

With the expansion of regional and national economies into a global marketplace, education has critical importance as a primary factor in allowing young adults to enter the workforce and advance economically, as well as to share in the social, health, and other benefits associated with education and productive careers. In the area of education, the Europe 2020 strategy (European Commission, 2010a) sets two targets: i) reducing the number of early school leavers and ii) increasing the share of young adults who have completed tertiary education, i.e. the educational level following the completion of one's secondary education, such as a high school, secondary school, university preparatory school, or gymnasium. More concretely, the Europe 2020 strategy envisages reducing the early school leaver rate from 15% to fewer than 10% by 2020. Reducing the number of early school leavers should be considered crucial because the lower educated population faces lower employment rates. A grouping of EU member states has already reached the goal of reducing early school leavers to 10%, notably the transition countries of Poland, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Lithuania. Luxembourg, Finland and Austria are the three western European countries that have already reached the benchmark of 10%. Other western countries – namely Sweden, Ireland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Hungary, France, Germany and Belgium – are very close to reaching the goal. However, the four Mediterranean countries of Malta, Portugal, Spain and Italy present a dramatically different picture. In Malta over 35% of students leave school with only a lower secondary degree. In Europe's fifth-largest economy – Spain – as well as in Portugal, the figure is still over 30%, and in Italy around 20% of its students leave school early. These numbers already underline the huge competitive problems of Portugal and Italy's economies. Taking the ongoing eurozone crisis into account, it becomes apparent that Portugal and Italy have to undergo structural reforms, in the sense of investing in their stock of human capital, to be able to strengthen competitiveness in the long run. Within this scenario the project aims to create a learning community based on training especially focusing on the fight against school failure and early school dropouts using Art education as a powerful tool. This problem, although with different figures arises in the participating regions. Art education is not only to be seen as a topic in 'history, art and culture' subjects but offers great potential for reaching the Erasmus+ transversal key competences as set out by the Reference Framework: learning to learn, social and civic competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship and cultural awareness and expression. Because innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship are increasingly important in the current job market, particularly in today's rapidly changing society with the demand for more flexible workers, the project aims at providing the target group with the necessary tools to develop these aspects amongst early-school leavers through Art education and to build teacher capacity for competence oriented education in a Art context. The consortium aimed at involving the target-groups of the project in the main activities of the project in order to address their needs more properly. Thus, a survey will be carried out in all partners' countries with the collaboration educators and early school leavers. A collection of learning techniques considered as good practices will be promoted. The findings of both activities will contribute to defining the contents of the Guidebook for Teachers, Trainers and Managers (TTM), two guides "School failure and dropping out: innovative didactic and guidance methodologies" and "A School for tomorrow's Europe: Bridging the Gap developing inclusive practice with Early School Leavers". Themed workshops are going to be one of the major activities to be completed in the 2nd year of the project. As such, the most important outcomes produced so far are two Guides containing, respectively, the conclusions about the current needs of the target groups and several techniques to promote creativity and an entrepreneurial spirit. After the realization of the workshops and the development of the final version of the Guides, an Event to present all the consortium's

outcomes implemented in all partner's countries will be promoted to present the project's results, to experience some of the techniques used at the workshops and also to distribute the final products of the project. Through the project, we are proposing:

- \* to improve school success and motivation,
- \* to fight against school failure and absenteeism ,
- \* to decrease anti-social behavior,
- \* to create growth in extracurricular activities
- \* to have result in fewer learning and behavior problems
- \* to inform parents and community on the importance of education.

The creation of knowledge societies in which knowledge creation among citizens is given top priority would be the appropriate step to unleash the creativity so badly needed for Europe's future wealth. However, the establishment of this kind of knowledge society will need a radical rethinking on the part of European policy-makers when dealing with educational matters. Furthermore, the crucial topic of educational quality is not even touched upon, although it is quite clear that the quality of education is as important as the quantity in the global competition for innovativeness. The project is particularly relevant, since within the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the European Commission has invited Member States and States seeking accession to the European Union to present national strategies for the early school leaving and school dropout within their national reform programmes for education, poverty reduction, and social and economic development. Early school leaving and dropping out of school before completing the normal course of secondary education have implications not only for the lives and opportunities of those who experience it, but also has enormous economic and social implications for society at large. Early leaving from education is a serious issue in many EU countries and has attracted the attention of many researchers, policy-makers and educators. Although the situation varies across countries and the underlying reasons for students leaving early are highly individual, the process leading up to it includes a number of common elements: learning difficulties, socio-economic problems, or a lack of motivation, guidance or support. Early leaving is highly challenging, not only for young people, but also for societies. For many, early leaving will lead to reduced opportunities in the labour market and an increased likelihood of unemployment, poverty, health problems and reduced participation in political, social and cultural activities. Furthermore, these negative consequences have an impact on the next generation and may perpetuate the occurrence of early leaving. Education systems play a crucial role in addressing early leaving from education. They must attempt to cater for the diverse needs of young people today. Dealing with the underlying causes of early leaving has thus become a central issue across Europe. EU countries have committed to reducing the proportion of early leavers to less than 10 % by 2020. In June 2011, education ministers agreed on a 'framework for coherent, comprehensive, and evidence-based policies' to tackle early leaving. Since then a working group bringing together policy makers and practitioners from across Europe has looked at examples of

good practice across Europe and has promoted an exchange of experiences on this issue. Last but not least, in the context of the European Semester, country specific recommendations issued to some Member States identify reducing early leaving as a policy priority area.

The project will allow to bring together a set of methods, techniques, actions and activities that the partners organizations will carry out to solve the problem of school failure and dropping out. Analysing the factors influencing early leaving such as low socio-economic background and in particular poverty, domestic violence, parents' with no or very low qualifications, migrant background or ethnic minority background, gender the project seeks to promote partnership between parents, teachers and community in order to enhance pupils' learning opportunities and to promote their retention in the education system using Art education as a powerful tool. The application of these new features in local environments will allow a continued and concerted action that is expected to produce a change in attitudes and behaviors toward school promoting the acquisition of new core competencies in relation to the project's topics. The idea that gives life to the proposal is summarized in the binomial INFORMATION – PARTICIPATION as well as in the belief that effective information can produce active and conscious participation. This Project is complementary to several national or European initiatives and programs that have already been developed, or are currently developed: Recommendation of the European Parliament & Council on key competences for lifelong learning (COM (2005) 548 final and 2006/962/EC); Horizon Community Initiatives; European Social Fund (ESF) 2020 Specific European Commission Objectives for early school leaving and dropout.