



Republic of Bulgaria
ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

RESOLUTION

on

"EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING - PROBLEMS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS"

(own-initiative resolution)

Sofia, 2017

The President Board of the ESC decided to develop a resolution on the topic of "Early School Leaving - Problems and Possible Solutions".

ESC President - Prof. Lalko Dulevski submitted the draft resolution for discussion to the Plenary Session

At its meeting held on 13 November 2017 the Plenary Session adopted the resolution.

1. The problems of early school leaving have a leading role in the work of the Economic and Social Council (ESC). ESC believes that this is one of the most serious challenges facing the country in the medium and the long term. Therefore, ESC has developed and adopted four specialized acts on this subject¹. The latter has been addressed also in other ESC acts².
2. Taking into consideration the high public awareness and sensitivity to the topic of early school leaving, ESC also organized a number of national and regional discussions and consultations with representatives of key stakeholders. The main findings and suggestions from them were reflected in the acts adopted by ESC, and on the basis of the dialogues held, ESC presented a number of concrete proposals and recommendations to the legislative and the executive branches of Bulgaria's government.
3. ESC is guided by the definition of early school leaving, among young people aged 18 to 24, as "any form of leaving the education and training system prior to completing secondary education or equivalent levels of vocational education and training"³. According to ESC, however, the problems of early school leaving should be regarded in close connection with the drop-out rate by individual periods of schooling, as well as with the question of the coverage of students in education.
4. From the discussions and consultations held, as well as from the research for the preparation of its acts ESC finds the use of different terms and definitions, such as "non-enrolment", "dropping out of school", "early school leaving", etc. In this regard, ESC considers that in subsequent broad public debates and consultations it is necessary to achieve a certain terminological unity with respect to the processes under consideration and on this basis to carry out and present subsequent evaluations, analyses and policies.

¹ Opinion "Policies for Reducing Early School Leaving"; Resolution on the "Draft Strategy for Preventing and Reducing the Share of Dropouts and Early School Leavers (2013-2020)"; Resolution on "Measures and Actions to Reduce the Share of Early School Leavers"; Analysis on "Early School Leaving";

² Resolution on "Draft National Reform Programme of the Republic of Bulgaria", Resolution on "Demographic Challenges Facing Bulgaria in the Context of the Europe 2020 Strategy", Resolution on the Main Positions of the Economic and Social Council on the Review of the Implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy in Bulgaria, Resolution on "Integrated Policy for Young People in Bulgaria".

³ Commission Communication: Tackling early school leaving: a key contribution to the Europe 2020 Agenda. COM (2011) 18 final, p. 2.

5. According to ESC, early school leaving is one of the most serious challenges facing the country with very serious direct and indirect negative effects, especially in the long run⁴.
 - 5.1. For ESC, early school leaving can be seen as a direct loss of public resource that is invested in the education of the individuals concerned, but without any outcomes visible to the general public.
 - 5.2. At the same time, reintegration into the education system of drop-outs requires the investment of a new public resources, which are very often for spent to teach very basic literacy, numeracy and skills. In this case, ESC finds the existence of double public expenditure borne by society as a whole resulting from early school leaving.
 - 5.3. Based on these and a number of other arguments, ESC considers that efforts to reduce early school leaving should also be seen as actions to support the optimization in the use of public funds and their more purposeful and effective spending.
6. ESC warns of the very serious consequences on the formation of human capital in the country, which result from the development of the early school leaving trends. As a result of these trends, in recent decades there are definitely negative consequences for the quality of human capital, which already has a very serious impact both on the labour market and on the basic socio-economic processes.
 - 6.1. The growing shortage of the necessary workforce and, at the same time, a sustainable and growing aggregate of long-term unemployed and non-workforce persons most clearly express the long-term consequences of early school leaving. For ESC, this is one of the main reasons for the limited economic growth and potential of the country.
 - 6.2. ESC also finds an increase in the cost of social benefits, support, etc., which is another consequence of the prerequisites of early school leaving.
 - 6.3. In its acts, ESC expresses its position that illiteracy and lack of education are a prerequisite and a source of higher crime and tension in society, which in turn also requires public spending to increase the necessary security and internal public order in the country.

⁴ Analysis "Early School Leaving".

- 6.4. Last but not least, the ESC is concerned that, as a result, the development of early school leaving processes has led to an increase in the rate of voters with low education and literacy or lack of literacy, posing a very serious challenge to the future of the political system and governance of the country.
7. To ESC, early school leaving is also a major challenge for the individual person, as lack of education or basic literacy practically limits the possibility of formal, statutorily regulated employment.
- 7.1. In its analyses, ESC has stressed that it is namely persons without education who are most often engaged in informal employment without any guarantees of labour or social security rights.
- 7.2. Moreover, ESC has found the inherited link between poverty and social inequality, with the main reason here again being illiteracy and lack of education. There is sufficient evidence that the majority of early school leavers come from families whose parents have also left school early.
8. ESC found that for the last two or three school years about 21,000 students leave the education system annually, with more than two thirds of them were between their 1st and 8th year of school. According to ESC, very early school leaving is especially typical for Bulgaria, which has its subsequent impact on the quality of the workforce and the problems of its realization in the labour market.
- 8.1. ESC also finds that while at the beginning of the current decade about 50% of students left school due to family reasons, in the 2015/2016 school year, this reason was indicated by about one-third of the students between their 1st and 8th year of school, and by about 40% of students in the secondary phase of education.
- 8.2. ESC draws attention to the marked increase in the impact of "moving abroad" on school leaving, which has been particularly evident over the last few years. This reason is much more characteristic of school leaving in the early stages of education - up to the 4th and the 8th year of school which shows that moving abroad is more typical for families with younger children.

9. ESC also pays special attention to the problems of the so-called "inconsistent" students, who attend school only one or two times a week, mainly in order to avoid suspension of their parents' childcare social benefits. ESC also expresses concern about the growing share of the so-called "problematic" students who are left without parental control due to their parents' living abroad or have uninterested and illiterate parents.
10. ESC also draws attention to the fact that in Bulgaria the level of early school leaving among girls is higher than among boys. Such a trend across the European Union is also evident in Romania, but in our country it is more pronounced.
 - 10.1. According to the ESC, the gender factor in early school leaving should be taken into account in the development of the relevant policies and measures, bearing in mind that what is at issue is probably the whole stereotype and lifestyle of an ethnic community. ESC also believes that it is necessary to undertake urgent and adequate measures to curb the so-called "early marriages" or family cohabitation of minors with minors, which directly affects the early school leaving of girls in very early childhood.
11. ESC notes that the specific tendencies of early school leaving in Bulgaria have a negative impact on the job opportunities and realization of early school leavers. There is sufficient evidence of the very low quality of the human capital of early school leavers in other EU countries, which has a serious impact on the economic activity and employment of such persons.
 - 11.1. For example, ESC found that while in 2016 in Romania the level of early school leaving is about 40% higher than in Bulgaria, the economic activity of young people aged 15 to 24 with basic and lower education in Romania is more than two times higher.
 - 11.2. Also, in 2016, the employment rate of young people aged 15-24 with basic and lower education in Romania is 2.5 times higher than that of the respective youth contingent in Bulgaria. This raises the issue of the need for a much deeper and more concrete analysis of early school leaving in Bulgaria and its impact on the situation of young people with the lowest education on the labour market.

12. Against the background of higher levels of early school leaving among girls ESC draws attention to the subsequent reflection of this fact on the state of this young labour force contingent.
- 12.1. While in 2007 the level of economic activity of boys aged 15 to 24 with primary and lower education is about 60% higher than that of girls of this age and educational contingent, in 2016 the gap increases to over 80 %.
- 12.2. ESC also found that in 2007 the employment rate of young boys with primary and lower education aged 15 to 24 years is 70% higher than that of girls, whereas in 2016 this difference increases up to 2.2 times.
- 12.3. At the same time, ESC stresses with particular concern that while in 2016 in the European Union an average of 21 boys and 15 girls aged 15 to 24 with basic and lower education were employed, in Bulgaria this was typical of about 8 boys and 4 girls in this age and educational group.
13. There are also very serious regional differences between the levels of early school leaving. For example, in 2016 the level of this indicator in the Northwest region of Bulgaria reaches 27.7% and is about 5 times higher than in the Southwest region. In this regard, ESC insists that analyses and policies to curb early school leaving should be much more focused on overcoming regional disparities, not just on the implementation of national policies and measures.
14. Taking into account all the challenges and trends mentioned, ESC made a deep analysis of the problem as early as in 2012 and adopted its opinion⁵, in which it recommended the development of a national strategy whose main aim would be to reduce the share of early school leavers below 10%.
15. Also, in connection with the target set in the National Reform Program of Bulgaria to implement the Europe 2020 Strategy – "Share of early school leavers 11% by 2020", ESC expresses its unanimous position on the need for a more ambitious target and restated its proposal to bring the share of early school leavers down to 10%. ESC also recommended that

⁵ Opinion "Policies to Reduce Early School Leaving".

this target should be monitored alongside the situation in the labour market of people with basic and lower education as well as the impact on the public finances and social systems of the country.

16. ESC welcomes the preparation of the draft National Strategy for Preventing and Reducing the Share of Dropouts and Early School Leavers (2013-2020) (the Strategy), and took active part in the public debate adopting a separate resolution⁶ on this strategic document.

16.1. Expressing its concern about the increasing share of children who have never attended school or dropped out before completing primary education, ESC has recommended a deeper study of the structure of early school leavers and their characteristics⁷.

16.2. ESC also proposes that the Strategy should include additional indicators to identify children at risk of early school leaving.

16.3. According to ESC, the Strategy must take into account the specific economic, social and demographic problems of the individual regions, which are a prerequisite for the serious interregional differences in the rate of early school leaving. Moreover, ESC urges the implementation of an integrated institutional approach to the implementation of the Strategy, ensuring effective control and transparency at all levels when assessing its implementation and realization.

17. ESC expresses particular anxiety about the finding that there is a growing tendency of reduction of the enrolment rate among children aged⁸ 7-10 years and among those aged 11-14 years and recommends that in the Strategy's indicators special attention should be paid to the coverage in education, especially in primary and pre-secondary education. ESC also pays very serious attention to children who have never attended school, and insists in its resolution and this should be taken into account in the Strategy.

⁶ Resolution on "Draft Strategy for Preventing and Reducing the Share of Dropouts and Early School Leavers (2013-2020)".

⁷ During the 2015/2016 school year the number of children leaving the primary education stage was 6568, which is 248 more children than the previous school year and is the highest value from the 2010/2011 school year. The number of children leaving the pre-secondary education stage for the 2015/2016 school year was 8139.

⁸ During the past 6 completed school years there is a decrease in this indicator for all groups of children, but the most alarming are the data for groups of children aged 7-10 and 11-14. ESC expressed concern about the finding that the coverage in education of children aged 7-10 years has decreased from nearly 100% (98.6%) for the 2010/2011 school year to 95.5% for the 2015/2016 school year.

17.1. ESC notes with satisfaction that these recommendations were reflected in the adopted Strategy, with the following new indicators:

-share of the population aged 7-11 in school education;

-share of population aged 12-14 in school education;

-share of persons who have never attended school in the age groups 7-11, 12-14, 15-17 and 18-19 years.

18. ESC proposed to include in the Strategy an additional long-term goal of a significant reduction in the proportion of students dropping out of school between years of schooling one and four, this indicator must not exceed 1.5% of the total number of enrolled pupils in each respective school year. At the same time, ESC regrets that this proposal was not included in the Strategy and again insists that it should be considered in the light of emerging trends and their impact on the labour market.

19. ESC underlines the fact that a number of measures and activities have been developed and implemented in accordance with the action plans of the Strategy. Conversely, ESC notes the lack of objective and realistic assessments of the effectiveness of these measures, the analyses being mainly focused on the quantitative rather than the qualitative aspects of the implementation of the Strategy.

20. According to the ESC, the main policies for limiting early school leaving and the specific measures for their implementation are developed and implemented mainly through the education system and do not reach the underlying economic, social and other specific factors.

20.1. For example, ESC does not find a specific measure or policy addressing the severely restricted access to and choice of schools in remote areas of the country, therefore the possibility of good quality and type of schooling of children in such settlements is restricted to the schools that are in close proximity to the place of residence.

20.2. This type of problems, according to ESC, are complemented with others related to the closing down of schools; presence of small schools with composite classes; lack of funds for covering the transportation costs of children in compulsory school age in case the family chooses that the child should study in another city or municipality;

discontinued coverage of transportation costs for students aged above 16 years if they study outside the place of residence, etc.

- 20.3. In this regard, ESC considers it extremely necessary to provide for the possibility of building dormitories, boarding houses and other means of ensuring the dignified accommodation for children who are studying outside of their place of residence, at a relatively remote distance, which makes daily trips between settlements unreasonable.
21. ESC accepts the groups of reasons for early school leaving (economic, social, educational, institutional, health-related and ethno-cultural) that are presented in the Strategy and other normative documents of the Ministry of Education and Science. At the same time, it finds certain differences in the data of the National Statistical Institute⁹ and the Regional Inspectorates of Education (RIEs)¹⁰ on the number of early school leavers within a given school year.
22. Considering all these circumstances, ESC recommends the creation of a unified national database to bring together the available information from all organizations and institutions. Moreover, ESC proposes to discuss the idea of introducing a single educational number (register)¹¹, which would record individual information for each student, incl. the school where he/she studied, his/her success in the individual disciplines, the level of education completed, etc.
23. According to ESC, the establishment of such an information system, and the provision of the necessary access to the information collected in it, will create an opportunity to solve a number of problems such as:

-tracking the so-called "occasional" students who often change schools;

⁹ The National Statistical Institute uses the following categories of reasons for early school leaving: due to reluctance to study, due to family reasons, due to moving abroad.

¹⁰ The Regional Inspectorates of Education provide detailed information, but do not take into account factors such as: reasons for leaving school, changing schools / domicile within the country, or continuing education outside the country.

¹¹ In 1997 the UK introduced individual student numbers. They enabled the effective monitoring of the success of school policy and the need for reforms. They allow monitoring of both early school leaving and other education issues. Similar electronic databases are also introduced in the Netherlands, Germany and Italy.

- analysis of the reasons for and number of excused and unexcused absences from class, as well as achievement of sufficiently reliable control in this respect;
- proving the acquired educational degree for the needs of the labour offices and specific employers;
- more detailed and in-depth study of school leaving and the reasons for it, etc.

24. Taking into account the efforts to create the Register for the Movement of Children and Students, ESC considers that there is still no effective monitoring of children at risk of early school leaving, as well as the necessary coordination of the activities for prevention and intervention between all involved institutions.

24.1. In this regard, ESC proposes to speed up the process of introducing a national e-system for pre-school and school education¹² and access to it for the competent authorities to monitor the movement of children and pupils to perform the necessary analyses and to undertake measures to prevent early school leaving.

25. ESC pays special attention to the problems with the children of Bulgarians who have moved abroad, part of which accompany their parents abroad for a certain period, others remain with their relatives in Bulgaria, while a third group permanently leave the country. According to ESC, there is currently no reliable tracking system for these children and therefore the council suggests to discuss possibilities for building an international system for tracking the movement of children and students when traveling and spending long intervals abroad (e.g. in EU countries).

25.1. In order to facilitate access to the education system, ESC recommended introducing a simplified procedure for recognizing a completed year, stage or level of education for school-aged children who have studied outside the country for a short period of time¹³. In this regard, ESC appreciates the amendments made to the relevant Regulation¹⁴,

¹² Envisaged in Ordinance 8 of 11.08.2016 for the information and documents in the system of pre-school and school education.

¹³ Resolution "Measures and Actions to Reduce the Share of Early School Leavers".

¹⁴ Regulation No 2 of 14 April 2003 for recognition of completed stages of schooling or degrees of education and professional qualification on the basis of documents issued by foreign schools, which entered into force on 28 June 2014.

which facilitates the procedures for the recognition of a completed year – from first to sixth including the latter.

25.2. At the same time, ESC is concerned that despite this relief, procedures will still remain quite bureaucratic, especially after the sixth year of schooling.

25.3. In this regard, ESC proposes to attach greater importance to the recognition of the individual years, stages or degrees of the results of the equalizing examinations for basic subjects, and not only to the "completeness" of the documents provided by the foreign school. ESC shares the view that if, after such exams, the student proves the necessary basic knowledge to build on during the upcoming school year, it is hardly fair and acceptable to prevent his/her education due to cumbersome and bureaucratic administrative procedures.

26. According to the ESC, more stringent control is needed when addressing and creating correct and reliable statistics. Such type of information creates conditions for constant monitoring of internal and external migration and its impact on the coverage in education by settlements. In this regard, ESC recommends the development of a mechanism for electronic submission of applications for change of permanent and current address, thereby simplifying the relevant administrative procedures as much as possible.

27. ESC welcomes the development and implementation by the Ministry of Education and Science of a pilot module "Early warning system for children at risk of early school leaving" in 50 educational institutions from 19 municipalities in the North-western and South-eastern regions.

27.1. ESC proposes to perform an analysis of the implementation of the Ministry's pilot system for early warning and, if necessary, to suggest corrective actions.

27.2. According to ESC, it is necessary to apply a harmonized approach to identifying students at risk of early school leaving, to become a tool for coordination and cooperation between all stakeholders, based on clear and uniform criteria and indicators developing the early warning system at the national level.

28. Taking into account the main problems and challenges related to early school leaving, ESC proposed a number of possible solutions to limit this phenomenon in a number of its acts. At

the same time, on the basis of the discussions and consultations organized on this topic, ESC has extended and systematized its proposals with new concrete measures and recommendations.

29. According to ESC, ensuring equal access to early childcare and pre-school education is key to the policy of preventing early school leaving.

29.1. ESC proposes to develop mechanisms to ensure attendance at compulsory pre-school education and its extension to four-year-olds.

29.2. In this regard, ESC urges for the development and implementation of further measures and policies to extend the coverage of children in kindergartens, as well as to increase incentives and opportunities to access preschool education of the appropriate quality and duration. An important aspect in this respect is the policy for the creation of protected nurseries, the implementation of specialized transportation programmes for children, free meals and free teaching aids.

29.3. ESC shares the understanding that reducing or eliminating fees and other costs altogether is an important incentive and opportunity to increase coverage and attendance in kindergartens and in the compulsory pre-school education system in general.

29.4. Another aspect in this regard are the incentives, incl. financial incentives, of local government to develop municipal programmes for modernizing existing childcare facilities and building new ones in order to ensure the coverage of children in nurseries and kindergartens at an early age.

30. ESC considers the mandatory whole-day organization of the education process for students at risk of early school leaving as another important preventive measure to contain this process. For ESC, this measure would have a very strong effect if a free lunch and additional activities were provided, so as to create the opportunity for children at risk to perceive the school as a desired place to be and a useful alternative to spend part of their leisure time.

30.1. New more effective incentives are needed for students belonging to risk groups and their parents with a view to ensure regular participation in the educational process. According to ESC, decreasing the level of difficulty of the curriculum and the

introduction of attractive and interactive training methods are part of the efforts in this direction.

30.2. ESC also considers it necessary to develop special measures to work with the parents of children at risk.

30.3. ESC also places a stronger emphasis on the need for additional activities with children for whom the Bulgarian language is not their mother tongue.

31. ESC shares the view that there is a need to extend the circle of pedagogical specialists by introducing the position of "Educational Mediator", which is already a fact from September 2017. There is an objective need to increase the number of resource teachers, psychologists and educators, as well as to involve them more actively in solving the problems of early school leaving.

31.1. ESC proposes to pay much more attention to the place and role of class teachers and even by alleviating their teaching burden to create conditions and time for their engagement and work with children and families at risk of early school leaving.

31.2. ESC proposes to pay special attention to the training of pedagogical staff and the qualifications of teachers, with particular emphasis on specialized training programmes for working in a multicultural environment, working with children at risk of early school leaving and working with children with special educational needs.

32. ESC also proposes, in a wider public debate, to discuss the feasibility and relevance of the idea to include the criterion of children's attendance of school among the selection criteria for participants in temporary work programmes for parents.

33. ESC has repeatedly supported the development of youth and children's organizations, as well as the creation or expansion of existing centres for working with children.

34. ESC proposes to strengthen the role and support of the Bulgarian system of regional cultural and communal centres. Based on the provision of additional funding regional cultural and communal centres can also be developed as information and training centres for children, especially in the field of ancient Bulgarian traditions, culture, art, customs, etc.

35. ESC believes it is of key importance to stimulate active community work and to introduce additional mechanisms to increase parental activity, capacity and competencies. Particularly important in this respect, ESC finds, is the work of trained mediators, co-workers or mentors with community members, as well as increasing the qualification of teachers to work with parents. In this regard, ESC also proposes the issue of discussing the idea of a "school for parenting" the realization of which, according to ESC, will have a direct positive impact on the attitude of part of the parents towards their children and their retention in school.
36. ESC insists on much more serious and effective preventive measures in order to limit and overcome the issue of "early marriages".
- 36.1. Novel and more adequate approaches are needed to raise the sensitivity and commitment of schools, families and the community to limit this problem, and to monitor and find the right solution for each particular case.
- 36.2. ESC considers as an effective measure in this respect the organization of campaigns to present the negative consequences of early marriages and, at the same time, to promote examples of successful Roma women who have reached their achievements on the basis of family support and good education.
37. At the same time, ESC considers that, along with all possible incentives and preventive measures, it is necessary to strictly observe the law and with regard to the sanctioning measures in case of established legal violations. In this regard, the council raises the question of the strict fulfilment of the obligations of mayors of the municipalities concerning the imposition of sanctions on parents who do not ensure the presence of their children at school, Art. 347 of the Preschool and School Education Act. Moreover, in connection with the often-voiced arguments for the lack of any financial means to meet the imposed penalties, ESC proposes a wider discussion of the possibility for compensation through the corresponding obligation to do community service work, after examining corresponding practices in this other countries.
- 37.1. Unresolved remains, according to ESC, the question of the responsibility of parents who have moved abroad and have left their children unattended without supervision, incl. and without control of their attendance at school.

- 37.2. ESC proposes to strengthen and effectively apply sanctions on school principals who allow fictitious enrolment of students or tolerate "hidden non-attendance" by excusing a large number of absences.
- 37.3. Linking the issuance of a driving license to school attendance until reaching compulsory school age (16 years) is another potential opportunity to curb early school leaving, which ESC believes should be put to wider public debate.
38. ESC recommends that municipalities and schools with a predominant share of children and pupils at risk of early school leaving should develop a comprehensive approach to integrated prevention policy based on agreement for cooperation. In addition, ESC proposes to develop and implement a specific interaction algorithm "school - students - parents - local government - local businesses - public organizations" with certain specific commitments of the school (the class teacher, the director, the school psychologist), the student and parent to local departments for child protection and social welfare of local committees to combat delinquency of minors, local businesses, community centres and centres for community and social support.
- 38.1. ESC is pleased to note that the majority of these proposals have been implemented both in the signed agreement between the institutions for cooperation in the implementation of the Strategy for Prevention of Early School Leaving as well as in the Mechanism for joint work by the institutions on enrolment and retention in the educational system of children and pupils in compulsory pre-school and school age (Mechanism) created by the decision of the Council of Ministers from July 2017.
- 38.2. At the same time, ESC insists on an assessment and, if necessary, a change in some of the measures set out in the Mechanism to ensure a more active and responsible engagement of other institutions as well as the educational ones.
- 38.3. ESC proposes to provide for measures to involve parents in cooperation with inter-institutional outreach teams for preventing early school leaving, as well as to prevent aggression and to enhance security in educational institutions.
- 38.4. At the same time, ESC recommends that this mechanism should become a permanent instrument of the Strategy within the framework of its Coordination mechanism.

39. Assessing previous practice and the results of limiting early school leaving, ESC notes that some of them did not have the necessary effect due to the lack of basic prerequisites for their effective and complete realization. Therefore, ESC recommends that measures and programmes should not start before they are fully secured with the necessary means and conditions for their effective implementation, thus avoiding the negative effects of the "half-way" implementation of such measures.

39.1. In this regard, ESC stresses that the legally imposed limitation on how many times a given year of schooling can be repeated should not be introduced unconditionally, but only after ensuring sufficient instruments and resources to overcome learning deficits through individual and additional schooling.

39.2. In this context, ESC is of the opinion that before discontinuing existing institutional forms of educational support for persons with special educational needs, it is necessary to provide an adaptation period and intensive individual support for these children.

40. In its acts and organized consultations, ESC has repeatedly expressed its position on the need to rethink and change the delegated budget model and the "money follow the student" mechanism. In this regard, ESC emphasizes that the funding standard should follow the framework and philosophy of the Pre-school and School Education Act, providing funds for general and additional support to all groups of children.

41. ESC recommends to discuss, develop and adopt legislative changes regulating the even closer linking of social assistance system benefits and supplements with the attendance of children and students in kindergartens and schools.

In conclusion, ESC considers that the public debate on the problems of early school leaving should continue and provide basis for improving the Strategy and increasing the impact of the actions and policies undertaken, as well as focus on educational work in educational institutions.

(signed)

Professor Lalko Dulevski, Ph.D

PRESIDENT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL