# JUMP @ SCHOOL

Testing a model to contrast early school leaving

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## Testing a model to contrast early school leaving

Project co-funded by

Lifelong Learning Programme

Coordinated by

REGIONE AUTÒNOMA DE SARDIGNA
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA

This report was written by Joelle Caimi, with the collaboration of Tiziana Piacentini (CIOFS/FP) and Elena Grilli (CIOFS/FP). Graphic layout Jean Marc Caimi. The English version was proofread by Juliet Tschank (ZSI).

We would like to thank all the partner organisations and the people that over the years have worked for Jump@school on all levels:
**Special Status Region of Sardinia**, leader of the project: Roberto Doneddu, Luca Galassi, Maurizio Zucca, Daniela Frongia, Stefania Congiu, Paolo Sedda, Annalisa Monni, Davide Zepponi
**CIOFS/FP, National Central Office:** Angela Elicio, TizianaPiacentini, Elena Grilli, Salvatore Merenda
**CIOFS/FP, Emilia Romagna:** Silvia Biglietti, Massimo Peron
**CIOFS/FP, Sardinia:** Anna Locci, Cristina Theis, Anna Cossu
**IVAL:** Gianluca Braga, Silvia Magistrali, Piergiorgio Reggio
**ZSI:** Juliet Tschank, Stefanie Konzett-Smoliner, August Gatcher, Alexander Kesselring, Caroline Manahl, Anette Scopetta, Ursula Holtgrewe, Eveline Zapfel, Pamela Bartar, Carmen Siller, Lisa Wimmer
**FCVPE:** Raul Linuesa Montero, Pau Recuenco Garcia
**Provincial Directorate Of Social Studies and Projects of Mardin**: Murat Kaya
**Meridium:** Zbigniew Michalak, Justyna Kowacka
**Caritas Gdànsk:** Jolanta Kruk, Małgorzata Niemkiewicz, Aleksandra Drygas
**MetropolisNet EEIG:** Reiner Aster, Anita Hebbinghaus, Diana Peitel, Mary Dellenbaugh, Jasmin Zouizi, Petra König
**FinisTerrae:** Michelangelo Belletti, Marco Martinetti
– Thanks to the headmasters, contact people and lab experts that have participated and invested in Jump@school, working on its implementation and reflecting on its results:
**In Italy. IPIA Galileo Ferraris, Iglesias:** Massimo Mocci, Cinzia Guaita, Andrea Pau e Jean Claudio Vinci (laboratory of creative writing and comic strips), Giorgio Marturana (laboratory of videophotography). **IPSAR, Tortolì:** Giambattista Usai, Luca Marongiu, Franco Murgia, Tonino Guiso, Maurizio Ghiani (laboratory of photofood), Donatella Contu - Ittiturismo "La Peschiera"Arbatax (laboratory of guided fishing).
**In Spain. Instituto de Educación Secundaria Juan de Garay:** Juan Carlos Serrano Martínez. Carmen Calonge Moreno, Tomás Igual Baselga
**Instituto de Educación Secundaria Malilla:** Araia Galiana, Celia Carrión Rubio.
Special thanks to JumpOperators and to the local researchers who have worked in the four schools of the project: Stefano Simola, Giulia Zucca, Roberta Manca,FabianaBarca, Manuela Cucca, Anna Lisa Lai, Pepa Domingo, Pilar Valiente, Eva Fauste, Camila Bozzo.
And finally, thanks to the students who have embarked on this adventure
Most of photographs contained in the present publication have been realised by the the photographer Giorgio Marturana during the project activities.

Published by: CIOFS/FP May 2017


• Also available on www.jumpatschool.eu •

“

*“Transforming subjects in citizens is a miracle that only schools can work”.*

**Piero Calamandrei**

”

# Presentation

The fight against early school leaving is one of the key challenges at European, national and regional level in order to create a smart, sustainable and inclusive milieu for growth.

A very high number of youths aged between 18 and 25 entering the labour market without a school-leaving certificate or even basic or specific vocational skills are deemed or condemned by society as a waste of resources and opportunities for modern societies and European economies in a globalised world. For this reason, Europe has set the stringent goal of reducing the rate of early school leaving to below 10% by 2020.

The Regional Government of Sardinia, along with 9 partners from 6 different countries (5 from the EU: Italy, Austria, Germany, Poland, and Spain; and Turkey) accepted this challenge. The Regional Government of Sardinia demonstrated the importance of this topic not only to the European Union or Italy but specifically for the island of Sardinia, by taking up the role of project coordinator in the "Jump@School" project funded by the European Commission within the framework of the European Programme for Lifelong Learning. The project aimed to "offer insights, recommendations and useful suggestions to define education and vocational training policies capable of preventing and fighting school dropout, also in the light of the new challenges presented by the current socio-economic scenario in Europe (economic crisis, high youth unemployment rates, migration)".

It is a pleasure for us to publish this report, which describes the path, results, reflections, strengths and weaknesses that have emerged from implementing the Jump@school pilot. We are fully aware of the importance of a close exchange of views with local communities and all the stakeholders involved, for it is the only way to promote effective intervention practices and models that are consistent with local needs. We believe that this report can be a useful tool to start a process that, on different levels, can encourage a debate and, above all, the testing of innovative action models along the lines of the findings of the project and the accurate description of risks and weaknesses given by the main stakeholders and professionals that have accompanied the different stages of the project.

We believe that, along with important reform processes of the European education systems, it is necessary to design and experiment new approaches capable of offering solutions and personalised services to students that are struggling to come to terms with school and with the transition from school to the labour market within the framework of a virtuous relation between schools and local communities; and more in general, to promote guidance.

The introduction of the external profile of the JumpOperator in the school context represents an important innovation, which, if properly supported by schools, will contribute to making school more inclusive, open, attentive to the individual needs of students, capable of supporting those who are facing difficult social, family and educational contexts that are less and less capable of preparing youths to enter the current globalised and complex society with the aim of a decent life for all.

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**Virginia Mura**
Councillor for Labour, Vocational Training,
Cooperation and Social Security
**Autonomous Region of Sardinia**

**Students who successfully complete their education are a success not only to themselves** but to the whole community. To stay in school means giving oneself the opportunity to be agents of one's future, and aware of one's identity, to discover one's abilities and to deal with one's limits, but at the same time to acquire the tools to overcome them.

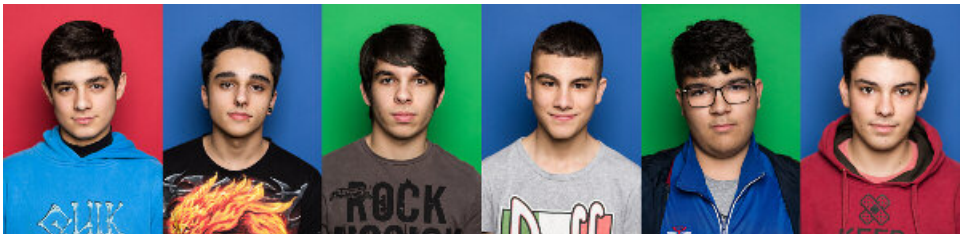
Students, who stay in school until they graduate, and who find a sense of self and life in their educational path, form a brick for building a more equitable, more critical and more productive society. Although there is a significant improvement in the situation at a European level, there are still too many students who for a number of reasons, often interconnected, drop out of school or training. Preventing and fighting the phenomenon of early school leaving is therefore a political and social imperative that calls into question the responsibilities of all actors involved: the family, school, political decision-makers and the students.

Experience has taught us some key things about early school leaving. We know, for example, that a student does not leave school overnight, but the process is gradual, marked by warning signals such as repeated absences, low grades, disruptive behaviour punished by detentions and suspensions, repeated school changes, poor motivation and poor involvement in school. Being able to identify and monitor these signals in a structural manner is the precondition for a timely and therefore more effective action. We know that the economic, social and educational poverty of the students' family context plays a crucial role in pushing a student to "give up" on school and look for a job, perhaps off-the-books and underpaid because they lack the qualifications, in order to support their family financially. Dialogue with families is an important strategy that bears fruits when fighting against early school leaving. We know that the school, its ability to propose customised pathways to students and to enhance their social and relational skills as well as cognitive ones, is an integral part of the solution. We also know that there is no single valid solution for all contexts for all students - There is no "silver bullet". If, therefore, you need to know, value and replicate, with appropriate adjustments, successful experiences, it is equally necessary on the other hand to experiment with new action strategies and to evaluate them as honestly as possible. It is from these assumptions that the Jump @ school project was born - an ambitious, complex and passionate job that has tried to contribute to the debate on prevention policies and strategies against school dropout, working with students of four secondary schools in Italy and Spain and relying on empirical data collected on the field.

**The Jump@school team**

**This report provides a general description of the Jump@school project, from the definition of the logic model of intervention, the design of the research pilot and its implementation in schools. The final part will be devoted to assessment presentation of the findings from a quantitative and a qualitative basis, providing food for thought and opening new prospects for future actions. Wide space and visibility will also be given to the experiences of the youth and the project operators, known as JumpOperators, who were the heart and soul of this experience of relational and educational enrichment and exchange.**





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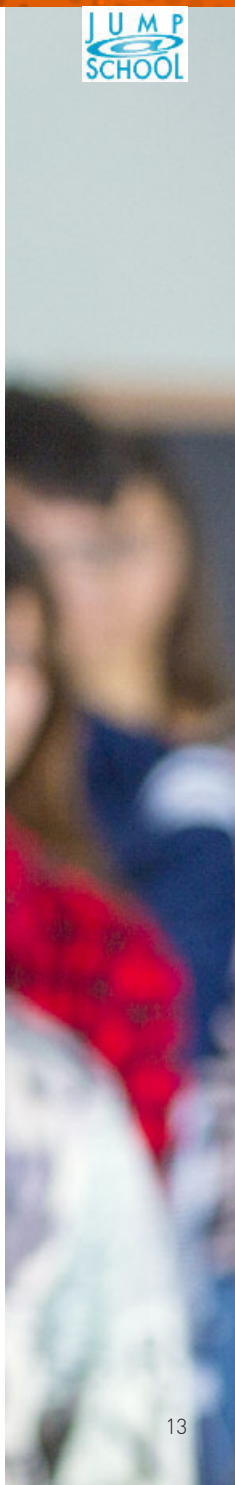
## Introduction

Jump@school is a project aiming at the prevention of early school leaving promoted by the Regional Government of Sardinia and funded by the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP). It involved a consortium of **ten partners** from **six countries** (Italy, Austria, Germany, Poland, Spain and Turkey), **four schools** and **480 students aged 14 to 17 years old**. The underlying idea of this project was to **develop a strategy to prevent early school leaving by testing an innovative intervention model in schools and assessing its impact** on the attitude of students, considered at risk of early school leaving, towards school. Jump@school is structured as a pilot project in line with the call for proposals EACEA/04/13 within the framework of the European Lifelong Learning Programme (2013 LLP KA1 Specific Call for proposals EACEA/04/2013), whose guidelines explicitly encouraged the use of experimental methods to guarantee a sound and transparent assessment of the impact of policies and actions.

The final goal of the process was to provide some insights, recommendations and useful suggestions for the definition of vocational training and education policies capable of preventing and countering early school leaving (ESL), also in the light of the new challenges posed by the current socio-economic scenario in Europe (economic crisis, high youth unemployment rates, migration issues).

The project covered a period of three years and is organised in four main activities described below.



✓ Selection of good practices tested in Europe

The Jump@school intervention model was developed by selecting and studying a number of good practices in Europe that aimed at countering early school leaving. Through these practices, some cross-cutting and recurrent factors were identified that provided the conceptual and methodological inspiration to plan Jump@school actions.

✓ Development and implementation of actions in schools

Based on the selected promising practices and in constant dialogue with the evaluation team, the Jump@school intervention was developed and described in the framework of a logic model (resources/inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact). The activities of the intervention are structured as a series of individual meetings and group activities carried out inside and outside schools. The intervention was implemented for 5 months (January/June 2016) in four secondary schools in Italy (Sardinia) and Spain (Valencia)

✓ Impact assessment and result analysis

To understand whether The Jump@school intervention had a statistically significant impact on some risk factors of early school leaving, it was evaluated using a counterfactual approach; specifically the two-group pretest-posttest design. This entailed the selection of a sample of students at risk of early school leaving and their random assignment to either the experimental/intervention/treatment group (that participated in the intervention) or to the control group (that did not participate in the intervention, thereby representing the counterfactual scenario). Data generated from a questionnaire completed by both groups at two points in time (before and after the intervention) were then compared to generate the impact of the intervention. The resulting findings were supplemented by a qualitative assessment of the action investigating the perceptions and the opinions of the actors involved. These findings formed the basis of the lessons learned presented in this publication.

✓ Dissemination and exploitation

The whole experience of the project was documented, exploited and disseminated at a European level through exchange seminars, publications, reports, videos and a website. The aims of the project and the needs of the pilot guided the project partners in selecting the implementation sites (countries, regions and schools), to make sure they met a number of strategic (ESL rates) and statistical criteria (number of students enrolled in schools). Initially, the pilot would have been implemented in the following countries: Italy (and precisely Sardinia where the project coordinator is based and a

region which has higher ESL rate than the national average – 25% compared to 18% Italian average in 2011; in 2016 the Italian national rate sank to 14% compared to 18% in Sardinia); Spain, that in 2016 recorded the second highest (19%)early school leaving rate in the EU after Malta (196%) and Turkey, which is not a EU member state, but with an extremely high ESL rate (34.3% in 2016) *.

## OVERALL OBJECTIVE

✔ Provide advice and suggestions to define specific policies for education and vocational training aimed at preventing and countering early school leaving.

## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

✔ Identify methodologies, strategies and tested good practices to prevent and counter early school leaving in contexts with high dropout rates.

✔ Improve education and training and policies meeting new challenges and changes (economic crisis, high youth unemployment rates, high percentages of immigrant or second-generation students)

*Source:
http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=edat_lfse_14&lang=en

Due to the exacerbated political situation in the Turkish-Syrian border, the Turkish partner, the Provincial Governorate of Social Studies based in Mardin just 50km from the Syrian border, had to cancel the experimentation in schools. The pilot was then as a result implemented in four schools (two in Sardinia and two in Spain) instead of six as foreseen in the initial phases of the project.

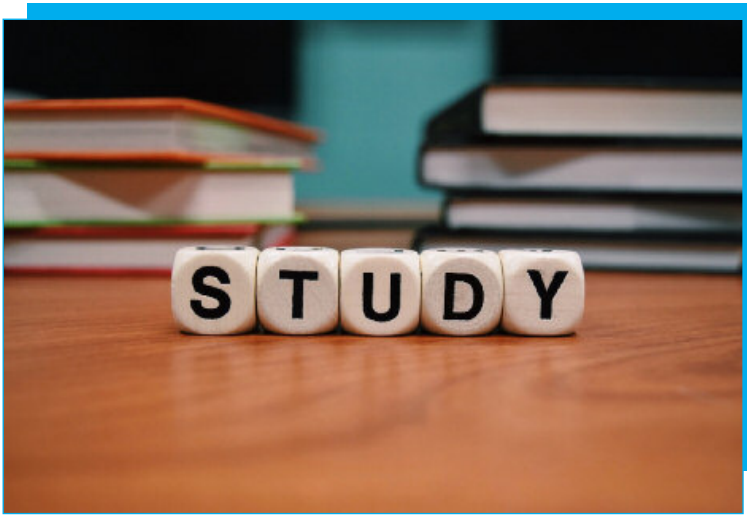
## The Context

Early school leaving is a serious problem in many EU countries. Even if the situation varies from country to country and the causes that determine it are individual to each student, there are some common themes that can be considered: learning difficulties, socio-economic problems and lack of motivation, orientation or support, both at a family and school level. This phenomenon poses a number of problems, not only for youths, but also for the society as a whole, because it limits the opportunities of young people in the labour market, thereby worsening the risks of unemployment and poverty with intergenerational repercussions (EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014). It is a multifactor, diversified and changing phenomenon which, increasingly clear, must be addressed with a holistic and collaborative approach, capable of impacting its many causes, ranging from psychological (problems resulting from lack of motivation, depression, anxiety), socio-economic ones (marginalisation, relational and economic poverty, etc...) and involving all the relevant actors. To be effective, a strategy to prevent and counter early school leaving must be structured as a coordinated and inclusive action, involving a network of partners and decision-makers, key players in schools and vocational training, welfare systems, youth organisations, students and families. It is therefore in this networking framework, as pointed out in the document published by the European Commission titled "A global and integrated approach to school in countering early school leaving: strategic messages" (European Commission, 2015) that Jump@school was designed, developed and implemented. Reducing early school leaving levels below 10% is one of the main goals of Europe 2020, the ten-year strategy promoted by the EU for growth and employment. This goal is one of the reference points for ET2020, a strategic framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training. In 2016 , the European average of early school leaving was around 10.7% compared with 11.9% in 2013 and 13.4% in 2011. As this average is close to the 10% target, it clearly hides some "outliers": countries like Spain (19%), Malta (19.6%), Romania (18.5%), Portugal (14%), and Italy (13,8%). The early school leaving rates of

Spain and Italy fall under the top 5 highest rates in the EU and Turkey is way above any European country justifying the selection of these three countries for the Jump@school project. Finally, National rates do not show the high regional disparities present in several countries, as it is the case in Sardinia compared to the Italian average – ESL rate of 5 points higher in 2016 compared to the National average.

## ESL definition and situation in the countries involved in the Jump@school project

According to the definition of the European Commission, early school leaving (ESL) refers to "young people (18-24 years) that have dropped out of school and vocational training at a level equal to or lower than the lower secondary school and who no longer attend school or any form of vocational training "(Final Report of the Early School Leaving, 2013, P. 8). In statistical terms, ESL rates at European level are measured as the percentage of 18-24 year olds who possess only a lower secondary school qualification or who have left school or education systems. Many EU Member States define and measure early

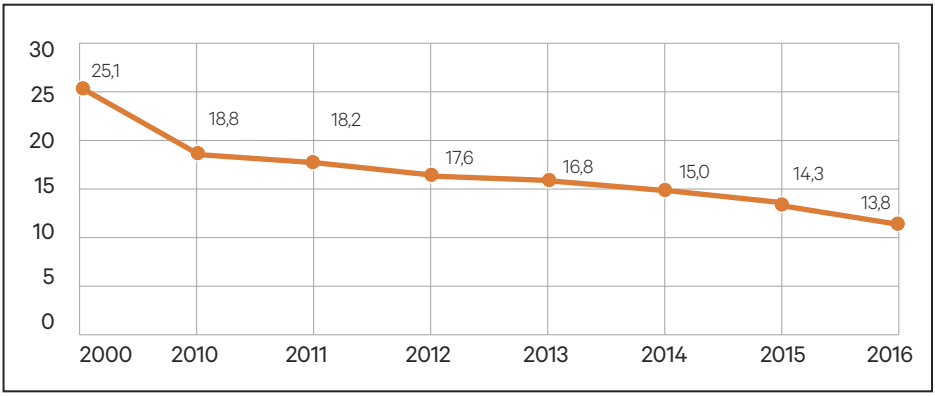


school leaving in different ways: in some cases, ESL may refer to leaving the school system before compulsory schooling, or before obtaining a minimum qualification or just before completing upper secondary school.
For example, in the Italian national context, the indicator is defined as "the percentage of the population aged 18-24 years with a lower secondary school qualification, who have not completed a vocational training course recognized by the Regional Authorities for more than two years and that do not attend school or any training activities"(Istat, 2011). The ESL definition excludes those pupils who leave school, but who later resume their studies to obtain a high school diploma before the age of 25. Since school drop-out data are collected annually in the context of the European Labour Force Survey, those who have taken part in some form of education or training four weeks prior to the survey are excluded (European Commission, 2011). The term ESL is often confused with the terms "drop out" and "NEET" (see box) which, while they all refer to a common problem, express distinct phenomena.
In defining its target group, the Jump@school project took the European definition of

## SIMILAR, BUT DIFFERENT

When it comes to abandoning school, there are different terms that are often used interchangeably. Although they refer to the same general phenomenon, these terms in fact imply differences:
**"Early School Leaving (ESL)"** refers to the failure of persons aged 18 to 24 old to complete upper secondary or equivalent vocational training.
**"Drop-out"** refers to “discontinuing an on-going course e.g. dropping out in the middle of the school term. Drop-out from education can occur at any time and can be experienced by different age groups (Thematic Working Group on 'Early School Leaving', 2013, p. 8)”
The acronym **NEET** indicates, instead, those young people between 15 and 24 years old "Not in Education, Employment or Training", i.e. those who are not included in a school or training course and are not even engaged in a business activity.

early school leaving into account. Bearing in mind that the project was aiming for a, preventive measure, the target group was defined as young people aged between 14 and 17 at risk of dropping out meaning that they were still in the school system and / or vocational training. Italy and Spain represent the two European countries that, together with Romania, Portugal and Malta, record the highest rate of ESL. The early school leaving rate in Italy in 2016 was 13.8%. Although this is a 0.9% reduction compared to 2015, 1.2% compared with 2014 and 11.3% compared with 2000 figures* , this value is still short of the European target set at 10%.

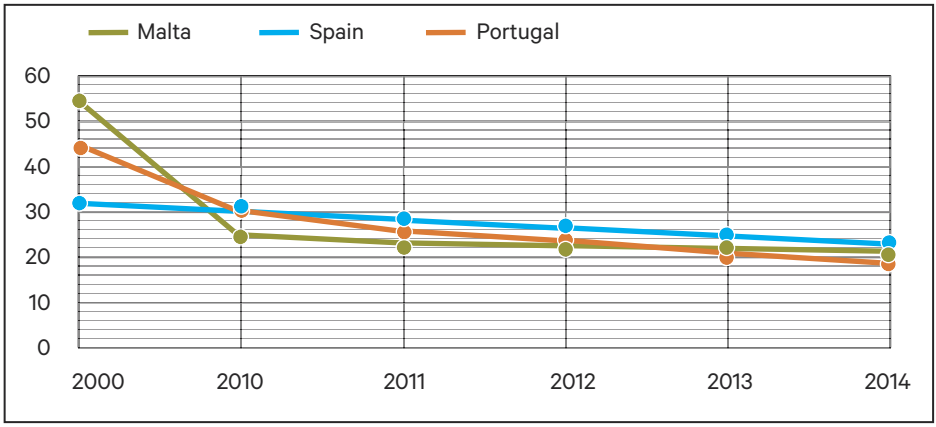



**ESL rates in Italy between 2000 and 2016.**
Source: (European Commission, 2013) and (Eurostat, 2015).

Males are also more likely to leave school than females. In Italy this gender gap was at 5.5 percentage points in 2014 and 4.8 percentage points in 2016. The EU average was at 3.2% in 2014 and 3% in 2016. In countries where early school leaving rate is differentiated by country of birth, Italy shows the highest native gap in 2015 (18.6%), with the early school leaving rate of students born abroad standing at 31.3% compared to 12.7% of "natives".

* http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do

The early school leaving rate in Sardinia, where the intervention was carried out in Italy, is the highest in the whole country, reaching 18% (2016), much higher than the national average (13.8%) and the European one (11.3%). As far as Spain is concerned, in 2014 the country recorded the highest early school leaving rates across Europe with 21.9%, despite a 1.7% decrease compared to 2013 and 7.6% compared to 2000. In 2000, Spain recorded the third highest early school leaving rate, just behind Portugal (43.6%) and Malta (54.3%). In 2014, Portugal had an early school leaving rate of 17.4% and Malta of 20.4%; both less that the Spanish early school leaving rate (21.9%). The most recent figures from 2016 place Spain as second highest with regard to early school leaving rates (19%), just behind Malta (19.6%). The rate of early school leaving in Valencia, where the intervention was implemented, was 22.3% in 2013; slightly lower than the Spanish average of 23.5% for the same year (Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, 2013).




**ESL rates for Spain, Portugal and Malta between 2000 and 2014.**
Source: (European Commission, 2013)

## General risk factors

The reasons that may lead a young person to leave school or training before obtaining a high school diploma are many and often interconnected. Caution should be taken in identifying possible causal links between some predictive factors and the actual school leaving. If, therefore, there is no single path that is common to all cases of early school leaving, it is possible to identify it is possible to identify some recurrent situations that point out to a risk situation.

Starting from the assumption that school leaving is usually the result of a gradual and cumulative process of lack of commitment from school (Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving, 2013), the Austrian Centre for Social Innovation ZSI, in charge of the evaluation of the pilot project, conducted a review of the international literature on school early school leaving. Based on these analyses, it was possible to break down and differentiate risk factors on five levels:

**1. Individual characteristics** Individual characteristics such as gender (male), belonging to an ethnic minority or being born in a foreign country, living in an urban or disadvantaged context, having important health problems

**2. Cognitive abilities and school performance** such as low cognitive ability, disability learning difficulties, disruptive behaviour, low self-esteem, psychological problems, emotional instability, poor organisational skills, destructive behaviour, low grades, high number of absences, suspensions.

Drop-out is usually the result of a progressive and cumulative lack of commitment in school.

**3. Family factors** such as exposure to high levels of family conflict, unstable home situations, low socio-economic status that forces young people to work to support family budgets, low levels of family support, stressful life events (financial difficulties, health problems, early parenthood), low family capital (economic, human, social and cultural).

**4. Attitude towards school** that includes issues such as low levels of concentration and motivation, low level of school satisfaction, alienation from school low commitment to complete an education.

**5. School-level factors** such as being bullied or mobbed, a high percentage of students belonging to an ethnic minority, a negative school climate with poor relationships between teachers and students, as well as between classmates, crowded classrooms and rundown schools, rigid training pathways that do not take into account the individual needs of students, low involvement of students, use of punitive measures resulting in exclusion such as suspensions.

These general risk factors provided the theoretical basis for identifying quantitatively measurable indicators that were used to select the sample of students at risk of early school leaving involved in the Jump@school project. The process of selecting the indicators will be discussed in detail in the section "Identifying the students at risk in the Jump@school project".

## The Jump@school partnership

The Jump@school partnership emerged from the interest of the Autonomous Region of Sardinia for a field experiment that would allow testing a solid school-based approach for preventing early school leaving. The Autonomous Region of Sardinia, in collaboration with CIOFS-FP, put together a partnership capable of contributing at various levels to the achievement of the work objectives. The consortium was created taking into account, on the one hand, the early school leaving rate in the countries where partners work (countries with high ESL rates such as Spain and Italy and countries with low levels such as Austria) and, on the other hand, the specific competences of the various partners in relation to education and schooling. In addition, as required by the call for proposals under which this project is funded, the partners implementing the pilot in their countries are regional authorities directly involved in the management of vocational training and job placement systems to ensure continuity and consistency between the aims of the project and the local socio-economic context.

**THE PARTNERS OF THE JUMP@SCHOOL CONSORTIUM ARE:**

● Autonomous Region of Sardinia - Department of labour, vocational training, cooperation and social security (Italy), responsible for planning and managing the entire regional vocational training system and the active labour policies of the region. The department is the official project coordinator of the Jump@school project and is responsible for the implementation of the pilot in Sardinia.

❒ Fundación de la Comunidad Valenciana del Pacto para el Empleo en la ciudad - (Spain), is a foundation that works in collaboration with local authorities and major trade unions to support the training and employment of disadvantaged people. The foundation l is responsible for implementing the Jump@school pilot in Spanish schools (Valencia).

◆ Provincial Governorate of Social Studies of Mardin (Turkey) is a local authority responsible for the management of education, tourism, culture and social affairs at a local level. For Jump@School, the governorate would have been responsible for the implementation of the pilot project in Turkish schools which, as already mentioned, was not possible because of the intensification of the conflict on the Turkish-Syrian border.

● CIOFS-FP (Italy) is a non-profit organisation specialised in vocational training and planning in Italy and Europe and has a wealth of experience in the transfer of good practices to counter social exclusion, discrimination, unemployment and marginalisation of young people. For Jump@School, it worked on the logic model of intervention and supported the implementation of the pilot project in Sardinian schools. It also supported the Autonomous Region of Sardinia in management and administrative coordination of the project.

▼ ZSI – Centre for Social Innovation (Austria) is an independent scientific institute working at European level in the field of social sciences and applied social and interdisciplinary research. For Jump@School it was responsible for designing evaluation, developing the data collection tools, and monitoring and evaluating the impact of the pilot.

● Finis Terrae (Italy) is a training and consulting agency with remarkable experience in youth network management, communication and dissemination strategies. Within

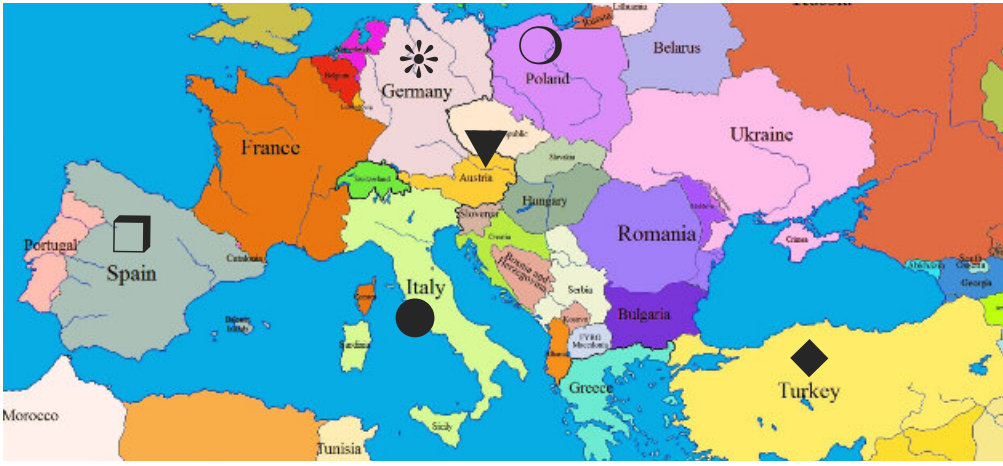
Jump@school project it focused mainly on the dissemination of results and knowledge and communication (website, brochures, management of the project social media profile).

✳ **MetropolisNet** (Germany) is a network of organisations promoting employment and social cohesion in major cities and European urban areas. For the Jump@school project, it contributed to enhancing results at European level, through coordination of exchange seminars between actors and the promotion of the use of concrete project results.

❍ **CARITAS - Archdiocese of Gdansk** (Poland) is a religious association active in social work. In particular, in Sopot, (Poland) it implements the project "Second Chance School" which strives to reconnect young people who have dropped-out of school with education. For the Jump@school project, it supported the partnership in designing the logic model and in enhancing and disseminating the results.

● **IVAL - Italian Institute of Evaluation** (Italy) is an independent organisation specialising in evaluation, research and monitoring in the various areas of community welfare, education and de-

The Jump@school partnership emerged from the interest of the Autonomous Region of Sardinia for a field experiment that would allow testing a solid school-based approach for preventing early school leaving.



velopment. For Jump@school it was responsible for the internal project evaluation and the qualitative evaluation of the pilot in the schools.

❍ **Meridium** (Poland) is a research, training and counselling institute supporting support school and job placement in collaboration with the Pozna regional labour office. Expert of the Second Chance School practice, for the Jump@school project, it provided support in dissemination and enhancement activities, particularly in eastern Europe.

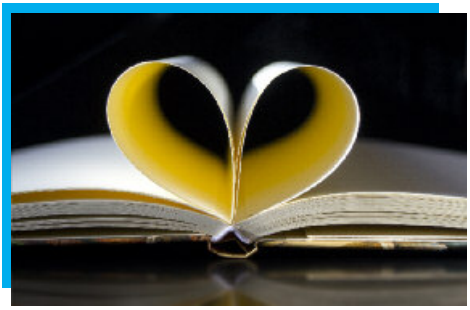
## Identification of students at risk

We have seen in the previous paragraphs how the main causes and motivations behind early school leaving are the result of a complex interplay between structural, social and personal factors related to the history of each individual student. How can we then establish measurable and statistically valid quantitative indicators that allow us to reliably identify students at risk of early school leaving? Based on a literature review (Allensworth / Easton 2005, 2007; Neild / Balfanz 2006; Duckworth / Seligman 2006; Neisser et al 1996; Jimerson et al 2000; Fredericks et al. 2004; Traag / Van der Velden

2008), ZSI, the project partner responsible for the design of the experimental model as well as the evaluation of the pilot, highlighted how there are several valid approaches to measuring risk behaviour in quantifiable terms. Indicators, for example, can be based on demographic characteristics (such as gender, number of repeated school years, family background with special attention to single parent families), socio-economic characteristics (such as family income, teenage pregnancies, having changed schools many times) or on personal aspects that are most influential on performance and attitudes towards school (e.g. school performance, self-discipline, disruptive behaviour, absenteeism). Whatever the approach and considering the lack of access to the students' demographic data, the following three predictive factors have were identified (Allensworth / Easton 2005, 2007; Neild / Balfanz 2006) as the most relevant in assessing the likelihood of whether a student will complete his or her studies:

- **School performance** measurable in terms of the number of negative grades in the last academic year or grade point average compared to a risk threshold.
- **Attendance** measurable in terms of the number of justified and unjustified days of absence from school compared to a risk threshold..
- **Disruptive behaviours** measurable in terms of number of disciplinary measures or suspensions compared to a risk threshold.

Right from the start, the information received from the local researchers indicated that the different schools selected to participate in the Jump@school experimentation did not gather information on attendance and disruptive behaviour in a common format that could be used to identify students at risk of early school leaving in a comparative form.



These findings, however, at least in the Italian context, brought to light the lack of a structural monitoring system of absences, thus potentially losing crucial information of identifying students at risk of early school leaving early enough (this issue will be touched on again in the final sections of this report).

**The selection process of the 480 students at risk of school early school leaving for the Jump@school project was therefore based, in addition to the age range (14-17 years), also on the performance indicator, measured in terms of average grades compared with a risk threshold** (5.99 for Spain and 6.99 for Italy, corresponding to a 2.0 average in the American rating system, used as an international reference benchmark and adapted to local contexts). In addition, checking the absences of the students at two moments in time before the commencement of the experimentation was useful in excluding those students who had already dropped out of school at the end of the first four months of the academic year, even though they were still formally enrolled.

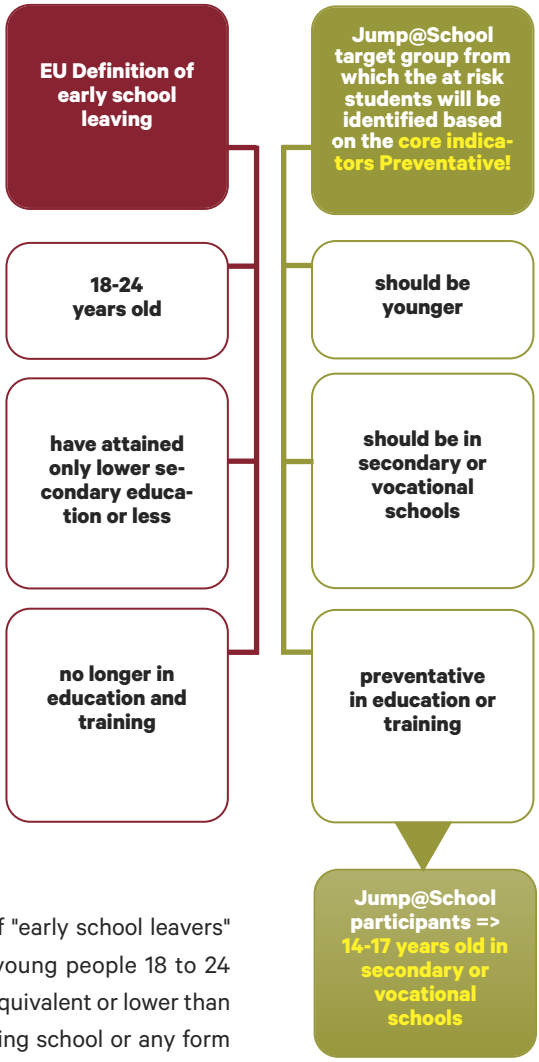
As far as the sample size is concerned, ZSI , based on a set of statistical parameters (likelihood, desired statistical power, effect) and calculations using the statistical software "G * Power", the minimum number of participants to be assigned to each group (testing and control) was determined at 55. Due to the risk of post-assignment attrition (abandonment of the trial), this number was increased to 60.

Thus, 120 students at risk of early school leaving (according to the indicator chosen) were randomly sampled in each school that participated in the Jump@school project.

| Country | Name of school | Location | Type of school | Nr of students |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Italy | IPSAR | Tortolì | State vocational secondary school | 699 (35 classe) |
| | G. Ferraris | Iglesias | State vocational secondary school | 500 (29 classes) |
| Spain | Instituto de Enseñanza Secundaria Juan de Garay | Valencia | Secondary education and secondary upper education school | 900 (27 classes) |
| | Instituto de Enseñanza Secundaria Malilla | Valencia | Secondary education and secondary upper education school | 640 (22 classes) |

Of these, 60 were randomly assigned using a statistical procedure on the statistical software SPSS to the experimental/intervention/ treatment group that received the intervention and 60 to the control group that did not participate in the Jump@school activities. The criteria for selecting the schools was the interest in combatting the ESL problem, the willingness to participate in the pilot and a sufficiently high student population (at least 400) to allow the selection of 120 students at risk of early school leaving in each school. The selected schools, two in each country, had to be of the same type, i.e. all vocational secondary schools.

The aim of the Jump@school project was to test the effectiveness of an action aimed at preventing early school leaving. As a result, the reference target from which the sample was selected for the pilot does not correspond to that of "early school leavers" as defined in the European context ("young people 18 to 24 years old who leave school with a level equivalent or lower than secondary school and no longer attending school or any form of vocational training "Final Report of Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving, 2013) but rather it references the group just before they fall into this definition. "Our" young boys and girls are therefore younger (between 14 and 17) and still attend secondary school but with characteristics considered at risk of early school leaving.



## The selection of good practices to counter early school leaving

The first step towards the definition of the Jump@school intervention was the collection and selection of good practices to counter early school leaving, realised or being implemented in the European countries where the partners work and beyond. A clear picture of the state of play allowed the definition of a unique model, rooted in pilots already validated in the European context. ZSI and CIOSF-FP developed a format for describing these successful experiences and defined eight criteria for their selection. Of the 38 good practices presented by the partners, 14 were considered in line with these criteria and

were subsequently analysed in detail. The selection criteria were:
selezione sono stati:

**Content:** Is the intervention innovative and relevant to inform future policies? Does the intervention have a coherent theoretical basis (is it clear how the intervention causes change?)

**Implementation:** How complex is it to implement the intervention in practice?

**Standardisation:** Is it possible to implement the intervention in a standardised way (fidelity to protocol) in multiple contexts without substantial changes to the protocol?

**Impact**: Does existing evidence suggest that the intervention is likely to be effective? Will it have a measurable impact on a range of outcome indicators?
**Transferability**: Can the intervention be properly implemented and replicated by others, in other contexts?
**Costs**: what are the costs of the intervention? Are they sustainable?
**Ethical aspects**: Are there ethical concerns regarding the action? Is it possible to obtain informed consent from students and parents?
**Risks and Threats:** what are the potential obstacles to the implementation of the intervention?
The point of this analysis was the identification of recurring elements common to these fourteen promising practices, to be used as an empirical and theoretical basis for the development of the Jump@school Intervention. Of these emerging elements, the partnership selected three, namely:

1. **The use of laboratories** (both professional and non-professional) inside and outside the school as a methodology that can work on counselling and motivation of students at risk of early school leaving.

2. **Case management**, i.e. the development of personalised actions working on the needs of the individual student ("case"), aimed at identifying useful individual paths that to address their problem in their specific context by also activating multiple resources in their territories.

3. **Vocational guidance and support during transitions**, i.e. actions aimed at supporting students in delicate transition phases within the school system and / or towards the labour market with counselling features

## The Logic Model of Intervention (LMI)

A logic model is used as a roadmap for projects to describe the link between the actions or the interventions to be implemented with the desired results.It is an indispensable instrument for the development, coordination, consistency and effectiveness of an intervention. Designing a logic model is helpful in thinking about the process of change, which the project aims to bring about:

- identifying the issues of the target group (students at risk of ESL)
- specifying the desired results and how these results will be measured
- developing a strategy of achieving the goals.

**More in detail, a logic model consists of the following elements:**

**Resources / inputs:** the human, financial and / or organisational resources needed to implement the project / activities.

**Activities:** what the project realizes with the resources: tools, events, workshops, actions. The activities serve to bring about the desired change.

**Outputs:** The project's direct results, which are generally referred to as the number of services and actions implemented.

**Outcomes:** specific changes in attitudes, behaviours, knowledge, abilities, and so on, which should derive from project activities and actions.

**Impact:** system-level changes in attitudes, behaviours, knowledge, skills etc. that should arise from the project activities and interventions and / or the changes at the political level.

The Jump@school logic model of intervention coordinated by CIOFS-FP and articulated in several stages of work, was a participatory and complex process that involved all project partners and took shape starting with pedagogical and methodological reflections arising from the analysis of good practices combatting early school leaving from a number of European countries within and outside the partnership. Its complexity is also derived from the fact that each activity was conceived in relation to the counterfactual evaluation model that led the whole process (and vice versa), which involved

lots of efforts in terms of design and coordination prior to action. One of the crucial aspects of this design was the need to build an action that was at the same time educational, sufficiently standardised, clearly defined and limited in time as to be implemented (and therefore evaluated) in all schools but at the same time would allow a certain degree of adaptability to the specific characteristics of each experimental context without losing its overall validity. The partnership therefore established that the LMI did not specifically define the contents of each individual activity to be carried out in schools (workshops, individual meetings, etc.), but rather focused on the objectives, i.e. those risk factors that it intended to face. For example, it was established that the main risk factors (objectives) on which all workshops in each school would focus on were:

- "Poor commitment to completing a course of study", "Passiveness", "Low attendance at school" (Attitude towards the school)
- "Low cognitive abilities", "Disruptive Behaviour", "Poor organizational skills" (Cognitive Skills and School Performance).

A logic model is used as a roadmap for projects to describe the link between actions and interventions and the desired outcomes

Each local team then planned activities that it deemed useful to achieve the objectives based on the local context, resources and the specific features of the intervention group. The Jump@school logic model of intervention necessitated at least two workshops and four individual counselling sessions per intervention group student as well as a support action on the self-esteem and motivation. The logic model also provided a set of operating grids and reference templates for planning, tracking, and following-up the activities to support the work of Jump@Operators in schools and to facilitate the exchange of information between different Jump@Operators, in various contexts. In the framework of the logic model, the timing and priorities of each stage of the action were also determined by elaborating a GANTT chart and the specific plans for each school involved in the pilot.

### INPUT

The logic model of intervention provided a detailed plan of the financial and human resources necessary for the implementation of the action. In particular, this centred around the main professional figure involved, the JumpOperator (see section "the Action" for a description of their competences and tasks), who has organised and guided the individual course of the students involved with a view to guaranteeing mentorship. In addition to JumpOperators, a key role was entrusted to the local researchers who had the task of collecting useful data on the field for impact assessment of the intervention.

### ACTIVITIES

The During the 5 months of the action in schools, the logic model of intervention provided the following activities which are all based on a strong educational relationship between the JumpOperator and every single student who participated (intervention group participants):

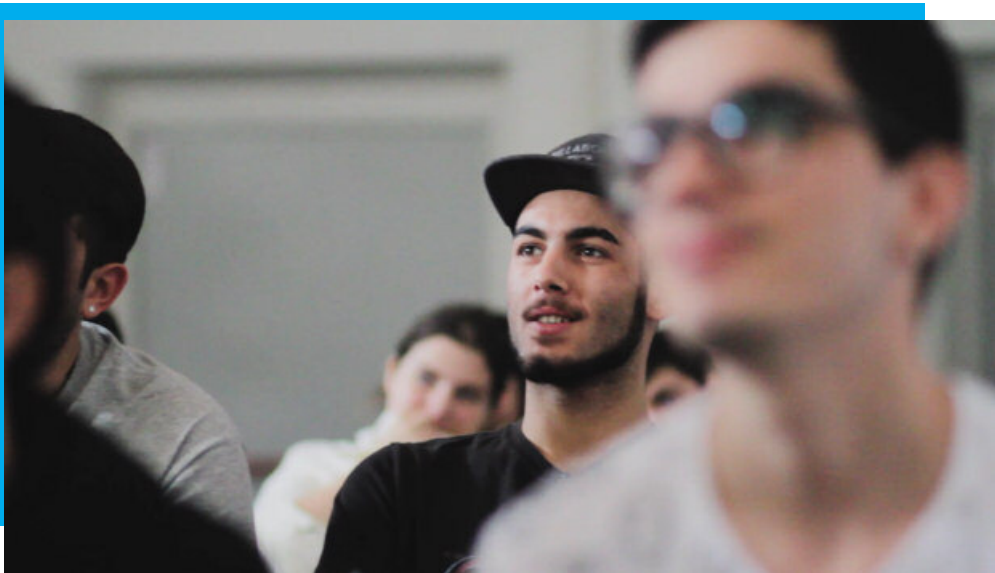
#### Individual activities (students alone or with JumpOperators)

- A first individual meeting between the JumpOperator and the student for the initial definition of each participant's profile and the beginning of the formulation of the Individual Development Plan (IDP) based on the student's main risk factors, as well as their wishes (See section "the action" for a IDP description).

- At least 4 individual counselling sessions with the JumpOperator, where to develop the IDP, guaranteeing the availability of the operator to have other shorter and more informal meetings throughout the duration of the action.
- Other individual activities, agreed with and monitored by the JumpOperator in line with the IDP, to be run outside of school autonomously or in collaboration with associations in the area (volunteer associations, sports clubs, community centres, etc.) such as extra tuition on school subjects, sports, dance, theatre, volunteer services, etc.

### Group activities (all the intervention group students together or divided into smaller groups)

- A kick-off meeting to "celebrate" the beginning of the (Jump@School) journey, to break the ice and to establish the feeling of belonging to a group.
- Support action on self-esteem and motivation (9 hours in total in multiple sessions, in groups of 10-12 participants)
- 2 workshops, possibly with about 10-12 students in each workshop lasting a total of 8 hours (four two-hour sessions). The LMI defined three types of workshops that could be implemented: communication, creative and "learning to learn" workshops.



- Other possible collective activities planned by the JumpOperator and students depending on collective needs and available resources include: cultural trips, parties at the end of a workshop to share the product of the workshop itself, sports events etc..
- A final event at the end of the pathway.

## OUTPUTS

Outputs are tangible results, derived directly from activities such as:

- The number of Individual Development Plan Agreements (IDPA) signed and description of the follow-up process
- The defined profile of the JumpOperator profile, specialised in countering ESL
- List of effective workshops and activities organised so as to help young people at risk of ESL to be re-motivated to attend school or reoriented to other educational paths
- A 9-hour module to improve reflection, self-esteem, problem-solving and decision-making ability.
- Videos or other outputs of the workshops

## OUTCOMES

The outcomes, unlike the impacts, are to be understood in the short term, that is, the changes in attitudes, behaviours, knowledge, skills etc. that are expected to happen within 1-3 years from the start of the activities of the program. Short-term results are usually expressed individually among the participants of the program:

- Increased attendance rate
- Increased number of students intending to go to college
- Increased student support
- Greater rngagement in school and, in general, more positive attitude with regard to "staying in school".

## IMPACT

Impacts are wide-ranging changes in organisations, communities, or systems following the activities of the program within 7-10 years:

- Long-term political and financial commitment to reducing early school leaving and keeping it high on the political agenda.
- Supporting schools to develop favourable and supportive learning environments focused on the individual needs of individual pupils.

- Promotion and support of multi-professional teams (psychologists, educators, pedagogics) in schools to address early school leaving.
- Contribution to a better understanding of early school leaving in the wider society.
- Enabling school staff (both teachers and other professionals in the school context) to provide students with differentiated learning support in an inclusive and individualised way.

## Training of the operators

Along with the selection of good practices and the construction of the logic model, another preparatory activity for the implementation of the Jump@school intervention was the training of JumpOperators as well as the local researchers responsible for data collection in schools. The training, co-ordinated by the project partners ZSI and CIOFS-FP, took place at three meetings: in Istanbul, Valencia and Cagliari with the aim of creating a space for sharing and exchange of ideas and information between project partners on for example the research goals, the key aspects of the pedagogical, organisational and operational approach of the action and the structure and procedures of data collection for the evaluation. In addition, issues relating to the ethical principles governing implementation of the pilot including those specifically affecting the work of the local researchers and the relationships to be maintained with other reference professionals at the local and transnational level were also addressed, also paying attention to building a coordinated and cooperative local team. Training sessions were followed up by coaching and tutoring activities by ZSI and CIOFS-FP to support all local operators during the 5-months implementation period.

Supporting schools to develop favourable and supportive learning environments focused on the individual needs of individual pupils is one of the impacts of the project

## Everybody at school: the Jump@school intervention

The implementation of the intervention in schools was the heart of the Jump@school project. Intervention or action refers to all those activities, both individual and collective, in which the students of the intervention/experimental/treatment group in each participating school took part in during the 5-month duration (between January and

June 2016) of the Jump@school pilot. The treatment group participants are those students who were randomly assigned to receive the Jump@school intervention as compared to those randomly assigned to the control group – who were similar in characteristics but did not enjoy the support of the JumpOperators – but whose results were compared against those of the treatment group to measure the impact of the intervention. In total, the intervention group included 240 pupils, of both genders, mainly falling in the 14 to 17 age group. The control group was made up of the same number of participants with very similar characteristics (assured by the random assignment of the participants into the two groups) making a total of 480 participants in the Jump@school project over two countries (Spain and Italy) in four schools. The methodological aspects of pilot will be described in detail in a dedicated section below.

The development of the intervention was supported by the entire project partnership as already discussed above, which provided objectives, guidelines and tools for managing and monitoring the activities. Among other things, the ethical aspects of the pilot project were considered; especially issues relating to the optimal duration and intensity of the activities as well as the workload of the local teams responsible for its implementation. The main aim of the Jump@school intervention was to try to reduce the rates of early school leaving in the contexts considered by reducing some of the risk factors and their effects. This goal was pursued by working on changing the relationship between students and the school system through offering them creative and alternative activities, through which they could experience their own needs and limits, discover and change their attitudes and interests especially with regard to "staying" in school and achieving positive learning outcomes and developing their skills. Before describing the activities that made up this model of intervention in great detail, the general principles are recalled below:

1. Supporting cognitive and non-cognitive abilities. The results of some economic and social studies indicate that non-cognitive skills, particularly relating to social, participatory and emotional skills, are more important for long-term results, such as education or employment, compared to those purely cognitive (Carneiro et al, 2011). James Heckman, US economist and Nobel prize winner, concludes that policies should focus on developing skills such as perseverance, reliability, and consistency. Empirical data confirm that mentoring and motivational programmes addressed to disadvantaged teenagers are particularly effective (Heckman and Rubinstein, 2011). Cognitive and non-cognitive skills are not in conflict with each other, but rather, they "nourish" one another. However, normal school paths often focus only on the first rather than on a holistic approach, which would support and promotion of soft skills and focus on self-esteem and motivation, through structured activities with students based on cognitive knowledge, knowledge of the heart (emotional learning) and of the hands (practical and physical abilities).

2. Working on relationships and emotional support. Developing relationships formed one of the central points of the path: relationships between each student and the JumpOperator who supported and accompanied him/her throughout the five-month period of intervention; between the student and the rest of the group of participants (in the intervention group through group activities) and between the student and his/her school. As emotional aspects such as anxiety, poor sense of belonging and motivation, low self-esteem and self-efficacy are important factors of early school leaving, the intervention could not ignore them. Particularly important was therefore the emotional support of the students, by providing them with JumpOperators, who were able to accommodate and address their needs and criticalities, respecting the times and spaces needed to build a trusted relationship.

3. Propose an alternative perspective for skills development. Jump@school tried to build an action that avoided the common mistake of dealing with increasing students' demotivation towards school traditional remedies such as additional homework, additional literacy and numeracy lessons. The activities of the Jump@school intervention therefore sought to offer the students new "entrance doors" for the discovery of their abilities and skills through for example manual work, creativity, images and storytelling.

4. Do not interfere with the ordinary school path. The Jump@school activities, available only for the intervention group, were structured in a way that they minimised any possible conflicts with the ordinary curriculum and school schedule of the students (the regular school time). In reality however, this was not always possible and in some cases, it resulted in friction with different stakeholders such as teachers in the schools (more information in the results section). Participation in the pilot was on a voluntary basis resulting from a process of negotiation and collaboration involving all concerned actors (students, parents, school leaders, teachers) who were informed and gave their consent on the general modalities, timing and commitment implied by the pilot. In the case of the Italian schools, parental consent for participation was implicit since the Jump@school intervention was included in the “Piano dell’Offerta Formativa”, P.O.F. (training offer plan) and was therefore included in the official activities of the school year 2015/2016. In one Spanish school both the control and intervention group participants required parental consent, whereas in the other Spanish school only the intervention group participants required parental consent. All participants were free to withdraw from participating from the activities of the project at any time.

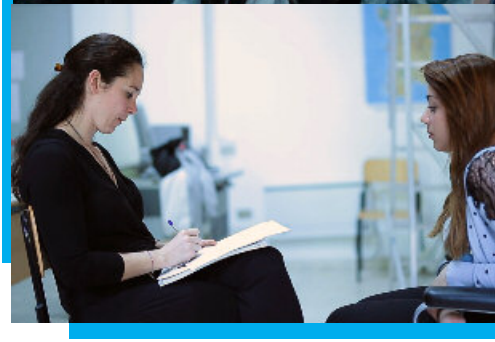
## The Protagonists

### The beneficiaries of the intervention

1 240 students who mainly fell in the age group of 14 to 17 years (there were some exception as this indicator was differentiated by grade level rather than by individual students), attending a vocational secondary school in Italy (Sardinia) and in Spain (Valencia), who were determined to be at risk of early school leaving based on their grade point average (GPA) at the end of the school year 2014/2015 (equivalent GPAs in Italy and Spain of below 2.0 in the American rating system). 240 who were very similar to this group provided the control group for the study. Their grades and absences were collected at two points in time and they were required to fill in a self-assessment questionnaire at these points in time but did not receive the Jump@school intervention.).

### The JumpOperators

2 The key professional figure of the project was the the JumpOperator or JumpO, who organised and guided the individual journey of each of the intervention group participants. Per school, there were two JumpOs each in charge of a maximum of 30 students. Identifying the profile, skills and tasks of JumpOS was a central part of the partnership's work. JumpOperators are experienced professionals such as tutors or counsellors, social workers or youth workers, or professional case managers. They are not necessarily psychologists, but rather educators, who can build positive relationships with the students, speak "their language", while maintaining the authority of a guide. During the intervention, the JumpOperators accompany the students in their entirety and complexity, supporting them in their pursuit of well-being and self-confidence inside and outside school. They are "facilitators and mediators of relationships" that



carry out activities acknowledged and reinforces school, but they are not part of the school. In particular, JumpOperators have the following characteristics:

- ☑ High analytical and are empathic
- ☑ Experience in working with young people at risk of leaving school early
- ☑ Experience in managing and facilitating group activities and in particular, creative workshops
- ☑ Good communication and active listening skills
- ☑ Flexibility and openness to new ideas and challenges
- ☑ Ability to put into practice knowledge concerning motivation
- ☑ Ability to manage formal and informal networks
- ☑ Knowledge of the local job market and its characteristics
- ☑ Knowledge of local resources in terms of local organisations (e.g. sporting and recreational) and youth services (e.g. counsellors, centres for psychological support, reproductive health, orientation and learning support) that can support the objectives of the intervention, where required.

Each intervention group of 60 students relied on the presence of two JumpOperators for the duration of the intervention, who had the following operational tasks:

- ➡ Understand the project and in particular its experimental nature.
- ➡ Develop a trusted relationship with the students participating in the intervention.
- ➡ Organise and conduct both individual and group activities to manage and monitor the individual path of each student.
- ➡ Definition of the individual development plan agreement (IDPA) together with each student during the individual sessions.
- ➡ Documentation and monitoring of all pilot activities.
- ➡ Build and facilitate good relationships with schools, local researchers, other stakeholders (including experts who could support in the organisation and running of workshops) and, where appropriate, with families

## Local Researchers

3 Given the experimental nature of the project, the local researchers, coordinated by the project partner ZSI, played a decisive role in guaranteeing reliability of the data collected to measure the evolution and impact of the intervention. In addition to staying in constant communication with the JumpOperators and the school reference people, they were especially responsible for:

- Establishing a good relationship with all the participants of the experimentation (both in the intervention and control group) and communicating with them the research goals in line with the communication strategy decided on by the partnership (part-blinding) and where necessary explaining data collection tools in their entirety or aspects thereof to them.
- Translating the different data collection tools into the local language and entries into English if necessary.
- Collecting secondary data on the main indicator (the GPA) to select the 120 students at risk of early school leaving in each school before and after the intervention, to determine the impact of the experiment on this indicator.
- Administering the various questionnaires to the participants and entering the responses in a coded system, system to ensure straightforward analysis by the ZSI evaluation team.

## The local community

4 The region in which the schools taking part in the project were located was an integral part of the intervention. On the one hand, local services were able to provide free support services such as psychological, healthcare, guidance for those students whose needs exceeded the support provided by JumpOperators. At the same time, various activities, and in particular, group workshops, were organised in collaboration with and / or at local facilities and businesses, also to enhance the relationship between the educational pathways and the socio-economic context of region.

Each intervention group of 60 students relied on the presence of two JumpOperators for the duration of the intervention, who had the following operational tasks:

# IL TEAM SUL CAMPO

## Italy

**Stefano Simola** (JumpOperator), a Philosophy graduate, is an expert in philosophical practices and participatory design techniques. He has experience in working with difficult children in schools and at home.

**Giulia Zucca** (JumpOperator) is a psychologist and dance therapist. She graduated in refugee care from the University of Essex (UK) in 2015. She worked in dance and movement projects in schools as well as projects to counter early school leaving. She is currently working within the system of temporary protection (SPRAR) to conduct group activities of psychological support to refugees.

**Roberta Manca** (researcher) is a clinical psychologist, working with teenagers and young people, and deals with research and activities in the field of early school leaving and social inclusion.

**Fabiana Barca** (researcher) is a certified labour psychologist and psychotherapist in training and deals with school and vocational guidance. She works as a therapist in a rehabilitation centre for drug addicts and is also co-ordinator in a SPRAR project (protection system for asylum seekers and refugees).

**Manuela Cucca** (JumpOperator) is an educator specialized in the treatment of special educational needs and learning disabilities. She works as home tutor and in nursery schools. She deals with hypoacusia, emotional literacy, school and vocational guidance. She has worked in the territorial educational service for minors and in a day centre for adults with mental disabilities.

**Anna Lisa Lai** (JumpOperator) is a social worker, family mediator and president /counsellor of the "Centro Antiviolenza Mai più Violate", which protects female victims of violence and their children. She is a regional equal opportunities commissioner.

# Spain

**Pepa Domingo** (JumpOperator) is a pedagogue, teacher and collaborator in various socio-educational projects. She specialises in educational coaching and emotional literacy. She has a Master's degree in School Performance and Early School Leaving and is a family and school mediator.

**Camila Bozzo** (JumpOperator). With a degree in Pedagogy and a Master's degree in Politics, administration and management for educational organisations, she works as an occupational counsellor, educator and trainer and also deals with curriculum development and intercultural mediation.

**Sara Gabarda** (Researcher) is a social educator and trainer. She has a longstanding experience in designing, implementing and evaluating projects in support of children, adolescents and adults with diverse educational and social needs.

**Pilar Valiente** (JumpOperator) is a pedagogue and expert in conducting and facilitating group activities for teenagers, and has worked as a trainer for several years and with different student groups.

**Eva Maria Fauste Garcia** (JumpOperator) is a pedagogue and social educator for various Spanish organisations and foundations. She is involved in social inclusion and job placement. She coordinates the daytime aggregation centre for teenagers in Aldaia, Valencia.

**María Escriche Pallarés** (Researcher) with a degree in special education, is a teacher and co-ordinator of educational activities for children and young people. She has 8 years of experience in the field of special education and has worked as an emotional educator with teenagers.

## The activities

As already mentioned, the "package" of activities offered to participants was a balanced set of individual activities aimed at providing each student with a dedicated listening and planning space (thanks to a "one to one" relationship with the JumpOperator), combined with group sessions cantered on the development of key skills to support the motivation of students in relation to "staying in school".

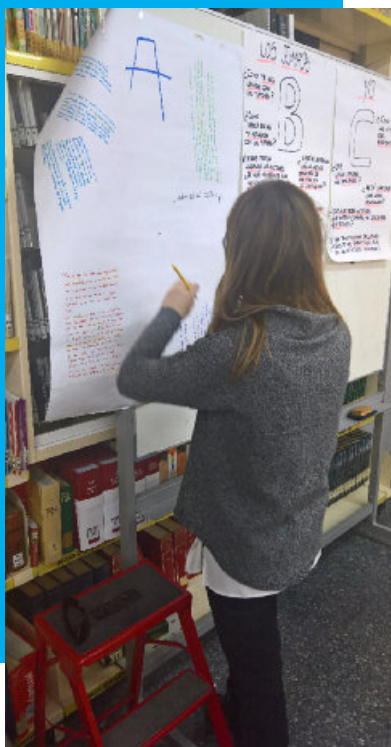
### 1 Individual activities

Each student had access to a minimum of four individual meetings with the JumpOperator with the possibility of extension based on individual needs of the students. The JumpOperator, therefore, became a flexible, welcoming and reliable resource with whom the beneficiaries could also go to for shorter, informal meetings to address issues such as university choice, compilation of CV, search for traineeships or solving problems with classmates, parents, with themselves.

The four compulsory meetings focused on the individual students, their resources, needs and goals (school and extra-curricular), organised as follows:

**1st interview:** compiling the initial student profile and stipulating an agreement between the student and the JumpOperator (IDPA) about the goals to be worked on together.
**2nd interview:** starting to work on the defined goals by priority and on individualised activities.
**3rd interview:** monitoring and verifying the goals achieved during the course as well as the activities carried out and evaluating the possible inclusion of additional goals to the IDPA.
**A final interview:** analysis of the work done over the intervention period, evaluation the goals achieved and those that need to be worked on further.

Compiling the initial profile of each participant was the first step towards a more in depth knowledge and understanding between JumpOperators and students. It was about collecting useful information to get to know the student with respect to possible ESL risk factors. Typical questions were about failures, unjustified absences, relationship with teachers, examinations and tests, family situation, friends, future prospects and their own interests. A questionnaire to support the JumpOperators with the initial profiling was provided to them, however at the same time leaving them free to use more informal tools to get closer to participants. Whatever the collection tool used, the initial student profile was a key resource for understanding each participant and tracking their path, which was then linked back to the IDPA.



The Individual Development Plan Agreement (IDPA) can be considered as the most important document of the entire pilot project, as it is a sort of formal, "contract" or sign of commitment between the student and the JumpOperator representing the project.

Together, the student and the JumpOperator defined and agreed upon learning objectives and the critical points to be addressed by designing the activities to be carried out during the five months of the intervention. In this process,, the JumpOperator enhances the sense of continuity and consistency in the students by showing them the connection between the individual and group activities they choose (including any activities that the students take part in independently of the school),

In the Spanish schools, individual work with students was a particularly important aspect of the intervention. There was a special focus on reflecting on future ambitions and strengthening the learning methodology for the students as this was identified as a common need. JumpOperators used a variety of tools and techniques to help participants identify their goals, change negative attitudes about themselves and plan their school work in relation to their abilities. For example, it was proposed to use a weekly and daily calendar for strategic homework management and tests in class, providing a number of tips on approaching the most difficult subjects and alternating learning and rest, thereby introducing a routine that could facilitate learning. The SWOT matrix was used to invite students to think about their own internal resources (strengths and weaknesses) and context (opportunities and threats), as well as to project into the future through an instrument called "a letter from the future", in which each participant received "an imaginary letter" from their future self, describing who they have become and how they face the small and big challenges of adulthood.

## 2 Group activities

In addition to individual sessions with the JumpOperator, the intervention proposed a series of activities which the students carried out with either with all the participants of the intervention group altogether or in small groups.

### The first meeting

After the participants were selected and the first individual interviews with each of the intervention group participants had taken place, all the 60 students in the intervention group per school celebrated the official start of the pathway through a group event, with the aim of "warming up" and starting to create a feeling of belonging to the project and to the group, in a convivial and informal climate. In some cases, this meeting also represented an opportunity to propose and illustrate some features of the Jump@school intervention and project by resorting to workshops and action-oriented games.

### The workshops

Every intervention group participant had the opportunity to take part in two workshops, of eight hours' duration each, divided into several sub-sessions usually of two hours each, in groups made up of about 12 students. To ensure the participation of all the students in the intervention group, several editions of every workshop were held. Each workshop was planned taking into account the students' risk factors, their wishes and the opportunities provided by the local context (experts, NGOs or associations, craftsmen or companies willing to contribute to organising an activity). The general goal of the workshops was restoring the students' feeling of self-efficacy and self-esteem, allowing them to see themselves as individuals with capabilities thanks to creative and engaging activities with concrete and sometimes even tangible results through the students' hands-on contribution, by supporting and being supported by the group. Every workshop was structured in

The Individual Development Plan Agreement (IDPA) is to be regarded as the most important document in the whole experiment, as it represented a sort of "contract" between the student and the JumpOperator

reference to the eight key skills for lifelong learning defined according to the European framework. For instance, the intervention group of the IPSAR Vocational Training School (wine and food and hotel hospitality – farming and rural development – welfare services – manufacturing and craft industries) of Tortoli, Sardinia, took part in a guided fishing workshop and in one devoted to food photography, both consistent with the school and possible training pathway to be followed by the students.

**The guided fishing workshop** took place at the Tortoli pond, in cooperation with the fishermen's cooperative "Cooperativa Pescatori Tortoli", which promotes environmental-related activities through the educational farm and environmental education centre, with the aim of making students familiar with the fishing sector (molluscs, oysters, eels and mullet) and its culture. Also thanks to the participation of a biologist, students had the opportunity to witness and take part in a series of activities such as fishing in fish-farming facilities, selecting fish, learning to identify the various species, processing fish in ready-to-use product, processing of oysters, purifying and labelling mussels, producing and processing mullet bottarga, using tools to measure salinity, temperature, oxygenation, water density and pH levels in the lagoon. The workshop allowed students to acquire specific skills in the field of fishing, cooking and employment opportunities linked to this sector and at the same time allowing them to work on topics such as socialising, self-esteem and local culture.

**Photographing food and beverages** was the topic of the second workshop chosen for this intervention group in Tortoli. This is a highly specialised skill requiring techniques that allow food to look attractive and savoury. Guided by a professional photographer, the students learnt to position lights, "set out" a dish for the shot and learnt how the professional digital camera and the flash work. The material produced, i.e. a series of photographic panels, represented for the students a concrete trace of their pathway within the project, a "trace" permanently exhibited inside the school premises.

Also in Iglesias images were one of the solutions adopted by students to tell their stories. The students of the vocational training school IPTA Galileo Ferraris in fact took part in a **video-making and photography workshop**, with the support of a professional photographer. As a "formal" approach was considered inappropriate, the workshop was organised in such a way as to illustrate in practical terms the main dynamics in the world of photography and video-making, so as to provide tips for experimenting, with a focus on light, which is essential to make effective shots, and image post-production techniques. The shot and counter-shot theory was illustrated, giving the students a chance to actively experiment the functioning of this type of shooting. The workshop ended with the production of a collective interview in which students illustrated, in a fun way, what they think of school and the project they are participating in. The photographs made were placed onto a 150x100 cm panel, and are currently exhibited within the school.

In Iglesias, the intervention group's students also took part in a **workshop on creative writing and comics**. The workshop was divided into two sections, one devoted to theory and one to practice. The students were explained how to create a literary genre story and the dynamics among the characters. With reference to the comics and illustration theory part,

they were then shown how to graphically create a character, how it can be made to move in an environment and how words and images are closely related in novels, comics, the cinema and videogames. To achieve this, various paper and video formats were utilised, trying to "speak" the language of young people. The practical section was based on Raymond Queneau's "Exercises in Style". The students worked on the transition from a simple idea to the story (i.e. the short structured plot of the story), to then pass on to screenplay (the story's breakdown into key scenes), and then the illustration of a specific moment in the story, so that images would complement the narration: at times with illustrations, or vignettes, strips, or whole comics pages.


As already pointed out in the previous paragraph, Spanish schools expressed the need to focus on the topic of **learning to learn**, in close connection with the themes of motivation and self-esteem. During the workshops, students were shown a series of motivational videos which then provided the background for a group discussion on themes such as frustration management, how to overcome obstacles, and the importance of commitment and concentration to reach one's educational goals, and not to be limited to or by them. The JumpOperators then helped students to discover their own learning styles, based on the VAK learning styles model (visual, auditory or kinaesthetic) and on Dale's cone of experience, with the aim of raising their awareness of individual differences and how

every style may be translated into a mind map for effective learning.
Last but not least, group games, such as tower building that would allow students to reflect on the learning process and not simply on its outcome were organised.

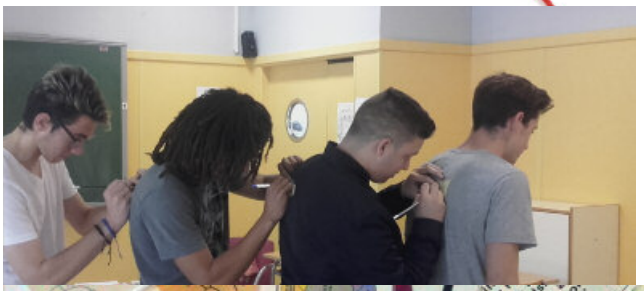
### Support action on motivation and self-esteem

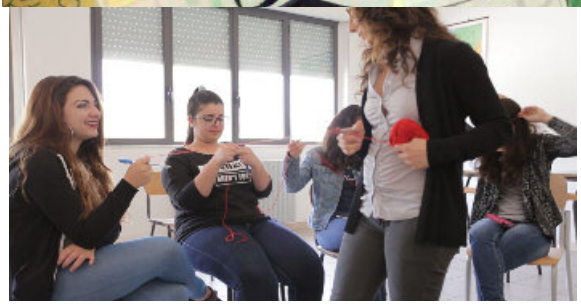
Motivation and self-esteem are two complex notions, strongly linked to the experiences typical of adolescence. They pervade the entire emotional, relational and social life of young people, in and outside school. Evidently, the goal of the Jump@school initiative did not include dealing with these themes in their complexity; however it was deemed essential to propose the intervention group to reflect on and share these notions, also in order to make them understand that these topics can be addressed within the school context. Each working group chose its instruments and content, but every experimental context shared the duration (nine hours divided into workshops of 1,5-2 hours each) and the general goals of this action, dividing the students in the intervention group into smaller sub-groups. The following topics were further developed:

- Knowing one's strenghts and weaknesses
- Increasing one's self confidence and believing in one's potential
- Learning to formulate positive opinions on oneself
- Learning to recognize and express one's emotions with special attention to one's previous resentment (emotional literacy)

- Learning to overcome difficulties resulting from psycho-physical limitations
- Observing one's reaction under difficult circumstances
- Learning alternative and constructive ways to manage one's life
- Stimulating cognitive readiness to undertake unusual and creative actions to solve problems
- Strengthening social skills, learning active communication
- Learning to accept criticism, learning to give and receive feedback (working on assertiveness)

The students in Valencia worked on their motivation and self-esteem by taking part in a series of group games, followed by presentations during the plenary sessions, which stimulated self-knowledge, reflections of one's qualities and skills, as perceived by themselves or by other members of the group. For instance, through the Mandala technique, the students used images and words clipped from magazines provided by the JumpOperators to make a mosaic representing them. The collage was divided into four quadrants, each representing a key aspect in the students' emotional sphere: what you are/have, what you wish for your future, the resources you have at your disposal to follow your



"We have put on the table our fears and desires. We believe that all students have brought home a bit of the work carried out, a bit of our group, and a bit of themselves: their beauty and intelligence, which they sometimes have a hard time recognising"

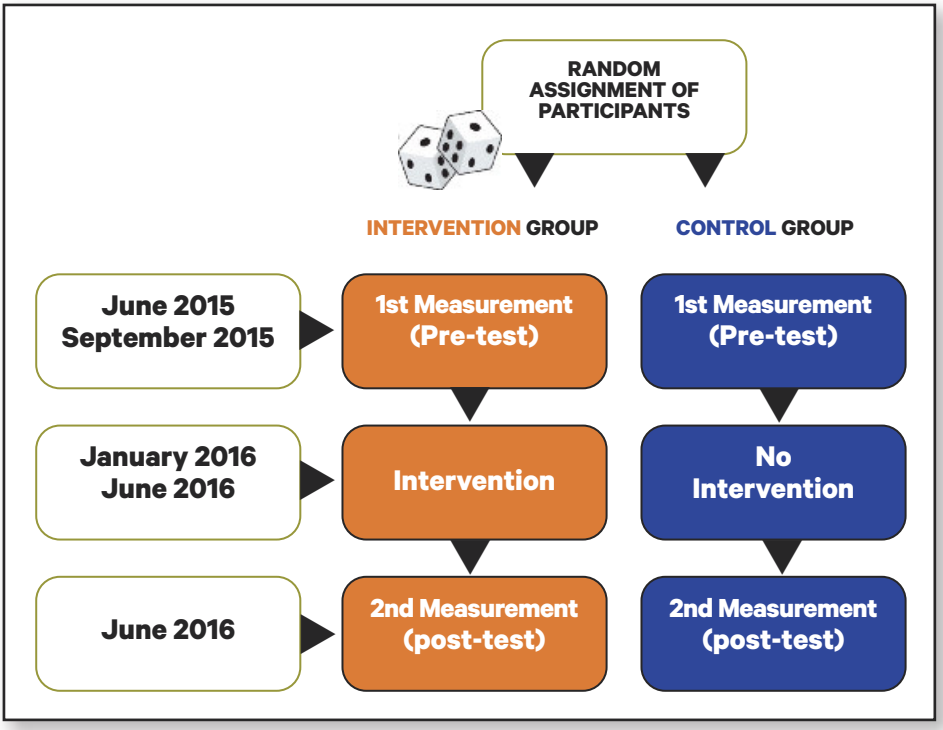
pathway, and those you still need to acquire.
Moreover, the "blind person and the guide" game, stimulated trusting others, as well as improved the empathic abilities of the participants who, in turns, played both roles, first being guided by their mate and then guiding him/her in a series of activities. Finally, the "tree of qualities" instrument, went a long way in raising awareness of the participants' value and strengths.

### The final party

At the end of the five-month pathway, the students, together with the project team, met for a final party during which, there was time and room to share impressions of the experience and look at some of the products resulting from the workshops.

## Experimental research design

In the Jump@school project, an experimental design belonging to the "pretest-posttest" family based on "two equivalent groups" was adopted. The founding principle of this research design type, already mentioned before, is rather simple: once the group of students at risk of dropping out had been identified, they were randomly assigned to two groups, an intervention group (also known as the treatment group or the experimental group) and a control group, which are equivalent and comparable in statistical terms. Both groups are measured using the same indicators and questionnaires. The only difference between the groups, as a consequence, is that the intervention group received the "treatment" which, in the Jump@school case, is represented by the Jump@school intervention.



In theory, the effect (or impact) may be defined as the difference between what happened after the implementation of an action (the factual situation represented by the intervention group) and what would have happened if that same action had not been carried out (counterfactual situation represented by the control group).

It is worth recalling that for the Jump@school experiment, in each of the four schools participating, **120 students considered at risk of early leaving based on the grade point average at the end of the preceding school year and mainly falling in the 14 to 17 age group, were randomly sampled. Out of these 120 students, 60 were randomly placed in the intervention group and 60 in the control group**.

In light of its ease of use and simplicity, this type of design is very popular in social research; however, it also presents some drawbacks which should be considered when interpreting results. A critical aspect in this experimental method, for instance, is maintaining the integrity of the experiment, in other words a clear-cut separation between the control and the intervention group throughout the action to avoid or reduce spillover effects. In the Jump@school case, the intervention group students and those belonging to the control group attended the same school and it was possible that students from both groups were in the same classes. As a result, it was reasonably assumed that the students would "mix" outside classes, sharing ideas and impression on the project, which could influence the results. To limit this effect, it was decided to "partly blind" the various parties involved. This means that they would be informed about the details of the project at different levels. The headmasters or school directors were informed of all the aspects of the intervention, including its experimental nature. On the other hand, until the end of the experiment, teachers, parents and students were told that the study is a project aimed at investigating how learning best occurs, which would take place within and outside the normal school time. It was communicated that due to limited resources, pupils would be randomly selected to take part in the project activities, whereby those selected would be involved to different degrees: some would be involved in individual and group activities and fill in some questionnaires, others would only complete a couple of questionnaires.
Keeping some actors - especially teachers - partly blinded made it possible to limit the impact of their interference - for instance, the so-called Rosenthal effect. Nevertheless, as will be described in the section devoted to results, this also represented an issue. Last but not least, an experimental design, particularly if applied to contexts involving adolescents, must also take into account problems relating to maturing of the

participants in the duration of the experiment (psychological and biological changes taking place during the intervention, but independent of the latter) as well as the dropping out of participants from the experiment after assignment to the two groups. These are just some of the limitations posed by such an evaluation design opted by Jump@school. More information on these limitations as well as how they were overcome can be found in the report on evaluation design as well as in the aftermath lessons learnt report, both available on the project's website:
**www.jumpatschool.eu**.

The Jump@school intervention was assessed at three levels: quantitative, qualitative and formative

## The intervention's evaluation strategy

The Jump@school intervention was evaluated at three levels. The first is related to its impact, i.e. the possibility of identifying and measuring a causal relationship between the intervention and its effects on the reference target group. This impact evaluation was based on quantitative data collection and analysis thereof. It was completed at the end of the experiment (summative evaluation) when all the data was available, although it had been already structured in the initial stages of design. A second level is related to the qualitative evaluation of the action, i.e. the systematic study of the perceptions and opinions of the various actors involved in the experiment (students, JumpOperators, teachers and school directors). This assessment was also carried out once the action had been completed, and was mainly based on instruments such as interviews and focus groups. Last but not least, the action was also evaluated, or, more appropriately, monitored on an ongoing basis (formative evaluation) with the aim of identifying possible problems

**THE BASIC ASPECTS OF THE COUNTERFACTUAL EXPERIMENT JUMP@SCHOOL**

- Separate measurements for the two action and control groups.
- Measurements at different times (pre-test and post-test).
- Measurements in the various places (areas, regions, cities, districts, schools, etc.) where the action has been carried out and comparison among the action areas.
- Quantitative indicators and quantitative analysis of data.
- Instruments for quantitative data collection (questionnaire

related to its implementation, and, where possible, of correcting them.This monitoring, mainly of a qualitative type, was implemented by resorting to a series of instruments (questionnaires, models, forms) which made it possible to receive feedback as well as a systematic and documented reflection by JumpOperators, and, in some cases, students, on the activities conducted, providing important "context" information concerning the experiment's process.

## IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND ITS INSTRUMENTS

1 Impact assessment measures the effect of an intervention on a target group. In this case, it has to do with establishing whether or not the Jump@school intervention had an impact (and if it has, in which direction) on the target population - students at risk of early school leaving. The main instruments resorted to in this assessment were two questionnaires, one to collect the "hard facts", and the other the "soft facts". These instruments investigated those risk variables (already mentioned in the initial sections of this report) which represent the "content" of the impact, i.e. what was specifically measured. Elements that could be potentially modified by an action involving students for a limited period of time (five months) such as grades, self-confidence with reference to school, the definition of personal goals, motivation towards learning, excluding structural factors such as, for example, the financial situation of families, or specific cognitive issues affecting students were focussed on. The impact assessment was coordinated by the Austrian partner ZSI.

### The "Hard facts" questionnaire

"Hard facts" are tangible dimensions based on empirical data rather than on perceptions. In the case of Jump@School, hard facts are represented by the students' average grades (grade point average – GPA). As it is well known, school performance is an important factor in predicting dropout and, at the same time, it is a factor which can be transformed within a relatively short period of time, for instance by changing the learning style or getting extra tuition on specific school subjects. Here, the question was, if and in which direction the intervention had impacted the average grades of the students in the sample. To select the sample of 120 students at risk of early school leaving, the GPAs of all the students in the school at the end of the academic year 2014-2015 were collected and based on the exclusion criteria defined within the

project (e.g. age and GPA threshold) the participants were randomly sampled from the pool of eligible participants. The GPAs of only the sampled students (120 per school in both the control and treatment group) were then collected from the schools' administration at two different points in time: half-way through academic year 2015-2016 (at the beginning of the intervention), and at the end of academic year 2015-2016 (at the end of the intervention). This was therefore not a questionnaire to be filled out by the participants, but rather a systematic collection of secondary data by the local researchers with the support of the schools administration. Grades in the individual subjects were averaged resulting in a GPA from zero to ten. At the end of the pilot, average grades were compared within each group and between the two groups, to analyse if one or both groups had improved, worsened, or if no change had taken place after the intervention, compared with the situation before its implementation.

### The "Soft facts" questionnaire

"Soft facts" are intangible dimensions referring to attitudes, beliefs and feelings. Some of these "facts" or constructs, such as motivation towards completing one's education, engagement in school and study pathways, and a feeling of self-efficacy, are extremely relevant in the field of dropout prevention. Building a questionnaire on "soft facts" was a time-consuming process that required several phases. As a first step, the dimensions that were expected to change due to the Jump@school intervention were selected based on the logic model of intervention, which was being developed at the time, as well as on a review of literature on school dropout and related risk factors (refer to the section on "general risk factors"). These dimensions, corresponding to risk factors to be addressed by the intervention include:

### Dimension 1: School motivation and valuing learning in school

This dimension tried to capture students' general motivation to go to school and learn and the value they attributed to learning (does the student believe or think that learning is important and useful?).

### Dimension 2: Withdrawal

This dimension tried to understand students' feelings with regard to "belonging" to school, investigating if students were committed or rather tended to give up on school.

### Dimension 3: Anxiety and uncertainty control

This dimension tried to capture whether students suffer from feelings of worry and nervousness with regard to normal school activities, feelings which, if particularly strong, have a clear impact on their desire to stay in school.

### Dimension 4: Engagement with learning

This dimension tried to capture students' learning skills and their personal approach to achievement in school.

### Dimension 5: Commitment to complete an education

This dimension tried to capture the students' intention to continue studying until they obtain their diploma, and the value they attributed to completing their course of study.

### Dimension 6: Self-regulation and control

This dimension tried to capture the students' ability to plan and organise their school work as well as keep track of their progress.

### Dimension 7: Self-confidence with learning

This dimension tried to capture the students' belief and level of confidence in their ability to understand and achieve good results in school.

Questionnaire items, i.e. statements, were formulated with reference to these seven dimensions. These items were adapted to the Jump@school research context starting from a series of similar instruments scientifically validated at international level. In its final version, the questionnaire was made up of 38 items, grouped into six clusters, which students were asked to answer through a 5-point Likert scale from "disagree strongly" to "agree strongly" or "very likely" to "very unlikely".

Once the instrument was developed, it was pretested in English on a sample of youths with characteristics very similar to those of the selected sample of the experiment. i.e. six youths aged between 14 and 17, to ensure that all items were understandable and that administration timings were in line with the average attention span related to this age bracket. The original questionnaire, developed in English, was then translated into Italian and Spanish by local researchers and checked by the local project managers as well as people external to the project whose mother-tongue was Italian and Spanish.

Questionnaires were administered to all students (intervention and control group), where possible, through an online survey managed by ZSI, otherwise through a pen and paper survey which was then entered onto the online survey platform by the local researchers at two different times: before and after the intervention.

The questionnaires at the two points in time (pretest and posttest) and for the two groups were identical, the only difference being that the posttest questionnaire for the intervention group contained five additional questions directly relating to the Jump@school activities carried out during the five months' duration of the intervention. As Jump@school is a project whose goal was to propose and test an intervention capable of preventing early school leaving, the fifth dimension of the questionnaire "commitment to complete an education" was considered as the main dependent variable.

In its final version, the questionnaire was made up of 38 items, grouped into six clusters, to which students were invited to respond through a 5-point Likert scale.

### Data analysis: a methodological outline

All the data collected through the two main instruments described above were analysed through descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The former is used to describe and summarise the main features of the dataset through univariate statistics such as fre-


quency distribution, measures of central tendency (the mean, median and mode) and dispersion techniques. Inferential statistical techniques were used to ascertain whether the Jump@school intervention had a significant effect.

**As to the questionnaire on "hard facts"**, a multilevel analysis was performed on the grade point averages with the student being the subject and the three points in time (six months before the intervention, right at the beginning and right the end of the intervention), the individual measurements. A "repeated measures" design was applied, as every subject was submitted several times to the measurement of a dependent variable, in this case the grade point average. The analysis was performed for each of the four schools separately. Then, the grade point averages were regressed on time (three levels), group (two levels, i.e. treatment and control), the interaction of time and group, the natural logarithm of the initial grade point average and the interaction between it and time. The output from the procedure is a coefficient for each variable enabling the computation of the trend by which the grade point average changed over time.

**The items of the "soft facts"** questionnaire were analysed using paired t-tests to test for within-group differences; i.e. the change from the pretest to the posttest for each group individually. To test for between-group differences; the differences between the change in the intervention group to the difference in the change in the control group, independent t-tests were carried out. The full description of the study's methodological aspects and data analysis by ZSI are available on the project's website www.jumpatschool.eu

### THE SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE: SOME METHODOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS

It should be pointed out that the questionnaire is a self-evaluation instrument which, by nature, entails some limitations. Some solutions were adopted to reduce the effects of limitations posed as much as possible. These include, in particular, the possible **distortion of results related to social desirability**, i.e. the tendency of respondents answering questionnaires in a manner that will be viewed favourably by others, for example by giving "the best answer" and adapting to the norm rather than giving their true and accurate judgement of the items. In order to counter this phenomenon, the respondents were assured that anonymous administration of their data will occur, and that their own answers were only identifiable to the research team, who held the key with name and participant code. Another effect to take into account was that of **cognitive dissonance**, whereby the research subject (participant), report improvements even if they did not occur to meet their own expectations in respect to what should have changed. To control for this bias when interpreting results, the "soft questionnaire" was not be solely relied on but in addition results were also reported on a more objective measure – the "hard questionnaire", which captures actual change (in terms of grades).

## THE QUALITATIVE EVALUATION OF THE ACTION

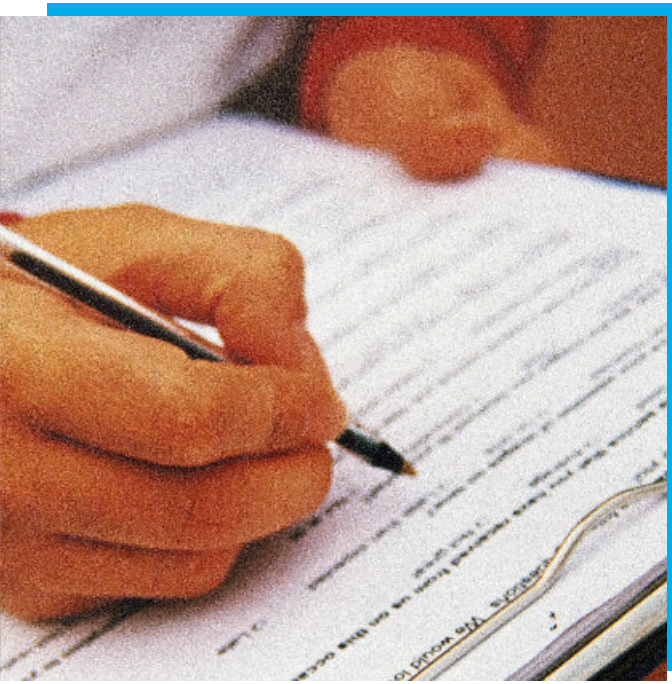
**2** As already pointed out, the evaluation strategy of the Jump@school intervention also benefitted from a qualitative survey, coordinated by the project partner IVAL, who managed to collect information from different the actors involved in the experiments in schools, both in Italy and Spain, after the end of the intervention. Given the complexity and also the "relational" nature of the Jump@school intervention, the project team felt the not to limit the impact evaluation to a highly structured and quantitative assessment as the counterfactual one. During the implementation, a pressing issue emerged concerning the fact that, without a more "holistic" view of the entire experience and its processes, a series of precious elements might be lost, which would play a part in the final perception of the results of the study by the actors involved. The goal of this qualitative assessment therefore consisted of "widening the scope" of the counterfactual evaluation to include more "anthropological" aspects, unrelated to goals or indicators, which may capture elements of the process (educational, emotional, operational) that may prove useful, among other things, to develop recommendations within the framework of policies aimed at fighting and preventing ESL. It was a qualitative inquiry, structured in a series of individual and group interviews, which had the aim of analysing the main perceptions of the Jump@school intervention from the viewpoint of the participants (the students) and of some privileged observers like the JumpOperators, researchers, headmasters and teachers. In addition, it aimed at studying the strengths and weaknesses of the experiment. The study, in this sense, was structured in a way that it only provided general inputs for discussions, granting the participants or interviewees a certain amount of freedom with reference to the topics of interest to be discussed and the opportunity to express their interpretation of the facts.

During the implementation, a pressing issue emerged concerning the fact that, without a more "holistic" view of the entire experience and its processes, a series of precious elements might be lost, which would play a part in the final perception of the results of the study by the actors involved.

## THE FORMATIVE EVALUATION

3 Throughout the duration of the intervention, the activities were constantly monitored thanks to a series of qualitative instruments, common to all schools, which made it possible to collect a series of "written" records of the process in every experimental context, thus contributing to the consistency of the research study structure. The instruments are standard forms and grids which the JumpOperators, students or local researchers had to fill in at certain stages, such as, for instance, after individual follow-up meetings. These instruments, as a sort of logbook, were used during the intervention to reflect on and assess an ongoing basis the perceptions of the various actors involved in relation to the activities carried out, and to make sure that the goals of the individual activities were progressively reached or readjusted and at the end of the intervention, to take stock of the context in which the action took place. These instruments may be divided into those used for monitoring individual sessions and those applied to the group sessions.

**Instruments for the formative evaluation of the individual sessions**



➡ *The IDPA (Individual Development Plan Agreement)*, which, as already pointed out, represented the main document in the entire experiment in which the JumpOperator and the student set out the individual pathway goals and the activities to implement in order to reach these goals.

➡ The individual monitoring process journal, which was drafted by the JumpOperator after each of the four individual follow-up meetings, had the aim of docu-

menting the pathway of each student, recording possible changes to the goals previously set, problems or specific elements having emerged during the meetings.

**Instruments for the formative evaluation of group activities**

➡ *The workshop feedback form* was filled out by the students right after taking part in each of the three compulsory workshops scheduled in the intervention. In this questionnaire, the student expressed his or her opinion on aspects such as clarity of the workshop's goals, the level of interest of the content, satisfaction with reference to the results achieved, strengths and weaknesses of the entire experience.

➡ *The workshop reflection form*, filled out by the JumpOperators with the aim of recording detailed information on the running of the workshops. Thanks to this instrument, the JumpOperator reflected n and assessed the level of interest and satisfaction of the students involved, with reference to the new skills and attitudes learnt, taking note of possible changes to be made in order to improve the following workshops.

➡ *The experiment monitoring template*, a qualitative questionnaire filled out by the researchers on a monthly basis throughout the intervention period served as a monitoring tool to collect information on the current state of implementation, challenges and concerns encountered during the implementation which may affect its effectiveness of the intervention or which should be considered when interpreting the results and solutions found to overcome these challenges.

## THE QUESTIONNAIRE'S DIMENSIONS AND ITEMS ON "SOFT FACTS"

**Dimension 1**
**School motivation and value of school-based learning**

| | |
|---|---|
| V14 | Generally, I like going to school. |
| V15 | I am getting a good education at my school. |
| V16 | I really don't care about school. |
| V20 | I enjoy learning because I get better at school. |
| V21 | I like telling others about what I've learned at school. |
| V24 | Most of the things that we learn at schools useless. |

**Dimension 2: Drop-out**

| | |
|---|---|
| V17 | I feel like I don't belong to this school. |
| V19 | I often feel like giving up on school. |
| V49 | When I get too much homework, I just don't do it. |

**Dimension 3: Keeping anxiety and uncertainty under control**

| | |
|---|---|
| V18 | School is stressing me out. |
| V34 | When tests are coming up, I worry a lot. |

**Dimension 4: Commitment to studying**

| | |
|---|---|
| V22 | I don't care about getting good grades. |
| V23 | My school work makes me curious to learn things not taught in school. |
| V35 | In school, I work only hard enough to receive a passing grade. |
| V42 | I put a lot of effort in doing my school work. |
| V46 | Anything I do for school is always last minute. |
| V50 | Outside of school, I don't put much effort on learning for classes. |

**Dimension 5: Commitment to completing one's course of study**

| | |
|---|---|
| V25 | I intend to stay in school until I complete my school leaving certificate. |
| V26 | I intend to complete a college/university degree. |
| V27 | Completing the school leaving certificate will prepare me for college/university. |
| V28 | Completing the school leaving certificate will mean that I will be told by others what to do. |
| V29 | Completing the school leaving certificate will help me to get a well-paid job. |
| V30 | Completing the school leaving certificate will allow me to learn new things |
| V31 | Completing the school leaving certificate will give me a sense of success |

| | |
|---|---|
| V32 | Completing the school leaving certificate will help me to do something positive with my life. |
| V33 | Completing the school leaving certificate will waste my time. |

**Dimension 6: Self-regulation and learning discipline**

| | |
|---|---|
| V36 | When I'm in class, I often think about other unrelated things. |
| V37 | I follow the rules in school. |
| V39 | When I'm in class, I just pretend like I am working. |
| V41 | I never finish whatever I begin. |
| V43 | I study at home even when I don't have a test. |
| V44 | I check my school work for mistakes. |
| V45 | If I cannot understand my school work, I keep trying until I do. |
| V47 | If I do badly in my tests, I work harder next time. |
| V48 | Before I start an assignment, I make a plan of how I am going to do it. |

**Dimensione 7: Study confidence**

| | |
|---|---|
| V38 | I feel good about who I am as a student |
| V40 | I cannot do well in school, even if I want to |
| V51 | If I try hard, I believe I can do my school work well |

## The impact assessment results

In the paragraphs below a summary of the results of the impact analysis based on the data collected through the two main quantitative instruments, i.e. the questionnaire on hard facts (the average grades) and on soft facts (the seven dimensions analysed in the questionnaire) are presented. A detailed analysis carried out by the partner ZSI, illustrated by specific charts for every dimension per school is available on the project website www.jumpatschool.eu.

For each participating school, the information presented in this section attempts to answer the following main questions:

- What changes were observed in the intervention group from the start of the intervention to the end?
- How different is this change exhibited by the intervention group compared to the change in the control group?
- What are the possible explanations and considerations that should be considered when interpreting the results?

### 1 HARD-FACTS RESULTS: VARIATION IN THE AVERAGE GRADES

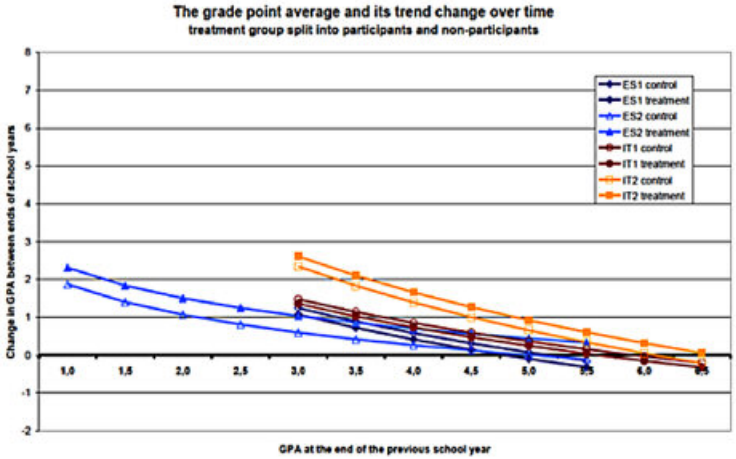
There is no firm evidence that the intervention impacted the grades that students achieved at the end of the academic year. Small differences in favour of the intervention group were obtained in two out of the four schools, i.e. Malilla (Valencia) and Iglesias (Sardinia). This result may be the outcome of various factors, such as the insufficient duration of the intervention, its insufficient intensity (few activities or irregular attendances by students) or insufficient orientation of the intervention to grade improvement.o un non specifico orientamento dell'intervento al miglioramento dei voti.

### Possible results

Considering the change occurred from the pretest to the posttest, each group's results could have faced one of five possible scenarios:

- A statistically significant change in the expected direction (i.e. a significant improvement from the pretest to the posttest).
- An insignificant change in the expected direction (i.e. an improvement from the pretest to the posttest, albeit not statistically significant).
- No change (i.e. the pretest and posttest means were equal).
- A statistically significant change in the opposite direction (i.e. a significant worsening from the pretest to the posttest).
- An insignificant change in the opposite direction (i.e. a worsening from the pretest to the posttest, however not statistically significant).

**The impact of the intervention is determined by the group differences i.e. the difference between the changes from the pretest to the posttest of one group compared to that of the other. This too can take the form of a statistically significant change between the two groups - either in the expected or in the opposite direction to the expected, or of a non-significant change, i.e. the group differences from the pretest to the posttest is not statistically significant.**




The biggest improvement was seen in Mallila, Valencia (ES02) which recorded an improvement of about 0.5 points.
At first glance this does not seem much, but if you consider that there was an improvement of 1 grade point in every other subject, then it is quite considerable.

## 2 SOFT-FACT RESULTS: CHANGES IN THE 7 DIMENSIONS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

### Juan de Garay School (Valencia)

In this school, the impact of the intervention was felt most with regard to improvement of learning technique and discipline in learning. This is represented predominantly by the sixth dimension of the soft questionnaire: 'self-regulation control'. Due to the intervention, the students who took part in the intervention improved their learning techniques: case in point being that they more often than not made a plan before starting an assignment and checked their school work for mistakes. Furthermore, the intervention improved the student's discipline in learning by increasing their engagement with learning; concretely by for example putting more effort in learning outside school regardless of whether they had a test coming up or not. In addition, the students reduced their tendency of doing school work at the last minute and were more determined to finishing anything they started. These marked improvements in learning techniques and discipline in learning correspond to the theme of one of the three workshops carried out in this school on 'learning to learn'. Some of the individual sessions also worked on these aspects. Another very important result was that Juan de Garay is one of the two schools (together with that of Tortoli) in which the intervention seems to have had a direct impact on

In two schools out of four there is an indication of the fact that the action has directly influenced the most important variable in the questionnaire "Commitment to completing one's course of study".

students' intention of getting a high-school diploma (represented by Dimension 5 "Commitment to completing an education"), considered as the main dependent variable of the soft questionnaire. In this regard, the intervention seems to have also improved the students' perception of the benefits of completing their education; this can be explained by the fact that they more strongly believe that by completing their high school certificate, they will no longer be told by others what to do and will therefore be more autonomous and that it will give them a sense of success. Moreover, the intervention appears to have significantly reduced the students' stress levels attributed to school as well as increased their enthusiasm in telling others what they have learnt at school - perhaps also thanks to the alternative and innovative learning styles (compared with school routine) they have been exposed to by the intervention. Although, like above, the students seem to have improved on their learning skills, there is still an indication that they do not care about good grades and only work hard enough to pass. However, considering that the students chosen to take part in the intervention were the 'poorer' students with regard to their grades, putting all their efforts into just passing rather than excelling is not necessarily a negative result.

**Malilla School (Valencia)**

Also in the Malilla school, the intervention had the greatest impact on students' learning techniques and discipline in learning represented by the 6th dimension of the soft questionnaire "Self-regulation and control", particularly with reference to the students' abilities to make a plan before starting an assignment, studying at home even

when they didn't have a test coming up and also, the tendency to finish what they started. Like in the other Spanish school, special attention was devoted to "learning to learn" through both the workshops and individual meetings. Another interesting finding is the intervention in this school seems to have decreased the students' valuing of what they are taught at school demonstrated by their increased inclination of finding the things taught in school to be useless after the intervention. Assuming the possibility that the school curriculum in Spain is not very stimulating (a hypothesis that would need to be scientifically proven), then this result suggests that the intervention may have stimulated and increased critical awareness of the students. Additionally, it is possible that because the intervention's educational methods and techniques may have been perceived as more dynamic and innovative in comparison, they might have started questioning the usefulness of the traditional school learning techniques. As in the other Spanish school, the intervention seems to have had a positive impact on reducing school-related stress levels, whereas it seems not to have directly had any influence on the items relating to commitment to complete an education (Dimension 5).

In Spain, the main improvement are related to the dimension "Self-regulation and control", which includes items relating to learning styles and discipline in learning

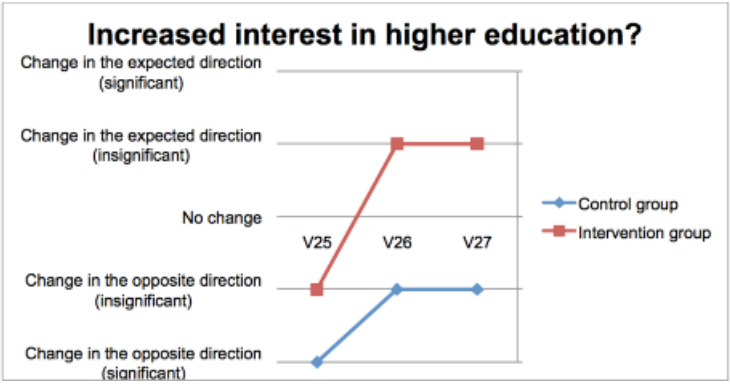
**IPSAR School (Tortolì, Sardinia)**

In this school, the most significant positive impact was recorded in relation to the fifth dimension of the soft questionnaire: "Commitment to completing an education". Besides the Juan de Garay school in Valencia, this was the only other school that showed a direct impact of the intervention on the main dependent variable of the soft questionnaire: the commitment to complete their high school certificate. The intervention seems to have increased also the students' motivation towards pursuing higher education (college/university) and the perception that doing so would increase their sense of autonomy and sense of success. In this school, the intervention seems to have increased the students' conformity to school rules and concentration

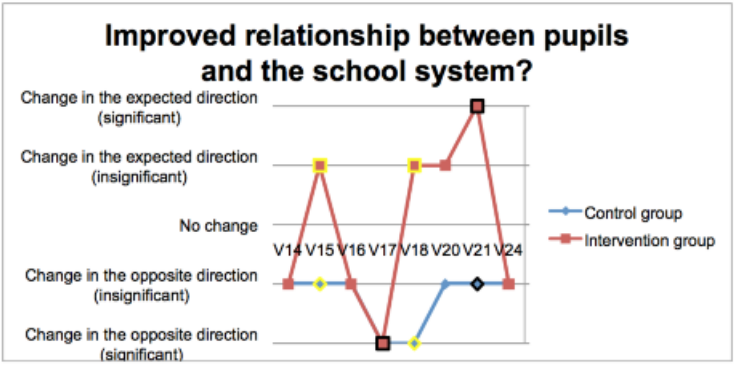
during classes. Unlike in the two Spanish schools where the school-related stress levels of the students decreased as a result of the intervention, in this school, the intervention seems to have had no impact on this item directly. However, at the same time, it seemed to increase the students' level of anxiety associated with tests. Simultaneously, the participants of the intervention felt less affiliated to the school or less like they belonged to the school after the intervention. This could be as a result of increased anxiety or their increased liking of alternative ways of learning as experienced through the Jump@school intervention or the newly acquired knowledge other possibilities are available outside of school. For example the workshops carried out, 'photo food' or 'guided-fishing' labs, gave the students an insight into the labour market. These workshops might have provided the students with role models who for example succeeded without having to complete formal education. At the same time, the students' school motivation and valuing learning increased demonstrated by the intervention group's participants increased tendency to more readily disagree that they don't care about school, and more readily agree that they like going to school, they get a good education at their school and they enjoy learning because they get better at school.

**G. Ferraris School (Iglesias, Sardinia)**

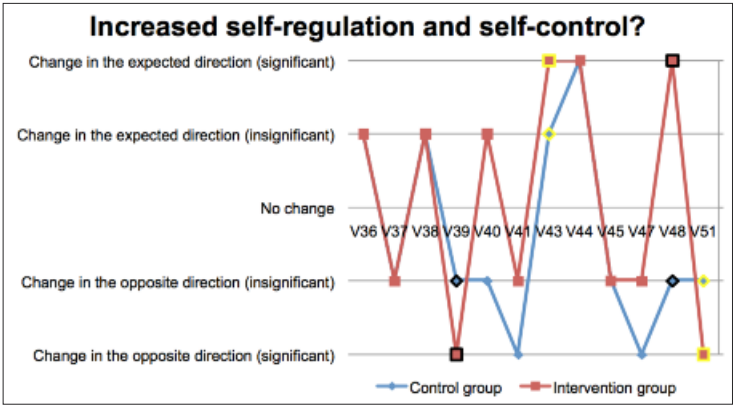
The results from the Iglesias school are the most controversial. On the one hand, the intervention seems to have improved the students' appreciation or valuing of school, and seems to have brought about a limited improvement in the intervention group students' grades. On the other hand, the intervention seems to have had a negative effect on the students' feeling of belonging to the school and, as a consequence, also on their motivation of completing their course of study. It appears in fact that in this school, students perceive no benefits resulting from getting their high-school diploma other than it will give them a sense of success. And even so, they do not seem willing to work harder in order to reach this goal. In comparison to the results of the other intervention schools, the results of this school stand out as having the most negative results. It should be pointed out that the socio-economic situation in the area of Iglesias, where the school is situated, is particularly critical. During the experiment's implementation, social tensions emerged owing to high unemployment rates and the depression affecting the local industrial system. This context of deep uncertainty may have influenced students' feelings towards their course of study, knowing very well the reality that awaits them after school.




There were no significant group differences in any of the three items representing an increased aspiration to go to college.




In three out of the eight items measuring the change in the relationship between pupils and the school system, the intervention group shows significant improvement compared to the control group.




Of the items measuring self-control or self-regulation, the intervention group showed a significant improvement in two: 'I study at home even when I don't have a test' and 'before I start an assignment, I make a plan of how I am going to do it'.

These graphs presents the results, at a group (intervention *vs* control) level, of the impact analysis as according to the objectives and outcomes of the Logic Model of Intervention. Please refer to the tables at pages 68 and 69 for the complete list of the items.

## 3 RESULTS CONCERNING THE SPECIFIC ITEMS RELATING TO THE JUMP@SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

The post questionnaire filled out by the intervention group included 5 items which investigated the students' satisfaction and experience in participating in the project. Overall, the results show a positive picture, particularly in the Spanish context:

**"Overall, the Jump@school activities were fun"**

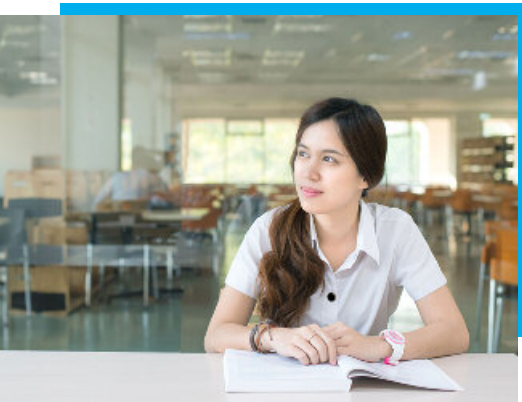
Most of the participants (87.58%) agreed (41.18%) or agreed strongly (46.41%) with this statement. This trend was particularly evident in Spain. No participant expressed strong disagreement with this statement, and only one person disagreed to this statement.

**"The Jump@school project helped me learn to study"**

This statement presented the greatest variety of answers, with 35.29% of the participants who neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. However, more than half of the participants (55.56%) agreed (32.03%) or agreed strongly (23.53%) with this statement. Also in this case, Spanish participants more readily agreed or strongly agreed with this statement as compared to participants in the Italian schools.

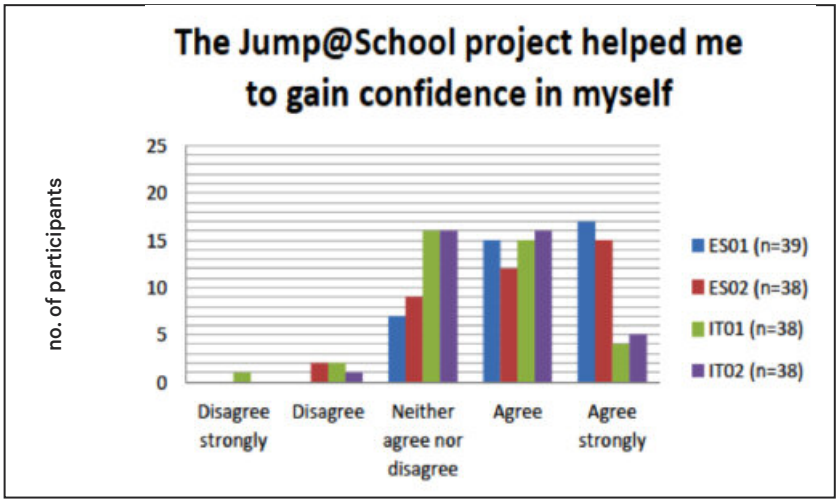
**"The Jump@school project helped gain confidence in myself"**

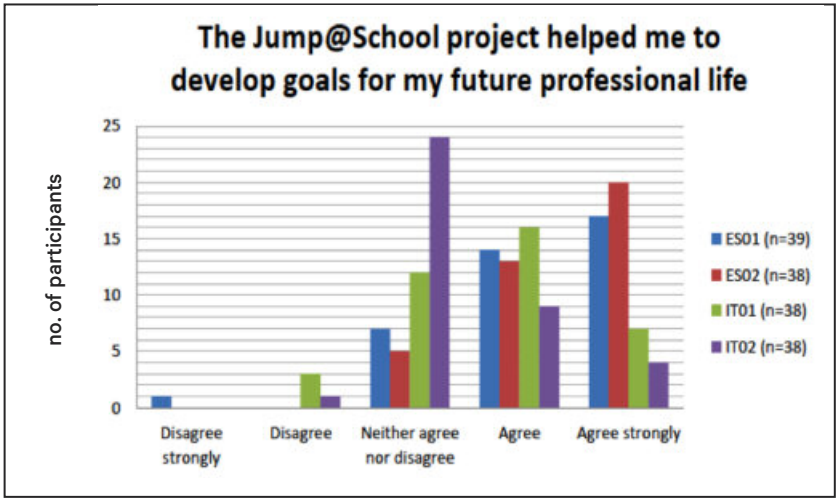
As with the two previous items most participants (64.71%) agreed (37.91%) or strongly agreed (26.08%) with this statement while 31.37% of them neither agreed nor disagreed with it In this case as well, the students in the Spanish schools more readily agreed or strongly agreed with this statement as compared to those in the Italian schools.



**"Jump@school helped me to develop goals for my future professional life"**

Again, most of the respondents agreed or agreed strongly with this statement (65.36%), and around 31% of the participants neither agreed nor disagreed with this item.



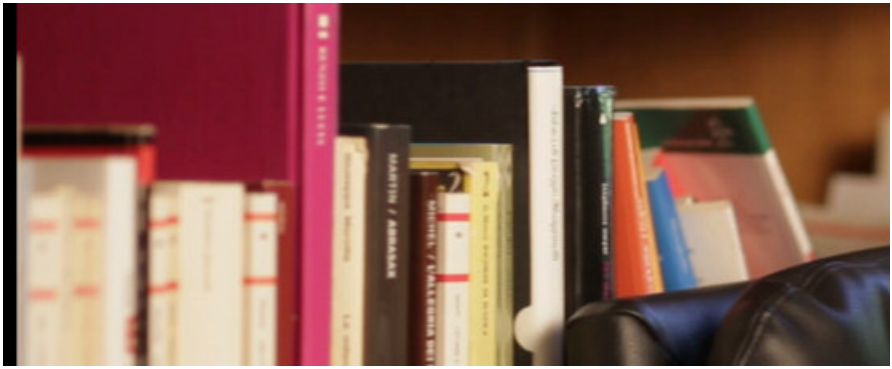




**"Through the Jump@school activities, I am more motivated for school work"**

This item experienced the highest level of disagreement compared to the other four items with 10.46% participants disagreeing or disagreeing strongly with this statement. Overall, however, more than half the students (57.52%) agreed (28.10%) or agreed strongly (29.41%) with this item, while approximately 30% neither agreed nor disagreed.

## What the results tell us...

The results of this impact evaluation, which in some cases have gone in the opposite direction to the expected, provided the opportunity for a honest and fruitful reflection on various methodological and operational aspects of the study and the intervention itself which were both very complex and limited by the call for proposal's budget and operational requirements. These reflections enabled capitalisation on the lessons learned and consideration of improvements to the study from the awareness gained. The "aftermath lessons learnt report", available on the project's website www.jumpatschool.eu details the limitations and challenges of the study as well as the lessons learnt. Below the main issues ascertained at the time of assessment, some



of which were also confirmed by the qualitative evaluation and which have potentially had an impact on the results, the following can be summed up:

### The complexity of the phenomenon and the relationship between independent and dependent variables

Early school leaving is an extremely complex phenomenon whose causes vary from student to student. This complexity implied a certain difficulty in establishing a direct relation between the independent variable (the intervention) and the dependent variables (GPAs and the items of the questionnaire on "soft facts").

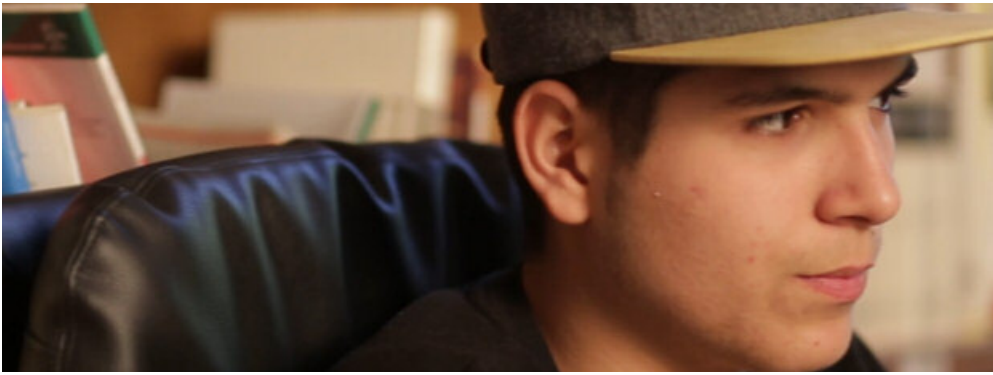
### Duration of the action

Improving the students' self-esteem and motivation, a soft skill, was one of the outcomes expected in the Jump@school logic model of intervention which fed into the project's main goal of reducing early school leaving.

Differently from improvement of some cognitive skills such as mathematics which can be worked on in a focused manner in a relatively short time, an improvement in soft skills implies a more holistic and in-depth approach, which, in order to produce a significant change, needs time. The five months' duration of the intervention may have therefore been insufficient to influence some risk factors considered in the Jump@school intervention, such as low self-esteem.

### The local teams' workload

Despite careful organisation and preliminary allocation of work on the



field (including training sessions for researchers and JumpOperators), the intervention's complexity and a series of unforeseen events, which are unfortunately common in experimental situations, had an impact of the workload of the local teams which in turn, could have had a negative effect on the quality of implementation of the intervention. Such occurrences include for example the fact that in Spain, it was only possible to have a single researcher for both schools, instead of one for each school as in Italy - therefore requiring the Spanish JumpOperators to support in fulfilling some tasks for the researcher.

### The intervention's timing

The Jump@Scjool pilot was implemented in Italy in the second semester of the school year 2015/2016. This translated to the second and third trimester of the same academic year in Spain. This period

can be considered a difficult time because students are focussed on preparing for their end of year examinations. As the whole intervention was compressed into 5 months, this meant that quite a lot of activities were implemented during a considerable short amount of time; all these activities were additional to the students' usual activities, therefore, considerably increasing their workload and pressure and could have contributed to the unexpected results. Furthermore, the fact that some of the intervention's activities were also carried out during the ordinary school hours may have had an impact on the students' performance, this means that the participants could have missed out some important straightforward academic activities like missing lessons. It should also be pointed out that the administration of the posttest coincided with the end of the school year where either the students were preparing for them or they are in the process of taking them. Subsequently, in this time students are usually characterised by heightened levels of stress and anxiety which were presumably increased by additionally having to complete the posttest during this period possibly resulting more negative results than expected.

### The self-selection of the intervention group through dropping out of the intervention or refusing to take part at all

Self-selection arises when the group composition is determined by choice rather than by chance therefore impacting the representativeness of the sample and the validity of the results. This is caused by for example the selected participants refusing to take part in the intervention at all (non-takers) or dropping out after consuming some parts of the intervention. In Spain, the number of non-takers was considerably high while in Italy it was the number of drop-outs from the intervention. It was checked in the data whether these forms of post-assignment attrition were systematic or not. The data gave a mixed picture in this regard. In two schools the poorer students carried through with the intervention, in one the better students did, and in the last one, the poorer students started the programme but then dropped out. As a result, it cannot be confirmed that this self-selection had an impact on the result.

### Problems related to the self-assessment questionnaire

The effectiveness of the questionnaire as a study instrument entails some limitations. As it is a self-assessment instrument, participants may, for instance, have overestimated their skills and attitudes in the pretest and due to increased self-reflection, possibly caused by the intervention, they could have been in a position to rate these aspects more accurately at the posttest, thus showing a negative change or worsening from the pretest to the posttest. Moreover, the self-assessment questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale for the assessment, which could

have been too complex for the target group. Complications also arose in translating items from English into the local languages and the fact that the questionnaires were not tested in the local languages.

### Maturation

Another factor that could have influenced the responses of the participants with regard to the soft questionnaire is maturation. The age group of the participants was between 14 and 17 and the two measurements were taken five to six months apart. For such an age group, many changes in attitudes occur within relative short periods of time. However worth noting is that the fact that all the participants grew older by five to six months limited possible distortions cause by this factor.

### Standardization

Although the logic model of intervention made it easier to design an intervention that was as standardised as possible for all school, some inevitable adjustments to the various local contexts caused the activities not to be perfectly identical, making the comparison between schools and countries difficult.

### Partial sharing of information

Due to previous experience and the experience of different studies in the area of education, which point to the fact that teachers could treat a child differently if they were told a fact (existent or non-existent) about the student which could in turn affect their performance in school (Rosenthal effect), it was decided to partially blind the teachers from the details of the intervention, for example the goal of the intervention, how the participants were chosen etc. (for more details on this aspect, see the paragraph on the qualitative evaluation's results).
However, it was noted that this blinding caused resistance from the teachers in some of the schools to the extent of some teachers directly and actively dissuading the participants from taking part in the Jump@school activities. It can therefore not be ruled out that the teachers' knowledge of the students' participation in the intervention could have affected their outcome in terms of GPA.

## The results of the qualitative evaluation

The information collected through this qualitative survey made it possible to place the Jump@school experience in context, and to understand it from all perspectives, including all those process and interaction elements which, necessarily, are difficult to capture by using standardised and quantitative instruments. All the actors involved in the experiment were interviewed and had the chance to share their perceptions on the project's strengths and weaknesses. The report "At-school Inquiry", including detailed description of methods, target groups involved in Italy and Spain as well as detailed results carried out by the partner IVAL, is available on the project website www.jumpatschool.eu.

### CONSIDERATIONS EXPRESSED BY PRIVILEGED OBSERVERS

**(JumpOperators, researchers, teachers and headmasters)**

During group and individual interviews, a group of privileged observers was asked to discuss and share the main strengths and weaknesses that in their opinion showcased the Jump@school intervention. More specifically, the discussion was focused on the three main themes: the intervention's content, the role of the JumpOperators and the students' reactions to the intervention.

### ▶ THE MAIN STRENGHTS OF THE JUMP@SCHOOL INTERVENTION ◀

**1. The content**

➡ Overall, **Jump@school was considered a solidly-structured action**, with valid and sustainable prerequisites for implementing a pilot experience having a potential impact on the students involved, although not immediately observable.

➡ **One of the main strengths was no doubt the topic of the intervention itself**, i.e. prevention of early school leaving, which is a matter of grave importance in all the schools involved. Projects promoting innovative action strategies on this theme are considered by schools as having an added value coupled with the fact that schools are often lacking the resources and instruments needed to autonomously carry out significant and well-structured actions.

➡ The **action was considered to have identified well the "special needs" of the students involved**, and the antidote proved to be effective. This involved granting ample opportunities

for listening, exchanges and guidance both through individual and group sessions.

➡ One of the very positive aspects pointed out was that **activities were developed so as to make it possible to work with students on different levels** (personal, motivational, associative and relational) through a dual approach thus enabling the integration of group learning and individual reflection phases.

➡ An aspect that was particularly appreciated – especially in Sardinia – was the **involvement of the local area in the activities proposed to the students**, an aspect that allowed the students to get to know the socio-economic context in which they live, and better understand the element of continuity between the educational system and the employment world.

➡ The **dynamic development of activities both in school and outside of it**, which made it possible to keep students' attention constantly alive, and interrupt school routine was considered a positive element.

➡ All the participants in the discussions also agreed on the **potential expansion of the action to accommodate more students**. This is due to the fact that many of the needs and issues identified in the selected sample can be related to most students in the schools involved.

## 2. The role of JumpOperators

With reference to the perception of the figure of the JumpOperators, all the interviewees shared a **strong enthusiasm for the work carried out by these professionals**. It is worth pointing out that their selection was one of the key elements in the entire project. JumpOperators were described as skilled and reliable young educators, who managed to establish a strong relationship of trust with students, being always available and ensuring the necessary discretion. Moreover, they played an essential mediation role between the

schools' educational needs and those of the experiment, playing a part in mitigating potential frictions.

Both in Sardinia and in Valencia, the debate also focused on the potential contribution that these professionals may inject into the school system, if resources allowed them to **be involved on a permanent basis**. Thanks to their cross-sectional skills (in the field of education, psychology, communication and management), JumpOperators were described as the **ideal profiles to provide support and guidance to students**, which schools cannot always grant through their traditional approaches.

### 3. Students' reaction to the intervention

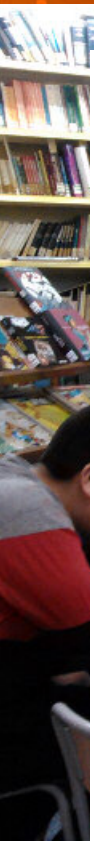
Most witnesses agreed on the fact that students were excited and willing to take part in the project. As JumpOperators ascertained, students **participated enthusiastically and consistently** in all activities, providing some significant food for thought with reference to the limitations of educational models exclusively based on traditional teaching. The close relationship established with the JumpOperators was considered as key to the success of activities. Some teachers also pointed out that they had noticed a **lower level of conflict among students participating in the action**. In Valencia, it emerged that, after participating in the intervention, students seemed more willing to attend school, suggesting a positive impact of the project on their motivation, if not directly on their commitment to studying.

## ▶THE MAIN ISSUES IN THE JUMP@SCHOOL INTERVENTION◀

During the various discussion sessions with "privileged observers", two main issues in the Jump@school intervention stuck out, i.e. the intrinsic limitations of the experimental model and the duration of the action.

### ➡ The intrinsic limitations of the counterfactual approach

The counterfactual approach set a series of methodological limitations in order to be able to control for some confounding variables that may have "contaminated" the results of the evaluation. In particular, a certain degree of confidentiality was maintained with reference to some elements of the experiment, such as the process for selecting students, and the specific goal of the intervention (what exactly was to be measured), and concerning the main goal of the project (testing a model that may have a positive impact on early school leaving).



While headmasters were taken through all the details of the process, teachers, parents and students were privy to only general information. For the same reason, teachers and families were not operationally involved in the action, so as to grant students a greater freedom of expression and confidentiality. Whereas in some contexts these approaches were accepted precisely as they were meant to be i.e, intrinsic to the research study design, resistance was witnessed in others. The central issue raised by JumpOperators as regards this resistance was that **the partial involvement of schools may have had a negative impact on the level of cooperation granted to the action**. Most interviewees suggested that a participatory design of activities would have been the ideal strategy to adopt. The JumpOperators reported several episodes in which some teachers, particularly in Sardinia, were unwilling to let the students take part in the activities. For this reason, the JumpOperators themselves raised some doubts concerning the appropriateness of this experimental design. A further concern highlighted by some teachers - opinion explicitly rejected by other teachers, was that keeping students in the dark concerning some information (i.e. criteria for students' selection) had raised **ethical issues** that led some students to give up participating in the experiment. In contrast though, JumpOperators did not identify this problem with the students they worked with. In Valencia, the school staff was less worried by the limited sharing of information on the action; however, it was pointed out that the involvement of teachers and students may have potentially increased the effectiveness of the intervention itself.

➡ The intervention's implementation period

A second issue had to do with the intervention's timeframe, both in terms of its duration, and of the period chosen.

In Sardinia, **the greatest problem was presented by harmonising the Jump@school activities' schedule with that of normal teaching hours**. Although some adjustments proved necessary

and some hurdles were met during the initial implementation phase, only little specific overlapping took place, thanks in part to the support and flexibility of the JumpOperators. Nonetheless, some teachers pointed out some issues such as that organising the activities on fixed weekdays implied giving up some subjects. This was especially true in Sardinia where the activities were carried out during normal school hours. In addition, the schedule of activities did not seem to have sufficiently taken into account the school's other extracurricular activities, nor the fact that the period was particularly stressful for students, because it coincided with the second term's tests and the end of the school year. In Valencia, the overlap between the teaching curriculum and the Jump@school pilot did not represent a problem particularly because activities were carried out during some tutoring hours that were already included in the school schedule. With regard to duration of the intervention, all involved pointed out that, in the case of a second edition of the project, **a longer period of time for the intervention's implementation should be considered**; for instance, a whole school year, in order to ensure a more seamless and efficient deployment of activities and an increasingly structured work on students, thus avoiding possible conflicts with the school system.

## CONSIDERATIONS EXPRESSED BY PARTICIPANTS
(students in the intervention group)

During the group interviews, students were asked to share their impressions with reference to four main themes: considerations on the activities carried out during the five months of the intervention, their relationship with the JumpOperators, their relationship with their peers participating in the action, and, last but not least, if and in what way they felt participation in the project had changed them.

### 1. The activities

Both Italian and Spanish **students described the experience as interesting and exciting, expressing their interest in participating in a second "more advanced" version of the project**, with the possibility of additionally including increasingly diversified activities, with a more intensive and longer weekly schedule, also to be carried outside school.

> "This experience has made me less shy and more self-confident"

In Sardinia, students seem to have particularly appreciated activities which involved the presence of professionals working in the local area. Also **individual mentoring activities were appreciated,** particularly because students felt at ease speaking about personal difficulties with the JumpOperators at an individual basis. According to the entire group of students interviewed from Valencia, the action was an excellent opportunity to expand innovative experiences, acquire new skills and receive content which is not provided for by the traditional school curriculum. Group activities concerning discussions on the students' future and sessions in which participants got to know each other better were also much appreciated.

> "J@S was useful to discover new aspects of myself"

## 2. Relationship with operators

**All the students who accepted to be interviewed were strongly fascinated by the JumpOperators**, figures described as brilliant in guiding group activities, as well as open minded and ready to listen to their personal problems and expectations. Students were in agreement that the JumpOperators served as reference figures, and that they would welcome a permanent involvement of these operators in the school system.

> "Thanks to this new experience I have gained the courage to try"

The students of all schools felt respected and welcome, and have attributed the quality of this relationship not only to the personality and skills of the JumpOperators, but also to the difference perceived between these professionals and teachers, psychologists or other professionals already involved in schools. Moreover, students indicated that they found concrete support in JumpOperators, when they were uncertain about what decisions to take, and, as a consequence, they felt more secure and positive in the school envi-

> "J@S was an experience that I would like to repeat"


ronment. Thanks to these exchanges with the JumpOperators, they were able to **discover skills and sides to their personalities that they had not reflected on before**.

### 3. The relationship with their peers participating in the intervention

Students from the Italian schools described the "working group" as being made up of friendly people, but in some cases also rude ones. In both Italian schools, students said that they continued interacting with people they knew more. The fact that activities tended to be organised in interchangeable groups of students probably played a part in leading to this result. However, the fact that strong relationship failed to be developed during the implementation of the activities did not negatively affect students' opinion on the group activities, and the process of sharing this experience with other students from their school has helped participants to be less shy and to open up.

Students from the Spanish schools on the contrary described a very pleasant group environment. They said they were enthusiastic about having had the chance to meet new people from school, with whom they stayed in touch also after the end of the activities. In addition, they noticed the growing support and cooperation that was esta-

blished in the group, also among those who did not know each other from the beginning. It was emerged that **most of the students preferred spending more time with this new group rather than with their usual schoolmates**.

### 4. Personal changes

Most students from the Italian schools said that taking part in this experience helped them be less reserved and feel more relaxed; however, they report that the intervention would not have produced a significant change on a personal level. On the other hand, in Spain most students declared that the intervention significantly improved their ability to understand and analyse some personal problems, and to take decisions and face challenges without being afraid of failure. Students also described a feeling of positive energy and wellbeing throughout the activities of the pilot, which in their opinion was structured in a way as to produce an inner maturing process.

> "If JumpOs were to work in schools permanently, that would be very helpful for many of us"

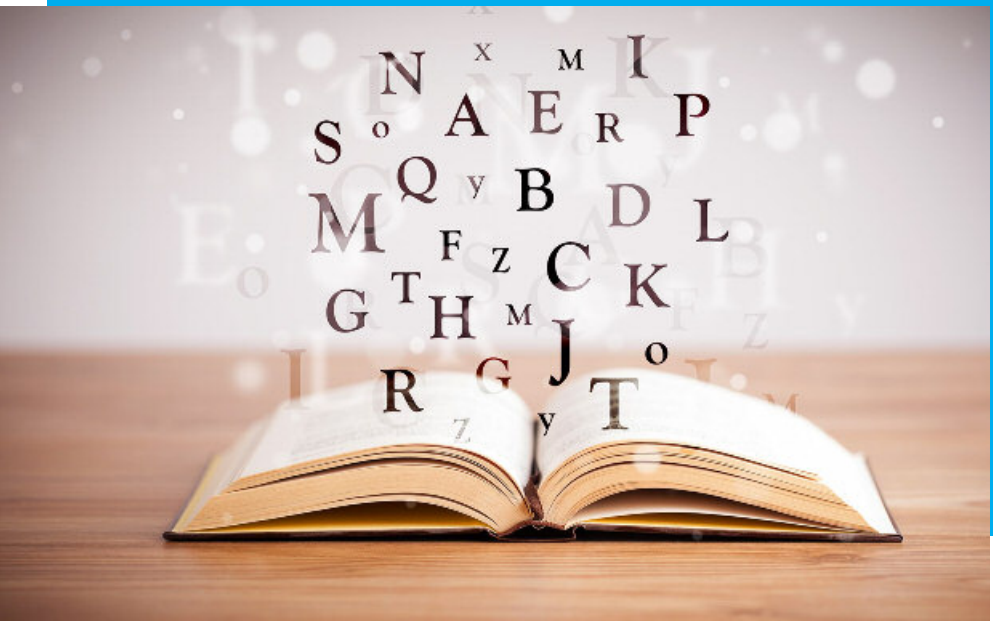
> "The JumpOs have made me feel serene and self-confident"

## Conclusions and recommendations

**The methodological approach of Jump@school:**
**Lights, shadows and lessons learned in the three years of implementation**

Jump@school has had the opportunity of observing, experimenting and drawing conclusions on the effectiveness of an intervention focused on preventing early leaving by resorting to a rigorous methodological approach, aimed at identifying its effects (positive, negative, neutral). The conclusions drawn below ought to contribute to future planning of projects and actions focusing on the same goal, bearing in mind the constraints, circumstances and the lessons learned from Jump@School.

School policies and actions aimed at fighting school drop-out: what is the legacy of the Jump@school experience?
The results of the assessments and the exchanges that took place before, during and after the intervention have highlighted some recurring elements allowing us to support the validity of the pedagogical principles on which the Jump@school model was based to prevent early school leaving. Moreover, important lessons were learned on the structural contexts in which similar actions could be implemented in the future.



1

**On the intervention and the figure of the JumpOperator**

➡ The presence of a "JumpOperator" is confirmed to be a need felt by students, headmasters, teachers and school operators. At present, in the Italian and Spanish school systems, there is no recognised and institutionalised space in which students may have access to a mentor guiding and supporting them in their development pathway; not limited to education but beyond studying. The "criticism" that was expressed by several parties has to do with the fact that JumpOperators were present in schools for an excessively short period of time, and not for everybody;

➡ An open question of great relevance is that of the balance between actions "inside and outside school" in actions aiming at preventing early school leaving. During the Jump@school project, both in Italy and in Spain, a debate kicked off on how JumpOperators and the activities they proposed should relate to the school and how they should be organised: is it better for these professionals to be totally external, i.e. not part of the school system and organisation? Or is it better for them to be internal, and therefore integrated/supporting the teaching staff through headmaster's coordination? So far, the preferences expressed seem to be towards having the JumpOperators as external to the school and therefore not having an "evaluation power" similar to that of teachers, however, it is necessary for them to work and coordinate their activities with the teachers and the schools.

**Recommendation 1 – political decision-makers, headmasters, institutions responsible for educational policies should continue with such experiments and, possibly, institutionalise middle profiles, responsible for listening, individual and group mentoring and support activities, giving evidence of positive and negative effects in the medium to long term.**

2

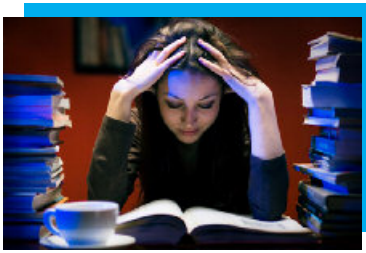
**On Early School Leaving (ESL) prevention policies.**

➡ Policies aimed at fighting against early school leaving cannot be significantly successful unless they are based on a

**Recommendation 2 – political decision-makers, institutions responsible for educational policies at the regional and national level should establish, as soon as possible, starting from the local and regional level, permanent databases on some key school dropout predictors for example absences, behaviour, average grades, etc. and they should cooperate with schools – headmasters, teachers, supporting staff – to define indicators, data collection methods and clarify intended use, granting an active role to all the actors involved.**

rigorous monitoring of the related data. Our experience concretely showed, for instance, that in the Italian and Spanish school systems no systematic and timely collection of data on students' absences exists, and these data are only collected late in the school year. For Jump@school, this meant excluding this indicator for determining at-risk students and having to make these checks several times in order to have reliable data and delay the start of the intervention. As a result of this, schools and other relevant institutions become aware which students have dropped out in the course of the year very late and hardly ever before they dropout therefore making it difficult to take any measures to keep these students in school. It is evident that this makes it impossible to plan effective preventive school dropout actions, both at the level of individual schools and in terms of general policies.

➡ It will prove very difficult to reach European targets by 2020 in the absence of a clear and focused investment on the identification of the real causes of school dropout and its interconnections, and without an agreement between schools and the local political and government institutions. If schools continue to have to deal with the reduction in the number of classes, staff, and resources owing to the reduced number of enrolled students, it will be very difficult to cooperate with them with the aim of monitoring the most significant risk variables such as absences in real time. Schools tend to keep such data for themselves that may potentially represent a threat for their functioning, at the cost of losing many students for the same reasons. If taking action on time implies disclosing and analysing data that may cause the loss of teachers and resources, schools will have to decide whether to "save" a person from school dropout or an entire school. This is a choice that no school should ever be made to make, and one which political decision makers should entertain no doubts.



➡ The interaction with the local area, its associations, entrepreneurial fabric and society proved to be a precious element in the Jump@School pilot, particularly appreciated by all the actors involved. This type of interaction, as concluded by the project, is totally positive and should be strengthened in a structured manner, and not left to chance alone, the individual projects or the goodwill of teachers, headmasters or external actors.

**Recommendation 3 – School institutions - headmasters, teachers and supporting staff, local associations and organisations should promoting, strengthen and, in the long term, stabilise cooperation with the social and economic fabric of the local area – through associations, bodies, enterprises, etc. This will allow students to open up to the needs, proposals and realities of their territories. Moreover, this helps to strengthen the relationship between the school institutions, the manufacturing sector and reference community, an aspect promoted by the recent Italian school reform which, in fact, introduced a system based on school-work alternation.**

3

**On counterfactual evaluation: a rigorous method or an obstacle to the project's success?**

Both statements may describe the reality of Jump@school. Undoubtedly, counterfactual evaluations are considered to be reliable, but they are not easy to reconcile with the constraints and requirements of a pilot funded through a European Commission call for proposals. The Jump@school experience provides ample food for thought on the relationship between a pure counterfactual evaluation and the bureaucratic-administrative structure of a European project, albeit of the pilot type. Our conclusions:

➡ The action's standardisation, difficult per se, is even more complicated if it has to be ensured in countries and specific contexts that are extremely far and different from one another;

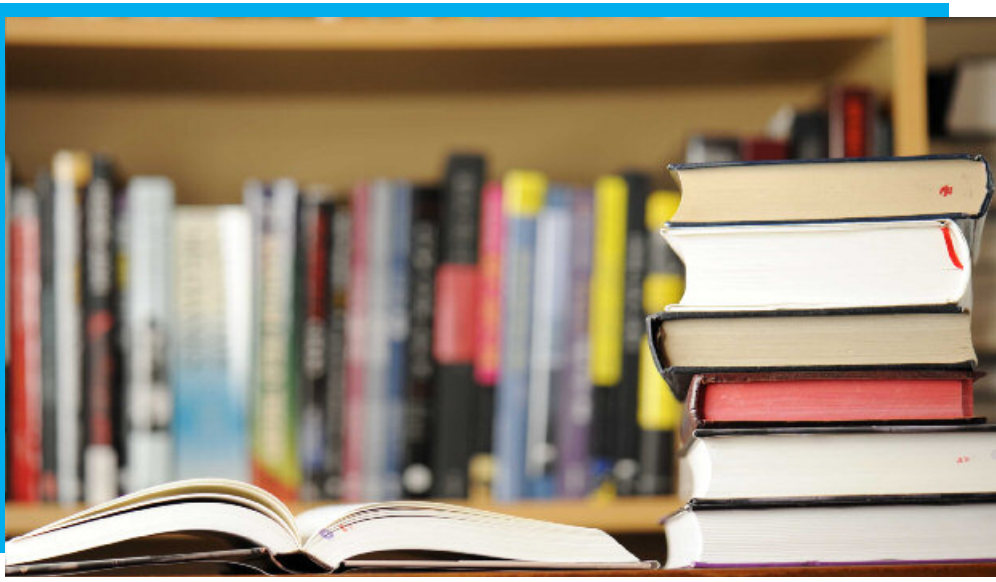
➡ The call for proposals required defining a sample size, tangible effects and expected impacts even before developing the intervention itself, finding and winning the commitment of the schools and analysing the local context. It was therefore necessary to

imagine, at the design stage, a theoretical sample and the effects of an action without any supporting data. Although it was carried out accurately, based on solid previous experience and sound analysis of international literature, this is a process that implies, for the lead partner and the entire partnership, taking up a great risk with reference to the "promises" made to the funding body at the time of submitting the proposal. This factor may discourage future proponents of this issue from submitting proposals and actions that are potentially valuable, as they may be considered to be too risky.

➞ In other research contexts in which the counterfactual method is used, researchers typically have a series of "emergency measures" at their disposal to face common issues such as the absence, at the first attempt, of a sufficient number of participants ready to take part in the experiment. In our case, and as it would be the case with all projects funded by similar calls for proposals, it proved difficult to access possible "emergency measures", such as the use of additional resources, the expansion or reduction of the sample, changing the eligibility criteria, timeframe, owing to the strict time and financial constraints of the call;

➡ he counterfactual method brings with itself also some ethical considerations. In fact, this method requires involving only part of the students at risk of early school leaving in a potentially beneficial action. Our partnership found a balance thanks to the fact that project coordinator, the regional government of Sardinia, together with the presence of other public authorities directly responsible for educational policies in the implementation countries, concretely provided opportunities for sustainability and continuity, in case positive results were achieved. However, the questions and positions expressed were numerous and varied over the three-year period. No doubt, these are key considerations that every future partnership will have to take into account before accepting to introduce such a specific and complex research method. ✪

**Recommendation 4 – political decision makers and European national and regional-level financing bodies should carefully consider, also based on the lessons learned during pilot projects, the requirements that need to meet. Concurrently start an open and serene dialogue with organisations and associations carrying out social research studies and impact assessments focusing on the most appropriate assessment approaches, methods and instruments to measure the tangible effects of interventions, considering constraints relating to time, financial aspects and implementation of the funded programmes.**

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