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PROJECT: IMPROVE – PREVENTING LOW READING INTEREST

POLICY RECOMMENDATION

REPORT FOR SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Today, children read less often than any previous generation and enjoy reading less than young people of the past according to a new study by the National Literacy Trust in 2019.... "Only 26% of under-18s spent any time each day reading. This is the lowest daily level recorded since the charity first surveyed children's reading habits in 2005".

The **"Improve"** project, part of the Erasmus+ Key 2 Partnerships for Cooperation program, **aims to combat the diminishing interest in reading among students aged 14 to 18 in Spain, Slovenia, North Macedonia, Italy, Portugal, Belgium, and Türkiye.** The primary goal is to reestablish reading as a crucial element in students' intellectual and cultural growth. This report provides policy recommendations to garner institutional support, elevate project impact, and boost reading proficiency among the community.

The decline in reading interest fuels educational and cultural disparities. In the digital age, strategic investments in reading literacy are vital to maintain reading skills amid evolving technology and culture.



STATISTICS ON READING LEVELS IN PARTNER COUNTRIES

According to the latest available PISA results, the reading literacy level among **North Macedonian** 15-year-olds is lower than the OECD average with girls performing better than the boys, with a statistically significant difference.

Similarly, the reading literacy level among **Slovenian** 15-year-olds is close to the OECD average but shows some disparities across different social groups. There's a noticeable performance gap between students in urban and rural areas.

15-year-old students in **Portugal** performed slightly better in reading literacy than the OECD average. Additionally, there is a statistically significant gender difference in reading literacy scores in Portugal, with girls outperforming boys, although the gender gap is smaller than the average gender gap observed across all OECD countries.

The average reading score of 15-year-old students in **Turkey** is below the OECD average in reading. The OECD report also found that there are significant disparities in reading performance between different groups of students in Turkey. Girls outperformed boys in reading by a statistically significant difference of 25 points. Students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds also performed worse than students from more advantaged backgrounds.

The OECD report suggests that the reading performance of 15-year-old students in **Italy** is slightly below the OECD average. However, the report also notes that there is significant room for improvement in the reading performance of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

According to the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), reading comprehension levels among **Belgian** school children have shown a decline. The 2021 study revealed a mild decrease in Wallonia, but a more concerning drop in Flanders. This study, carried out every five years, assessed reading comprehension of fourth-grade students and had over 6,700 participants from Flanders and 4,271 from the French-speaking region.

Finally, the average reading score of 15-year-old students in **Spain** was 481 points, compared to an OECD average of 487 points. This means that Spanish students scored slightly below the OECD average in reading. In Spain, boys outperformed girls in reading by a statistically significant difference of 6 points.



CURRENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN PARTNER COUNTRIES



In **North Macedonia**, student reading progress is evaluated within the mother tongue curriculum in a non-standardized manner, using various assessment methods such as essays, tests, quizzes, and projects. Positive aspects include a strong foundation in literacy development, but there are negative aspects, including a lack of targeted support for struggling students, a need to implement digital platforms to improve reading comprehension, and a requirement for teacher training in modern reading instruction methods.



Slovenia's curriculum emphasizes holistic child development, including reading skills, but lacks specific interventions for students at risk of falling behind in reading. Many schools still rely on traditional teaching methods, which may not be effective for all students. Positive aspects include a strong foundation in literacy development and some schools integrating digital platforms for better reading comprehension. However, negative aspects include the absence of targeted programs for struggling students and a need for teacher training in modern reading instruction methods.



In PISA 2018, **Portugal** faced key policy challenges such as reducing grade repetition, improving equity, enhancing adult skill levels, and ensuring long-term education funding sustainability. Efforts were made to decentralize decision-making to schools and municipalities, emphasizing administrative aspects and local innovation. Positive aspects include a foundation in literacy development, some integration of digital platforms for reading comprehension, and the National Reading Plan (NRP) aimed at improving literacy levels, particularly among young people. However, negative aspects remain, including a lack of targeted support for struggling students and a need for teacher training in modern reading instruction methods.



The **Turkish** government has increased its investment in early childhood education in recent years, recognizing the importance of early literacy development. This includes expanding access to preschool programs and providing training for preschool teachers on literacy instruction. However class sizes in Turkish schools are often large, which can make it difficult for teachers to provide individualized attention to students who need extra help with reading.



In 2020, **Italy** adopted the National Action Plan for the Promotion of Reading, spanning from 2021 to 2023, which aims to encourage reading as a means of individual growth and national development. The plan seeks to increase the number of readers, promote libraries and bookshops, support reading initiatives by public and private entities, enhance intercultural reading, address educational and cultural poverty, and facilitate reading for individuals with disabilities while also emphasizing the integration of digital reading skills.



For the academic years 2018–2022, **Flemish** educational authorities have initiated in-service training programs to enhance teachers' abilities to support pupils with specific educational needs and to focus on reading comprehension



In **Spain**, based on the data collected from the 2022 Barometer, the rise in reading rates observed in 2020, a result of confinement measures and mobility restrictions, has evolved into a sustained trend that began the previous year and increased modestly in 2022.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARTNER COUNTRIES FOR IMPROVEMENTS

As project partners we have collected policy recommendations for the decision makers.

1. Propose laws and regulations that favor the funding of literary education programs in schools and libraries. These programs, by supporting the importance of reading, can increase young people's interest in books and literature.

2. Proposals for the creation of reading activities: Representatives may propose reading promotion activities aimed at youth, such as reading contests, book clubs and book fairs.

3. Provide access to reading resources: Politicians can support laws and regulations that provide access to well-stocked libraries and resource centers for all citizens.

4. Promote local literature: Politicians can promote local literature and authors to further foster a sense of community and belonging among young people.

5. Engage the community: Political representatives can issue a call to action for parents, guardians and educators to become actively involved in supporting and encouraging the reading habit among young people.

6. Create partnerships with the private sector: Policymakers can collaborate with local businesses and organizations to provide reading resources or sponsor reading promotion activities.



7. Encourage the use of technology: In the digital age, policymakers can promote the use of ebooks, reading apps and digital book platforms to attract young people to read.

8. Allocate funds for the acquisition of books in schools: Representatives can advocate for ensuring sufficient budgets for schools to keep their libraries up to date and attractive to students.

9. Promote literary careers: Encouraging interest in careers associated with literature such as writing, editing, literary criticism, among others can also increase interest in reading.

10. Teacher Training: Provide comprehensive training programs for teachers on modern reading instruction methods, integrating technology and interactive teaching techniques.



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We would like to make you aware that the project has developed the Training program IMPROVE, which will continue to be available in our website: <https://improveproject.org/>

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