

Meeting in Genk: from 07-10-2025 to 10-10-2025

Work package: 'Early leavers reduction strategies'

Day 1: in school, Atlas College domein Techniek & Innovatie, Genk, Belgium

Content of the proposed activity:

> Day 1: In school (Atlas College Genk 6):

✓ 1/ Team building activities (icebreakers and energizers): understanding team dynamics and clarifying project's objectives.

2/ Early leavers rate sharing/analysis: identifying factors, trends and analysing variations by country, gender, background,... . This activity aims to share/analyze the early leavers rates in truck driver training programs across partner countries, identifying key risk factors, trends, and variations based on demographics such as country, gender, and socio-economic background.

3/ Early leavers reduction strategies:

✓ - Sharing good (proven) practices.

- Tailored interventions (mentoring, individualized learning plans, monitoring, evaluation, impact, ...). (Success indicator: A 'measurable' reduction in early leavers rates among apprentice truck drivers).

✓ 4/ Developing a dissemination plan.

✓ > Meeting assessment: Have the predefined objectives been achieved? Where do we need to make adjustments?

✓ > Report of the meeting and tasks.

***Divergence from the initially planned activity:**

2/ Early leavers rate sharing/analysis: identifying factors, trends and analysing variations by country, gender, background,... .

This activity aims to share/analyze the early leavers rates in truck driver training programs across partner countries, identifying key risk factors, trends, and variations based on demographics such as country, gender, and socio-economic background.

BECOMES:

✓ 2/ Comparative Analysis of Early Leaving in Truck-Driver Training: Trends, Risk Factors and Learner Profiles.

Explanation:

During this first project meeting it became clear that the partners first needed time to understand each organisation's context.

The partner countries use different education and training systems, definitions of early leaving, registration methods and approaches to collecting demographic data.

As a result, it was not yet possible to make a reliable and meaningful direct comparison of early-leaver rates by country, gender or socio-economic background.

Before conducting a quantitative comparison, the partners need to agree on common definitions, indicators, data sources and reporting methods.

This change does not alter the overall objective of the activity. It makes the objective more realistic and appropriate for the current stage of the project.

The first meeting focused mainly on qualitative exchange and the identification of relevant factors.

A more detailed statistical analysis of early-leaver rates can be carried out later, once comparable data and shared methodology have been established.

Comparative Analysis of Early Leaving in Truck-Driver Training: Trends, Risk Factors and Learner Profiles

The meeting report identifies several factors that are highly relevant to early leaving from vocational and transport-related training.

It can therefore be used as a **qualitative risk analysis** and as a basis for designing a common data-collection framework across partner countries.

The strongest risks identified are:

- Low or inappropriate motivation for choosing vocational education
- Students choosing a programme because other options are full
- Desire to enter employment and earn money as quickly as possible
- Absenteeism and disengagement
- Behavioural and disciplinary problems
- Additional learning, emotional, behavioural or language-support needs
- Weak communication between school and parents
- Teacher and support-staff shortages
- Budget constraints
- Mismatch between students' expectations and the actual demands of the occupation

These risks are particularly relevant to truck-driver training, where learners must combine theory, practical driving, safety responsibilities, technical knowledge and workplace discipline.

1. Evidence relevant to early leaving

Factor identified	Evidence	Possible effect on early leaving
Wrong or forced educational choice	Some students choose a programme simply because their preferred programme is full; transport is mentioned as a possible alternative choice	Low commitment, dissatisfaction and withdrawal
Weak motivation	Increasing numbers of vocational students reportedly choose vocational education because they do not want to attend school or want to earn money quickly	Poor attendance, limited effort and dropout when training becomes difficult
Economic pressure	Many vocational students want to start working as soon as possible	Learners may leave training for paid employment before completion
Absenteeism	School attendance is described as a major issue in Finland; high absence can lead to exclusion or administrative intervention	Missed theory, practical training and assessments can cause failure or withdrawal

Factor identified	Evidence	Possible effect on early leaving
Behavioural difficulties	Two or three students are at immediate risk of exclusion; disciplinary codes and cards are used	Exclusion, conflict with staff or voluntary withdrawal
Family and parental difficulties	Contact with some parents is difficult; parents may become defensive when exclusion is discussed	Problems remain unresolved and students receive insufficient support
Additional support needs	Around 30% of students require enhanced care; students include learners with autism, emotional or behavioural difficulties, hearing impairments and language needs	Without appropriate adaptations, learners may fail or disengage
Teacher shortages	There is a shortage of qualified teachers and concern about lowering entry requirements for teachers	Reduced training quality and less individual support
Financial constraints	Budget reductions limit investment in staff and resources	Fewer support services, larger workloads and weaker retention measures

Factor identified	Evidence	Possible effect on early leaving
Class and support conditions	Belgium is described as having smaller classes and better-trained support staff than France	Better conditions may support retention, although no early-leaver figures are given
Support interventions	Approximately 90% of students with an external support worker succeed each year	Suggests that targeted support may reduce early leaving, although this is not a causal evaluation

2. Suggested Trends

2.1 Increasing complexity of learner needs

The Belgium partner reports that the number of students requiring additional support is increasing. Approximately 30% of learners are described as needing enhanced care, while around 14% receive support from an external assistant.

This suggests a trend towards a more diverse vocational learner population, including students with:

- Autism-spectrum conditions
- Emotional or behavioural difficulties
- Hearing or speech impairments
- Language-learning needs
- Difficulties associated with social or family circumstances
- Possible learning disorders

For truck-driver training, this means that a standard programme may not be sufficient for all learners.

Early-leaver prevention may require:

- Differentiated theory instruction
- Additional support with literacy and technical vocabulary
- Flexible assessment methods
- Structured practical training
- Clear safety routines
- Early referral to specialist support

2.2 Shift from occupational interest to short-term economic motivation

Vocational students increasingly choose programmes because they:

- Do not want to remain in general education
- Are not motivated by school
- Want to earn money quickly
- May not have a genuine interest in the occupation

This is a particularly important risk for truck-driver training. The profession may appear attractive because it offers a relatively direct route to employment, but the training itself can involve:

- Regulations and theory
- Long periods of concentration
- Safety responsibilities
- Technical maintenance knowledge
- Practical examinations
- Irregular working conditions
- Physical and psychological demands

Students who enter only for immediate employment may leave once they discover that the occupation or training is different from their expectations.

2.3 Growing importance of attendance monitoring

School absenteeism is a major concern in Finland. Although the report does not provide Belgian absence figures, **absenteeism should be treated as a central early-warning indicator.**

In truck-driver training, absence is especially damaging because practical skills are cumulative. Missed sessions can result in:

- Insufficient driving hours
- Delays in licence or qualification requirements
- Failure to meet assessment standards
- Loss of confidence
- Disconnection from the group and trainers

2.4 Disciplinary escalation as a possible pathway to early leaving

The disciplinary system progresses from warnings and codes to yellow and red cards, potentially ending in exclusion. There are two or three pupils who have been identified as being at immediate risk of being excluded from school. This indicates a possible pathway:

low engagement → poor attendance or misconduct → conflict with school → parental disengagement → exclusion or voluntary withdrawal

For truck-driver programmes, disciplinary risk may be particularly significant because safety-critical behaviour is essential. However, training providers should distinguish between:

- Serious safety violations that require firm action
- Behaviour caused by unmet support needs
- Minor rule-breaking that could be addressed through mentoring or restorative measures

3. Variation by country

Mainly Belgium, with comparisons to France, Finland and Scandinavia.

It does not present early-leaver rates for any of these countries, so the country comparison remains contextual rather than statistical.

Belgium

- Relatively small classes compared with France
- External guidance and support through the CLV system
- A structured continuum of care
- Government-funded support workers
- Significant budget and teacher shortages
- Student choice of school and programme, but capacity limitations
- Disciplinary procedures that can lead to exclusion

Potential implications:

- Stronger support structures may protect against early leaving.
- Capacity restrictions may lead to unsuitable programme choices.
- Budget and staffing problems may weaken the effectiveness of support.
- Students in vocational education may be vulnerable to low motivation and rapid entry into work.

France

- Larger classes, sometimes reaching 25–35 students
- Less favourable pay and training conditions for support staff
- Greater difficulty providing individual attention

Potential implications:

- Larger classes may make it harder to identify early warning signs.
- Lower support capacity may increase risks for learners with additional needs.
- Truck-driver trainees may receive less personalised assistance, particularly in theory-based modules.

Finland

- A legal expectation that young people remain in education until age 18
- Stronger use of multiprofessional teams
- Greater emphasis on school attendance
- Involvement of teachers, coaches, nurses, psychologists and parents

Potential implications:

- Early leaving may appear more strongly as absenteeism before formal withdrawal.
- Multidisciplinary intervention could improve early identification.
- Differences in legal and institutional systems make direct comparison with Belgium difficult.

4. Variation by socio-economic and personal background

Several related factors:

- Family circumstances and home structure
- Parental engagement
- Desire to earn money quickly
- Language needs
- Refugee or migrant background
- Additional educational or behavioural needs
- Access to support services

These factors may influence early leaving through several mechanisms:

Economic pressure

Family support

Language background

Migration or refugee background

Disability or additional support needs

5. Proposed early-leaver risk model for truck-driver training

A common model could classify risk factors into five groups.

A. Entry and motivation

- Programme chosen because preferred option was unavailable
- Limited interest in driving or logistics
- Expectation of immediate income
- Unrealistic understanding of the profession
- Previous negative school experience

B. Participation and learning

- Repeated absence or lateness
- Missed practical sessions
- Difficulty with literacy, numeracy or technical theory
- Failure in examinations
- Low participation in classroom activities

C. Personal and social circumstances

- Financial pressure
- Housing or family instability
- Caring responsibilities
- Mental-health difficulties
- Migration-related barriers
- Weak parental or social support

D. Behaviour and safety

- Repeated disciplinary incidents
- Conflict with instructors
- Unsafe behaviour during practical training
- Failure to comply with road-safety procedures
- Substance-use concerns, where relevant

E. Institutional conditions

- Lack of qualified instructors
- Insufficient practical vehicles or equipment
- Long waiting times for tests
- Large groups
- Weak communication between training provider and employers
- Insufficient learning support

6. Recommended data collection across partner countries

To enable a meaningful comparison, each partner should report the following.

Core outcome measures

- Number enrolled
- Number completing
- Number who leave early
- Number transferred to another programme
- Number excluded
- Number who leave for employment
- Number still enrolled after 6, 12 and 18 months
- Number obtaining the relevant qualification or licence

A useful definition could be:

An early leaver is a participant who exits the truck-driver training programme before completing the planned qualification and does not transfer to another recognised programme within a defined period.

The definition should be agreed by all partners before data collection.

Demographic variables

- Country and training provider
- Gender
- Age at enrolment
- Migration or language background
- Socio-economic status or eligibility for financial support
- Previous educational level
- Employment status at entry
- Disability or additional support needs
- Urban or rural residence, where relevant

Training variables

- Programme type and duration
- Full-time or part-time status
- Theory/practical balance
- Employer involvement
- Availability of mentoring
- Access to external support
- Number of practical training hours
- Waiting time for examinations

- Instructor-to-trainee ratio

Early-warning indicators

- Absence percentage
- Unauthorised absence
- Late arrival
- Failed assessments
- Missed driving sessions
- Disciplinary warnings
- Requests to change programme
- Financial-support requests
- Contact attempts with parents or support services

Reasons for leaving

Reasons should be coded consistently, for example:

1. Employment before completion
2. Financial pressure
3. Lack of motivation
4. Wrong programme choice
5. Academic or examination failure
6. Health or disability-related barriers
7. Family or personal circumstances

8. Behavioural or disciplinary exclusion
9. Transfer to another programme
10. Relocation or migration
11. Administrative or legal barriers
12. Unknown

7. Recommended analysis methods

For each country and demographic group, calculate:

- Early-leaver rate = $\text{early leavers} \div \text{enrolled trainees}$
- Completion rate = $\text{completers} \div \text{enrolled trainees}$
- Employment-before-completion rate
- Exclusion rate
- Average absence rate
- Assessment-failure rate
- Support-access rate

Results should be shown by:

- Country
- Gender
- Age group
- Socio-economic background
- Language or migration background

- Support-needs category
- Programme provider
- Entry qualification
- Type of exit

It would also be useful to compare:

- Supported versus non-supported trainees
- Students who chose the programme freely versus those placed due to lack of capacity elsewhere
- Students with high and low attendance
- Students with and without prior vocational experience

Because the number of female trainees or specific demographic groups may be small, percentages should be accompanied by the actual number of participants.

8. Practical recommendations

Before enrolment

- Provide realistic information about truck-driving work and training demands.
- Use an orientation session or job-shadowing opportunity.
- Assess motivation, language needs and basic theory skills.
- Explain costs, licence requirements, working conditions and employment prospects.
- Identify learners who selected the programme only because alternatives were unavailable.

During training

- Monitor attendance and assessment performance from the start.
- Introduce a mentor or tutor for every trainee.
- Offer additional support in language, literacy, numeracy and technical theory.
- Provide flexible support for learners with disabilities or behavioural needs.
- Establish an early-warning system after repeated absence or failed assessments.
- Connect training to real employers and authentic work tasks.
- Use a supportive rather than purely punitive response to early difficulties.

When risk becomes visible

- Contact the trainee quickly and identify the underlying cause.
- Involve family members or social services where appropriate.
- Offer a written improvement plan with clear targets.
- Consider temporary adjustments before exclusion.

- Provide referral routes for financial, psychological or learning support.
- Record the final reason for leaving to improve future prevention.

For partner-country cooperation

- Agree a common definition of early leaving.
- Use the same reporting template.
- Exchange examples of successful retention measures.
- Compare both outcomes and institutional conditions.
- Conduct interviews with early leavers, not only administrative analysis.
- Include the learner's own explanation of why they left.

Overall assessment

The meeting report offers substantial qualitative evidence about the **risk environment** surrounding vocational learners, but it does not yet support a statistical analysis of early-leaver rates in truck-driver training. The most important emerging risks are inappropriate programme choice, weak motivation, economic pressure, absenteeism, unmet support needs, disciplinary escalation and limited institutional capacity.

The next step should be to combine this qualitative evidence with standardised quantitative data from every partner country. Only then will it be possible to identify whether differences in early leaving are mainly associated with country context, gender, socio-economic background, learner support, programme organisation or the quality of the transition into employment

Day 2: in transport company H.Essers, Patrik Renckens: Coordinator Resources

- ✓ - Identify root causes of early leavers (common reasons like work-life imbalance, long working hours and irregular schedules, job stress, physical demands, low job satisfaction,...).
- ✓ - Strategies to reduce early leavers.
- ✓ - Collaboration with education.

All three items are discussed in the meeting report, although they are not always presented explicitly under the label “early leavers.” The document mainly discusses driver shortages, turnover, rapid drop-out and retention challenges.

1. Root causes of early leaving

The meeting report document identifies several relevant causes:

Root cause	How it is discussed
Poor work-life balance	Drivers are away from home for one or more weeks, sometimes two or three weeks in pharma transport. Family commitments make the job less attractive.
Long and irregular working hours	Working days may last 10, 12 or 15 hours. Start times can vary from 03:00 to 08:00, and end times are unpredictable.

Root cause	How it is discussed
Unpredictability	Traffic jams, loading delays, winter conditions and factory delays make it difficult to predict when drivers will arrive home.
Physical demands	The work involves straps, curtain trailers, loading activities and working in cold or difficult conditions. Physical strain can cause shoulder, muscle and back problems.
Stress and administrative pressure	Increasing regulations, tachograph requirements, inspections and high fines create stress and financial risk.
Low job satisfaction or mismatch of expectations	New drivers may expect to “just drive,” but discover waiting times, physical work, irregular schedules and limited time at home. This creates rapid disappointment and departure.
Inadequate or unclear pay conditions	The document mentions unpaid or poorly compensated waiting time, high costs on the road and the difficulty of making ends meet on the available salary.
Lack of social contact	Drivers may have very little personal contact during the working week, which can negatively affect wellbeing.
Poor facilities and safety concerns	The availability and quality of parking, showers, toilets, restaurants and safe resting places affect the attractiveness of the job, especially for female drivers.

Root cause	How it is discussed
Lack of realistic information before recruitment	Some candidates receive an overly positive picture of the profession and discover the difficult aspects only after starting.
Contract and rotation problems	Long rotations for foreign drivers, difficulties taking leave and changing vehicles can reduce commitment and retention.

The meeting report gives a particularly clear example of early leaving: a driver onboarding process costs approximately €1,600, but the investment is lost when a driver leaves after only two weeks.

It also describes temporary Romanian drivers who returned home on the same day after discovering the actual working conditions. This shows that the meeting was concerned with early attrition, even if the term “early leavers” was not used consistently.

2. Strategies to reduce early leavers

Several possible retention strategies are discussed or proposed:

Improve realistic recruitment and job previews

The strongest strategy in the meeting rapport is to provide an honest picture of the job before recruitment.

- Candidates should first spend approximately three weeks accompanying an experienced driver.
- They should experience the real working conditions before starting formal training.
- Recruitment should explain the difficult aspects, including:
 - irregular hours;
 - waiting times;
 - physical work;
 - long periods away from home;
 - winter conditions;
 - loading and unloading tasks;
 - limited predictability.
- This approach is intended to prevent people from starting with unrealistic expectations and leaving after a few weeks.

Strengthen onboarding, mentoring and coaching

The company already has several relevant mechanisms:

- driver mentors;
- introductory interviews and driving tests;
- practical support for new drivers;

- an internal academy;
- follow-up by coordinators;
- conversations instead of purely punitive responses when problems occur.

The document suggests developing further training modules on:

- tachograph compliance;
- planning;
- wellbeing;
- professional attitude;
- realistic expectations.

These measures could help new drivers adapt more successfully and reduce avoidable early departures.

Improve work-life balance and flexibility

The meeting rapport discusses, but does not fully resolve, the need to:

- improve home-time predictability;
- offer more suitable rotations;
- take family circumstances into account;
- provide individual flexibility where possible;
- avoid promising home arrival times that cannot realistically be guaranteed;
- align route types with employees' family expectations.

A limitation is also acknowledged: transport operations cannot always accommodate fixed schedules such as starting every day at 09:00.

Improve communication and feedback

The meeting rapport proposes or describes:

- regular newsletters;
- WhatsApp and email communication;
- a ten-question driver survey;
- structured feedback channels;
- more personal contact between coordinators and drivers;
- monitoring the effectiveness of communication.

These measures can help identify dissatisfaction before it results in resignation.

Improve wellbeing and working conditions

Existing or proposed measures include:

- modern trucks and larger cabins;
- access to guarded parking areas;
- showers and restaurants;
- improved sanitary facilities;
- separate facilities for women;
- free coffee and waiting areas;
- occasional flexibility for personal problems;
- better and safer parking infrastructure;
- improved washing, shower and rest facilities.

The meeting rapport also suggests that governments and European institutions should develop more safe, affordable parking areas with proper basic facilities.

Reduce administrative stress and fines

The meeting rapport identifies high fines and compliance mistakes as demotivating factors. Proposed measures include:

- a uniform compliance handbook;
- regular mandatory training;
- clear tachograph procedures;
- assigned trainers;
- audits and monitoring;
- dashboards and follow-up.

These actions are included in the final AI-identified action points of the document.

Increase social connection

The company organizes meetings, meals and social activities, although attendance is low because drivers prefer to spend their free time at home. The document therefore recognizes the need for wellbeing initiatives but also shows that traditional social events may not be sufficient. More practical and accessible forms of engagement may be necessary.

3. Collaboration with education

Yes, collaboration with education is discussed extensively.

Cooperation with schools and training providers

The meeting rapport refers to:

- visits by students, including Atlas students;
- the driver-training programme;
- Academy;
- company visits and tours;
- practical demonstrations and exercises;
- cooperation between schools, companies and training organizations.

The purpose is to give students a realistic understanding of the profession before they choose it.

Better transition from school to employment

The proposed process is:

1. Give students realistic information about the profession.
2. Let candidates accompany a driver for approximately three weeks.
3. Allow them to decide whether the job suits them.
4. Start formal driver training only after they confirm their interest.
5. Provide further coaching and professional guidance after recruitment.

This is presented as a way to reduce mismatch and early drop-out.

Education for teachers

The meeting report explicitly states that teachers also need training. Suggested objectives include:

- better student guidance;
- understanding the actual transport profession;
- realistic career counselling;
- helping students develop an appropriate work attitude;
- preparing students for the physical, social and organizational demands of the job.

However, the document does not specify the exact curriculum, responsible institutions or timing.

Parent involvement

Parents are considered an important part of the education and career-choice process. The document recommends:

- informing parents about the real nature of driver work;
- involving parents in discussions about expectations and wellbeing;
- explaining the consequences of irregular hours and time away from home;
- strengthening communication between parents, schools and companies.

The meeting rapport argues that unrealistic parental expectations may contribute to students entering unsuitable occupations or expecting excessive comfort and flexibility.

Company visits and practical exposure

A small company tour with exercises is planned to help young people understand the workplace. This supports the broader idea that students should see and experience the profession rather than rely only on classroom explanations or recruitment advertising.

Overall assessment

Item	Discussed?	Assessment
Root causes of early leavers	Yes	Discussed extensively, particularly work-life imbalance, unpredictability, physical demands, stress, unrealistic expectations and poor job fit.
Strategies to reduce early leavers	Yes	Several strategies are present, especially realistic job previews, mentoring, training, better communication, improved facilities and compliance support.
Collaboration with education	Yes	Discussed in detail through schools, students, teachers, parents, training providers, company visits and work-based exposure.

The clearest overall conclusion is that the meeting rapport sees early leaving primarily as a consequence of a mismatch between expectations and the actual job. Its main proposed solution is therefore **realistic career information and practical exposure before formal training or employment**, combined with stronger onboarding, coaching, wellbeing support and collaboration between companies, schools and parents.