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Grade retention during compulsory school education in Europe:

Regulations and practices



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Preface

Purpose of this report

Each educational system evaluates its students' progress during the academic year, and implements a number of strategies to help its struggling students so they can make adequate progress. In a large number of countries, repeating a grade is an option for students who, despite remedial efforts, do not achieve adequate progress. However, the value and effectiveness of grade retention is at least up for debate. A lot of research has been done on the effects of grade retention, and the majority of the results speak against this practice (Allen, Chen, Willson, & Hughes, 2009; Goos et al., 2021; Holmes, 1989; Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Jackson, 1975; Jimerson, 2001; Pipa et al., 2024; Valbuena et al., 2020; Xia & Kirby, 2009). Nevertheless, many students around the world are retained, with frequencies differing substantially across countries.

This report focuses on the regulations and practices that are in effect, in 2023, in 37 European countries (more specifically, the 37 national units being part of the Eurydice Network in 2023, including 27 member states of the European Union and 10 associated states) regarding grade retention in compulsory education. Compulsory education covers two stages. Primary education (ISCED 1) is the first stage. Primary education, as a form of general comprehensive education, usually lasts between 4 and 6 years, depending on the specific country. Lower secondary education (ISCED 2) is the second stage. It also serves general education, although at this stage, some countries impose school tracks offering different curricula, leading to different degrees. Regulations regarding grade retention are discussed for both stages, along with criteria for grade retention, limitations that prevent grade retention from taking place frequently, measures to support students who are at risk of being retained, and the stakeholders involved in the grade retention decision-making process.

This report extends the 2011 report from the Eurydice network (Eurydice, 2011) by incorporating more countries, as well as current rates and updated regulations regarding grade retention. As in the 2011 Eurydice report, regulations for special education, education for gifted children, and private education are not considered.

Data sources used in this report

There were mainly four different data sources used for accomplishing this report. The first source was the website of Eurydice (<https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/>), a network established by the European Commission aiming at explaining how European educational systems are organized and work. The second source was information gathered through questionnaires administered to educational (law) experts of 23 of the 37 investigated Eurydice Network national units, in the period November 2022 to March 2023. The third source was information obtained from official governmental websites of the 37 national units, such as websites from ministries of education or school authorities. And finally, the fourth source was

information gathered via the student questionnaire administered in the PISA studies from 2012 until 2022 (OECD, 2020, 2023).

Organisation of this report

This report is organised as follows. Chapter 1 presents the regulations and rates regarding grade retention at ISCED levels 1 and 2, per country. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the grade retention regulations and rates, across Europe. Finally, chapter 3 offers main findings based on chapters 1 and 2, limitations, and some preliminary recommendations for European educational policymakers.

Chapter 1: Grade retention regulations and rates per country

ALB - Albania

In Albania, compulsory school education starts at age 6 and lasts for 9 years, divided into a primary cycle (grades 1-5) and a secondary cycle (grades 6-9). Albania has a single structure Education System, combining primary and lower secondary education. Grade retention is allowed but with certain restrictions.

Approximately 3% of the 15-year-old students in Albania have repeated at least one grade during their school career, according to PISA student questionnaire data (2018) and around 6% have repeated at least once in 2022.

The main criteria for grade retention in Albania are low student results, school absenteeism, and behavioural issues. If a student fails core subjects or has insufficient grades in more than 70% of the subjects, grade retention may be considered. Attendance plays a crucial role, and excessive absences can lead to grade retention. Consistently poor behaviour can also result in grade retention.

Grade retention is not applicable for students in grades 1-3, unless requested by parents. Voluntary grade retention is possible upon parental request.

To prevent grade retention, alternative measures are implemented, particularly in grades 1-3. These measures include individual reinforcement, individual programs, and concrete assistance for parents. Students failing specific subjects may repeat those subjects without repeating the entire year.

The decision-making process involves class teachers, who have the authority to decide upon grade retention. Parents can propose grade retention, and their input is considered valuable. There is no formal process for appealing grade retention decisions.

AUT - Austria

The Austrian educational system consists of compulsory schooling for 9 years, starting at age 5 with one year of kindergarten, followed by 4 years of primary education (grades 1-4) and 4 years of lower secondary education (grades 5-8). Grade retention regulations are implemented at the central level. Grade retention is allowed, with some restrictions. It does not extend the duration of compulsory education. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, specific changes were made regarding the grade retention regulations, with grade retention not being enforced in the academic year 2019-2020. Voluntary grade retention is possible.

About 14% of the 15-year-old students in Austria have repeated at least one grade during their school career, according to PISA student questionnaire data (2018). According to the PISA data from 2022, 16% of the students have repeated a grade.

In primary education, the main grade retention criteria are school absenteeism, family/health problems, and low grades in core subjects. Grade retention is not allowed in grade 1. In grade 2, permission is required to progress if a student fails two or more subjects. In grade 3, no more than one insufficiently graded core subject is allowed for progression. Remedial measures implemented to help struggling students succeed are tailored educational activities and individualized support. The grade retention decision-making process involves the class teacher, parents, the school doctor, and the school psychologist. Parents can propose grade retention, but the final decision lies with the class teacher.

In lower secondary education, the main criteria considered for grade retention are low grades in compulsory subjects and absenteeism. Grade retention is not allowed in the final year of compulsory education. Voluntary grade retention is allowed only once. In order to prevent grade retention, several preventive and remedial measures are implemented, such as early warning systems, individual learning support, corrective exams, remedial teaching, summer school programs, and tracking. The grade retention decision-making process involves the class teacher(s), the class conference, and the school head. Parents can propose grade retention and have the right to appeal against a grade retention decision.

BEL - Belgium

Belgium has a decentralized educational system with different regulations in force in its different communities. Compulsory education starts at age 5 and includes primary education (grades 1-6) and lower secondary education (grades 7-9). Grade retention is practiced with high institutional autonomy, and regulations can vary between schools.

About 31% of the 15-year-old students in Belgium have repeated at least one grade during their school career, according to PISA student questionnaire data (PISA 2018) and around 27% have repeated at least once in 2022.

In primary education, grade retention is allowed with restrictions. Parents can request voluntary grade retention. The main grade retention criteria are low subject results and family/health problems. The number of allowed grade retentions is limited, and it is not allowed for students aged 15 or older. Measures to prevent grade retention include summer schools and specialized programs for newly arrived students. The French-speaking community has the "Pact for Excellence in Teaching" to enhance basic skills and to provide support to struggling students. The grade retention decision-making process involves the class council, consisting of teachers and the school head, who assess the student's academic performance. The psycho-medical-social centre may provide additional assessment and advice. Parents play an important role in the decision-making process.

In lower secondary education, grade retention is allowed in the Flemish and German communities, while automatic progression is practiced in the French community. The main criteria for grade retention are low exam results and low overall development as apparent from an overall assessment. There are limitations on grade retention, such as the maximum age of 25 in secondary education. Measures to prevent grade retention include school tracking, re-sits, remedial and differentiation periods, and a program for language mastery. Alternative measures are implemented to address shortcomings and to provide catch-up opportunities. The class council is involved in the grade retention decision-making process, along with the school head and, in some cases, the psycho-medical-social centre. Parents are informed and their input is valued throughout the decision-making process.

BGR - Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, compulsory education begins at the age of 4 and lasts for 11 years. Pre-primary education is mandatory for 3 years, while primary education spans grades 1 to 4, and lower secondary education covers grades 5 to 7. Bulgaria has a single structure Education System, combining primary and lower secondary education. Grade retention in compulsory school education is possible but with restrictions.

According to PISA student questionnaire data, the frequency of grade retention in Bulgaria lies at about 4% of 15-year-old students having repeated at least once in 2018 and 5% in 2022.

The main criterion for grade retention decisions is low results in school subjects. Corrective exams are mandatory for students with low educational performance. If a student fails these exams or does not take them, they repeat a grade.

There are certain limitations on grade retention in Bulgaria. Grade retention is not allowed in grades 1 to 4, as well as in grade 7, which is the last year of compulsory education.

In grades 1 to 4, low-performing students receive individual assistance from their teachers, as well as additional schooling hours, to improve their performance. In grades 5 and 6, students who have failed a class, can take corrective exams to address their deficiencies and avoid grade retention.

BIH - Bosnia and Herzegovina

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the compulsory school educational system is decentralized, with primary and lower secondary education combined into one phase. The duration of compulsory schooling is typically 10 years, although it may vary depending on the specific canton. Bosnia and Herzegovina has a single structure Education System, combining primary and lower secondary education. Grade retention is permitted with certain restrictions, in all cantons.

The grade retention rate in Bosnia and Herzegovina is low, with less than 2% of the 15-year-old students having repeated a grade in primary or lower secondary school at least once, according to PISA student questionnaire data (PISA 2018).

The primary criterion for grade retention is low subject results. If a student has two failed grades in mandatory subjects or the class examination, they are required to take a remedial examination. Additionally, a student may repeat a grade if they have three negative grades in mandatory subjects or fails to take the class or remedial examination. Excessive unexcused absences can also lead to grade retention.

Students are allowed to repeat a grade only once during their compulsory school education.

To prevent grade retention, alternative measures are implemented. These include preparatory classes for children without pre-school experience, remedial exams for students who need additional support, supplementary classes, and consultations with parents to involve them in their children's academic progress.

The decision regarding grade retention is made collectively by the teaching staff within the school.

CHE - Switzerland

In Switzerland, compulsory education starts at age 4 and lasts for 11 years. The educational system is decentralized, which means that the 26 cantons have their own specific regulations regarding compulsory school requirements and grade retention. Compulsory education comprises 2 years of pre-school, 6 years of primary education, and 3 years of lower secondary education, across all cantons (except Ticino). Legislation regarding grade retention varies to a large extent between the cantons, with some cantons allowing grade retention in exceptional circumstances and other cantons prohibiting grade retention or allowing voluntary grade retention upon request.

In Switzerland, approximately 18% of the 15-year-old students report having repeated a grade at least once in 2018 and 13% in 2022 (PISA). According to the decentralized nature of the Swiss education system, retention rates can vary between the cantons.

In primary education, across all cantons allowing grade retention, the main criteria for grade retention are typically low student results, insufficient overall development, low school attendance, and personal circumstances, usually as assessed at the end of the school year. The cantons Basel-Stadt, Solothurn, and Zug, exceptionally allow grade retention in case of health or family issues. All cantons have different limitations regarding grade retention, such as restrictions on non-retainable grades or the number of repetitions allowed. Across the 26 cantons, preventive measures are in place to support struggling students, including individualized programs, additional support, and adjustments to the learning goals. These measures aim to address students' needs and help them progress academically. Special education measures are also available as an alternative to grade retention, providing tailored support to students with specific needs. The grade retention decision-making process involves various stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, legal guardians, students, and school management, with the level of involvement varying across the cantons. The final decision rests with the school authorities or teaching staff.

In lower secondary education, grade retention is subject to more restrictions as compared to primary education, across the 26 cantons. If grade retention is exceptionally considered, it is mostly for reasons of low student results. Special education measures and track-changing are alternative options. Parents, teachers, and school administration are consulted in the decision-making process, with the final decision made by the school authorities or teacher staff.

CYP - Cyprus

In Cyprus, compulsory education begins at age 4 years and 8 months and lasts for 10 years. The primary education stage covers grades 1 to 6, while the lower secondary education stage includes grades 7 to 9. Grade retention is allowed but with restrictions, and the legislation regarding grade retention is established at the central level.

The grade retention rate in Cyprus lies around 4% in 2018 and 5% in 2022, according to PISA student questionnaire data.

In primary education, low subject results and students' age are the main criteria for grade retention. Grade retention is allowed under specific restrictions. A student may repeat a grade once, typically in grade 1, based on valid reasons and with the approval of the school's inspector. Voluntary grade retention is permitted upon the agreement of key stakeholders, including the school, teacher, headteacher, educational psychologist, and inspector. Measures preventing grade retention in primary education include differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and effective communication with parents. Remedial teaching programs and individual support are offered to address specific needs, while continuous observation and evaluation help monitor progress. Collaboration with parents ensures their involvement in their child's learning process.

In lower secondary education, the main grade retention criteria are school absenteeism and low subject results. Students must pass grades in key subjects. Students failing re-sits are required to repeat their grade. Grade retention is allowed but with some restrictions. Students may repeat a grade twice within the same school but may need to enrol in a different school if they need to repeat a class for the third time. Alternative remedial measures in lower secondary education include retaking exams to improve performance. The decision-making process involves class teachers and legal guardians, with class teachers assessing students' academic performance and making the final decision based on the established criteria.

CZE - Czechia

In the Czech Republic, compulsory education lasts for 10 years, starting at the age of 5, including a 1-year compulsory preschool preparatory program. Primary education spans grades 1 to 5, followed by lower secondary education from grades 6 to 9. Grade retention is allowed but with restrictions, and voluntary grade retention is possible upon parental request. Regulations are implemented at the central level. Czechia has a single structure Education System, combining primary and lower secondary education. During the COVID-19 pandemic, recommendations were given to schools to grade students less strictly and to provide additional support.

The grade retention rate in the Czech Republic was at about 5% in 2018 and 4% in 2022, according to PISA student questionnaire data.

Grade retention is based on criteria such as low subject grades, school absenteeism, and the presence of family/health problems.

There are certain limitations on grade retention in the Czech Republic. A student may repeat a grade only once at the primary school level (grades 1 to 5) and only once at the lower secondary school level (grades 6 to 9). Additional grade retention may only occur in case of health problems.

Corrective exams can be applied in order to prevent grade retention, and students not passing up to two compulsory subjects at the end of the second semester may take these exams. Moreover, there is school tracking from lower secondary education onwards. Struggling students can change tracks instead of repeating their grade. Yet, students rarely do this. Unofficial tracking at the primary school level is increasingly being applied.

The decision to retain a student is made by the class teacher, taking into consideration health reports and parental proposals.

DEU - Germany

Germany has a decentralized educational system with autonomy given to the 16 federal states. Compulsory education starts at age 6 and lasts for 9 or 10 years, depending on the federal state, with primary education and lower secondary education as separate stages. Each federal state has its own regulations and restrictions regarding grade retention. Some federal states allow grade retention, with restrictions. Other federal states preserve grade retention for exceptional circumstances only or do not allow grade retention at all.

In Germany, across federal states, about 20% of the 15-year-old students in 2018 and 19% in 2022 have repeated a grade at least once (PISA). However, it is important to note, that the grade retention rates vary vastly from state to state according to each states legislation and practices.

In primary education, across all states allowing grade retention, the main criterion for grade retention is low subject results, but specific criteria and policies vary across states, for example, also considering factors such as school absenteeism, family/health issues, school changes, and overall assessment. Grade retention is allowed only once during primary education. Some states apply automatic promotion from grade 1 to 2. Some states have a flexible school entrance phase, allowing students to progress based on their individual learning progress. And some states allow voluntary grade retention upon parental request. Alternative remedial measures, such as personalized support plans, differentiated learning groups, and early intervention, are implemented in order to address students' difficulties, preventing grade retention. Grade retention is decided by the teacher council, involving parents' opinions. Appeals can be made, with the educational authority making the final decision.

In lower secondary education, across all states allowing grade retention, the main criterion to retain a student is low subject results throughout the school year, but there are variations in the regulations across different states. For instance, in some states, satisfactory performance in all relevant subjects is required for promotion, while other states allow weaker marks in one subject to be compensated with satisfactory marks in other subjects. Besides students' achievement, some states also consider school absenteeism or family/health problems as a criterion for grade retention. As for the limitations on grade retention, in most states, grade retention is allowed only once per grade, and not consecutively. Specific state-related rules apply too. In Berlin, grade retention is allowed only in exceptional cases and requires agreement of the school, student, and his/her parents. Hamburg permits grade retention for special reasons, upon request, and upon approval from the local authority. Voluntary grade retention is allowed in most states, upon parental request. In order to prevent grade retention, several alternative remedial measures are implemented, including conditional grade progression, delayed grade promotion decisions, grade compensation, re-sits, individualized support plans, tailored support for struggling students, digital learning environments, and support from special educational centres. The grade retention decision-making process typically involves the teacher conference, with decision authority lying in the hands of the teachers or the school head, depending on the state. Schools are required to inform parents in case grade retention is considered for their child.

DNK - Denmark

In Denmark, compulsory school education lasts for 10 years and begins at the age of 6. The educational system follows a single structure, without a distinction between primary and lower secondary education. By law, grade retention should be considered as an exceptional measure. Students typically progress automatically to the next grade based on their age.

In Denmark, 3% of the 15-year-old students report having repeated a grade at least once (PISA, 2018 and 2022).

In the Danish educational system, personalized learning and individual progress are emphasized. Various measures are in place to support students' academic progress and to prevent grade retention. Specialized support, personalized learning plans, additional resources, and intervention programs are used to address students' learning difficulties and to provide targeted assistance. A collaboration between teachers, parents, and educational professionals is crucial in order to develop effective strategies and interventions.

The decision to retain a student is made by the school head in consultation with the parents, who provide valuable insights about their child's situation. Other stakeholders, including teachers and educational professionals, may also contribute to the decision.

ESP - Spain

Spain has a 10-year compulsory educational system, starting at age 6, which includes primary education (grades 1-6) and lower secondary education (grades 7-10). Grade retention is not permitted in grades 1, 3, and 5, and only exceptionally allowed in all other grades.

Spain has a high grade retention rate, with about 29% of the 15-year-olds reporting having repeated a grade at least once in 2018 and 22% in 2022, according to PISA.

In primary education, the main criterion to consider retention in grades 2, 4, and 6, is low school subject results. Students who have not achieved the objectives and have not acquired the necessary key skills, may be retained. Grade retention can be applied only once, with a personalized reinforcement plan. It is an exceptional measure, which can only be taken after having implemented other measures to address curricular gaps or learning difficulties. The decision on grade retention is made by the teaching team, with input from parents or legal guardians.

In lower secondary education, low school subject results are the main criterion for grade retention to be considered, as in primary education. Students with insufficient results in more than 2 subjects may be retained. Grade retention is allowed only once per grade for grades 7 to 9, twice for grade 10, and twice in total for the entire compulsory school period. As in primary education, legislation states that other support measures (such as retake exams, reinforcement plans, tests, conditional progression) have to be implemented first, before considering grade retention. Decisions on grade retention are made collegially by the teaching team, with advisory input from parents or legal guardians.

EST - Estonia

In Estonia, compulsory school education lasts for 9 years and begins at the age of 7. The legislation considers grade retention as an exceptional measure. Estonia has a single structure Education System, combining primary and lower secondary education. Schools have the autonomy to decide whether or not to retain a student. Voluntary grade retention is not regulated, with preventive measures and appropriate support being encouraged instead.

About 3-4% of the 15-year-old students in Estonia have repeated a grade at least once (PISA, 2018 and 2022).

Low subject results play a crucial role in determining grade retention.

There are no specific limitations on grade retention. Flexibility is provided to adjust the pace of learning and the timing of grade progression.

The focus is on implementing alternative measures, such as individual curricula and supplementary study opportunities, to address students' needs and to promote their academic progress. Alternative measures, including summer assignments and individual curricula, are implemented to support students' progress and avoid grade retention.

The decision to retain a student is made by the teacher council, involving the student or his/her legal representative and considering their opinion. The aim is to provide personalized and supportive education that meets the individual needs of students.

FIN - Finland

In Finland, compulsory school education integrates primary and lower secondary education and lasts for 9 years. Finland follows a single structure Education System, combining primary and lower secondary education. The legislation foresees grade retention for exceptional circumstances only. Students typically progress automatically to the next grade based on their age.

The grade retention rate in Finland lies at about 3%, according to PISA student questionnaire data (2018 and 2022).

Low subject results and low overall development are the main criteria for grade retention. Students reaching a satisfactory level of performance in all assessed subjects, are typically promoted to the next grade. Grade retention is considered in cases of significant academic challenges, and students progressing according to a personal study plan, may be retained, if they consistently perform poorly.

In order to prevent grade retention, Finland emphasizes alternative measures and support systems. Remedial instruction, intensified cooperation with students' family, and special needs support measures are implemented to provide increased support for struggling students. Early identification of subjects where students are at risk of failing is crucial, and support is tailored to their individual needs. General support is provided within everyday school activities, and intensified support involves collaboration with teachers and experts to create a learning plan. Special support is available for students with unique needs, involving parental involvement and multi-professional cooperation. Flexible basic education is an option for students facing underachievement or lack of motivation, aiming to enhance study skills and facilitate the transition to upper secondary level. Corrective exams allow students to demonstrate their knowledge in specific subjects, while remedial instruction provides additional support.

Decisions regarding support measures and grade promotion/retention are made by the principal and teachers, jointly. The Provincial State Office has the authority to intervene in cases of flawed decisions, to conduct a new assessment and to make the final decision regarding grades or promotion.

FRA - France

In France, compulsory education starts at age 3 and lasts for 12 years, with grades 1 to 5 comprising primary education, and grades 6 to 9 comprising lower secondary education. According to the legislation, grade retention should be used for exceptional cases only.

About 17% of the 15-year-old students report having repeated a grade at least once, according to PISA student questionnaire data (2018). In 2022, 11% of the students reported the occurrence of grade retention.

In primary education, the main criteria for grade retention are low subject results and low overall development as apparent from an overall assessment. Grade retention is pursued only after other efforts trying to remedy students' low academic progress have failed. Support systems, such as personalized programs and support plans, are implemented to address difficulties and promote academic progress. The decision to retain a student is made by the teacher council, involving the opinions of parents or legal guardians.

In lower secondary education, grade retention is considered a last resort measure for students with low academic progress (i.e., low subject results and low overall development), after all other options have been exhausted. Preventive measures are prioritized to avoid grade retention. Restricted or probational progression may be used, and personalized programs and support plans are implemented to address learning difficulties and to provide tailored assistance. The decision to retain a student is made by the teacher council, involving dialogue with the head of the institution, the student and his/her legal representatives. Appeals can be made, and, if so, the final decision is made by the Inspector of National Education.

GRC - Greece

In Greece, compulsory education starts at the age of 4 and lasts for 11 years. It consists of 2 years of pre-school education and 9 years of primary and lower secondary education. By law, grade retention is considered as an exceptional measure, allowed only in exceptional circumstances. During the COVID-19 pandemic, specific changes were made to the grade retention regulations. More specifically, the requirements regarding the minimum overall degree for successful completion of grades and the allowed number of school absences were modified, with the aim of providing more flexibility and ensuring fairness in the education system.

About 3-4% of the 15-year-old students in Greece report having repeated a grade at least once (PISA, 2018 and 2022).

In primary school, the main criteria for grade retention are low school subject results and school absenteeism, but family/health problems, insufficient participation, non-completion of assigned work, and unresponsiveness to assessments are also considered. Alternative measures preventing grade retention, are implemented, such as additional support, personalized remedial programs, and corrective exams (for extended health-related absences). Decisions on grade retention are made in special pedagogical meetings involving teachers, the school head, and the educational coordinator, not parents.

In lower secondary education, the main criteria for grade retention are low school subject results and school absenteeism. Specific requirements apply for students with disabilities or special needs. Additional support measures are implemented to prevent grade retention, such as additional lessons, and corrective exams for (at maximum 4) failed subjects. Decisions on grade retention are made by the teachers. Parents are typically not involved in the decision-making process.

HVR - Croatia

In Croatia, compulsory school education entails a single structure system starting at age 6 with pre-school education and continuing for 9 years. Primary and lower secondary education are combined into a single structure, spanning grades 1 to 8. Grade retention in compulsory school education is allowed but with restrictions.

According to PISA student questionnaire data, the grade retention rate in Croatia is relatively low, with less than 2% of the 15-year-olds having repeated a grade at least once in 2018 and about 1% in 2022.

The primary criterion for grade retention is low subject results. Students must have passing marks in all subjects in order to progress to the next grade. If their overall achievement is assessed as insufficient, typically indicated by a grade of 1, they will be retained in the same grade for an additional year.

In Croatia, there are limitations on grade retention, but for secondary school students only. They are allowed to repeat the same grade only twice, unless exceptional circumstances are approved by the Minister of Education.

To prevent grade retention, there are some alternative measures in place. For instance, in exceptional cases, a student from grades 1 to 3 may advance to the next grade, conditionally, even if they have an insufficient mark in one subject at the end of the school year. However, this allowance is applicable only once. If the student continues to have an insufficient mark in the same subject in subsequent years, grade retention may still be implemented.

The grade retention decision-making process involves the teacher council and the school head. The class teacher initiates the proposal for grade retention, which is then evaluated and discussed by the teacher council and the school head.

HUN - Hungary

In Hungary, compulsory education begins at the age of 3, with pre-school, and lasts for 11 years, encompassing grades 1 to 8. Compulsory education continues until the end of the academic year in which a student reaches the age of majority. Students have options regarding their compulsory education once they turn sixteen years old, such as concluding their education with certain qualifications. Hungary has a single structure Education System, combining primary and lower secondary education. Grade retention is allowed, with some restrictions, and voluntary grade retention is also possible.

According to PISA student questionnaire data, about 9% of the 15-year-old students have repeated a grade at least once in 2018 and 6% in 2022.

The main criteria for grade retention are low subject results and school absenteeism. Students need to obtain a pass mark in each subject. Students failing a subject have the opportunity to take a repeat exam. If they fail this exam or if they do not participate, they have to repeat the grade. Excessive school absences can also lead to grade retention.

Grade retention is not permitted in cases of school changing.

In order to prevent grade retention, supplementary exams and re-sits are offered to students who fail to meet study requirements or receive failing marks. Additional support during individual sessions is given to struggling students in grades 1 to 4. Tracking and track changing based on performance levels are also used as measures preventing grade retention.

The decision to retain a student is made by the teachers. Parents' opinions and advice are sought, and they can also propose grade retention themselves. Expert opinions from rehabilitation committees or national experts are crucial in assessing a student's ability to continue education.

IRL - Ireland

In Ireland, compulsory school education lasts for 9 years, from ages 6 to 15, encompassing both primary and lower secondary education. However, it is common for most children to start primary education already at the age of 4, and for all children to be enrolled in primary school by the time they turn 5. By law, grade retention is allowed for exceptional cases only and with certain restrictions.

According to PISA student questionnaire data, 6% of the 15-year-old students in Ireland have repeated a grade at least once in 2018 and 4% in 2022.

In primary education, criteria for grade retention include school absenteeism, family/health problems, and low development as apparent from an overall assessment. Alternative measures are prioritized to support students, such as targeted interventions, personalized learning plans, resource teaching, and support schemes for disadvantaged areas. Participants in the grade retention decision-making process include the class teachers, the learning support teacher, the school head, and parents.

In lower secondary education, criteria for grade retention include extensive school absenteeism, serious illness, family trauma, poor academic records requiring remedial treatment, or a school change. In general, remedial treatment and individualized programs are provided to support struggling students, preventing grade retention. The decision to retain a student is made by the school head, taking into account input from teachers, learning support teachers, parents, and other stakeholders (such as doctors, in case of health-related absences).

ISL - Iceland

In Iceland, compulsory school education combines primary and lower secondary education and lasts for 10 years. Grade retention is not allowed, unless in very special circumstances. Students typically progress automatically from one grade to the next. The focus is on providing inclusive education and tailored support for students with special needs.

Accordingly, less than 1% of the 15-year-olds in Iceland have repeated a grade at least once (PISA, 2018 and 2022).

The only criterion for grade retention to be exceptionally considered for a particular student, is student health problems.

In general, a series of preventive measures is implemented in schools, including screenings, observations, and psychological or social assessments to ensure students receive appropriate instruction and support. Regular assessments of students' competences and progress guide their education and provide valuable information to students, parents, teachers, and school authorities. In cases where students are unable to attend school due to long-term illness or accidents, they have the right to receive instruction at home or in a medical facility. Special classes or schools can be established to meet the needs of students who require a specialized learning environment. Active cooperation between families and schools, as well as consultation between school personnel and parents, enhances students' chances of success. Specialist services provided by municipalities support schools in resolving issues and promoting the well-being of students. Early evaluation and counselling are essential in addressing educational, social, or psychological challenges and ensuring continuity of education during transitions between school levels. Study and vocational counselling are integral parts of specialist services, assisting students in harnessing their abilities, solving problems, and guiding them towards further studies and employment.

The decision to retain a student can only be proposed by the legal representatives of that student, in very specific circumstances such as long-term illness.

ITA - Italy

In Italy, compulsory school education lasts for 8 years, starting at age 6. Primary education and lower secondary education are separate stages. Grade retention is allowed in both stages, but only in exceptional circumstances and with specific restrictions.

The grade retention rate for 15-year-olds in Italy lies at about 13% in 2018 and 9% in 2022, according to PISA.

In primary education, the main criterion for grade retention is low development (in terms of maturity, marks, and skills) as apparent from an overall assessment, throughout the year and at the end of each quarter. Alternative measures implemented to prevent grade retention include supplementary tests for students who missed assessments due to illness, and additional support tailored to students' specific needs. Grade retention decisions are made by the class teachers, in exceptional cases only, with parental involvement.

In lower secondary education, the main criteria for grade retention are insufficient development as apparent from an overall assessment and school absenteeism. Students need a school attendance rate of 75% in order to advance to the next grade. In order to prevent grade retention, several alternative measures are implemented, such as supplementary exams for students unable to be evaluated due to valid reasons, and additional support initiatives for student who do not fully meet the learning attainment targets. The decision to retain a student is made by the class council.

LIE - Liechtenstein

In Liechtenstein, compulsory school education lasts for 9 years, starting at age 6. In primary education, grade retention is allowed, but in exceptional circumstances only. In lower secondary education, grade retention regulation is less restrictive. Grade retention does not extend the compulsory education period.

In Liechtenstein, approximately 19% of the 15-year-old students report having repeated a grade at least once (PISA, 2012).

In primary education, by law, students are typically automatically promoted to the next grade. Voluntary grade retention can be requested if deemed necessary, based on criteria such as health problems and unfavourable family circumstances. Students can only repeat once or twice, depending on enrolment delays. The last year of primary education can only be repeated voluntarily in exceptional cases. Overall, extra support is given to struggling students, helping them succeed. In case of voluntary grade retention, parents decide.

In lower secondary education, grade retention is permitted, including voluntary grade retention. Criteria for grade retention include low potential success in the following year and insufficient academic performance in core subjects. Grade retention is limited to one repetition within lower secondary education, and the last year of lower secondary education can only be repeated voluntarily. Preventive measures used include supplementary lessons, special support for students with learning disabilities, remedial courses, assisted learning, homework assistance programs, and track changing practices. The decision-making process involves the teacher council, which evaluates academic performance and considers input from parents and, if necessary, school psychologists. Parents have an active role in the decision-making process, and their input is considered. The teacher council has the final word, based on all gathered information. In case of voluntary grade retention, parents have the final word.

LTU - Lithuania

In Lithuania, compulsory school education lasts for 11 years, starting at age 6. Primary education includes grades 1 to 4, while lower secondary education covers grades 5 to 10. Grade retention is regulated centrally, with consistent guidelines across the country. Grade retention is allowed, with some restrictions.

According to data from the PISA 2018 and 2022 student questionnaire, 2% of the 15-year-old students have repeated a grade at least once.

In primary education, the main criteria governing grade retention decisions are overall low assessment results and low subject results. Only students in grade 4 with negative annual assessment results may repeat their grade. In order to prevent grade retention, all students are carefully monitored by their teachers and struggling students receive extra assignments and counselling. Together with educational authorities, teachers discuss students' progress and determine whether they should proceed, repeat the year, or receive additional work. Recommendations are made to the school principal, who makes the final grade retention decision. Transparency is ensured through communication with parents or guardians.

In lower secondary education, grade retention is considered when students face difficulties or fall below expected standards. Alternative interventions and support measures are explored. If a student receives an unsatisfactory year-end assessment, does not engage in social civic activity, or receives an unsatisfactory score for an additional assignment, teachers and staff assess the situation. The principal considers overall performance and support needs. Grade retention is not applicable in the final year of lower secondary education, graduate students in lower secondary education only repeat failed classes not the entire year. To prevent grade retention, additional work or social civic activities are assigned to students with unsatisfactory assessments. Regarding the decision-making process, as in primary education, the teacher council is responsible for grade retention recommendations, and the school principal makes the final decision.

LUX - Luxembourg

In Luxembourg, compulsory school education starts at age 4 and lasts for 12 years. It includes primary education (grades 1-6) and lower secondary education (grades 7-9). An upcoming act aims to extend compulsory schooling from age 16 to 18. Grade retention is allowed in both primary education and secondary education, but with some restrictions. Voluntary grade retention is only permitted in lower secondary education.

According to data from the PISA student questionnaire (2018), the grade retention rate in Luxembourg is high, with about 32% of the 15-year-old students having repeated a grade at least once.

In primary education, the main criterion for grade retention is insufficient student results, in particular in German, French, and mathematics. Primary education is organized in two-year cycles. A cycle can be extended by 1 year. Within the same learning cycle, promotion to the next year occurs automatically. In total, the maximum allowed number of grade retentions is two. Measures used to prevent grade retention include tailored support measures, personalized educational plans, and regional and national support options. The decision to retain a student is made by the class teacher, based on consultations of the pedagogical team. Parents have the right to appeal the decision.

In lower secondary education, various criteria are used to consider grade retention, namely family or health problems, insufficient maturity, special needs, and low subject results. Grade retention is allowed only once in lower secondary education. Measures for prevention and support include considering overall performance, revision assignments, support lessons, and track changes. Grade retention decisions are made by the class council, considering expert opinions and parents' input.

LVA - Latvia

In Latvia, compulsory school education lasts for 11 years, starting at age 5. In Latvia, primary and lower secondary Education are combined to a single structure. Grade retention is allowed but only for exceptional cases. Generally, students progress automatically to the next grade.

In Latvia, approximately 3-4% of the 15-year-old students report having repeated a grade at least once (PISA, 2018 and 2022).

Criteria for grade retention include school absences, family/health problems, and insufficient subject results or progress. As for the latter, students are expected to achieve a grade no lower than four points in most subjects. Students who do not master the curriculum or receive low grades may repeat the year.

To prevent grade retention, alternative measures are implemented, such as supplementary study measures and the development of study plans. These measures are mandatory for students with lower grades and aim to address difficulties early on.

The grade retention decision-making process involves the teacher council and the school head. Parents also play a role in the process, providing input and expressing their views. In case of disagreement, parents or students have the right to appeal the decision made by the school head.

MKD - The Republic of North Macedonia

In the Republic of North Macedonia, compulsory education spans 9 years and combines both primary education (grades 1 to 4) and lower secondary education (grades 5 to 9). The law for primary education emphasizes inclusive education and allows retention in grades 1 to 6 in exceptional circumstances only. In lower secondary education, grade retention regulation is less restrictive. Voluntary grade retention is also possible.

According to data from the PISA 2018 and 2022 student questionnaire, about 3% of the 15-year-old students in the Republic of North Macedonia have repeated a grade at least once.

The main criteria for grade retention are family/health problems and low subject results. In grades 6 to 9, students failing their corrective exam in 1 or 2 failed subjects or students with more than 2 insufficient grades at the end of the school year, are required to repeat the grade.

In order to help all students succeed, a multi-tiered support model is implemented, with several preventive and remedial measures including functional assessments determining students' opportunities and needs, curricular adaptations, individualized educational programs, the involvement of tutor-volunteers, remedial classes, supplementary instruction, and corrective exams.

Teachers and legal guardians have the authority to propose grade retention, with the final decision made by the teacher council. Expert input from psychologists, doctors, or special needs teachers may be sought when necessary.

MLT - Malta

In Malta, compulsory education begins at age 5 and lasts for 11 years. Compulsory education consists of primary education (grades 1-6) and lower secondary education (grades 7-9). In primary education, students automatically progress to the next grade level. In secondary education, grade retention is allowed (with some restrictions) but generally discouraged due to its potential socio-emotional impact on students, foreseeing it as a rather exceptional measure to be implemented in exceptional circumstances only.

About 5% of the 15-year-olds in Malta report having repeated a grade at least once (PISA, 2018 and 2022).

In primary education, automatic promotion is the general practice. Grade retention is applied in exceptional circumstances only. Many measures are implemented to prevent students from struggling or to support students experiencing difficulties, such as additional class support, individualized educational programs, availability of learning support educators, modifications to the curriculum, catch-up classes, and support services like psycho-social support and inclusive education support. The decision to retain a student is made by the parents, based on extensive consultation with teachers and other professionals.

In lower secondary education, grade retention is permitted but only under exceptional circumstances. The main criterion for grade retention to be considered for a student is low subject results. To prevent students from struggling, many measures are used, such as prevention and intervention strategic measures, support from the national school support service (NSSS), additional class support, the availability of core curricular program mentors, tracking and track-changing practices, and the assignment of mentors to lower-track students. Grade retention is considered if a student still shows significant learning gaps after all aforementioned measures have been applied. The grade retention decision-making process involves parents, school authorities, and class teachers, with class teachers providing recommendations and parents making the final decision.

MNE - Montenegro

Montenegro has a single structure education system with compulsory education lasting 9 years, combining both primary education and lower secondary education. Students start at age 6 and progress through the 9 grades, across 3 cycles. Grade retention is generally allowed in grades 5 to 9, with some restrictions, and exceptionally allowed in grades 1 to 4, where automatic promotion is the general practice.

The grade retention rate in Montenegro is lower than 2% (PISA, 2018 and 2022).

The main criterion for grade retention is low student results. In grades 5 to 9, students with at least 4 failing grades, and students with failures on remedial exams, have to repeat their grade. In grades 1 to 4, students who do not master the teaching material to the extent that they cannot continue education, may be (exceptionally) considered for grade retention.

There are certain limitations on retention in grades 5 to 9 in Montenegro. Students can take corrective exams if they fail 1, 2, or 3 exams. Students who turn 15 in the current school year and have insufficient grades, can progress to the next grade conditionally. This means that they can take the grade exam in the following school year from the subjects for which they had insufficient marks.

In order to prevent students from struggling and to support student facing difficulties, several measures are used, including remedial classes during the school year, and supplementary classes for non-native speakers to support language acquisition and integration into the teaching process. Educational measures such as warnings, reprimands, transfers, and the involvement of a committee may be implemented based on pedagogical justifications.

The decision-making process for grade retention involves a collaboration between the class teacher or council, the professional service within the school, and the parents. They assess the student's academic performance and consider the need for grade retention, with input from the teacher or council on progress and the professional service on overall development. Parental input is essential due to their knowledge of the child's individual circumstances.

NLD - The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, education is voluntary for children at the age of 4, and mandatory for children aged 5 to 16. Primary education begins at age 4, covering grades pre-K to 6. Lower secondary education starts at age 12, covering grades 7 to 10. In general, grade retention is allowed, but due to the high level of autonomy given to the schools, each school has its own regulations and restrictions regarding grade retention.

According to PISA student questionnaire data, 17% of the 15-year-old students in 2018 and 22% in 2022 have repeated a grade at least once.

In primary education, across all schools, low overall assessment results (including low academic performance, unreadiness for the next grade level, unsatisfactory learning and work attitudes) are the main criterion for grade retention, but specific criteria and policies vary across schools. Students can repeat a grade a maximum of two times, across all primary school grades. Measures used to prevent grade failure include extra time for assignments, special classes for students with specific needs, remedial teaching programs, intensive academic programs during school breaks, and streaming (at the end of primary school). The decision to retain a student is made by the teachers, specialized educators, and school managers. Parents are informed and can appeal the decision.

In lower secondary education, each school can define its own grade retention criteria and restrictions. Typically, however, low student academic performance is the main criterion to consider grade retention, while students are allowed to repeat a specific grade only once or to be retained in lower secondary education (in general) twice, at most. Measures implemented to support struggling students include remedial teaching and conditional progression. Class teachers, school heads, specialists, and parents all participate in the grade retention decision-making process, with school boards responsible for the final decision.

NOR - Norway

In Norway, compulsory education spans 10 years, including primary education (grades 1-7) and lower secondary education (grades 8-10). According to the Education Act and Regulations, automatic promotion should be the prevailing practice across compulsory education and grade retention should be discouraged.

No data are available regarding the percentage of students repeating a grade, neither via PISA, nor via national statistics.

The criteria for grade retention are determined at the school level. Typically, various factors are taken into account, such as low student academic performance and excessive school absenteeism.

Additional support tailored to individual students' needs is provided, in order to help students overcome challenges. Regular assessments, collaboration among stakeholders, and early intervention are key strategies used to prevent grade retention. Schools offer additional assistance, such as tutoring and individualized learning plans, to students at risk of falling behind. Flexibility in assessment and communication among parents, teachers, and students ensure effective support. Efforts are made to improve the overall quality of education, reduce disparities, and provide equal opportunities for academic success. Special education services are available for students with specific needs, with decisions made based on expert assessments and considering students' benefits from attending regular education.

The decision to retain a student involves the school principal, student, parents or guardians, and teachers, with grade retention being very rare and primarily a voluntary choice made by parents.

POL - Poland

In Poland, the educational system follows a single structure, with compulsory education starting at age 6 and lasting for 9 years. It includes 1 year of preschool and 8 years of basic school (grades 1-8) that integrates primary and lower secondary education. Grade retention is generally allowed in grades 4 to 8, with little restrictions, and exceptionally allowed in grades 1 to 3, where automatic promotion is the norm.

According to PISA student questionnaire data (2018 and 2022), 3% of the 15-year-old students have repeated a grade at least once.

The main grade retention criteria are insufficient subject results, school absenteeism, and behavioural issues. In grades 4 to 8, students must achieve end-of-year marks higher than 'unsatisfactory' in all compulsory subjects in order to be promoted. If a student receives an 'unsatisfactory' mark in one subject, they can take a repeat or resit exam. Failure to pass this exam results in grade retention. Students attending less than 50% of compulsory classes can take a qualifying exam to determine promotion eligibility. In grades 1 to 3, repeating a year is considered an exception, requiring justification from psychologists who assess the student's circumstances.

Measures implemented to support struggling students and to prevent grade retention include resit exams, conditional progression, and qualifying exams.

The teacher council, consisting of the school head and teachers, assesses the student's academic performance and decides on grade retention. Psychologists contribute to this decision-making process by evaluating the student's well-being, identifying learning difficulties, and providing recommendations. In grades 1 to 3, parental acceptance is also necessary for grade retention decisions.

PRT - Portugal

In Portugal, compulsory education lasts 12 years, in a single structure from ages 6 to 18, divided into basic education, with a primary cycle (grades 1-4), secondary cycle (grades 5-6), and third cycle (grades 7-9), and secondary education (grades 10-12). In general, according to legislation, grade retention should be considered in exceptional circumstances only. Due to some level of autonomy given to the schools, each school has its own regulations and restrictions regarding grade retention. Voluntary grade retention is not allowed.

The grade retention rate in Portugal is high, with about 27% of the 15-year-old students having repeated a grade at least once in 2018 and 17% in 2022, according to PISA student questionnaire data.

The main criteria for grade retention to be considered are low subject results (in particular, low marks in core subjects), low overall assessment results, school absenteeism, and family or health problems. For core subjects, such as Portuguese, mathematics, and foreign languages, the criteria are defined centrally for grades 4, 6, and 9, and institutionally for the remaining grades.

Some limitations apply, according to the (central) Portuguese legislation. In grade 1, retention is not allowed. In grades 5 and 6, age limitations apply.

In order to support struggling students and prevent grade retention, several measures are implemented, such as formative assessments, student monitoring, tutoring, team teaching, absenteeism tests, and conditional progression.

In the grade retention decision-making process, class teachers play a central role. They closely monitor students' academic performance, assess their progress, and determine if grade retention is necessary. Other teaching staff members and the multidisciplinary team for inclusive education are available for consultation and support, offering additional perspectives and insights to inform the process. The school head is responsible for ratifying the grade retention decision. Parental involvement is crucial throughout the assessment process. Schools have the responsibility to engage parents or legal guardians, providing them with regular updates on their child's progress and creating opportunities for input and feedback. If parents disagree with the grade retention decision, they have the right to appeal.

ROU - Romania

In Romania, compulsory education begins at age 6 and lasts for 13 years, including 5 years of primary education, 4 years of lower secondary education, and 4 years of upper secondary education. Grade retention is allowed, with some restrictions, and the duration of compulsory education remains the same regardless of grade retention application.

In Romania, approximately 4-5% of the 15-year-old students report having repeated a grade at least once (PISA, 2018 and 2022).

In primary education, the main criteria for grade retention are low subject results, school absenteeism, and behavioural issues. Students must achieve a sufficient final average mark for each subject, and cannot exceed 50% absences for each subject, in order to progress to the next grade. Grade retention limitations apply to the preparatory grade and the first grade, which cannot be repeated. Intensive remedial education periods and special re-examinations are organized during the summer vacation to support students who failed subjects. The decision to retain a student is taken by the teacher council, based on a detailed monitoring of the student by his/her teacher and tutor teacher, and with involvement of his/her parents.

In lower secondary education, grade retention is considered based on the same criteria as in primary education, being low subject results, school absenteeism, and behavioural issues. No limitations exist. Re-examinations and counselling sessions are provided as alternative measures to support struggling students. As is primary education, the decision-making process involves the teacher council, with parents being informed and involved in the evaluation.

SRB - Serbia

In Serbia, compulsory school education lasts for 9 years, combining a preschool preparatory program (starting at age 5,5), primary education (grades 1 to 4), and lower secondary education (grades 5 to 8). Grades 1 to 8 constitute 'basic education' and are single-structure-organized. Grade retention regulations are determined at the central level, with grade retention being forbidden in grades 1, 2, 3, and 8, and allowed in grades 4 to 7. Voluntary grade retention is possible in grades 1 to 3, upon request of parents or legal guardians. Grade retention extends the compulsory education period by one year.

Serbia has a low rate of grade retention, with about 1-2% of the 15-year-olds reporting having been retained at least once, according to PISA student questionnaire data (2018 and 2022).

The main criteria for grade retention in grades 4 to 7 are low subject results and excessive school absenteeism. Students with up to 2 unsatisfactory grades, must take a make-up exam. If they fail these exams, they must repeat their grade. Students with more than 2 unsatisfactory grades automatically repeat their grade, without the chance to catch up via a make-up exam. Students who were frequently absent, must take compensatory grade exams. If they fail these exams, they have to repeat their grade.

Alternative measures implemented to prevent grade retention are make-up exams and compensatory grade exams. Other support measures are not specified by legislation.

The grade retention decision-making process involves both the class teachers and the teacher council. They jointly make the decision.

SVK - Slovakia

In Slovakia, compulsory education starts at the age of 5 (with pre-school education) and continues for 11 years. Primary education spans grades 1 to 4, followed by lower secondary education from grades 5 to 9, combined to a single structure. Compulsory schooling is considered fulfilled after completing 11 years of education, regardless of grade (retention). By law, grade retention is seen as an exceptional measure, to be considered only after other remedial measures have been implemented.

According to PISA student questionnaire data, 6% of the 15-year-old students in Slovakia have repeated a grade at least once during their school career in 2018 and 8% in 2022.

Criteria for grade retention are factors such as low school attendance, family or health issues, and low subject results. Students may repeat a grade if they were unable to be assessed, even after a substitute assessment date, due to reasons of excessive school absenteeism or family/health issues. Additionally, students are required to repeat their grade if they fail more than 2 subjects by the end of the second semester or 1 subject after a retake exam.

Typically, students are allowed to repeat a grade only once during their entire academic journey.

Alternative measures, such as tracking, substitute assessment dates, and retake examinations, are implemented to provide appropriate educational support.

The school head plays a crucial role in the decision-making process for grade retention. They carefully assess all students' educational results, considers input from the students or their legal representatives, and makes the final decisions.

SVN - Slovenia

Slovenia follows a unified education system for compulsory school education, combining primary school and lower secondary school into 'basic school'. The mandatory schooling period starts at the age of 6 and lasts for 9 years. Grade retention policies are determined at the central level to ensure consistency across schools and regions. Grade retention is forbidden in grades 1 and 2, and allowed in grades 3 to 9, with some restrictions. It does not prolong the period of compulsory schooling. Voluntary grade retention (upon request of legal guardians) is only permitted in grades 3 to 9.

According to PISA, about 4% of the 15-year-old students in Slovenia in 2018 and 3% in 2022 have repeated a grade at least once during their school career.

Criteria for retention in grades 3 to 9 include low school attendance, family/health problems, school changes, insufficient overall development, and low subject results. In grades 3 to 6, students receiving a negative evaluation in one or more subjects, despite having received supplementary classes and other forms of individual and group assistance, may repeat their grade. In grades 7 to 9, student receiving 3 negative marks and students failing retake exams are required to repeat the grade. Grade retention may also occur due to prolonged absence, illness, relocation, or other reasons. This also holds for grades 1 and 2, exceptionally.

The maximum number of repeat years is two.

Evaluation measures are in place to detect low-performing students early. Alternative measures implemented to prevent grade retention include retake exams, supplementary classes, availability of individual assistance, adapted educational programs with lower standards.

The decision to repeat a grade is made by the teacher council, upon a written proposal from the class teacher. If a student and his/her parents disagree with the decision, they have the right to appeal. Parents may also propose grade retention, which the school can agree upon.

SWE - Sweden

Sweden has a 10-year compulsory educational system, starting at age 6, which includes primary education and lower secondary education. In general, students are automatically promoted after each grade. By law, grade retention should never be used, unless in very exceptional circumstances, when it is deemed necessary for the student's academic progress.

According to PISA (2018 and 2022), about 3-4% of the 15-year-old students have repeated a grade at least once during their school career.

Criteria considered for grade retention (in exceptional circumstances) are low school attendance, family/health problems, failure to meet knowledge requirements, and the guarantee of eligibility for upper secondary education.

Grade retention is limited to a repetition of failed subjects, not the entire grade.

To detect low-performing students, teachers continuously assess students' progress. If concerns arise about reaching the goals, a special support needs investigation is conducted (by special education or special needs teachers) and the school develops a program with measures to support the student's progress, such as special tutoring, summer school, support by assistant teachers, or adaptations to the learning environment. Special education may be offered for students with very low goal attainment or specific challenges, with the goal of eventually returning to the regular class.

Grade retention decision are made by the principal, along with relevant staff and professionals, at the end of the school year. Parents have the opportunity to express their opinion before the decision is made.

TUR - Türkiye

In Türkiye, compulsory education begins at the age of 6 and lasts for 8 years, combining both primary education (grades 1 to 4) and lower secondary education (grades 5 to 8). In primary education, grade retention is allowed in exceptional circumstances only, and voluntary grade retention is possible upon request by students' legal guardians. In lower secondary education, grade retention regulation is less restrictive.

According to PISA student questionnaire data (2018), 7% of the 15-year-old students in Türkiye report having repeated a grade at least once during their school career. In 2022 the retention rate dropped to 2%.

The main criteria for grade retention are school absenteeism and grade failure as shown in low overall assessment results (grades 1 to 4) or low subject results (grades 5 to 8). Grade retention is typically required for students who were absent from school for at least one semester, or for students who cannot be evaluated due to school absences. Besides that, grade retention is considered for primary school students who did not reach the required level of proficiency, and for lower secondary school students who received low subject results.

In grades 1 to 4, retention is allowed only once, exceptionally.

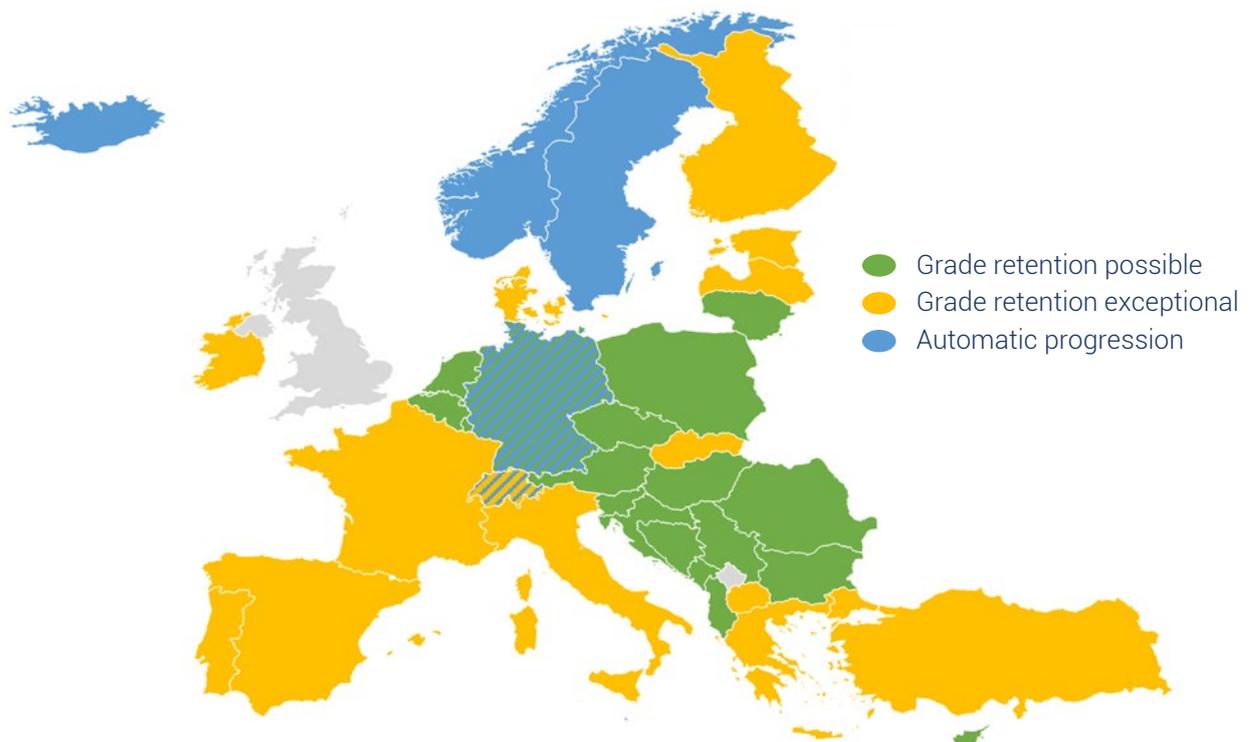
The decision to retain a student is made by the school principal and the class teacher, upon written request of the parents, in primary education. In secondary education, the decision is made by the teacher council, after having informed the parents.

Chapter 2: Cross-country comparison of grade retention regulations and rates

Grade retention regulations

Regulations regarding grade retention in the 37 investigated Eurydice Network national units are shown in Figure 1, for ISCED 1, and Figure 2, for ISCED 2. These regulations refer to the academic year 2022-2023, and distinguish countries based on 'possible grade retention', 'exceptional grade retention', and 'automatic grade promotion'.

Figure 01: Grade progression in primary education (ISCED 1) according to existing regulations 2022/23



Sources: <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/>, questionnaires administered to educational (law) experts, and official government websites

Notes:

Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, and Switzerland have decentralized educational systems, so regulations may vary between the states/regions.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) and The Republic of Kosovo (both in grey) are not part of the Eurydice Network and were therefore not considered in this report.

Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are members of the Eurydice Network since 2024 only, and were therefore not included here.

GR possible: Grade retention is considered as a possible option and is applied with regulated restrictions.

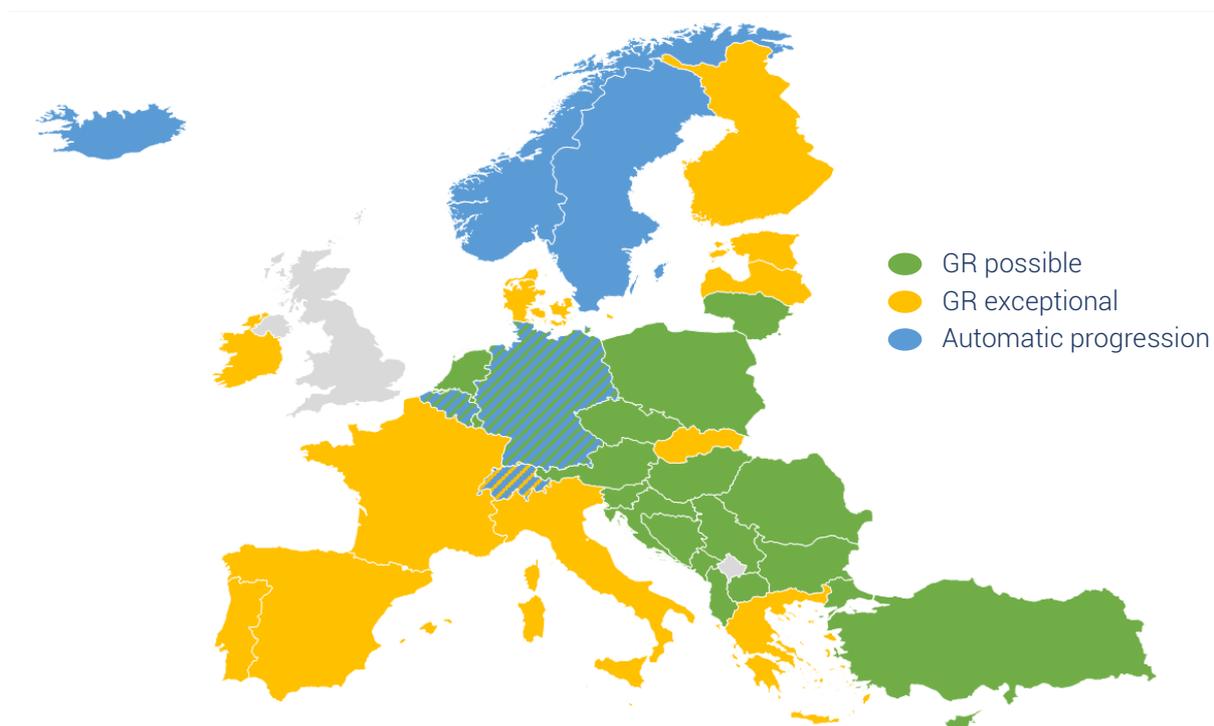
GR exceptional: Grade retention is considered as an exceptional option. Alternatives and catch-up opportunities are preferred.

Automatic progression: Automatic progression is the general procedure. Grade retention is discouraged and can only be applied when specifically requested and when other preventive measures and alternatives have been exhausted.

In primary education, grade retention regulations exhibit a range of practices across the 37 investigated national units of the Eurydice Network. For a significant number of countries, including Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia, grade retention is a feasible option. A set of countries, such as Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Portugal, the Republic of North Macedonia, Slovakia, Spain, and Türkiye, consider grade retention as an exceptional measure, reserved for particular circumstances. Countries such as Iceland, Malta, Norway, and Sweden adopt an automatic grade progression approach, ensuring students typically advance to the next grade irrespective of their performance. Finally, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, and Switzerland have intricate systems due to the decentralized organization of their education. Regulations depend on the region. Belgium allows for grade retention, but its decentralized educational system means that individual regions might have specific regulations. Germany not only permits grade retention but also has provisions for both exceptional grade retention and automatic grade progression. Switzerland combines automatic grade progression and exceptional grade retention.

In lower secondary education, grade retention regulations also vary among the 37 investigated national units of the Eurydice Network. For many countries, including Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Hungary, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Poland, the Republic of North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia, grade retention is possible. A group of countries, namely Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Portugal, Slovakia, and Spain, consider grade retention as an exceptional measure. Iceland, Norway, and Sweden follow an automatic grade progression system, where students typically move to the next grade regardless of their performance. Finally, Belgium, Germany, and Switzerland have a more complex system, with regulations differing across the regions. In Belgium, grade retention is possible, but there is also a provision for automatic grade progression. Germany combines possible grade retention, exceptional grade retention, and automatic grade progression. Switzerland, finally, allows for automatic grade progression and exceptional grade retention.

Figure 02: Grade progression in lower secondary education (ISCED 2) according to existing regulations 2022/23



Sources: <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/>, questionnaires administered to educational (law) experts, and official government websites

Notes:

Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, and Switzerland have decentralized education systems, so regulations may vary between the states/regions.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) and The Republic of Kosovo (both in grey) are not part of the Eurydice Network 59 and were therefore not considered in this report.

Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are members of the Eurydice Network since 2024 only, and were therefore not included here.

GR possible: Grade retention is considered as a possible option and is applied with regulated restrictions.

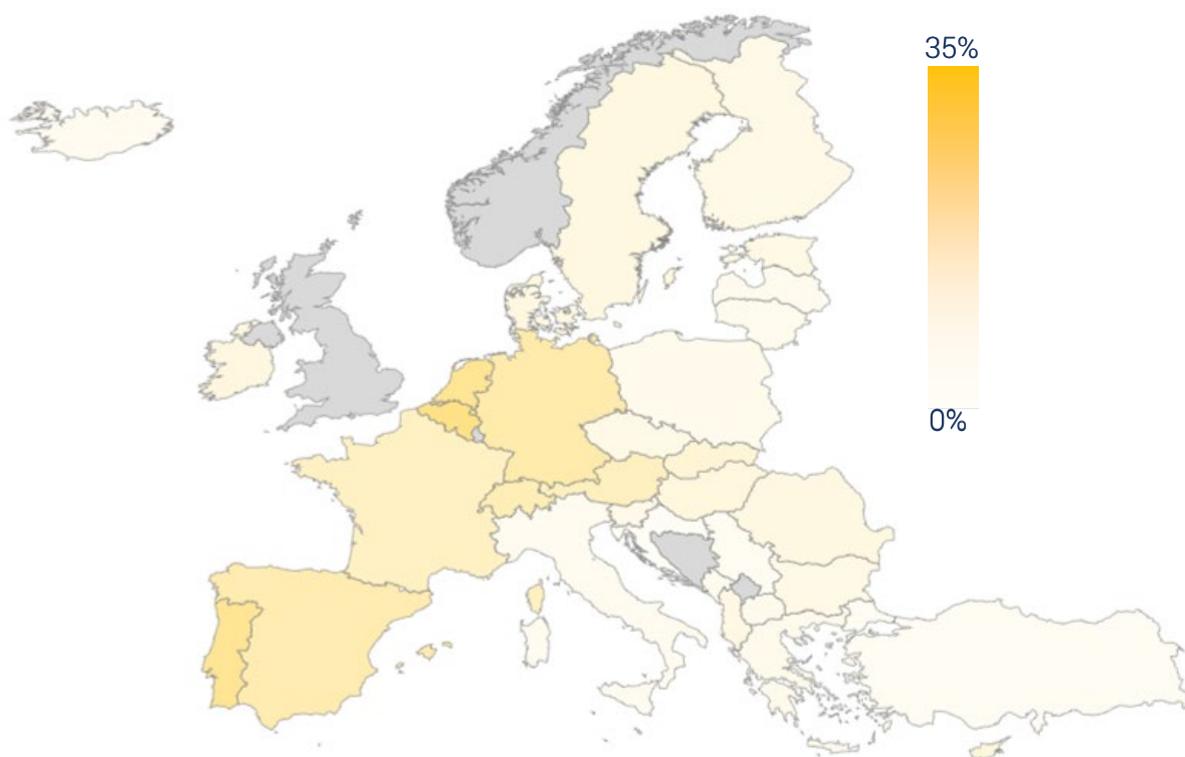
GR exceptional: Grade retention is considered as an exceptional option. Alternatives and catch-up opportunities are preferred.

Automatic progression: Automatic progression is the general procedure. Grade retention is discouraged and can only be applied when specifically requested and when other preventive measures and alternatives have been exhausted.

Grade retention rates

Rates of grade retention in the 37 investigated national units of the Eurydice Network are shown in Figure 3, for ISCED 1, Figure 4, for ISCED 2, and Figure 5, for ISCED 1-3 (until age 15) altogether. These rates refer to data Retrieved from the PISA 2022 student questionnaire (OECD, 2023). Of the 37 investigated countries, 33 countries took part in the PISA study in 2022. Data from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, and Norway were not available for 2022. As a result, their grade retention rates could not be reported.

Figure 03: Grade retention rates in primary education (ISCED 1)



Source: PISA 2022 student questionnaire

Notes:

Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, and Switzerland have decentralized education systems. Grade retention regulations and therefore grade retention rates may vary between states/regions.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, and Norway (all in grey) did not participate in the PISA 2022 study and therefore could not be included.

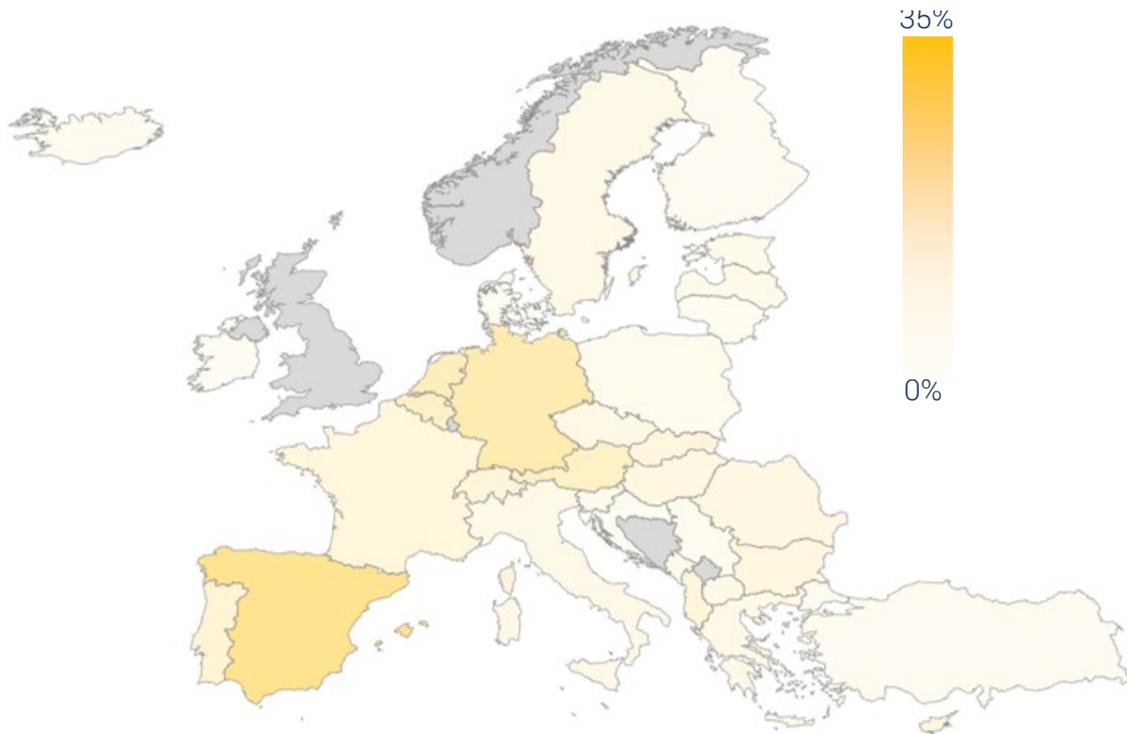
The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) and The Republic of Kosovo (both in grey) are not part of the Eurydice Network and were therefore not considered in this report.

Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are members of the Eurydice Network since 2024 only, and were therefore not included here.

In primary education, in 2022, the highest grade retention rates were reported by Belgium with 16%, Portugal with 14%, and the Netherlands with 14%. Germany, Spain, Switzerland, Austria, and France reported above average grade retention rates: Germany 11%, Spain 10%, Switzerland 9%, Austria 8%, and France 7%. Slovakia, Hungary, Cyprus, and Malta presented

average grade retention rates of about 4-5%. Countries such as Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, Romania, Albania, Estonia, Bulgaria, Czechia, Finland, Slovenia, Greece, and the Republic of North Macedonia fell below average, with grade retention rates equalling about 2-3%. Poland, Montenegro, Lithuania, Latvia, Italy, Iceland, Serbia, Türkiye, and Croatia reported the lowest grade retention rates, of 1% or less. The collective average across the 37 Eurydice Network national units was 4%.

Figure 04: Grade retention rates in lower secondary education (ISCED 2)



Source: PISA 2022 student questionnaire

Notes:

Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, and Switzerland have decentralized education systems. Grade retention regulations and therefore grade retention rates may vary between states/regions.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, and Norway (all in grey) did not participate in the PISA 2022 study and therefore could not be included.

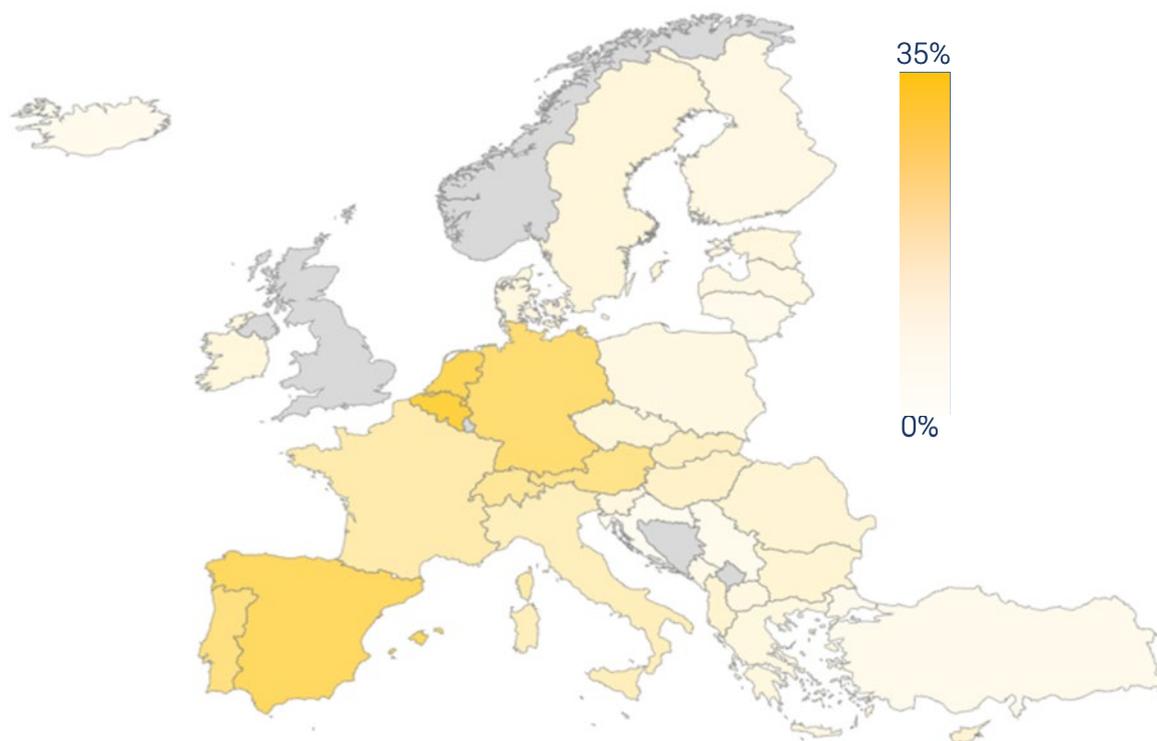
The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) and The Republic of Kosovo (both in grey) are not part of the Eurydice Network and were therefore not considered in this report.

Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are members of the Eurydice Network since 2024 only, and were therefore not included here.

In lower secondary education, in 2022, Spain reported the highest grade retention rate with 15%. High grade retention rates were also reported by Germany with 10%, the Netherlands with 9%, Austria with 7%, and Belgium with 7%. Portugal reported grade retention rates of 5%. Average grade retention rates of 3-4% were reported by Switzerland, Albania, Slovakia, France, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Czechia. Greece, the Republic of North Macedonia, Italy, Latvia, Estonia, Malta, Montenegro, and Slovenia had below average grade retention rates around 2%. Several countries, including Poland, Serbia, Iceland, Türkiye, Finland, Lithuania, Croatia,

Denmark, and Ireland, reported grade retention rates of 1% or less. The collective average across the 37 Eurydice Network national units was around 3%.

Figure 05: Grade retention rates in compulsory school education (ISCED 1 - ISCED 3)



Source: PISA 2022 student questionnaire

Notes:

Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, and Switzerland have decentralized education systems. Grade retention regulations and therefore grade retention rates may vary between states/regions.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, and Norway (all in grey) did not participate in the PISA 2022 study and therefore could not be included.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) and The Republic of Kosovo (both in grey) are not part of the Eurydice Network and were therefore not considered in this report.

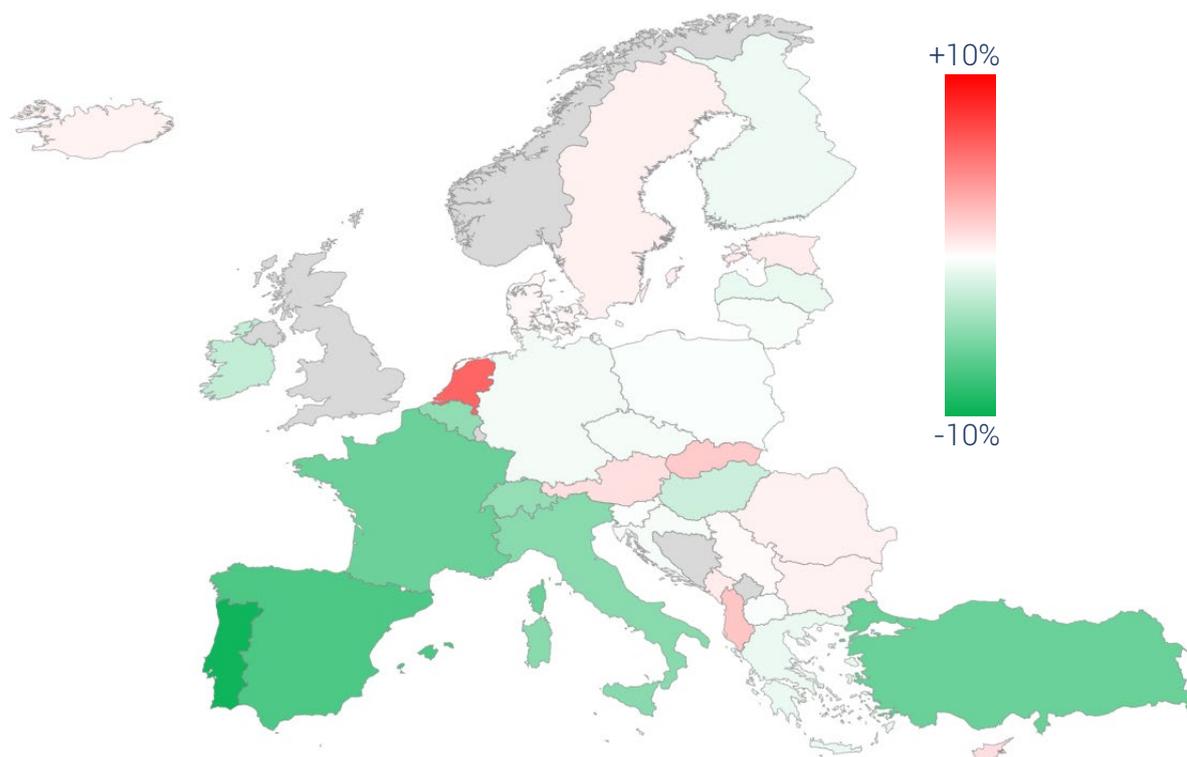
Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are members of the Eurydice Network since 2024 only, and were therefore not included here.

By age 15 (accumulated over primary, lower, and upper secondary education), in 2022, Belgium had the highest grade retention rate with 27%. High grade retention rates were also shown by the Netherlands with 23%, Spain with 22%, Germany with 19%, Portugal with 17%, and Austria with 16%. Above average grade retention rates were reported by Switzerland with 13%, France with 11%, Italy with 9%, and Slovakia with 8%. Many countries, including Hungary, Albania, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Romania, Malta, Czechia, Sweden, Ireland, and Estonia reported below average grade retention rates, equalling 4-6%. Grade retention rates around 3% were reported by Slovenia, Denmark, Greece, Poland, the Republic of North Macedonia, Latvia, and Finland. The countries with the lowest grade retention rates were Montenegro, Lithuania, Serbia, Türkiye, Iceland, and Croatia, all showing rates below 2%. The collective average across the 37 Eurydice Network national units was 7%.

Country comparison

Changes in the rates of grade retention in the 37 investigated national units of the Eurydice Network are shown in Figure 6, for ISCED 1-3 (until age 15) altogether. These changes are calculated based on a comparison of grade retention rates Retrieved from the PISA 2018 and 2022 student questionnaires (OECD, 2020, 2023). Of the 37 investigated countries, 35 countries took part in the PISA study in 2018 and 33 countries in 2022. Liechtenstein and Norway did not participate in any year. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Luxembourg did not participate in 2022. As a result, a change in the grade retention rate of these 4 countries could not be calculated.

Figure 06: Change in grade retention rate in compulsory school education (ISCED 1 - ISCED 3) from 2018 to 2022



Source: PISA student questionnaires 2018 and 2022

Notes:

Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, and Switzerland have decentralized education systems. Grade retention regulations and therefore grade retention rates may vary between states/regions.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, and Norway (all in grey) did not participate in the PISA 2018 and/or 2022 study and therefore could not be included.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) and The Republic of Kosovo (both in grey) are not part of the Eurydice Network and were therefore not considered in this report.

Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are members of the Eurydice Network since 2024 only, and were therefore not included here.

Between 2018 and 2022, there were notable changes in the cumulative grade retention rates across several national units of the Eurydice Network. the Netherlands reported the biggest overall increase in grade retention rate, by age 15, with 6%. Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Iceland, Montenegro, Romania, Slovakia, and Sweden saw increases in their cumulative grade retention rate ranging between 1% and 2%. Conversely, Belgium (-4%), France (-6%), Italy (-5%), Portugal (-9%), Spain (-7%), Switzerland (-4%), and Türkiye (-6%) experienced significant declines in grade retention rates by age 15. Meanwhile, several countries such as Croatia,

Country comparison

Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia showed no significant changes in their cumulative grade retention rate. Overall, across the 37 Eurydice Network national units the cumulative grade retention rate decreased with 2%, between 2018 and 2022.

Chapter 3: Conclusion

Main findings

This report focused on the complex tapestry of regulations and practices that were in effect, in 2023, in the 37 Eurydice Network national units, regarding grade retention in compulsory education. Overall, each country's educational approach appeared to be a reflection of its unique blend of cultural, historical, and pedagogical influences.

Still, despite uniqueness, some interesting communalities appeared in the grade retention regulations of the 37 Eurydice Network national units. In all 37 countries considered, grade retention is accompanied by a plethora of alternative support mechanisms designed to help struggling students succeed. These mechanisms can range from additional tutoring sessions, specialized programs, to more personalized learning plans.

However, there are also remarkable differences between the 37 Eurydice Network national units regarding their grade retention regulations. More specifically, the criteria that trigger grade retention and the decision processes that govern it, are as varied as the countries themselves. The main law-based criterion that determines whether a student must repeat a grade is always a lack of academic achievement, either shown in low standardized test scores or shown in low overall assessment results. Yet, in some countries, criteria such as behavioural issues, school absenteeism, overall developmental difficulties, or personal circumstances are also specified in the legislation. Moreover, in many countries, by law, poor grades at the end of the school year should not always result in grade retention. For instance, teachers may allow students to retake tests, offer them extra work to help them catch up, or allow them to advance (conditionally), in specific circumstances. The grade retention decision-making process also varies substantially across the 37 national units of the Eurydice Network. In the majority of the countries, by law, the decision to retain a student should be taken by the class teacher(s). In some countries, input from additional instructors or school administrators is needed. In a few countries, the involvement of educational specialists (such as educational authorities, educational psychologists, or guidance services) is required. In all countries, parents or legal guardians should be frequently updated regarding the development of their children. In most countries, parents should be involved, in some way, if their child's grade progression is in doubt. Few countries require parents' permission for their child to be retained. Moreover, in some countries, by law, the decision-making process should be highly collaborative, drawing upon insights from educators, administrators, parents, and occasionally students themselves. In other countries, according to the law, grade retention decisions should be made by specific educational bodies or councils, with a more top-down approach.

There are also substantial differences between the 37 Eurydice Network national units regarding their grade retention rates. Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, Germany, Portugal, and

Conclusion

Austria appear to have notably high cumulative grade retention rates, with 16% to 27% of the 15-year-old students reporting having been retained at least once. Montenegro, Lithuania, Serbia, Türkiye, Iceland, and Croatia, contrarily, show grade retention rates below 2%, as reported by their 15-year-old students. In the Netherlands, the cumulative grade retention rate (by age 15) increased with 6%, between 2018 and 2022, whereas in Portugal, Spain, Türkiye, France, Italy, Belgium, and Switzerland it decreased with about 4% to 9%.

Given the differences in grade retention regulations and rates across the 37 national units of the Eurydice Network, an important question that follows is whether regulations and rates are linked. Is there a pattern between the legislative provision for grade retention (in terms of criteria and decision-making processes) on the one hand and its practical application on the other hand? A detailed look at all information gathered in this report reveals that there is no simple answer to this question. Looking across the 37 investigated countries, it seems that countries with comparable regulations show different rates of grade retention. In primary education, for instance, legislation stating that grade retention is possible (albeit with some restrictions) in practice can lead to rates between as low as 0% and as high as 16%. When grade retention should be considered by the law as an exceptional measure, rates appear between 1% and 14%. Laws regarding grade retention criteria lead to equally diverse patterns, with an obligation to consider multiple criteria equalling rates from 0% to 16%, and only student results, from 0% to 7%. If the law foresees limitations, rates vary from 0% to 16%. Legislation regarding grade retention decision-making (with the final word given to the teachers, the school head, versus many stakeholders together) leads to equally diverse rates. In lower secondary education, results are similar. Numerous factors might contribute to these variations observed, including the infrastructure of the respective country, the duration of the legislative establishment, the level of detail within the legislation, potential disparities between daily practices and legislative mandates, and cultural influences on both legislation and the practice of grade retention. Given the heterogeneous nature of the categories outlined in this report, direct comparisons are challenging, necessitating careful monitoring of changes over time. That said, looking closer within some countries, it also becomes clear that regulations and rates are still linked to some extent. In Germany, for instance, some federal states allow for grade retention, and some do not. Accordingly, the grade retention rates vary. In both France and Spain, in 2013, a law was passed to make grade retention an exceptional measure. The cumulative grade retention rate in France dropped from 28% in 2012 to 11% in 2022. Similarly, in Spain, it dropped from 33% in 2012 to 22% in 2022. This trend could indicate the effectiveness of such legal restrictions.

Limitations

Although the findings of this report provide an important insight into grade retention regulations and rates across the Eurydice Network, in 2023, one important limitation should be acknowledged. This report was carefully compiled based on information available via the Eurydice website, questionnaires administered to 23 educational experts, official governmental websites, and data from the PISA 2018 and 2022 student questionnaires. We highly value correctness and comprehensiveness of the information presented in this report. However, we cannot guarantee that descriptions of regulations related to grade retention as well as data

depicting its frequency in the different countries, are free from error or complete. In the course of compiling this report, it is important to acknowledge the presence of gaps, missing data, and missing information related to various aspects discussed herein. The reasons for the absence of information are multifaceted and do not necessarily imply the nonexistence or negation of certain regulations, practices, or procedures. Rather, these omissions stem from a variety of factors that we would like to elucidate. First, some information might be missing due to regulatory variation. Legal frameworks and practices can vary considerably across jurisdictions and industries, leading to diverse interpretations and implementations. In some instances, certain practices may not be explicitly outlined in legislation because they occur infrequently and do not warrant exhaustive regulatory provisions. Such cases might rely on the discretion of decision-makers, who assess unique circumstances and determine appropriate courses of action on a case-by-case basis. Certain practices might be common within an industry or sector, yet remain undocumented in formal legislation. These customary practices might not be explicitly written down but are widely accepted and understood within the professional community. Second, the absence of specific information might arise from limited access to certain data sources or documents. For instance, as for the grade retention rates, comparable European census data currently do not exist. Instead, we had to rely on the best available alternative, which is student self-report data from the PISA 2018 and 2022 studies. For primary education, this means that the reported rates refer to grade retention experiences as early as 2011/2015, potentially well before the legislation documented in this report was in force. While efforts were made to gather comprehensive information, restrictions in data availability could have led to gaps in our analysis. Third, in some cases, the absence of information might indicate that certain actions or practices are not commonly undertaken or not permitted. While we strove to present a comprehensive view, we recognize that some activities might not be conducted due to various reasons. It is crucial to approach this report with an understanding that the absence of information is not necessarily synonymous with a lack of significance or relevance.

Recommendations for educational policymakers

With the aforementioned limitations in mind, we want to conclude this report by providing some suggestions for educational policymakers, based on the findings of this report.

First, this report revealed that comparable European census data on grade retention rates are currently not available. Some countries have national statistics on grade retention. In order to advance our knowledge about grade retention, in terms of its causes, effects, and potential alternatives, it would be valuable for European educational policymakers to collect such data, annually or at least periodically, comparable at the European level.

Second, this report revealed that, if educational policymakers want to reduce the grade retention rate in their country, merely changing the educational laws will not be enough. Defining grade retention as an 'exceptional measure' and foreseeing several limitations in the legislation can still lead to high grade retention rates. How can this be explained? A possible reason for grade retention to be more common in some countries, despite legislation hampering its application, might be that teachers in those countries have more positive beliefs about the effectiveness of grade retention (e.g., Asberger et al., 2020; Cipriano & Martins, 2021; Crahay et al., 2013;

Conclusion

Juchtmans et al., 2012; König & Darge, 2010; Ribeiro et al., 2018; Santos et al., 2023; Talloen et al., 2020), while they are at the same time in charge of the decisions to retain students. Thus, educational policymakers might benefit from investing time and money in providing teachers evidence-based alternatives, not by law, but in practice, via high-quality in-service trainings and extra resources. As such, the gap between theory (law) and practice can be reduced, fostering all students' individual growth.

The process to reduce grade retention rates by adjusting the legislation takes time and additional efforts and is not done overnight. Changes in legislation alone are not enough to reduce retention rates. Only if enforced properly and combined with implementation measures, enough resources, and alternatives for retention, it can be successful.

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Glossary

Country codes

ALB	Albania
AUT	Austria
BEL	Belgium
BGR	Bulgaria
BIH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CHE	Switzerland
CYP	Cyprus
CZE	Czechia
DEU	Germany
DNK	Denmark
ESP	Spain
EST	Estonia
FIN	Finland
FRA	France
GRC	Greece
HRV	Croatia
HUN	Hungary
IRL	Ireland
ISL	Iceland

ITA	Italy
LIE	Liechtenstein
LTU	Lithuania
LUX	Luxembourg
LVA	Latvia
MKD	The Republic of North Macedonia
MLT	Malta
MNE	Montenegro
NLD	The Netherlands
NOR	Norway
POL	Poland
PRT	Portugal
ROU	Romania
SRB	Serbia
SVK	Slovakia
SVN	Slovenia
SWE	Sweden
TUR	Türkiye

International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED)

The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) is a framework developed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to facilitate comparisons of education statistics and indicators across countries on the basis of uniform and internationally agreed definitions. ISCED classifies education from pre-primary level (ISCED level 0) to the doctoral or equivalent level (ISCED level 8), allowing a comprehensive view of the entire educational journey. Relevant for this report are ISCED levels 0, 1, 2, and 3.

ISCED 0 refers to pre-primary education. This level of education is primarily dedicated to the provision of early childhood educational experiences that help in the development of children. It acts as a foundation stage that introduces children to basic learning concepts and routines, often in a play-based environment. Pre-primary education focuses on holistic child development, preparing children for a smooth transition to primary education. Typically, it caters to children aged 3 to 6 years old. However, the age can vary based on the educational structure of different countries.

ISCED 1 refers to primary education, which is the start of systematic instruction in various subjects. It lays down the basics of education, focusing on reading, writing, mathematics, and initial scientific concepts. The completion of this level establishes a foundation for subsequent

learning, ensuring that students acquire essential skills and knowledge for higher education levels. Usually, it involves children from age 6 to 12. Nevertheless, these ages can differ across various educational systems.

ISCED 2 refers to lower secondary education. This level of education builds upon the knowledge and skills acquired at the primary level. It involves more specialized and in-depth instruction, preparing students for higher educational stages. Successfully completing this level prepares students for upper secondary education, ensuring they have obtained necessary foundational knowledge in various subjects. Typically, it includes students aged 12 to 15. The age bracket may vary based on different countries' educational structures.

ISCED 3 refers to upper secondary education, and focuses on preparing students for tertiary education or entry into the workforce. It encompasses more specialized knowledge and skills, often allowing students to choose areas of focus or specialization. Completion of this level often leads to a diploma or certificate, signifying that students are prepared for higher education or vocational training, or are ready to join the workforce directly. It mainly includes students aged 15 to 18/19. However, age ranges can differ in various educational systems.

Single structure education is a unified or integrated educational model that combines primary education (ISCED 1) and lower secondary education (ISCED 2) into a continuous single structure or system without any transition or interruption. In such a system, there is no clear boundary or division between these two educational levels.

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We would like to conclude this report with acknowledging some important people and organisations who made this report possible. First, we want to thank the European Commission for providing financial support, as this report was subsidized under the Erasmus+ KA2 2001 programme (grant 2021-1-BE02-KA220-HED-000022966). Second, we want to express our sincere gratitude to the 23 educational (law) experts who generously contributed their time and effort to this research, adding an important insider-perspective, next to information provided by the national units on the Eurydice website, official governmental websites, and PISA student questionnaire data. Third, we wish to thank several staff members at the Medical School Berlin, University College Leuven-Limburg, the University of Maastricht, and ISPA Instituto Universitario, for their assistance during this research. And finally, we want to thank the broader scientific community, and in particular Timo Ehmke, Dominique Lafontaine, Susanne Backes, Jannick Demanet, Timo van Canegem, and Paul Fabian, for having critically reviewed parts of this report, for continuously inspiring us, and for providing us the opportunity to jointly advance our research field.