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Conference on

‘Early School Leaving’

Vilnius, 18-20 November 2013

# Central question

## Current situation across the EU

Reduce the number of early school leavers is a central issue in both the Education and Training 2020 programme and the Europe 2020 programme: by 2020 the share of early school leavers has to be reduced to maximum 10%.

The concern of the European Union is legitimate: research demonstrates that there is a relation between early school leaving and problems related to societal participation in different domains (employment, citizenship, health, social status, participation in culture,..). Moreover, the negative consequence of a low qualification level has impact on the next generations. According to the most recent data from OECD[[1]](#footnote-1), a great deal of the economic and social hardship caused by the crisis fell chiefly on less-educated individuals. The unemployment gap between well-educated young people and those who left school early widened during the crisis.

Facts and figures

According to the Eurostat figures for 2012, a majority of EU Member States have made progress on the Europe 2020 education targets to reduce the rate of early school leaving to below 10%. However, there are still wide disparities between Member States and between males and females. The share of young people leaving school early now stands at 12.8% on average in the EU, down from 13.5% in 2011. Overall, girls tend to do better: the rate of early school leavers among girls is 24% lower than for boys.

According to the Education and Training Monitor 2012, which is a staff working document part of the European Commission Communication ‘Rethinking education’, reaching the target would require at least as much effort as in the past, if not more. “Targeted action remains necessary to reduce early school leaving through comprehensive, targeted evidence-based strategies.”

## State of the art of the innovation policies

EUNEC considers that it is a merit of European cooperation that this theme is high at the policy agenda and became a top priority.

The most recent EU recommendation on early school leaving[[2]](#footnote-2) is from 2011. In this recommendation, the rate of early school leavers is defined as the proportion of the population aged 18-24 with only lower secondary education or less and no longer in education or training. This document, focusing on prevention, intervention and compensation policies is a good basis for European cooperation.

In March 2012, the European Commission organized a conference[[3]](#footnote-3) to discuss ways of addressing early school leaving and to share views on the most urgent needs for further policy development and to see some concrete examples of successful initiatives. The conference also marked the launch of a Thematic Working Group in this field.

Member States agreed at the Council meeting in February 2013[[4]](#footnote-4) to focus on improving the performance of young people at high risk of early school leaving and with low basic skills. This can be achieved, for example, through early detection across the education system and by providing individual support.

The Commission reports on latest developments concerning early school leaving and tertiary attainment in [the Education and Training Monitor](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/progress_en.htm), released on 30 October 2013. The yearly country-specific reports related to the follow-up of the European Semester show already that many Member States are not so successful in implementing the commitments taken[[5]](#footnote-5). The Communication of the Commission of May 2013 is a very severe one. The Commission concludes that the share of early school leavers, particularly for people with a disadvantaged or migrant background, remains unacceptably high in several Member States (…). These problems existed before the crisis but are especially problematic now in the view of the breadth of economic adjustments taking place, and the prospect of longer working lives. Skills mismatches and bottlenecks in many regions and sectors are a further illustration of the inadequacy of certain education and training systems. In the country-specific reports the warnings toward Member States to take up these problems are compelling.

While the factors leading to early school leaving vary from country to country, the causes of ineffective policies can be boiled down to three typical issues[[6]](#footnote-6):

* Lack of a comprehensive strategy: many countries adopt a patchwork of different measures to tackle various aspects.
* Lack of evidence-based policy-making.
* Insufficient prevention and early intervention. Compensatory measures are not enough to address the root causes of the problem.

## Focus for the EUNEC conference

During the conference the education councils will make a state of the art of the reform in each country and identify what could be done to push national policies into a higher pace of reform.

Therefore we will examine the profile of the early school leavers and discuss the efficiency of policies to deal with these problems. One of the main levers for success seems to be to adjust learning processes to the motivation and learning styles of the present generation of youngster. Another perspective is a multilevel analysis of the stream of incidents and context-related factors leading to detachment from education.

Roughly, two types of early school leavers can be distinguished:

* The profile of the pupil that drops out of school just before the end of schooling
* The profile of the pupil who belongs to a multi-problem group.

The first profile has followed a ‘normal’ curriculum, but decides to quit right before the end of compulsory education. Causes are diverse: ‘dead end’ trajectories, demotivation, wrong choices... This group already acquired a lot of competences. They should be able to reach a sufficient qualification level, with only limited extra efforts.

The second group is the most problematic one; the outcomes of the conference should include policy recommendations to address the needs of this particular profile. These are pupils that have followed a very fragmented curriculum and lack a lot of competences.

Motivation, or lack of motivation, is a central concept to be addressed. In that sense, the conference will also include information and debate on the general profile of the current generation of pupils: How are they living? And how are they learning?

The theme of the Vilnius conference is closely linked to former EUNEC topics: the conference on guidance (Budapest 2009), the conference on new skills and new jobs (Lisbon 2011), the conference on migration and education (Larnaca 2012), and the seminar on community schools (Brussels 2013)[[7]](#footnote-7).

# Programme

## Venue of the conference: Seimas (Parliament) of the Republic of Lithuania, Gedimino pr. 53, Vilnius

## Sunday, 17 November 2013

Arrival of the participants and check in at the hotel (<http://www.ratonda.centrumhotels.com>).

## Monday, 18 November 2013

*Chair of the day* ***Mia Douterlungne,*** *EUNEC General Secretary*

9.00 – 9.30 h Welcome session

**Adrie van der Rest**, EUNEC President

**Audronė Pitrėnienė**, Chair of the Seimas Committee on Education, Science and Culture

**Vilija Targamadzė**, President of the Lithuanian Education Council

9.30 – 10.30 h 'A holistic approach to early school leaving prevention in Europe: Key strategic priorities for system level development' by Dr **Paul Downes**, Director, Educational Disadvantage Centre, Senior Lecturer in Education (Psychology), St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin City University, Member of European Commission Network of Experts on the Social Aspects of Education and Training (NESET) (2011-13)

10.30 – 11.00 h Questions and debate

11.00 – 11.30 h Coffee break (I Building)

11.30 – 12.15 h ‘Early school leaving in Lithuania: current situation and policies’, by Dr **Saulius Zybartas**, Director of the Department of General Education and Vocational Training, Ministry of Education and Science

‘In a Search for a Good School’, by **Gražvydas Kazakevičius**, Director of the National Agency for School Evaluation

12.15 – 13.30 h Lunch (I Building)

12.30 – 13.00 h Press conference (Press Conference Hall)

13.30 – 14.30 h Guided tour of the Seimas (Meeting Point – Conference Hall)

14.30 – 17.00 h Visit to ***Gabijos* Gymnasium** in Vilnius (FOR EUNEC MEMBERS AND SPEAKERS ONLY) (Departure in front of the III Building of Seimas)

## Tuesday, 19 November 2013

*Chair of the day* ***Adrie van der Rest****, EUNEC President*

09.00 – 10.00 h Key note presentation by **Annalisa Cannoni**, European Commission

10.00 – 10.30 h Questions and debate

10.30 – 11.00 h Coffee break (I Building)

11.00 – 13.00 h Parallel workshops: first round

**Martine Poirier**, Sherbrooke University: Presentation of *Trait d’Union*, a school dropout prevention programme adapted to students (with the support of Laurier Fortin and Danyka Therriault)

**Andrea Fraundorfer**, Head of the Unit for tackling early school leaving, Department of Psychology and Educational Counselling, Ministry of Education, Arts & Culture, Austria: ‘The long way from a strategy on early school leaving to sustainable changes in schools’

13.00 – 14.30 h Lunch (I Building)

14.30 – 16.00 h Parallel workshops: second round

Professor **David Justino**, President of the Portuguese Education Council: ‘Early school leavers and labour markets: the Portuguese case in a European context’

**Koen Stassen**, Vlor (Flemish Education Council): 'Measures to tackle early school leaving in Flanders'

17.00 h Pick up at the hotel for conference dinner offered by the Ministry of Education and Science at *M. K. Čiurlionis* Arts Gymnasium

## Wednesday, 20 November 2013

*Chair of the day Professor* ***Juozas Augutis****, Deputy Chair of the Lithuanian Council of Education*

10.00 – 11.00 h Presentation of the outcome of the working groups

11.00 – 12.00 h Debate leading to conclusions moderated by **Roos Herpelinck**, Flemish Education Council

12.00 h Closing remarks by **Adrie van der Rest**, EUNEC President

12.30 h Closing lunch (Restaurant “FOOD”, Gynėjų str. 16)

1. Education at a glance 2013, OECD indicators (<http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag.htm>) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2011:191:0001:0006:EN:PDF> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/doc/esl/report_en.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Council Conclusions on investing in education and training — a response to ‘Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes’ and the ‘2013 Annual Growth Survey’, February 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/nd/2013eccomm_en.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Communication from the Commission’Tackling early school leaving: A key contribution to the Europe 2020 Agenda’, COM(2011) 18 final, January 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Read the statements of those events at <http://www.eunec.eu/statements/shared-viewpoints> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)