

## **EUROPE 2020 TARGET: EARLY LEAVERS FROM EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

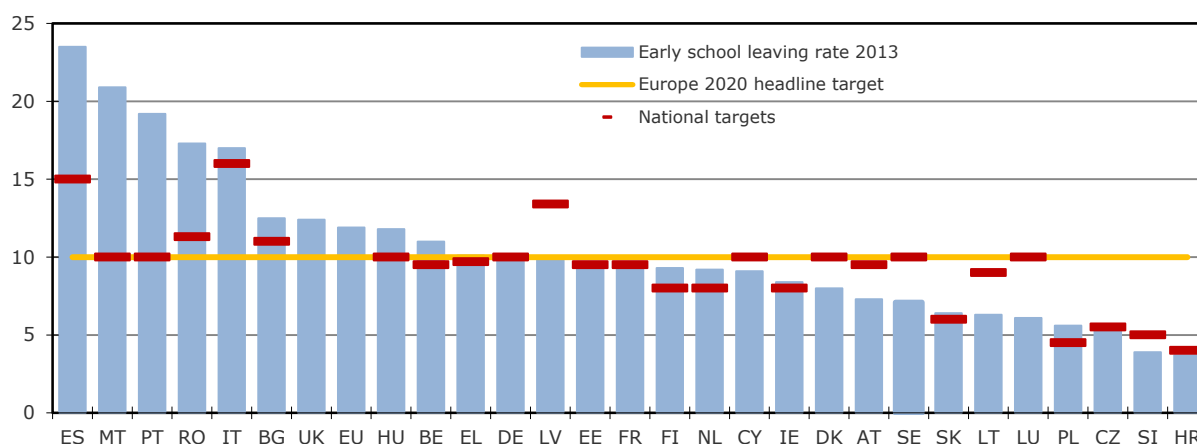
*"By 2020, the share of early leavers from education and training (aged 18-24) should be less than 10%"*

Early school leaving<sup>1</sup> is an obstacle to economic growth and employment. It hampers productivity and competitiveness, and fuels poverty and social exclusion. With its shrinking workforce, Europe has to make full use of its human resources. Young people who leave education and training prematurely are bound to lack skills and qualifications, and to face serious, persistent problems on the labour market. The latest Education and Training Monitor showed that there are nearly 5,5 million early school leavers across Europe and that the average unemployment rate amongst them is about 40%<sup>2</sup>.

### **1. Key statistical indicators**

The EU average rate of early leavers from education and training is now 11.9%, down 0.8 percentage points from 2012. The improvement is in line with recent progress and, if continued, means that the Europe 2020 headline target of below 10% is within reach. Eighteen Member States have rates of early leavers from education and training below the Europe 2020 headline target (CZ, DK, DE, EE, IE, FR, HR, CY, LV, LT, LU, NL, AT, PL, SI, SK, FI, SE). This number was thirteen in 2012, meaning that in addition to FR<sup>3</sup> four countries dropped below the 10% for the first time in 2013 (DE, EE, CY, LV).

Figure 1. Early school leaving (2013), Europe 2020 headline target and national targets



Source: Eurostat (LFS).

Eleven EU Member States have now reached their national targets for early leavers from education and training (CZ, DK, DE, HR, CY, LV, LT, LU, AT, SI, SE). Three of these countries had not yet reached their national targets in 2012 (DE, HR, CY). SK is the only Member State having reached its national target earlier (in 2008) but now featuring a rate of early leavers slightly above its national target.

### **2. Assessment of main challenges in Member States**

#### *The extent of the challenge*

A more comprehensive assessment follows when comparing current performance (2013) with recent change (2010-2013). Figure 2 sets off the 2013 early school leaving rates identical to the bar chart in Figure 1 against the average annual change in early school leaving rates (in percentage terms) over the period 2010-2013. The two dashed lines are the reference points for this assessment: firstly, the headline target of "below 10%" and, secondly, the minimum progress required for the EU as a whole to reach this target by 2020.

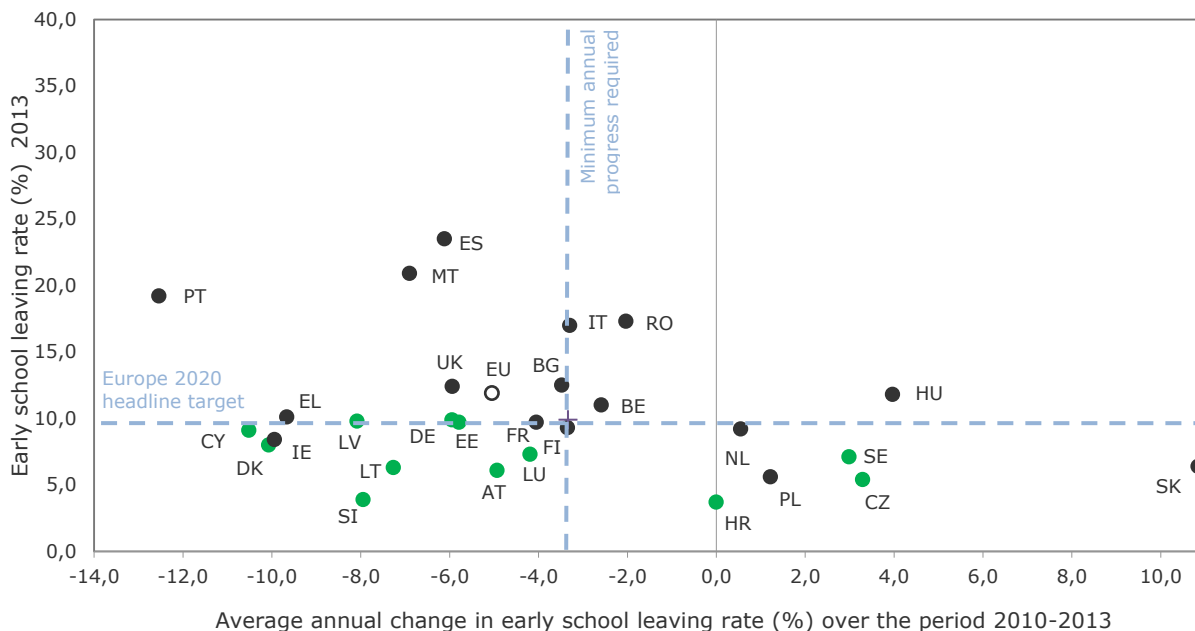
<sup>1</sup> The terms early school leavers and early leavers from education and training are used interchangeably in this document.

<sup>2</sup> See: [ec.europa.eu/education/monitor](http://ec.europa.eu/education/monitor).

<sup>3</sup> FR is the only Member State with a break in time series between 2012 and 2013, due to methodological changes. This means 2012 and 2013 data for FR are not directly comparable.

The latter is not difficult to ascertain. The EU average early school leaving rate in 2010 was 13.9% and it would need to be below 10.0% by 2020, ten years later. It follows from a basic calculation that the minimum annual progress required for the EU as a whole during this period is -3.3%, whereas the observed annual progress for the EU between 2010 and 2013 has been -5.1%. This means that the EU on average is on track and that the headline target is within reach if current progress is sustained.

Figure 2. Early school leaving: current performance and recent change<sup>4</sup>



Source: DG EAC calculations based on Eurostat (LFS) data. Note: EU Member States having already reached their national targets are depicted in green.

From the scatterplot in Figure 2, five groups of countries can be distinguished.

1. Countries that have early school leaving rates below 10% and are nonetheless still making progress (CY, DK, IE, LV, SI, LT, DE, EE, AT, LU, FR, FI). The majority of these countries have also reached their national targets, with the exception of IE, FR and FI.
2. Countries that have early school leaving rates below 10% but are no longer making progress. Whereas the early school leaving rate in HR has remained stable between 2010 and 2013, early school leaving rates have been *increasing* in NL, PL, SE, CZ and SK. In this group of countries, SE, CZ and HR have reached their national targets. However, at the current pace, particularly CZ and HR are at risk of falling behind their targets again. SK owes its position as outlier to a strong performance in 2010 that has consistently worsened since.
3. Countries that have early school leaving rates above 10% but are nevertheless making significant progress (PT, EL, MT, ES, UK, BG). This is a diverse group of countries, with PT, MT and ES standing out as the three EU Member States with the highest early school leaving rates. PT, however, continues also to be the country with the strongest annual improvement.
4. Countries that have early school leaving rates above 10% and an annual progress that is below the minimum requirement for the EU as a whole to reach its target by 2020 (IT, BE, RO).
5. Countries that have early school leaving rates above 10% and are moreover showing *increasing* early school leaving rates between 2010 and 2013. Only HU belongs to this group<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> A country's average annual progress excludes a change preceding a break in time series. This applies to LV (2011), NL (2011) and FR (2013).

<sup>5</sup> Both RO and BE belonged to this group as well last year, when the assessment was made for the time

## Target groups

As can be seen in Annex B, the rate of early leavers from education and training is **considerably higher amongst boys** (an EU average of 13.6%) than it is amongst girls (an EU average of 10.2%). The relative disadvantage of boys is most pronounced in CY and PT (more than 9 percentage points), whereas BG and CZ are the only countries with a (small) advantage of boys. Between 2012 and 2013, the gender gap has on average slightly decreased (most notably in MT and PT), but exceptions can be found (most notably in RO).

Secondly, across the EU, early school leaving rates amongst the foreign-born population are **more than twice as high** as the early school leaving rates for the native-born population (Annex C), hinting at worrisome socioeconomic discrepancies between the two groups. The native-born/foreign-born disparity has slightly decreased (from 14.7 percentage points in 2009 to 13.9 percentage points in 2012), but is still astounding in a number of Member States<sup>6</sup>. The difference is by far worst in EL, followed by AT, IT and CY. Calculations show that the EU as a whole would be 30% closer to reaching its Europe 2020 target of reducing the early school leaving to below 10% if the gap between foreign-born and native-born were closed, and some countries would even meet their national targets<sup>7</sup>. Identifying ways of tackling the problem, a recent study on newly arrived migrant children demonstrated that inclusive education systems are better equipped to integrate migrant children successfully and to support them effectively in school education<sup>8</sup>.

## Nature of the challenge

While the factors leading to early school leaving vary from country to country, based on the 2011 Council Recommendation<sup>9</sup> on policies to reduce early school leaving, the causes of ineffective policies can be boiled down to three typical deficiencies:

1. **Lack of a comprehensive strategy:** Strategic approaches to address early school leaving are not yet broadly implemented in Member States, although there is a growing tendency to better link existing and new measures and develop more comprehensive strategies. In addition, relevant stakeholders are often not involved in efforts to develop and implement measures. A Peer Review on policies to reduce Early School Leaving in March 2013 highlighted the need to involve business in measures to reduce early school leaving to e.g. allow for more work-based learning, improve guidance for young people at risk of early school leaving and ease their transition from school to work.
2. **Lack of evidence-based policy-making:** with some notable exceptions, Member State policies lack detailed information on the background of early school leavers and an analysis of the causes and incidence of early school leaving. Only a few countries take a systematic approach to collecting, monitoring and analysing data on early school leaving, as confirmed by a second Peer Review on early school leaving in March 2014.
3. **Insufficient prevention and early intervention:** Member States start to devote more attention to prevention, but still stronger focus on preventive and early intervention measures is needed both at system level and at the level of individual education and training institutions. Prevention measures at system level need to address especially problems of segregation in school education, the negative effects of grade repetition, the lack of support of groups at risk of early school leaving and the need to improve the attractiveness of vocational education and training (VET).

The 2011 Council Recommendation<sup>10</sup> gives guidance to Member States on how to tackle early school leaving and sets out the way forward. Member States should implement coherent, comprehensive and

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period 2010-2012 (see chapter 3 of the *Education and Training Monitor 2013* at [ec.europa.eu/education/monitor](http://ec.europa.eu/education/monitor)). This is another indication of the good progress between 2012 and 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Note that the latest data available is of 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Based on a report prepared for the Directorate-General for Home Affairs, *Using EU Indicators of Immigrant Integration* ([http://ec.europa.eu/ewsi/UDRW/images/items/docl\\_37216\\_243039941.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/ewsi/UDRW/images/items/docl_37216_243039941.pdf)).

<sup>8</sup> Authored in 2013 by the Public Policy and Management Institute (PPMI) on behalf of the European Commission ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/migrants/report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/migrants/report_en.pdf)).

<sup>9</sup> OJ C191, 1.7.2011, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> OJ C191, 1.7.2011, p. 1.

evidence-based strategies, comprising prevention, intervention and compensation measures. A Thematic Working Group on early school leaving, composed of policy-makers, practitioners and experts from 27 Member States and key European stakeholders organisations developed guidance on successful factors for developing comprehensive policies<sup>11</sup>. It stressed the importance of prevention and the need to enhance cross-sectoral cooperation, and to create creating partnerships and synergies among different stakeholders at all levels.

### 3. Horizontal issues

To ensure the **effectiveness** of the policies advocated by the 2011 Council Recommendation, it is important to identify the main factors leading to early school leaving and to monitor developments at national, regional and local level. First experiences in countries applying more advanced data collection systems show that high-quality evidence monitoring is very useful in maximising the reduction of early school leaving. As early school leaving is more frequent among young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, among people with migrant background and ethnic minorities such as Roma, and among boys, these should be key target groups for policy interventions.

Prevention and early intervention can be strengthened through better support for those at risk at an early age. There should also be better support for teachers, trainers and other education staff, parental involvement and stronger cooperation in and around schools, including with local communities and stakeholders. Extra-curricular activities and measures to raise the self-esteem, motivation and resilience of young people at risk of leaving school early are also important.

Intervention measures must be designed in a way that does not lead to segregation in the education system e.g. by creating measures that are beneficial for all students and all types of education and training institutions or by designing alternative educational pathways in a way that they provide relevant qualifications which allow learners to re-enter mainstream education and training.

Increasing the provision of high-quality initial VET can help reduce early school leaving. Combining general education with work experience can provide an alternative, and for some learners, more motivating path through education.

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<sup>11</sup> 'Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support', November 2013, final report of the Thematic Working Group on early school leaving: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/esl-group-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/esl-group-report_en.pdf)

## ANNEX: ADDITIONAL STATISTICAL INDICATORS

Annex A. Early leavers from education and training (total)					
	2000	2010	2011	2012	2013
EU 28	17.6 <sup>EU 27</sup>	13.9	13.4	12.7	11.9
Belgium	13.8	11.9	12.3	12.0	11.0
Bulgaria	:	13.9	11.8	12.5	12.5
Czech Republic	:	4.9	4.9	5.5	5.4
Denmark	11.7	11.0	9.6	9.1	8.0
Germany	14.6	11.9	11.7	10.6	9.9
Estonia	15.1	11.6	10.9	10.5	9.7
Ireland	:	11.5	10.8	9.7	8.4
Greece	18.2	13.7	13.1	11.4	10.1
Spain	29.1	28.4	26.5	24.9	23.5
France	13.3	12.6	12.0	11.6	9.7b
Croatia	:	3.7	4.1	4.2	3.7
Italy	25.1	18.8	18.2	17.6	17.0
Cyprus	18.5	12.7	11.3	11.4	9.1
Latvia	:	13.3b	11.6	10.6	9.8
Lithuania	16.5	7.9	7.4	6.5	6.3
Luxembourg	16.8	7.1	6.2	8.1	6.1
Hungary	13.9	10.5	11.2	11.5	11.8
Malta	54.2	25.9	23.6	22.6	20.9
Netherlands	15.4b	10.0	9.1	8.8	9.2
Austria	10.2	8.3	8.3	7.6	7.3
Poland	:	5.4	5.6	5.7	5.6
Portugal	43.6	28.7	23.2	20.8	19.2
Romania	22.9	18.4	17.5	17.4	17.3
Slovenia	:	5.0	4.2	4.4	3.9
Slovakia	:	4.7	5.1	5.3	6.4
Finland	9.0d	10.3	9.8	8.9	9.3
Sweden	7.3	6.5	6.6	7.5	7.1
United Kingdom	18.2	14.9	15.0	13.6	12.4

Source: Eurostat (LFS). Notes: b= break; u= unreliable; d= definition differs; p= provisional.

## Annex B. Early leavers from education and training by sex

	Males				Females				Gender gap
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2010	2011	2012	2013	2013
EU 28	15.8	15.3	14.4	13.6	12.0	11.5	10.9	10.2	3.4
Belgium	13.8	14.9	14.4	13.2	10.0	9.7	9.5	8.7	4.5
Bulgaria	13.2	11.2	12.1	12.3	14.5	12.6	13.0	12.7	-0.4
Czech Republic	4.9	5.4	6.1	5.4	4.8	4.4	4.9	5.5	-0.1
Denmark	14.1	12.1	10.8	9.9	7.7	7.0	7.4	6.2	3.7
Germany	12.7	12.7	11.3	10.4	11.0	10.8	9.9	9.3	1.1
Estonia	15.2	13.1	14.0	13.6	7.8	8.6	7.1	5.8	7.8
Ireland	13.4	12.8	11.2	9.8	9.6	8.8	8.2	6.9	2.9
Greece	16.5	16.1	13.7	12.7	10.8	10.1	9.1	7.6	5.1
Spain	33.5	31.0	28.8	27.0	23.1	21.9	20.8	19.9	7.1
France	15.1	13.8	13.4	10.7b	10.0	10.2	9.8	8.8	1.9
Croatia	4.6u	4.8u	4.6u	4.7u	2.6u	3.4u	3.6u	2.7u	2.0
Italy	22.0	21.0	20.5	20.2	15.4	15.2	14.5	13.7	6.5
Cyprus	16.2	15.1	16.5	14.8	9.8	8.1	7.0	4.2	10.6
Latvia	17.2	15.8b	14.7	13.6	9.4	7.5b	6.3	5.8	7.8
Lithuania	9.8	10.0	8.1	7.8	6.0	4.6u	4.6u	4.7u	3.1
Luxembourg	8.0	7.6	10.7	8.4	6.0	4.8u	5.5	3.7u	4.7
Hungary	11.5	12.1	12.2	12.5	9.5	10.3	10.7	11.1	1.4
Malta	32.6	29.6	27.5	23.2	18.5	17.1	17.6	18.2	5.0
Netherlands	12.1b	10.8	10.2	10.9	7.8b	7.2	7.3	7.4	3.5
Austria	8.4	8.8	7.9	7.7	8.2	7.8	7.3	7.0	0.7
Poland	7.2	7.4	7.8	7.9	3.5	3.7	3.5	3.2	4.7
Portugal	32.7	28.2	27.1	23.6	24.6	18.1	14.3	14.5	9.1
Romania	18.6	18.5	18.0	18.6	18.2	16.6	16.7	16.0	2.6
Slovenia	6.4	5.7	5.4	5.0	3.3u	2.5u	3.2u	2.6u	2.4
Slovakia	4.6	5.4	6.0	6.7	4.9	4.6	4.6	6.1	0.6
Finland	11.6d	11.2	9.8	10.4	9.0d	8.4	8.1	8.3	2.1
Sweden	7.5	7.8	8.5	7.9	5.5	5.4	6.3	6.2	1.7
United Kingdom	15.8	16.2	14.7	13.7	14.0	13.8	12.4	11.2	2.5

Source: Eurostat (LFS). Notes: b= break; u= unreliable; d= definition differs; p= provisional; p.p.= percentage points.

## Annex C. Early leavers from education by country of birth<sup>12</sup>

	2009			2012		
	Total	Foreign-born	Native-born	Total	Foreign-born	Native-born
EU 28	14.2	27.7	13	12.7	25.4	11.5
Austria	8.7	22.5	6.2	7.6	17.7	6.0
Belgium	11.1	20.5	10.0	12.0	22.6	10.6
Bulgaria	14.7	:	14.8	12.5	:	12.6
Croatia	3.9	:	4.0	4.2	:	4.2
Cyprus	11.7	23.0	7.8	11.4	20.7	8.1
Czech Republic	5.4	15.0u	5.2	5.5	9.3u	5.5
Denmark	11.3	15.8	11.0	9.1	10.1	9.0
Estonia	13.9	:	14.1	10.5	:	10.6
Finland	9.9	21.8	9.3	8.9	14.9u	8.7
France	12.2	24.2	11.3	11.6	22.9	10.8
Germany	11.1	:	9.5	10.5p	:	9.1
Greece	14.5	44.5	10.0	11.4	42.0	8.3
Hungary	11.2	:	11.1	11.5	14.4:u	11.4
Ireland	11.6	13.9	11.2	9.7	12.3	9.2
Italy	19.2	42.3	16.7	17.6	39.1	14.8
Latvia	13.9	:	14.0	10.5	2.3:u	10.6
Lithuania	8.7	:	8.6	6.5	14.1:u	6.4
Luxembourg	7.7b	13.4	5.4	8.1p	10.6	7.1
Malta	36.8p	:	37.3	22.6	20.1:u	22.7
Netherlands	10.9	14.2	10.7	8.8p	12.2	8.6
Poland	5.3	:	5.3	5.7p	5.5:u	5.7
Portugal	31.2	29.4	31.4	20.8	20.3	20.9
Romania	16.6	:	16.7	17.4	:	17.4
Slovakia	4.9	:	4.9	5.3	:	5.3
Slovenia	5.3	13.0u	5.0	4.4	10.1u	4.2
Spain	31.2	45.2	27.9	24.9	40.7	21.4
Sweden	7.0	11.9	6.4	7.5	12.8	6.7
United Kingdom	15.7	11.5	16.3	13.5	12.2	13.7

Source: Eurostat (LFS). Notes: b= break; : = data are either not available or not reliable due to very small sample size; u= data lack reliability due to small sample size; p= provisional. Data for the Czech Republic, Finland and Slovenia lack reliability due to small sample size in 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Note that the latest data available is of 2012.