

More than six million young people in the EU leave education and training with lower secondary level qualifications at best. They face severe difficulties in finding work, are more often unemployed and more often dependent on welfare benefits. Early school leaving hampers economic and social development and is a serious obstacle to the European Union's goal of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The Commission today approved an action plan that will help Member States to achieve the Europe 2020 headline target of reducing the EU average rate of early school leavers to under 10%, from the current level of 14.4%, by the end of the decade. José Manuel Barroso, the President of the European Commission, said: "*Europe cannot afford that so many young people who have the potential to contribute to our societies and our economies are left behind. We need to realise the potential of all young people in Europe in order to recover from the crisis.*"

The European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, Androulla Vassiliou, added: "*Reducing the share of early school leavers across Europe by just 1 percentage point would create nearly half a million additional qualified young people each year. Most EU countries have made progress in reducing the number of young people leaving school with low qualifications, but more needs to be done.*"

The Commission's new initiative outlines the situation across Europe regarding early school leaving, its main causes, its risks for future economic and societal development, and proposes ways to tackle the problem more effectively.

The accompanying proposal for a Council Recommendation contains guidelines to help Member States develop comprehensive and evidence-based policies to reduce early school leaving.

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