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European Union**

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From:	Permanent Representatives Committee (Part 1)
To:	Council
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Subject:	Draft Council conclusions on reducing early school leaving and promoting success in school

At its meeting on 11 November 2015 the Permanent Representatives Committee noted that there was now unanimous agreement on the above text.

The Council is accordingly invited to adopt the conclusions on the basis of the appended text and to forward them for publication in the Official Journal.

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Draft

Council conclusions on reducing early school leaving and promoting success in school

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

IN THE CONTEXT OF

−   The Europe 2020 target in the field of education to reduce the average European rate of early school leavers[1] to less than 10% by 2020[2];

−   The Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 establishing a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020")[3];

−   [The 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training[4]],

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT

−   The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning[5];

−   The Council conclusions of 11 May 2010 on the social dimension of education and training[6];

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1   The share of the population aged 18 to 24 with only lower secondary education or less and no longer in education or training (Eurostat/Labour Force Survey).
2   EUCO 13/10, ANNEX I, fourth indent (p.12).
3   OJ C 119, 28.5.2009, pp. 2-10.
4   ST 13858/15 [N.B. Inclusion of this reference is subject to adoption of the Joint Report at the November Council.]
5   OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, pp. 10-18.
6   OJ C 135, 26.5.2010, pp. 2-7.

–   The Council conclusions on early childhood education and care: providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow[7];

–   The 2011 Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving[8], in particular the annexed policy framework, and its call to ensure that Member States have in place comprehensive policies on early school leaving, comprising prevention, intervention and compensation measures by the end of 2012;

–   The European Parliament resolution of 1 December 2011 on tackling early school leaving[9];

–   The Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee[10];

–   The Paris Declaration of 17 March 2015 on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education,

AND IN THE LIGHT OF

–   The Luxembourg Presidency's symposium *Staying on Track - tackling early school leaving and promoting success in school* held in Luxembourg on 9-10 July 2015, which brought together participants from across the EU in the fields of policy making, research and practice to debate this important topic;

–   The Luxembourg Presidency's conference on *Diversity and Multilingualism in Early Childhood Education and Care* held in Luxembourg on 10-11 September 2015;

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[7]   OJ C 175, 15.6.2011, pp. 8-10.
[8]   OJ C 191, 1.7.2011, pp. 1-6.
[9]   OJ C 165E, 11.6.2013, pp. 7-19.
[10]   OJ C 120, 26.4.2013, pp. 1-6.

− The 2013 final report of the ET 2020 Thematic Working Group on early school leaving and the 2015 policy messages of the Working Group on Schools Policy;

− The 2014 report of the ET 2020 Thematic Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care proposing key principles for a Quality Framework in this area,

CONSIDERS THAT

At the midway stage in both the Europe 2020 strategy and the ET 2020 strategic framework, and four years after the Council adopted a recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving[11], the time is ripe to take stock of the progress made so far, with a view to reviewing, consolidating and improving measures aiming at reducing this phenomenon and promoting success in school for all.

Since adoption of the Council Recommendation in 2011 many earlier findings on early school leaving (ESL) have been refined and supplemented by peer learning and exchanges of good practice between Member States, by further research and by detailed analysis of the policies adopted at national level. The Europe 2020 headline target on ESL has kept this issue high on national policy agendas and has contributed to promoting educational reforms.

Although solid progress in decreasing ESL rates has been made in recent years, still too many pupils continue to leave education prematurely[12]. Huge discrepancies remain between and within Member States, and the comprehensive strategies advocated in the 2011 Council Recommendation are still lacking in many countries.

For this reason, the EU and the Member States acknowledge the need to actively pursue efforts to achieve - and, where possible, even exceed - the Europe 2020 target.

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[11] The United Kingdom voted against the Recommendation.
[12] According to 2014 data, 11.1% of 18 to 24 year olds have left education and training without completing an upper secondary programme, amounting to around 4.4 million young people (Source: Eurostat (LFS), 2014).

EMPHASISES THAT

1. Early school leaving tends to result from a range of frequently interconnected personal, social, economic, cultural, educational, gender-related and family-related factors, and is linked to situations of cumulative disadvantage which often have their origin in early childhood. Groups with low socio-economic status are affected to a greater extent and early school leaving rates are particularly alarming for certain groups, such as children with migrant backgrounds (including newly arrived migrants and foreign-born children), Roma children and children with special educational needs.

2. The design and quality of education systems also have a strong impact on learners' participation and performance, and certain systemic factors may negatively influence learning progress. In addition, factors such as an unfavourable school climate, violence and bullying, a learning environment in which learners do not feel respected or valued, teaching methods and curricula which may not always be the most appropriate, insufficient learner support, lack of career education and guidance or poor teacher-pupil relationships may lead learners to leave education prematurely.

3. In our increasingly diverse societies, there is an urgent need for inclusive and coordinated responses from both educational and non-educational stakeholders which are aimed at promoting common values such as tolerance, mutual respect, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, as well as fostering social integration, intercultural understanding and a sense of belonging.

4.   Ensuring that every young person has equal access to quality and inclusive education[13] and the opportunity to develop his/her full potential, irrespective of individual, family-related or gender‑related factors, socio-economic status and life experiences, is key to preventing marginalisation and social exclusion, as well as reducing the risk of extremism and radicalisation.

5.   Completing upper secondary education or vocational education and training tends to be considered as the minimum entrance qualification for a successful transition from education to the labour market, as well as for admission to the next stages of education and training. Since early leavers from education and training face a higher risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, investing to support the educational achievement of young people can help to break the cycle of deprivation and the intergenerational transmission of poverty and inequality.

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[13]   For the purpose of these conclusions, the term *inclusive education* refers to the right of all to a quality education that meets basic learning needs and enriches the lives of learners.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES, WITH DUE REGARD FOR THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH NATIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES, TO

1. Actively pursue implementation of the 2011 Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving, in particular by:

    (a) continuing the process of developing and implementing comprehensive strategies - or equivalent integrated policies composed of evidence-based prevention, intervention and compensation measures **-** which are coherently embedded in high-quality education and training, and which benefit from sustained political commitment with a strong emphasis on prevention;

    (b) ensuring the committed participation of, and long-term cooperation between, stakeholders from all relevant areas (notably education and training, employment, economic affairs, social affairs, health, housing, youth, culture and sport) at and across all levels, based on clearly identified roles and responsibilities and involving close coordination.

2. Alongside the EU early school leaving indicator, explore opportunities for developing or enhancing national data collection systems which regularly gather a wide range of information[14] on learners, especially those at risk and early school leavers. Such systems, covering all levels and types of education and training and in full compliance with national legislation on data protection, could:

(a) enable the regular monitoring of educational progress with a view to the early detection and identification of learners at risk of early school leaving;

(b) help to define criteria and indicators for identifying educational disadvantage;

(c) help to understand the reasons for early school leaving, including by collecting the views of learners;

(d) facilitate the availability of data and information at different policy levels and their use in steering and monitoring policy development;

(e) provide the basis for developing effective guidance and support in schools with a view to preventing early school leaving, as well as follow-up measures for young people who have left education and training prematurely.

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[14] *a wide range of information* means in particular learning more about:
- the age at which discontinuation of education and training occurs;
- the relationship between early school leaving and truancy;
- differences with regard to early school leaving according to gender, academic performance or achieved education levels;
- the socio-economic background or a proxy, such as neighbourhood information;
- the background and/or mother tongue of the learner.

3. Where relevant, consider setting more ambitious national targets for reducing early school leaving, particularly if existing ones have already been reached.

4. Identify those schools or local environments which present a high risk of early school leaving and high levels of educational disadvantage and which might benefit from additional support or resources.

5. Pursue - as appropriate - the reform of education systems, looking at the whole spectrum of education and training, including non-formal learning and acknowledging the role of youth work, with a view to reinforcing structural, pedagogical, curricular and professional continuity, easing transitions, addressing segregation and inequalities in education systems and promoting measures which support learners' progress and educational achievement and motivate them to complete their education.

6. Ensure generalised, equitable access to affordable, high quality early childhood education and care. The cognitive and non-cognitive skills developed in early childhood education and care can help children to unlock their full potential and provide them with the foundations for life and success in school. Early childhood education and care structures should also encourage the effective acquisition of the language(s) of instruction, while respecting cultural and linguistic diversity. Developing a feeling of belonging and establishing secure and trusting relationships from an early age are crucial for children's further learning and development.

7. Encourage and promote collaborative ("whole-school") approaches to reducing early school leaving at local level, for instance through:

a) greater room for manoeuvre for schools with regard to governance, curriculum issues and working methods, including through increased autonomy accompanied by effective accountability;

b) adequate open and transparent quality assurance mechanisms and school planning and improvement processes, established and implemented with the active involvement of the entire school community (school leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff, learners, parents and families);

c) effective partnerships and cross-sectoral cooperation between schools and external stakeholders, including a variety of professionals, NGOs, businesses, associations, youth workers, local authorities and services, and other representatives from the community at large in accordance with local contexts;

d) cooperation between schools of different types and levels which are located in the same area, as well as networking and multi-professional learning communities at regional, national and international levels, in order to promote the exchange of good practices;

e) excellence in school governance and leadership, for instance by improving recruitment procedures and continuous professional development opportunities for school leaders;

f)   a culture of support and collaboration between pupils, parents, families and school staff, with a view to strengthening young people's identification with the school system, increasing their motivation to learn and encouraging their involvement in cooperative decision-making processes;

g)   support for schools in reaching out to all parents and families beyond the formal requirements for participation, and in building a culture of mutual trust and respect in which parents and family feel welcome at school and feel involved in their children's learning;

h)   mechanisms to detect early signs of disengagement, such as regular absences or behavioural issues;

i)   systematic support frameworks for learners at risk of early school leaving, including mentoring, counselling and psychological support, as well as the possibility of additional support for learners whose native language(s) is/are not the language(s) of instruction;

j)   the provision of a wide range of accessible extracurricular and out-of-school activities - for instance, in sport, the arts, volunteering or youth work - that can complement the learning experience, as well as increase learners' participation, motivation and sense of belonging.

8. Whilst encouraging high expectations for all pupils and promoting access to the basic skills and knowledge that will best equip them for the future, explore the potential of more personalised, learner-centred forms of teaching and learning, including by means of digital resources, as well as the use of different assessment methods such as formative assessment[15].

9. Ensure, with due regard for institutional autonomy, that initial teacher education and continuous professional development provide teachers, trainers, school leaders, early childhood education and care professionals and other staff with the skills, competences and background knowledge needed to understand and tackle educational disadvantage and possible risk factors that might lead to disengagement or early school leaving. Such skills, competences and knowledge could cover issues such as classroom and diversity management strategies, relationship building, conflict resolution, bullying prevention techniques and career education and guidance.

10. Ensure that career education and guidance, more flexible pathways and high-quality vocational education and training of equal value to general education are available to all learners.

11. Provide access to high-quality "second chance" schemes and other opportunities to re-engage in mainstream education for all young people who have left education prematurely, and ensure that any knowledge, skills and competences acquired by these means, including through non-formal and informal learning, are validated in line with the 2012 Council Recommendation[16].

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[15] For the purpose of these conclusions, the term *formative assessment* refers to measures used to accurately identify learners' needs and to provide timely and continuous feedback as part of the learning process.

[16] OJ C 398, 22.12.2012, pp. 1 - 5.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION TO

1.   Make maximum use of the opportunities available under the ET 2020 strategic framework and via the open method of coordination, including the possibility of strengthening peer learning and, where necessary, of contracting research and studies, in order to strengthen evidence-based policy making and to develop and disseminate examples of successful policy practice.

2.   Use the funding opportunities offered by EU instruments such as the *Erasmus+* Programme, the European Social Fund and the European Fund for Strategic Investments[17] to support measures aimed at reducing early school leaving as part of comprehensive policies and at promoting cooperation in and around schools.

3.   Continue to identify, through research and peer learning, examples of the most effective collaborative practices at school and at local level aimed at alleviating educational disadvantage, reducing early school leaving and ensuring more inclusive education. Ensure the wide dissemination of such practices among school practitioners and stakeholders, in particular through the eTwinning community and the School Education Gateway.

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[17]   Regulation (EU) 2015/1017 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 June 2015 on the European Fund for Strategic Investments, the European Investment Advisory Hub and the European Investment Project Portal and amending Regulations (EU) No 1291/2013 and (EU) No 1316/2013 [OJ L 169, 1.7.2015, pp. 1–38].

INVITES THE COMMISSION TO

1. Continue to follow and disseminate information on developments in the Members States, and to report periodically on the progress towards the *Europe 2020* target and the implementation of Members States' strategies or equivalent integrated policies on early school leaving in the context of the European Semester and of the ET 2020 reporting arrangements, including through the Education and Training Monitor.

2. Develop further cooperation with researchers, Member States, relevant stakeholders, networks and organisations, with a view to supporting the implementation of national and EU policies on early school leaving.

3. Enhance cooperation on this topic with relevant international organisations such as the OECD in collaboration with the Member States.

4. Recall the importance of maintaining a focus on inclusive education and reducing early school leaving in the context of the planned mid-term review of *Erasmus+*.