshops and work spaces generated.



These actors can be grouped as follows:

Students: considering the objective and context of this guide, we will refer to students in the last cycle of primary school and the first cycle of secondary school. They are at the center of the educational process, in general, and of transition, in particular. Although traditionally they have been seen mainly as recipients of change, their participation and their ability to take part in the transition process can have a significant impact on their academic success and emotional well-being. An impact not only individual, but also collective, understanding that the place of friends and peers as referents and closest support, especially at this stage, greatly influences both educational outcomes and expectations of achievement.

Teachers: both primary and secondary, play an essential role in facilitating a successful educational transition for students. Their guidance, support and leadership are fundamental to help them cope with the change and adapt to a new academic environment, facing the challenges associated with the transition. In addition, the classroom environment and the teaching-learning processes that are promoted by the role of the teacher are decisive in favoring the students' commitment to their own learning process.

Students' families: they play a key role in the educational process, as they are the main referents and responsible for providing protection to children and adolescents. Their participation and link with the school is fundamental, especially when it comes to providing security in the face of change, accompanying them throughout the process, favoring communication with the schools and promoting interest and motivation to learn.

School management teams: both primary and secondary schools. The people who make up this team, in their different roles, play a key role that translates into the proper functioning of the school itself and, therefore, of the transition process. Their leadership, strategic planning and coordination are fundamental when it comes to generating processes that facilitate the cohesion of the entire educational community as a whole. They are, to a greater extent, responsible for the identification of educational needs, the development of policies and procedures, the continuous support to the teaching staff, the promotion of exchange and collaboration between schools, and the promotion of a positive school climate.

Public administration: at state, autonomous/regional and local levels. It is essential that there is facilitation and direct support from public institutions linked to the educational field to ensure that policies are established, resources are allocated and clear guidelines are provided, facilitating processes and generating partnerships that facilitate a positive transition.

Local social entities: Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play an important role within the educational community, especially in environments of greater socio-economic vulnerability, by complementing the efforts of educational institutions and governments in providing additional resources and support for students, their families and even within the schools themselves. In addition, they represent a reference in the field of non-formal education, being able to contribute their technical and methodological experience in this regard.

Main challenges and difficulties in transition

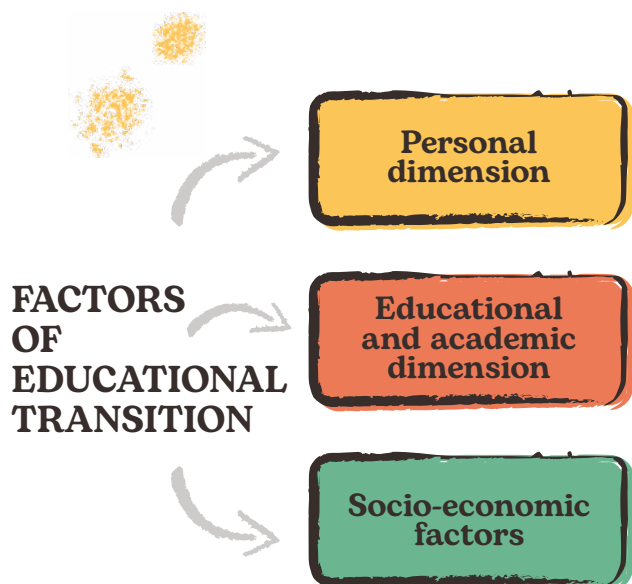
Educational transitions are part of a process of change of stage between Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary Education, more specifically they are, quoting Sebastián (2015): *"critical moments of change that students experience when moving from one environment to another, opening opportunities for their development and learning for life"* ⁽³⁰⁾. As any change, it entails difficulties for students and families, but they are also a new opportunity for learning and personal growth that enrich the educational experience.

The transition from primary to secondary school marks one of the most striking changes in the educational system. During this transition, a series of transformations

of different kinds take place, which can be key in the configuration of students' school trajectories.

These changes are related to factors that intervene and condition success or failure in these moments of transition in which, at the same time, changes in the educational environment, curricula, peers, teachers, and others typical of the adolescent stage coexist.

Below, as a result of the conclusions drawn from the workshops carried out during the Project, as well as from the research and studies consulted, we present the factors that are at play when it comes to favoring a good primary-secondary educational transition.



Factors related to the “Personal Dimension”:

- Motivation and expectations play a key role in academic success and in the student's adaptation to his or her new environment. Academic self-concept and self-perception can undergo significant changes due to the introduction of new challenges.
- Previous academic experiences, both positive and negative, in primary education can influence a student's academic self-concept during the transition to secondary school. Two out of three students who drop out of compulsory secondary education accumulate educational backwardness, i.e., they are not in the grade that would correspond to their age ⁽³¹⁾.
- Moving to a new high school with different academic expectations and a more complex learning environment can affect a student's perception of his or her academic abilities and achievements. Also, students may begin to compare themselves to their peers in terms of academic performance, which may influence their self-concept and confidence in their abilities.
- The onset of adolescence with the physical and emotional changes they experience can affect their academic performance and adjustment to school.
- On the other hand, we see that there is a generational factor resulting from the current culture and time, which translates into an inclination and tendency for immediacy, which can sometimes lead to passivity and lack of effort in the face of

rewards that are not immediate or in the medium and long term. In addition, at a sociological level, a certain breakdown of the culture of effort and a low tolerance to frustration can greatly influence this process.

- Finally, the mental health and psycho-emotional well-being of the students, as well as the fact of having certain social skills, is a determining factor when it comes to knowing how to cope with this change.

Factors related to the

“Educational and academic dimension”:

- Changing educational legislation is a destabilizing factor in the educational system, especially in the case of Spain. Changes in educational laws cause changes in curricula, in the subjects to be taught in each course, specialties to be assumed by the teaching staff, etc. All this prevents the long-term consolidation of educational projects and methodologies, causing greater insecurity and destabilization for teachers, students and families.
- The curricular, methodological and dynamic differences between primary and secondary schools are key in the adaptation to this change. An increase in the workload and in the demand for the achievement of results, an increase in the number of reference teachers, the appearance of new subjects and the change in the structure and dynamics of classes in the secondary stage can greatly affect the academic performance of students arriving at the school.
- The learning gap within the class, produced by students who arrive at secondary school with great deficiencies in basic skills and knowledge, which they should have acquired in primary school, necessarily conditions their possibilities of adaptation and achievement, and affects the students as a whole. This, in addition to a teaching staff that must attend to a larger number of students, to whom they dedicate fewer teaching hours than primary school teachers, and who do not have the opportunity to know in depth the particular needs and characteristics of each of the people they teach.
- Finally, a good predisposition of secondary school teachers to innovate in their educational practices, to have access to pedagogical training and active and innovative methodologies, to encourage teaching motivation, avoiding overload,

frustration and excessive rotation, favor students' motivation and their ability to adapt to changes, creating a positive classroom environment from the outset.

“Socio-economic”

factors:

- Public policies and the management of resources oriented to the educational sphere are decisive in compensating for socio-economic factors in the most vulnerable environments. In those contexts of greater complexity, it is essential to have more and better resources (economic, material, human, infrastructure...) to compensate for the structural inequality faced by their community and to face, in particular, the challenges faced by their students. However, in many cases, it is precisely the opposite, being these schools the ones with the least support and resources, having to face their educational work with greater difficulties and obstacles than schools with greater resources. Students attending highly complex schools are twice as likely to drop out of school prematurely as those attending other schools ⁽³¹⁾.
- The previous education and the cultural level of the student's family are important factors, as they can influence the value given to education and school as the engine of the educational and social elevator, and also when it comes to accompanying the student, from home, in his or her educational process.
- The socio-economic situation of the student's family can favor or hinder the educational transition. Instability at home, lack of support and networks and financial stress, among others, can cause, in addition to discomfort and uncertainty in children, a clear disadvantage when accessing certain resources and opportunities, not only educational, but also basic needs (housing, food, health...) that inevitably condition their educational process and their emotional well-being.

In summary, we can therefore affirm that in order to achieve a positive educational transition, with all that this implies, especially in highly complex contexts, all the key factors that we have described above must be addressed jointly by the different actors involved, with a community and comprehensive approach, placing the student at the center and going beyond the merely academic and formal educational sphere.

To this end, we will approach the role that non-formal education, with its different methodologies and approaches, can play, both in the process of educational transition and in preventing absenteeism and early school leaving by the most vulnerable students.



Highly complex schools:

These are schools with a significant number of students in a situation of educational vulnerability, who manifest a series of difficulties or obstacles throughout their school trajectory; these obstacles, both personal and social, hinder the possibility of taking sufficient advantage of the teaching in the classroom and the school context in general. In most cases, these schools are located in socially disadvantaged areas and have students belonging to families with a low socio-economic and educational level ⁽³²⁾.



NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN THE FIELD OF TRANSITION



NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN THE FIELD OF TRANSITION

Conceptualizations

Education, in all its forms, plays an essential role in human development and in the formation of societies. It is often classified into three main categories: formal education, informal education and non-formal education. Each of these forms of education has its own distinctive characteristics and contributions to the educational process.

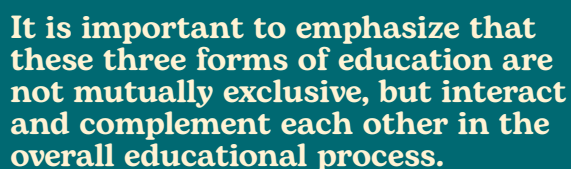
According to Coombs ⁽³³⁾, formal education refers to the structured and organized system of learning that takes place in recognized educational institutions, such as schools, colleges and universities. This type of education is governed by established academic programs, defined curricula, and formal assessment standards. Obtaining degrees and certifications is an integral part of formal education, and its main objective is to prepare students for specific roles in society and the labor market ⁽³⁴⁾.

On the other hand, Vázquez ⁽³⁵⁾ defines informal education as the continuous process of learning that occurs throughout life through everyday experiences, social interactions and cultural practices, *"education conceived as controlled learning, is a process of training for self-education throughout life, and mainly within spaces and with non-formal approaches and resources"* ⁽³⁵⁾. This form of education is not deliberately structured or planned, but occurs spontaneously and unintentionally. However, we believe that intentionality is always present, but it may not be so manifest or explicit, but operates in the latent. People acquire knowledge, skills and values through activities such as observation, experimentation and participation in communities and social groups ⁽³³⁾.

Finally, non-formal education comprises a wide variety of organized and systematic educational activities that take place outside the formal education system ⁽³⁶⁾. In contrast to formal education, which focuses primarily on academic content, non-formal education is dedicated to providing specific and practical learning to particular groups of the population in diverse and flexible settings. This type of education may include job training programs, personal development courses, extracurricular activities, and community workshops, among others ⁽³⁷⁾.

According to Coombs ⁽³³⁾, non-formal education refers to any organized and systematic

educational activity that takes place outside the framework of the formal educational system, aimed at specific subgroups of the population. This definition focuses on the knowledge and the population to which this educational practice is directed, with particular learning purposes. On the other hand, Vázquez ⁽³⁵⁾ suggests that non-formal education and lifelong learning are characteristics of modernity, where all learning acquires its own meaning within today's cognitive society. In line with these ideas, Brambilla, Gonfiantini and Ibarra ⁽³⁶⁾ claim that non-formal education represents a social strategy that seeks to offer alternatives to the school system, allowing access to cultural goods that complement or expand the knowledge and competencies excluded or limited by the formal system. This form of education also responds to the current educational crises and seeks to provide spaces for the acquisition of knowledge and cultural goods throughout life, promoting the integration between academic knowledge and social demands.



It is important to emphasize that these three forms of education are not mutually exclusive, but interact and complement each other in the overall educational process.

Formal education provides the academic foundation and certification necessary for professional and academic advancement, while informal and non-formal education offer opportunities for experiential learning, the development of practical skills and the acquisition of contextual knowledge. Formal and non-formal education are united by pedagogical intentionality, organization and systematization. While they are separated, among others, by the structural criterion, which states, in the words of Parcerisa ⁽³⁸⁾, that: *"formal and non-formal education are differentiated by their inclusion or exclusion, respectively, from the formal educational system or hierarchical educational structure that is oriented to the provision of academic degrees"*.

In short, as Brambilla, Gonfiantini and Ibarra ⁽³⁹⁾ conclude: *"To improve the quality of educational practice, it is necessary to be alert, evaluating the processes and identifying the moments of intervention, increasing or decreasing the degrees of systematization or formalization to achieve the proposed objectives"*.

Non-formal education in school

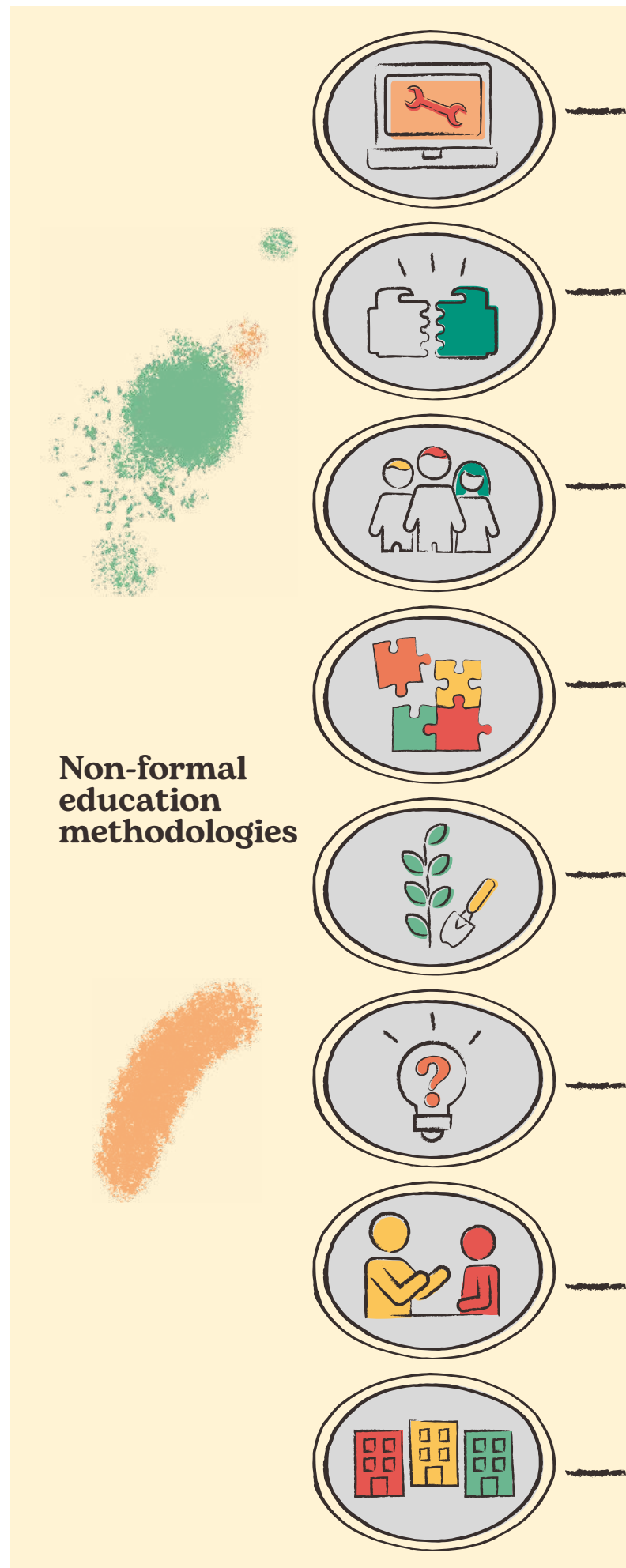
Schools are facing new challenges, such as conflict, the integration of the migrant population and school failure. In response, the aim is to promote integration, foster coexistence and prevent social exclusion, which are considered the pillars of education in the 21st century, according to European Union guidelines.

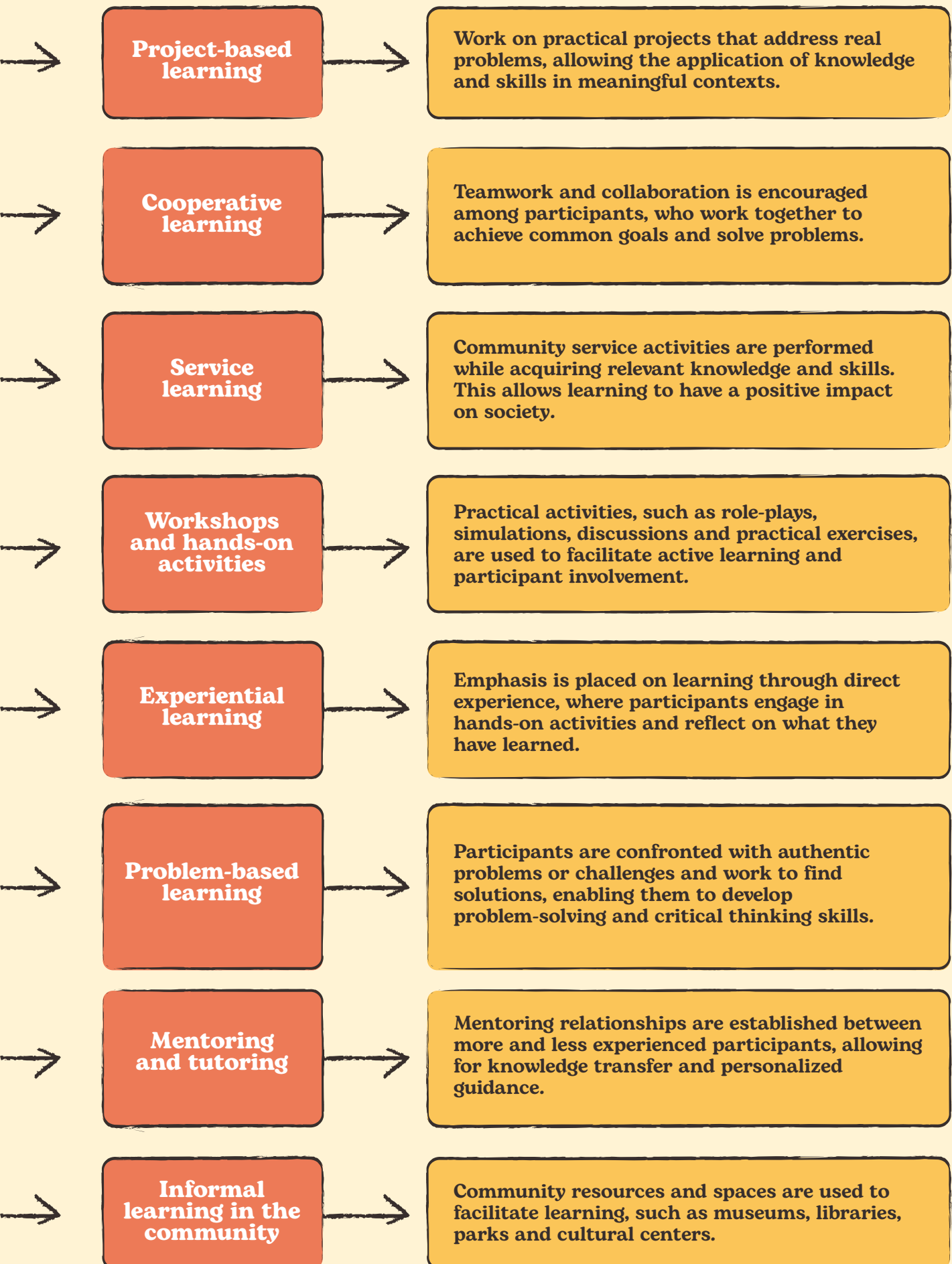
In order to achieve an education that forms individuals capable of adapting to a constantly changing world, the coordination of all educational agents is required. This implies overcoming traditional pedagogies and adopting a cooperative, dialogic and social approach to education.

As Romans, Petrus and Trilla ⁽⁴⁰⁾ point out: *"It is not only a matter of incorporating methodologies that have proven to be very profitable in non-formal settings to promote integration and social participation. It would also be a matter of incorporating them into the specific work curricula themselves in the different areas that support these objectives which, on occasions, were relegated to transversality and to which insufficient attention is paid"*. This is a job that must be done by both professionals and educational agents, whose collaboration with teachers is fundamental. *"Only the incorporation of this philosophy will prevent these types of actions from remaining anecdotal or succumbing to the temptations of excessive regulation, rigidity and the inflexibility inherent in educational programs"*, emphasizes Romans and collaborators ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

Non-formal education methodologies

There are several methodologies used in non-formal education designed to foster active, participatory and experiential learning. Some of the most common methodologies include:





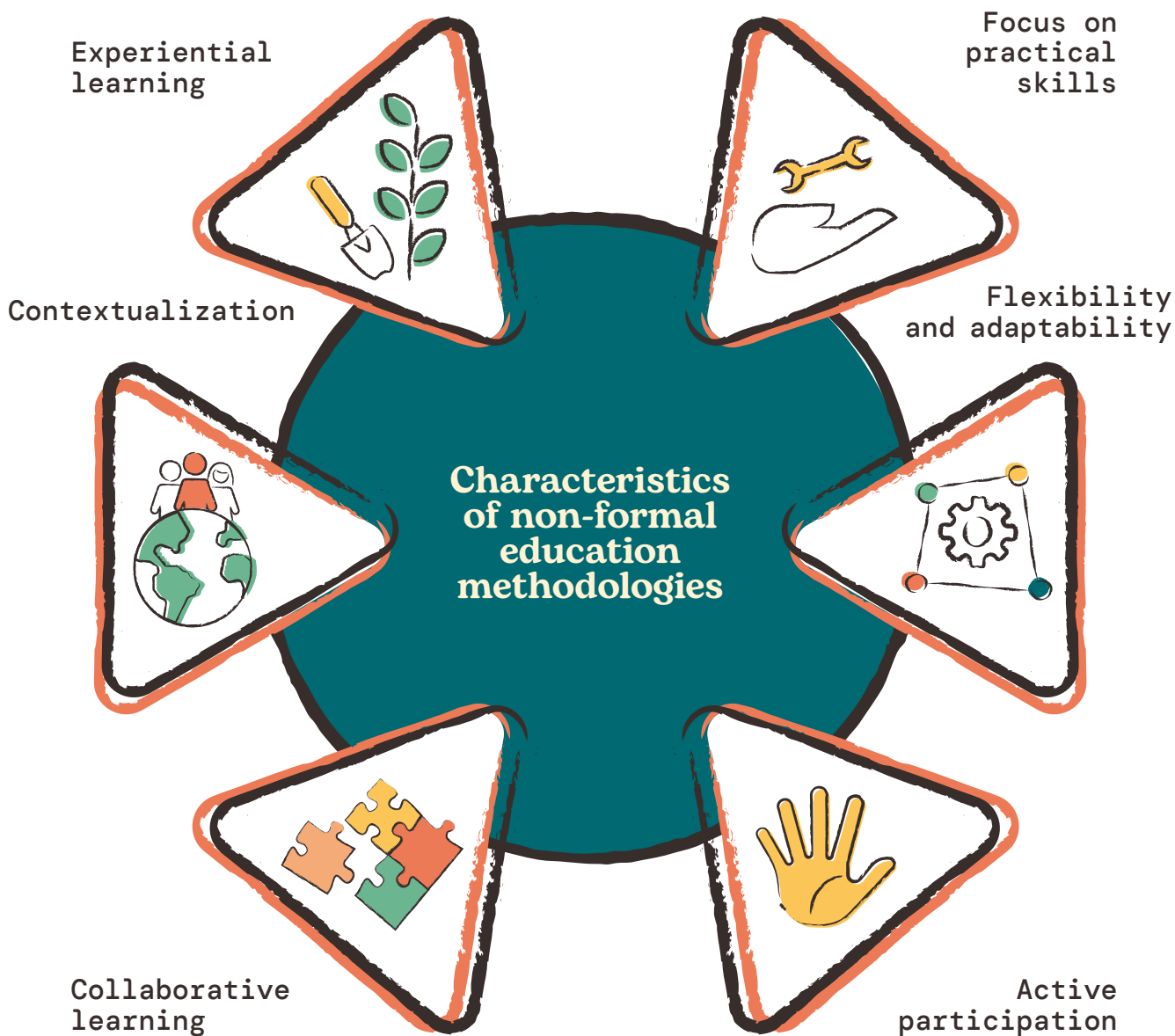
In these methodologies, learning is not limited to the four walls of the classroom; it extends into the community, where students become agents of change by participating in service activities that benefit others. From project-based learning to cooperative learning, these methodologies share a student-centered approach. Here, learning is active and experiential, where students are immersed in meaningful activities that allow them to apply their knowledge in real situations.

Collaboration and teamwork are fundamental to this approach. Students learn to communicate, cooperate and lead as they work together to achieve common goals.

In addition, learning is contextualized, making it relevant and meaningful by addressing real-world problems and participating in hands-on projects that reflect their environment and community.

But beyond knowledge acquisition, these methodologies focus on developing cross-cutting skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving and creativity. And they do so with flexibility and adaptability, adjusting to the needs and interests of students and to diverse educational contexts.

Some key characteristics of non-formal education methodologies include:



Experiential learning:

hands-on activities and direct experiences are fundamental in non-formal education. Participants learn through active exploration, experimentation and reflection on their own experiences.

Focus on practical skills:

non-formal education often focuses on the development of practical skills and competencies relevant to daily life or work. This may include social skills, job skills, problem-solving skills, among others.

Flexibility and adaptability:

non-formal education methodologies are often flexible and can be adapted to the needs, interests and abilities of the participants. This allows for greater personalization of the learning process.

Active participation:

the active participation of participants in the learning process is encouraged. Instead of being passive receivers of information, participants are expected to actively contribute, share ideas and participate in interactive activities.

Collaborative learning:

Teamwork and collaboration are encouraged. Activities are usually designed to encourage cooperation, the exchange of ideas and the collective construction of knowledge.

Contextualization:

learning is related to meaningful and relevant contexts for the participants. This may involve the use of practical examples, case studies or real-world situations to illustrate concepts and facilitate understanding.

In addition, these methodologies can contribute to reducing educational gaps by providing more equal and personalized learning opportunities. By adapting to the individual needs of students and encouraging active participation, they work to ensure that they can develop their full potential and that no one is left behind.

Finally, these methodologies foster student empowerment by involving them in meaningful projects and community service activities. This gives them the opportunity to have a positive impact on their environment and to develop a sense of ownership and responsibility, which can serve as a catalyst for the neighborhood and the community.

Non-formal education in educational transitions

The transition between different educational stages, such as primary and secondary school, is a crucial period in the academic life of students, which can significantly influence their future success. In this context, non-formal education emerges as an invaluable tool to facilitate a successful educational transition and improve the educational experience as a whole.

When we speak of non-formal education in this context, we refer to those organized and systematic educational activities that take place outside the framework of the formal education system, with the purpose of providing certain types of learning to specific groups of the population. As defined by Coombs ⁽³³⁾, non-formal education encompasses a wide range of structured activities that aim to provide learning and personal development in settings beyond the traditional classroom.

Non-formal education methodologies applicable in the field of educational transition can be diverse and adapted to the specific needs of students, families and teachers. This may include student participation in extracurricular activities, family involvement in their children's educational process, collaboration among teachers to implement innovative classroom practices, and community involvement in educational initiatives.

The introduction of non-formal education in the educational environment can offer a series of benefits to favor the transition between educational stages. First, these methodologies can provide a more holistic and personalized approach to addressing individual student needs during periods of change. In addition, non-formal education can encourage students' participation in their own learning process, promoting autonomy and responsibility.

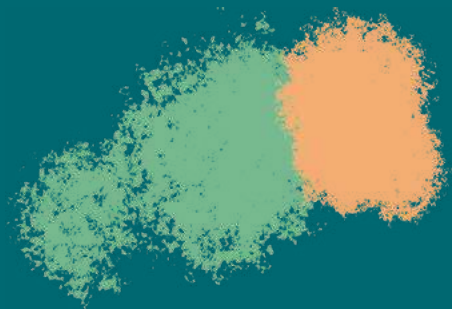


By incorporating innovative and participatory classroom practices, educators can create a stimulating learning environment that motivates and encourages student engagement in education. Likewise, by involving families and the community in the educational process, a support network is established that strengthens the transition between educational stages and promotes long-term academic success.

It is important to keep in mind that non-formal education does not replace formal education, but rather complements and enriches the educational process as a whole. While formal education focuses on the academic curriculum and the attainment of degrees and certifications, non-formal education provides a space for experiential learning, the development of practical skills and the acquisition of knowledge outside the classroom.



**GOOD PRACTICES IN
THE INTRODUCTION OF
NON-FORMAL EDUCATION
TO FAVOR EDUCATIONAL
TRANSITION**



GOOD PRACTICES IN THE INTRODUCTION OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION TO FAVOR EDUCATIONAL TRANSITION

One of the objectives of the Project has been, on the one hand, to generate a working space where to reflect on the educational transition process as a key element to favor continuity and permanence in the educational system of students in a situation of greater vulnerability, and, on the other hand, to extract the methodological keys of non-formal education that promote the prevention of school absenteeism and early school dropout.

This chapter presents a series of experiences and good practices that show how to put into practice the methodologies of non-formal education to face the challenges presented in the previous analysis.

For this purpose, we will present two case studies that can help to visualize and summarize the conclusions drawn throughout the project and that show how networking, with a comprehensive and community-based approach, and including the perspective of non-formal education, generate significant changes in educational communities in the most socioeconomically vulnerable environments. In addition, we will dedicate a section to introduce the map of good practices that we have developed during the Project, which reflects different programs and projects, promoted by key actors and in different contexts, countries and regions, with the common objective of favoring positive educational transition and reducing early school leaving.



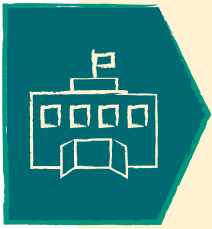
Case of the secondary school Las Lomas and the Fundación Ayuda en Acción

The educational project of the secondary school Las Loma has as one of its objectives to support students in the transition from primary to secondary school in order to achieve a successful change of stage. In addition, they work in a network with the associated primary schools, from which their students come from, and coordinate with the public administration (absenteeism area of the Alicante City Council, social centers, etc.).

On the other hand, the Fundación Ayuda en Acción, through its program Escuela que Rompe Barreras (School that Breaks Barriers), carries out an educational intervention within primary and secondary schools, working in highly complex schools where the aforementioned challenges and difficulties are present. Specifically, it works on different actions, in collaboration with the secondary school Las Lomas, to reduce absenteeism and promote a good transition, with actions that involve changing the vision of students with respect to education, but above all of the families; and it is a work that is tried to be approached from within, in coordination with other social organizations, teachers and professionals involved in the educational field. Ayuda en Acción also has a **methodological guide** on educational transition that addresses specific issues when intervening in this process.

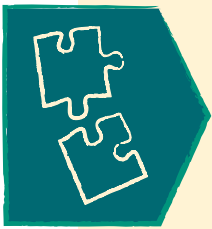
Therefore, this case serves to reflect the close collaboration between two key actors such as a school (formal education) and a social entity (non-formal education) that, thanks to their close collaboration, seek to promote the permanence in the educational system of students and the involvement of families in their teaching-learning process, while encouraging the commitment of families and improving the motivation of teachers.

The **key actions**, based on different methodologies from non-formal education and on which this intervention is based, are the following:



Open days

A day is organized in which students and families can get to know the facilities of the school and the professionals who work there, with a guided tour and an informative talk where they can learn more in detail about the operation and characteristics of the school, encouraging experiential learning with dynamics that allow them to become familiar with the new environment.



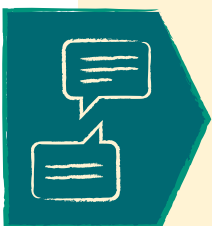
Recreational activities

To encourage student participation and to get to know each other. The idea is to generate leisure activities, with an educational component, in which students, families and the community participate. These activities range from the organization of a solidarity race, a makeup and costume workshop during the carnival party or a cooperative game between primary and secondary students *escape-room* type, about environmental care and climate change. In these activities, the aim is to closely involve students in the last year of primary school, as well as students in the first and second year of secondary school, so that relationships are established and secondary students become a reference known by the students who will be part of their school next year, in addition to promoting cooperative learning and service learning.



Cultural visits

Primary school students go as an audience to see a play by senior high school students, which serves to continue getting closer to the school and its students, who welcome them, and to learn about the different activities offered by the school, giving importance to the extracurricular workshops and their educational value.



Informative talks in a participatory format

6th grade students of primary school usually have many doubts regarding the new rules, sanctions, the permission or not of the use of cell phones, the subjects, how recesses work, possible conflicts with students from higher grades, trips, excursions, and other activities. Through a group presentation, in which participation is encouraged with group dynamics, we try to clear up these and other doubts that may arise, in addition to generating an environment of trust so that this channel of communication remains open. In these talks we count on the testimony of students from the high school who talk about their personal experience to give a closer and more diverse vision and who play the role of mentors for the new students.

Individual attention and psycho-emotional support for students

Through the figure of a specialized psychologist, provided by Ayuda en Acción, who works in both primary and secondary schools and becomes a constant and referent figure, even at the change of stage. The attention is carried out with both primary and secondary school students, but it is especially in the secondary school stage when there is more demand for this service, since during adolescence is where more problems arise from the socio-economic situation they live, identity problems or a possible psycho-emotional discomfort. We work through individual sessions, which serve as specialized support, always in coordination with teachers, tutors and guidance services. The objective is to help students, adapting to their needs and promoting the acquisition of practical skills. This support figure is based on the foundations of non-formal education to intervene with students and achieve their involvement, confidence, and, above all, to make them feel that they have support.



Counseling service to teacher

To provide them with tools that they can use in class and that can generate attitudinal changes. The psychologist is in charge of offering this service to teachers, so that they can promote a series of techniques in the classroom with students who present greater difficulties, such as: the modeling technique (defining a positive behavioral model and reinforcing those attitudes); positive reinforcement of small achievements and progress, instead of simply punishing the negative; counseling, through active listening and counseling; as well as the setting of short-term goals, guiding motivation towards a close and real change.



Mindfulness

To work mindfulness from an early age and favor a good environment in the classroom. Work is done through games and stories that allow them to practice breathing, body sensations and relaxation through actions such as pressure-distension of the muscles. It is also about creating a space dedicated to calm, providing the class with a place to go to when they are more agitated or for students with a more active profile. This space is especially useful when they return from break, since this is the time when they tend to be more agitated. It works mainly with primary school students, but in older ages, including secondary school, the idea is to intersperse basic exercises of 5 minutes, practices with sounds or touch, with the explanation of the basics. The class should be participatory and focused on the students' real problems: exams, family, friends, future, etc.



Peer mediation



Ayuda en Acción works this technique with students in the last cycle of primary school as a means to address conflict resolution, promote the acquisition of values and generate assertive forms of communication. In addition, coordination with the secondary school is essential, so that the management and guidance team knows who the mediator students are who are moving from 6th grade of primary school to 1st grade of secondary school, so that their trajectory is taken into account and their future integration into the mediation carried out in the new school is considered.

Participatory talks



With the aim of improving coexistence and enhancing social skills. They are carried out mainly with students in the last cycle of primary school, during school hours, in tutorials, and previously planned with the teacher. The participation of the tutors is key to broaden learning and to learn about behaviors to be taken into account in their students in group work. The methodology is based on dynamic, participative classes, making reference to elements of their environment, in which figures and references from different cultures appear. In the use of close references it is relevant to do it with a gender perspective with the participation of former students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, to reinforce especially among female students who continue studying. The most interesting part of the presentation is the participation of the students, their opinions, which generate debate, and their interaction with other classmates, which allows us to assess how they relate and observe the internal dynamics of the group, as well as generating learning.

Work with families



Through the generation of community plans and guidance services for families, as well as an exclusive space to advise and support families in situations of special vulnerability and with students who are at a higher risk of absenteeism and early school leaving. In addition, we seek, through various activities such as informative talks, conferences and end-of-year parties in which they are invited to participate, to generate workshops or specific training spaces of interest to them. One of these activities are the Spanish classes and key competences for migrant families, offered by the secondary school Las Lomas and Ayuda en Acción, so that they are linked to the school, making them direct participants, and also being positive references for their sons and daughters who see how their parents study. Likewise, in this work with families, the creation and consolidation of AMPAS (Association of Mothers and Fathers of the students) / AFAS (Association of families of the students) in the schools is encouraged, accompanying and guiding them in the process so that they themselves, and constituted as an association, propose and lead many of the actions related to the family and the community as a whole.

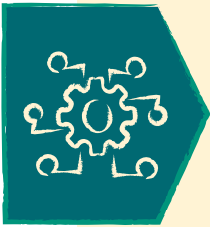


If you want to read the guide to accompany AMPAS that promote inclusive education, see here: [link](#)

Coordination and networking

The dimension of the challenges that arise requires a joint work of the educational community and other actors, so that, in this case, both the secondary school Las Lomas and the Fundación Ayuda en Acción work jointly with:

- **Primary schools:** it is essential that there is constant communication and networking with these schools, so that coordination in the transfer of students is the maximum possible. It is important to plan and execute the aforementioned joint interventions and actions, to follow up students with special difficulties, to carry out the transfer of files, etc. In addition, we seek to work on the creation of the new secondary classroom groups with coherence and in collaboration with the primary schools, taking into account that the lack of a structured transition affects the learning dynamics and can generate difficulties in the interaction between students. Through meetings with the primary school teachers, the groups are configured according to the friendships, interests of the students and the recommendations resulting from the previous experience of the primary schools.
- **Guidance team:** working on joint programming for individual attention and preventive group activities.
- **Public administration:** In the case of the city of Alicante, there is a Technical Department for the Prevention of School Absenteeism in charge of the prevention, resolution and monitoring of absenteeism cases with which it is essential to coordinate, through regular meetings to discuss the cases and the progress made in the monitoring of each one. In addition, it is essential to be able to network with other public resources of interest such as social services or health centers, especially for the possible referral of cases to child mental health.





In summary, some of the keys to this experience are the following:

- ▶ To have people as references in that moment of change, being able to have spaces for primary school students to get to know the new teachers and the students with whom they will be sharing spaces and work.
- ▶ To let them become familiar with the school, not only in terms of academics and curriculum, but also with the activities and culture of the school, as well as its facilities, which may be familiar to them upon arrival.
- ▶ To have specialized and individual support figures for both families and students, especially for those with greater difficulties.
- ▶ The importance of applying a preventive approach in the Primary-Secondary transition through the promotion of conflict resolution, favoring a good environment in the classroom and in the school as a whole, and attending to possible psycho-emotional problems or difficulties of the students.
- ▶ Protagonism of the students. The actions proposed encourage students to feel that they participate in their learning and have a voice in the school, becoming more committed and involved and, consequently, generating greater attendance and performance in the classroom.
- ▶ Leadership of the management team as a driver of change and generator of innovative proposals to work on transition and prevent early dropout. It is essential to have a motivated and committed team with the capacity to lead attractive educational projects adapted to their context and reality and that, in turn, can transmit this spirit and passion for their work to their teaching staff.
- ▶ Continuous training for teachers as a key element to encourage them to apply innovative practices, adapted to the needs of their students, to motivate learning and to favor the inclusion of students with greater difficulties.

Case of L'Albero della Vita

Varcare la Soglia is a national program of the L'Albero della Vita Foundation for the fight against educational poverty, active since 2014 in the cities of Milan, Palermo, Genoa, Perugia,

Catanzaro and Naples. The program is based on collective intervention with the family unit, bringing an approach that recognizes the potential of the family and the students and their abilities both to get out of poverty and to be a resource within their community.

The generation of a network of proximity: the reinforcement of social interactions to support the community, create connections between the families themselves, enable them to discuss common problems and lay the foundations of a network of proximity and a sense of community.

Training and job placement orientation: focused on the development or reactivation of the employability skills of the project beneficiaries, generating competencies for active job search.

The intervention is based on four main lines of work:

Material support: which allows families to obtain monthly food and, if necessary, hygiene products and school supplies to meet their needs.

Socio-educational support: which, through individual interviews and home visits, offers families an itinerary of guidance and tutoring by educational professionals. The aim of this axis is to support them in the process of reacquiring their skills and their consequent empowerment.

Along with all this, and specifically as one of the objectives of its intervention, it seeks to combat absenteeism and school dropout in these disadvantaged socio-economic contexts. The key activities of the intervention in this area are:

- **"ImpariAmo" workshop:** This high-intensity extracurricular workshop, organized on a daily basis, both in the organization's premises and in the schools, allows us to enhance teaching skills and promote motivation among students aged 6 to 13, through educational and recreational activities throughout the school year and during the summer months. The objective is to reinforce school autonomy, reduce learning deficits, strengthen motivation for study, reinforce soft skills, through the consolidation of fundamental and basic knowledge of learning. A methodology based on peer education, discovery learning, cooperative learning, etc. is used, with activities linked to art and music, including educational trips to discover the territory and culturally relevant places.
- **Co-planning workshops with teachers:** with the aim of identifying innovative didactic methodologies of non-formal education to be applied in the classroom.
- **Workshops to strengthen teachers' interpersonal skills:** addressing strategies to improve problem-solving in the classroom, conflict management techniques, verbalization, recognition and emotional management.
- **Socio-educational itineraries in the classroom:** a team of educators works with teachers, in the classroom and during school hours, with the aim of intervening in group relationships within the classroom to promote individual and cooperative well-being through moments of discussion and learning, using non-formal education methodologies.
- **Talent workshop:** To support the quality of educational guidance and prevent school dropout, visits are made to the artisan sector of the territory; meetings with young artisans and entrepreneurs, who, thanks to their own trajectory, can positively influence young people with success stories. In addition, practical laboratories are organized to make handicraft prototypes so that students can experiment.
- **Theater workshops:** With the help of expert artists who accompany students from 13 to 17 years old into the world of theater art with the aim of promoting inclusion and enhancing the emotional and creative dimension, so that they can consciously build skills and tools to achieve their own well-being, necessary for any type of learning.
- **Workshops to reinforce STEAM skills:** Workshop to reinforce learning in STEAM disciplines (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics), especially crucial to overcome the digital skills gap. Through an action learning method, students are guided on a path that stimulates critical and computational thinking, where experimentation is able to reinforce knowledge learning and knowledge related to innovation and digital literacy.
- **Sports activities:** Sports activities (athletics, basketball, volleyball, soccer, dance, etc.) in schools, outside school hours, under the guidance of educators and specialists from local sports associations, with the aim of promoting the psychophysical well-being of children and the values linked to sports (commitment, loyalty, perseverance, protagonism/activism and respect for the rules).
- **Individual sessions with families:** to accompany parenting in order to favor the family relationship and support them in dealing with and solving the problems experienced by their children during their development or that arise at certain moments of transition.
- **Workshop for children from 3 to 5 years old "Viaggio in Prima Classe":** from kindergarten to primary school. The success of a good transition at this stage has a positive impact both on the development of children and on the prevention of future school failure and absenteeism. The involvement of families in the transition and the educational trajectory of their children is fundamental. Here the educators involved in the school work through laboratories and thematic and experimental workshops with parents and children.
- **Organization of events:** for families, students and schools, open to the whole community, on the occasion of holidays, national and international days, or on

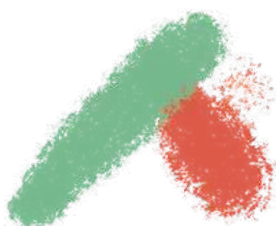
different topics such as civil rights, environment, etc. with the aim of increasing the sense of belonging to the community and promoting active citizenship.

- **Networking:** L'Albero della Vita Foundation is part of the REP (local educational network) which, together with the Dropout Monitoring Center, the schools, the municipality, the local social service and local associations, detects the phenomenon of absenteeism and early school leaving, plans and organizes interventions, verifies the actions undertaken and, in short, intervenes in the transition process to promote a positive change of stage for the students.



In summary, we can point out that some of the key elements of this experience are:

- ▶ **Socio-educational intervention with a holistic approach aimed at the whole family unit.**
- ▶ **Generate a sense of belonging to the community and the school.**
- ▶ **Use of non-formal education actions and methodologies to strengthen the soft skills of students, families and teachers, through recreational-educational activities inside and outside the school.**
- ▶ **Accompaniment and support to students, by specialized professionals, for a successful passage through the educational transition phases.**
- ▶ **Protagonism of families in the educational path of students.**
- ▶ **Networking with all the actors involved in the prevention and fight against absenteeism and early school leaving.**



Other cases of good practices: Map of experiences

One of the results of the Project has been to develop a map of experiences and good practices related to the primary-secondary transition and the work carried out by schools, public administrations and social entities to prevent absenteeism and early school leaving.

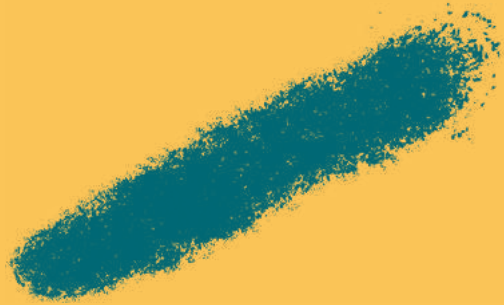
To collect this information we conducted a survey with a set of questions, as well as some targeted interviews, which we sent through different channels to various institutions in Spain and Sicily-Italy, resulting in a map of good practices with key information that can help to visualize the main lines of action, their keys and the evidence of success experienced in each of the projects analyzed.

The map, consisting of 24 projects, is in English and can be viewed by clicking on the following [link](#).

In addition, for the participatory workshops carried out both in Spain and Italy, we prepared summary sheets with all the relevant information on some of the projects that appear on the map and others that were not included, and that we consider to be relevant for their innovative approach, their replicability or for containing actions that address an unmet need, or that contemplate in a relevant way any of the key factors mentioned above. These files, whose projects are promoted by social entities, schools and public administration, can be viewed at the following [link](#).



CONCLUSIONS



CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this guide, we have tried to address the problem of school absenteeism and subsequent early school leaving in Spain and Italy. First of all, we focus on the main causes and on the importance of addressing the transition between educational stages, specifically in primary and secondary education, as a key element in preventing this problem, which occurs, to a greater extent, in contexts of socioeconomic vulnerability and which continues to have a negative impact on students in some European Union countries such as Spain and Italy.

The main premise on which this guide is based is that school absenteeism is one of the first indicators of possible early school leaving. In addition, lack of regular school attendance can result in academic difficulties, cause a disconnection with the educational process and, ultimately, have a negative impact on the mental health and emotional well-being of students, as well as on the school climate in general. In this sense, school transition times are a critical point in educational continuity, since a successful transition will increase the likelihood of ensuring the student's permanence in the educational system and an increase in future opportunities.

As we have seen throughout the project and through the literature consulted, there are a number of key factors to be taken into account when addressing the causes of absenteeism and early school leaving, directly related to the personal dimension, the educational-academic dimension and the social dimension of students. These factors, which intervene specifically in the transition process, and which, depending on the context, can favor or disfavor a successful change of educational stage, must be approached from different spheres and involve all the agents that form part of the educational community as a whole.

Therefore, any intervention to address this problem should involve the participation of teachers, students, families, public administration and social entities present in the community. It is precisely as a result of this networking that initiatives such as those proposed throughout this project are born and that can provide answers to the challenges that arise in highly complex schools, favoring the generation of opportunities for students attending these schools.

One of the main objectives of the project, which we address comprehensively in the guide, is to value and recognize the importance of non-formal education methodologies to meet these challenges. These methodologies offer a flexible and participatory approach that complements and enriches formal education, thus allowing us to more effectively address the individual needs and specific challenges faced by students during this transition period.

On the one hand, non-formal education provides opportunities for experiential learning, the development of social and emotional skills, and the exploration of personal interests and hobbies outside of the traditional classroom environment.



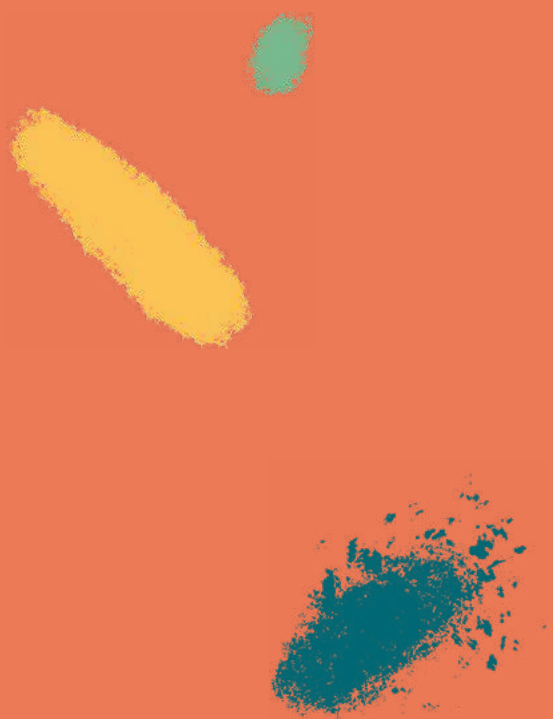
Through the cases and initiatives analyzed in this guide, we have been able to see how to include extracurricular activities, mentoring programs, community projects, accompaniment and support for the most vulnerable students and families, and training and support for teachers, among others. In addition, non-formal education can play an important role in preventing absenteeism and early dropout by providing students with meaningful and relevant experiences that strengthen their sense of belonging and connection to school, in addition to developing soft skills, such as teamwork, conflict resolution and effective communication, which are fundamental for academic success and for individual and collective well-being.

On the other hand, by integrating these methodologies in the educational transition process, schools seek to facilitate the adaptation of students to the new academic stage and the promotion of their overall well-being, creating a more inclusive and welcoming environment that promotes their participation and commitment. These experiences can also help students to become actively engaged in their educational process and to pursue their goals with enthusiasm and determination.

In conclusion, these methodologies offer an opportunity to enrich the educational experience and prepare students to face the challenges of the real world with confidence and resilience. They can also be a good starting point for addressing a complex and structural problem, which also requires a greater allocation of resources and the consolidation of public policies that accompany and support all the work carried out by educational communities.



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