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PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND
THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Draft 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of
the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)**

New priorities for European cooperation in education and training

{ COM(2015) 408 final }

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1. INTRODUCTION

The ET 2020 Joint Report

Established through the Council Conclusions of 12 May 2009,¹ the ET 2020 strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training provides for the adoption of a Joint Report by the Council and the Commission at the end of each 3-year work cycle. The Joint Report looks at the main achievements of the past work cycle, determines the main remaining challenges and identifies the *priority areas* for the next work cycle. To thoroughly prepare this Joint Report, the Commission has conducted a mid-term stocktaking of ET 2020.

Preparing the 2015 Joint Report was not a routine exercise. In February 2014, the Education Council made clear that:

- Member States and Commission should try to “*increase the added value and optimise the effectiveness of the ET 2020 strategic framework and its underlying governance and working arrangements*”; and that
- the purpose of the mid-term stocktaking was “*to help prepare the next draft Joint Report, with a more forward-looking focus which identifies key priority areas and concrete issues for future work*”.

Contributing elements to the mid-term stocktaking

The key findings of the ET 2020 mid-term stocktaking draw on a variety of contributions, including:

- **ET 2020 National Reports** in which the Member States elaborate on progress during the past work cycle, remaining challenges and needs for future cooperation at EU-level;
- **Senior officials' input:** In the spring 2014, the ET 2020 Directors General (DG) meetings (for schools; higher education; VET) and the High Level Group (HLG) each held a discussion on the overall ET 2020 framework and its working methods. In the autumn 2014, the DG meetings each held a discussion on their sectoral priorities. In December 2014, the HLG discussed the overall orientations of the Joint Report;
- The **independent interim evaluation** of ET 2020 by contractor Ecorys was submitted on 3 November 2014 and includes recommendations for ET 2020's improvement;
- The annual **Education, Training and Youth Forum** (9-10 October 2014) was specifically devoted to input by stakeholders, civil society and NGOs in the ET 2020 stocktaking;
- Input by the **European social partners:** On 5 June and 13 November 2014, the European social partners provided input in the ET 2020 stocktaking on the

¹ Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), OJ C 119, 28.5.2009, p. 2–10.

occasion of meetings with EAC. On 6 November, the European sectoral social dialogue committee in education also discussed the ET 2020 priorities.

ET 2020: the value of an integrated strategic framework

The ET 2020 strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training was launched by the Council in May 2009. It is designed to cover learning in all contexts — whether formal, non-formal or informal — and at all levels: from early childhood education and schools through to higher education, vocational education and training and adult learning.

During the ET 2020 mid-term stocktaking, there was a general consensus among stakeholders about the **great value of having such an integrated strategic framework** covering education and training in all its contexts, levels and dimensions. Input from the stakeholders emphasised that such an integrated approach is necessary:

- To ensure the coherence and permeability between the various education and training sectors and to bridge the gaps between formal, informal and non-formal learning (which is instrumental in making lifelong learning operational);
- To bring the necessary broader transversal context to the sectoral agendas (stakeholders generally agreed that in education and training a sectoral silo approach can only lead to sub-optimal results); and
- To effectively weigh on the EU's overall political agenda, in particular in the context of the reviewed Europe 2020 and the European Semester.

Several reasons plead for a coherently integrated policy framework in education and training, also reflected in the integrated nature of the new Erasmus+ programme:

Lifelong learning: in the modern economy, learning has become a necessary and enriching activity during the various stages of life. Since the Lisbon Strategy, European cooperation on education and training has been underpinned by the principle of lifelong learning from early childhood to adult learning. Requests by stakeholders, including by learners, providers and employers, for a simpler, more user-friendly and more flexible approach to implementing the lifelong learning paradigm plead for an enhanced coordination between the various education and training sectors and for a strongly integrated overall policy framework.

Permeability: European cooperation in education and training has fostered a world of learning that is increasingly characterised by permeability between education and training contexts, sectors and levels. With a view to reducing the skills gap and improving employability, such permeability is essential to allow learners, providers and employers to fully benefit from education and training opportunities. However, in order to work in practice, permeability needs to go hand in hand with policy coherence, which at this moment is ensured through the mechanisms of the ET 2020 strategic framework.

Qualification and competences: A key element of permeability is improved transparency and recognition of qualifications and competences and extended acceptance of European transparency and recognition tools. This is essential to the development of quality education and training, and to facilitate mobility for both lifelong learning and occupational purposes throughout Europe, between countries as well as across sectors.

To be beneficial to learners, graduates, providers and employers, the further development of transparency and recognition of qualifications and competences is necessarily a cross-sectoral activity that requires coherence and coordination of education and training as a whole, whether formal, non-formal or informal. This can also help to better use the skills of those having acquired qualifications outside of the EU.

Communication: The integrated ET 2020 framework allows for greater efficiency in linking with the public and with the education and training stakeholders than a compartmentalised approach. This is important since the effectiveness of European activities in education and training depends to a large extent on reaching the stakeholders, including at regional and local levels.

ET 2020 strategic objectives: preserving the stability

The large majority of Member States and most other stakeholders have indicated a clear **preference for stability in ET 2020's four strategic objectives as formulated by the Council in 2009**, which guide ET 2020's overall activities:

1. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
2. Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
3. Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship;
4. Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

Arguments for stability of the strategic objectives include:

- The current strategic objectives still reflect a large consensus among the Member States. A reopening of the strategic objectives might lead to a lengthy negotiation for rather limited results;
- The strategic objectives are sufficiently broad to encompass new concerns and new agendas: for example, they emphasise the importance of education in promoting intercultural competences, democratic values and non-discrimination. They underline the importance of “the use of new teaching and learning technologies” and of “digital competence”.
- The key issue with ET 2020 is not the formulation of the strategic objectives, but the weaknesses in its operational nature. Enhancing the operational nature of ET 2020 is what the Joint Report should concentrate on.

ET 2020 priority areas: making the strategic framework more operational

The stock-taking indicated a preference for the stability of the four strategic objectives but at the same time called for ET 2020 to be more focused and more operational. The difference between the ET 2020 strategic objectives and the current priority areas is viewed as minimal and does not provide strong enough guidelines for implementation.

Thus far, priority areas have hardly served as tools that help focus European cooperation on a limited number of key questions or on achieving particular outcomes. In this context, Member States and stakeholders generally expressed a willingness to make the

future priorities more concrete and operational. Several Member States also underlined the need to reduce the number of priorities and deliverables. In February 2014, the Council has underlined that the mid-term stocktaking is “to help prepare the next draft Joint Report, with a more forward-looking focus which identifies key priority areas and concrete issues for future work”.

In this context, the independent evaluation recommended that a more tightly focused set of objectives should be linked to concrete and clear intended outcomes which can be systematically monitored (recommendation 2). The evaluation report went on to propose that a work programme should be added to ET 2020 which sets out a coherent package of activities to be undertaken at European level and with milestones and goals for Member States in order to be able to better measure progress (recommendation 3).

It is proposed to have in **Annex 1** of the Joint Report the list of *priority areas* (reduced from 13 to 6) and to define for each *priority area* a set of *concrete issues* to be taken forward in the ET 2020 Working Groups or in any other ET 2020 instrument. These issues:

- represent a common challenge for the Member States;
- show a clear added value in tackling them at European level.

These *concrete issues* will be followed on by the Working Groups, as made explicit in their mandates. They will be monitored by the informal groups of senior officials.

ET 2020 is firmly anchored in the EU’s broader political agenda

ET 2020 contributes to the implementation of the Union’s overall political priorities and is the key European tool in providing support to Member States in the modernisation of their education and training systems.

ET 2020 contributes in the first place to the EU’s priority of boosting jobs, growth and investment, which requires investing in education and training with the aim of improving educational outcomes, overcoming skills gaps, enhancing employability and social inclusion, and boosting innovation and competitiveness. To be effective in these areas, our education systems must be modernised.

Commissioner Navracsics’ mission letter explicitly states that “The European Semester should be the vehicle for pursuing the modernisation of education systems”. ET 2020 is crucial in this context, but needs further sharpening of the focus on assisting clusters of Member States that face issues identified in the CSRs, notably via peer learning activities, conducted both within and outside the ET 2020 Working Groups (see chart below).

An equally important role of education and training lies in preventing and tackling radicalisation, racism, fanaticism and violence. As follow-up to the Paris declaration of 17 March 2015 a new strand of activities could be identified under ET 2020’s third strategic objective, aimed at embedding democratic values and respect for fundamental rights, combatting racism and discrimination and promoting social cohesion and intercultural competences.

In addition, ET 2020 is actively contributing to other major Commission priorities, such as:

- the Digital Single Market, notably via the ET 2020 Working Group on Digital and Online Learning and the ongoing work to improve digital skills and competence education as well as the uptake of digital technologies and innovative tools and pedagogies across all education sectors;
- the European Agenda on Security, via the reinforcement of the third strategic objective under ET 2020.

ET 2020 governance cycle

ET 2020 has been operating on the basis of three-year work-cycles. During the stocktaking a number of stakeholders suggested that the three-year cycles became obsolete. The Union's political rhythm moves in accordance with the five-year terms of the European Parliament and of the Commission. The Union's overall strategy for jobs and growth – Europe 2020 – was established for a ten-year period, with a mid-term review after five years and the Council Conclusions of 12 May 2009 on the ET 2020 strategic framework underlined that education and training had to remain firmly anchored in the broader strategy.

In this context, the draft Joint Report proposes that the ET 2020 governance cycle is henceforth synchronised with the Union's five-year political cycle as well as with the rhythm of Europe 2020.

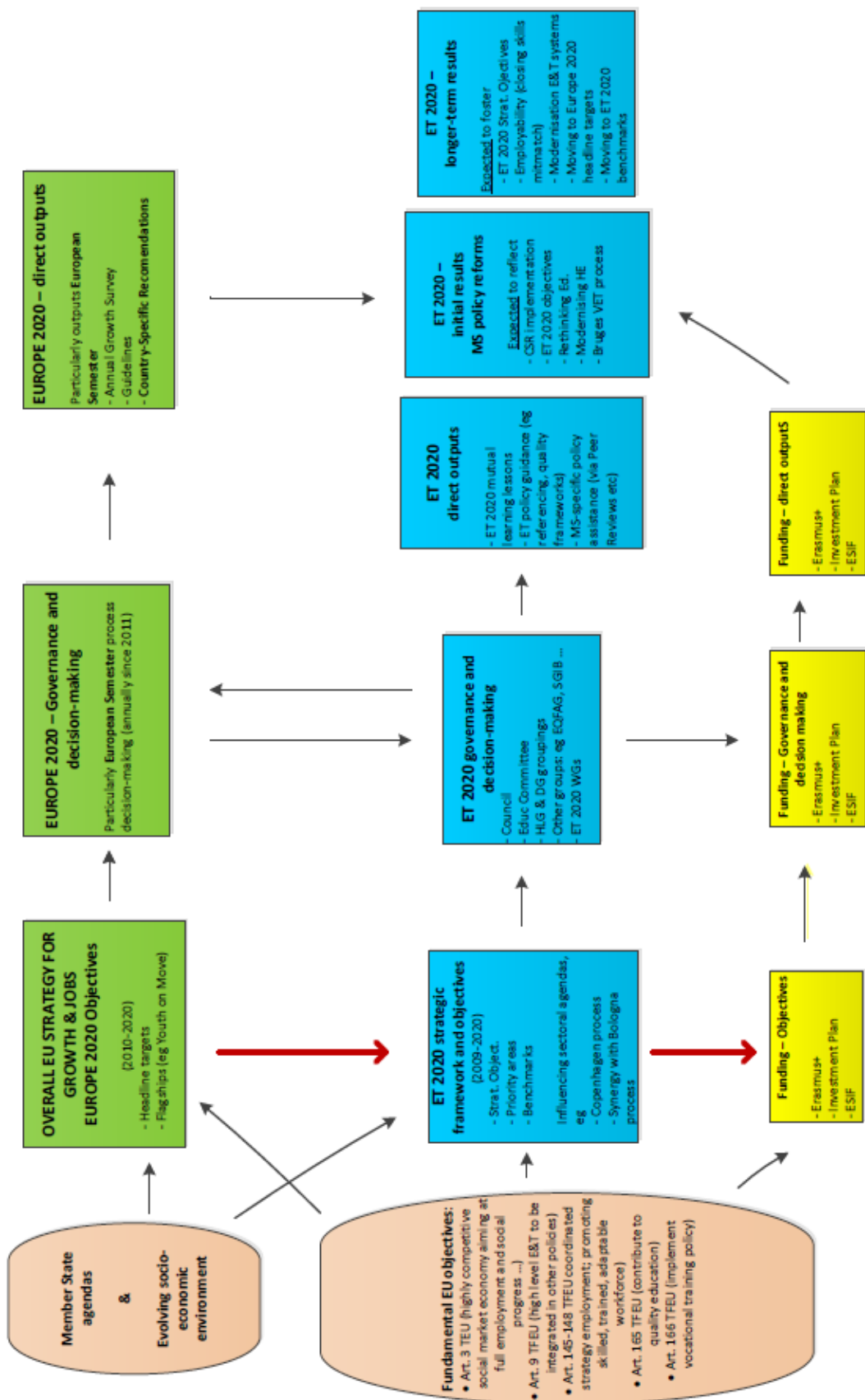
For ET 2020, this implies that the next Joint Report will be in 2020 (and not 2018), thereby allowing more time for Member States to produce National Reports. As the results of European cooperation in education and training tend to take longer than three years before bringing about tangible effects, the five-year cycle will also enable a more reliable assessment of past policy orientations before making major changes.

ET 2020 IN CONTEXT

Objectives

Governance

Effects



The Staff Working Document: content and structure

The present Staff Working Document accompanies the Commission Communication proposing the draft 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020).

The Staff Working Document provides the analytical basis for the Joint Report. It offers insight into the developments recorded over the period 2012-2014 and aims at:

- Reviewing progress made at national level towards the ET 2020 objectives;
- Taking stock of the developments at European level within the ET 2020 Strategic Framework implementing the open method of coordination in the field of education and training.

Following the **introductory chapter**, the structure of the present Staff Working Document includes:

- An extensive **chapter 2**, focused on the implementation of ET 2020 strategic objectives and priority areas. This chapter follows the order of the ET 2020 strategic objectives and especially of the priority areas as identified in the 2012 Joint Report, thus allowing for a systematic reporting on the previous ET 2020 work cycle.

A standard structure was used under each priority area, including the policy context at EU level, reporting, remaining challenges, priorities for further action.

The cross-country analysis was primarily based on Member States' national reports, but in some cases reference is also made to other official sources of information, such as, inter alia, Cedefop and Eurydice.

To note that the national actions/initiatives mentioned in this document represent only a snapshot of the developments in a given ET 2020 priority area, as not all countries reported fully and ongoing initiatives may exist in Member States which have not reported them. The concrete examples reported here are intended to illustrate progress. They are not necessarily examples of good practice.

The "priorities for future action" correspond to the "concrete issues" identified in the 2015 Joint Report. They are based on the Member States' national reports and the outcomes of the 2012-2014 work cycle, as well as on evidence and analysis the Commission has at its disposal.

- A detailed **chapter 3** on Governance, which provides an overview of the implementation of ET 2020 open method of coordination with a focus on its working bodies, methods and outcomes.
- **Annexes**

2. THE ET 2020 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY AREAS: IMPLEMENTATION AND ORIENTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

2.1. Making Lifelong learning and mobility a reality

Lifelong learning (LLL) strategies continue to form an important mechanism to guide and connect education and training policies. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality remains a fundamental ET 2020 principle, calling for coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies based on building blocks such as early childhood education and care and the reduction of early school leaving, and supported by European and National Qualification Frameworks, permeability of learning pathways and transparency and recognition of learning outcomes.

In this context, adult learning remains a specific challenge for a number of Member States. The value for adults to learn throughout life needs renewed and special attention and has to be acknowledged as an integral part of a continuum, delivering skills from early childhood to later life.

Learning mobility for learners and educators is an equally essential element of lifelong learning and a means for enhancing adaptability and employability.

2.1.1. Lifelong learning strategies

Policy context at EU level

In the majority of EU Member States the LLL approach is recognised across the education and training framework. However, as LLL strategies are sometimes conceived for a limited duration, efforts must be pursued over the next ET 2020 cycle to ensure their mainstreaming in long-term policy and legislation.

Embedding the concept of LLL and flexible learning in policy across all sectors requires coordination and partnership, supported by continued implementation of European and National Qualification Frameworks (EQF, NQFs) that include formal, non-formal and informal learning routes, at all levels of education and training.

Reporting

The ET 2020 stocktaking revealed that more than half of EU Member States have a comprehensive LLL strategy in place². Some implemented their strategies between 2012 and 2014 with a view to improving access, participation, flexibility and recognition³.

Austria introduced its comprehensive "LLL 2020" strategy in 2011, consisting of ten lines of action, each supported by strategic objectives, measures and benchmarks. In addition, within the framework of the comprehensive "LLL 2020" strategy, each public university must develop its own institutional LLL strategy.

Denmark adopted a comprehensive approach implementing a wide range of essential initiatives to promote LLL: assisting municipalities in promoting early childhood

² AT, BG, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, FR, HU, LT, LU, PL, PT, SI, SK, UK.

³ AT, CY, EE, HU, LU.

education and care to support vulnerable children, supporting measures targeted at school, higher and adult education and continued training (receiving an extra DKK1 million for 2014-17), promoting youth education programmes.

Some Member States (FI, SE) consider that their entire educational system is already built and developed around the LLL concept and therefore do not plan to develop any explicit LLL strategy as such, others (SI) recently amended their LLL legal base and a number of them are developing an integrated LLL strategy or renewing the existing one.

Remaining challenges

Several Member States still have to put comprehensive lifelong learning strategies in place. Since such strategies are essential to link up the various forms and levels of learning and ensure the necessary permeability, all Member States are encouraged to establish or renew them.

This should go hand in hand with reinforced efforts to smoothen transitions within the lifelong learning educational trajectory and generate a seamless continuum which delivers skills from early childhood to later life. Furthermore, LLL strategies will not be successful without provision of lifelong guidance services, needed to inform and accompany learners, and reach out to low-skilled and disadvantaged groups.

Achieving a learning continuum over the life-course in addition to modernised formal education requires the provision of comprehensive information on studies, counselling and career planning across sector-specific boundaries. Policy experimentation, financed through Erasmus+ in 2014, gives impetus to the development of “one-stop shops” to provide this service at local and regional level, and could be followed on by prospective studies geared at opening up existing training centres and educational institutions to reach a wider public, and to provide flexible modular pathways.

Priorities for the future

- Re-igniting lifelong learning strategies addressing the **transition phases** within school education, while promoting transitions to and between vocational education and training (VET), higher education (HE) and adult learning (AL), including non-formal and informal learning, and from education and training to work.

2.1.2. Adult learning

Policy context at EU level

Despite having lifelong learning strategies in place, it can be observed that many Member States simply **lack a coherent policy on adult learning** which links seamlessly with policy on initial education and training and which is implemented with the same rigour as policy on schooling.

For this reason, during the period 2012-2014, **the European Agenda for Adult Learning** reinforced the ET 2020 priorities in the sector, in order to achieve the longer term vision of **equal opportunity and access to high-quality learning**. The Agenda strongly emphasises the need to focus on awareness raising, participation and access for those groups that need learning most, including the low-skilled and unemployed adults, migrants and older people.

The Council Resolution asked Member States to designate a national coordinator, in order to facilitate cooperation in implementing this agenda: 36 countries have now nominated a national coordinator, of which 21 are in education ministries and the rest in related national agencies.

Between 2012-2014, Lifelong Learning programme funding was secured to support the national coordinators in taking concrete steps to enhance, intensify and coordinate adult learning by involving all the relevant stakeholders. National coordinators were required to develop national activity plans to implement the European Agenda for Adult Learning at national and regional levels and to this aim 28 of the then 32 national coordinators applied for funding.

The most common forms of coordination and exchange with stakeholders were: conferences and seminars⁴; meetings to get stakeholder involvement on specific issues⁵; fostering networks of stakeholders⁶. Some countries developed closer cooperation via occasional working groups⁷. Core groups to steer the agenda (DE, EL, FR, IT, NO) and in a few cases sustainable mechanisms for cooperation such as national bodies for adult or non-formal learning (BG, FI, HR, LT) were also set up.

National coordinators' activities focused on awareness-raising of the European Agenda and highlighting the importance of national adult learning policy, in particular for the low-skilled target groups. More than 60 national events and 230 regional events took place, and websites and promotional materials were developed. Awareness raising campaigns were organised in 12 Member States⁸, and regular calendar events such as learning weeks or days were reinforced or introduced, including a learning bus in EE and LI. These events provided opportunities for peer learning and exchange of practice for national coordinators and stakeholders from other countries.

Starting with 2015, Erasmus+ funding could support future work in this direction.

Operational since 2014, **EPALE** (Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe) provides a collaborative space for enhanced networking and cooperation among adult learning professionals (educators and policymakers) across the EU. It aims at driving change in the adult learning sector and support its transformation. It provides a repository of high quality learning resources that will enable staff to further develop their teaching and outreach skills and an incubator for cooperation and the development of digital teaching materials, in particular Open Learning Resources.

An analytical framework for the analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness was developed in close association with the ET 2020 Working Group on adult learning. Finalised in 2015, it provides a tool for further cooperation to develop and improve adult learning policies in Europe, including use by future Working Groups.

The EU level could enhance opportunities for mutual learning and exchange, including through Erasmus+, involving continued support and reinforcement for the national

⁴ EE, EL, FI, IS, LT, LU, LV, PL, PT, RO, TR, UK.

⁵ AU, DK, LV, PT, NL, SI.

⁶ IS, FI, HR, SE, PT.

⁷ BG, CY, DE, EE, IT, LI, LU, NL, PL, SE, UK.

⁸ DK, EE, ES, FI, HR, IT, LI, LT, LU, LV, RO, SI.

coordinators for adult learning, staff mobility and professional development, further development of EPALÉ, as well as innovative projects and policy experimentation.

Reporting

Adult learning is an area where prolific activity has been reported during the ET 2020 stocktaking. An extensive examination of national policy commitments to adult learning, main types of programmes, learning flexibility and progression pathways, outreach initiatives, guidance services and targeted financial support is provided by Eurydice⁹.

The majority of Member States¹⁰ reported measures to enhance the **quality of the adult education system**. Some have advanced in the area of accreditation and evaluation of providers and programmes, of monitoring systems, or have introduced national standards and regulations, or set up responsible bodies¹¹. Most of the Member States reported measures to raise participation in adult learning by **focusing on the individual adult**¹², through a range of activities: counselling¹³, flexibility in learning - evening courses, part-time courses, personalised training programmes or e-learning¹⁴, broadening the variety of courses¹⁵, recognition and certification of prior learning (BE, PL, PT). Distance learning now accounts for about 5% of adult learning¹⁶.

Efforts have been made to enable the participation in adult education **of specific target groups**, such as persons in correctional facilities (IT, LV), foreigners and migrants (IT, SE), and older people (BG, DE, LT, PL). Young adults were targeted through initiatives under the Youth Guarantee (FI).

Measures to improve the **efficiency of adult learning** are underway in the majority of countries. There is a trend towards measures to better serve labour market needs, which focus on: raising the interest of the world of work for adult education (LV, LT, PL, SI), steering adult education towards labour market demands (BG, LV, PL), supporting employer investments in adult education (LT, PL, SI) and enhancing the involvement of employers in adult education (BG, PL).

In **Northern Ireland (UK)** a shift from non-formal to formal learning was reported: about 90% of adult education leads to a qualification, designed with the support of sector skills councils and employers.

In 2014, both **Estonia and Lithuania** published new legislation on non-formal adult learning, in the latter this was accompanied by a quality assurance system and the development of an action plan 2014-16.

In the area of financing adult learning, **improvements to the funding system** have been made in some countries¹⁷, for example by developing new funding criteria, or through the

⁹ Adult Education and Training in Europe: Widening Access to Learning opportunities, Eurydice, 2015. http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/179EN.pdf.

¹⁰ AT, BE fr, BE nl, BG, CY, CZ, DK, EE, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, MT, NL, PT, SI, SK, UK.

¹¹ AT, BE fr, BE nl, BG, CZ, FI, HU, IE, SK.

¹² AT, BE-fr, BE-nl, BG, CY, DK, IE, IT, LV, LU, LT, PL, PT, UK.

¹³ AT, BG, DK, IT, LV, PL, PT.

¹⁴ DK, IT, LV, LU, PT, SE.

¹⁵ CY, DK, IE, LU, LT.

¹⁶ Adult Education and Training in Europe: Widening Access to Learning opportunities, Eurydice, 2015.

¹⁷ CZ, DE, DK, EE, FI, FR, HU, LT, SI.

participation of employers and municipalities. Funding mechanisms to raise participation in adult education include providing programmes free of charge (AT, CY, EE, UK), training vouchers (DE) and additional funding for providers to improve quality and personalise training (SE).

Measures related to **regionalisation and better exploitation of facilities locally** include the setting up of regional Education and Training Boards (IE), the identification of regional priorities and the provision of regional support and information to increase participation (FR, LT), the establishment of regional adult education centres (DK, IT, LV), regional cooperation between employers and institutions (LV, PL), the involvement of VET schools by establishing them as lifelong learning centres (CZ).

In **Ireland** the Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS) and the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) were established in 2013 and all education and training centres vested in SOLAS were transferred to their respective ETB. SOLAS published a five-year strategy for the development and delivery of an integrated further education and training system, linked to labour market needs. This includes setting up referral protocols between education and training boards and *Intreo* offices (single points of contact for all employment and income supports). Annually, each ETB will deliver the overall budget to make provision for learners and will detail the programmes and courses it will deliver, as well as target learner profiles and the National Framework of Qualifications levels that will be achieved, in consultation with employers and local *Intreo* offices.

Remaining challenges

The results of the OECD's Adult Skills Survey (PIAAC)¹⁸ highlight that Europe's growth and competitiveness is at risk, in a situation where one in five Europeans surveyed have weak literacy and numeracy skills and one in four have difficulties in using ICT to solve problems. Although, on average, more than 50% of those with weak skills are in employment, they enjoy much less training than high-skilled people and are therefore stuck in a "low skills trap".

With respect to the 15% benchmark, the Labour Force Survey results show that in 2014 only 10.7% of all adults aged 25 to 64 participated in lifelong learning. When considering only tertiary education (ISCED levels 5 and 6), the 15% benchmark has been reached, but only 4.4% of those with low attainment levels participated (lower secondary educational level or less - ISCED 0-2).

The Adult Education Survey (AES)¹⁹ shows that, with a few exceptions, the demand for adult and continuing education grew between 2007 and 2011, in spite of the economic crisis. However, it also highlights a lack of motivation to learn as a huge challenge to be overcome. Of all the adults in EU28, almost half (46%) responded that they do not participate and do not want to participate in learning activities in the future. Two thirds of those who already participate in learning (28% of the total adult population) do not want

¹⁸ OECD (2013) Skills outlook 2013, <http://skills.oecd.org/skillsoutlook.html>; PIAAC (2013) Implications for education and training policies in Europe, http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/piaac_en.pdf.

¹⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Lifelong_learning_statistics,

to participate more in adult learning (their learning needs were “satisfied”), whereas 14% would have liked to participate more than they actually could.

Motivation, outreach, access and participation remain the key challenges facing adult learning²⁰. Even basic skills provision is fragmented and dispersed among a myriad of providers, stakeholders, policies, short-term and longer-term initiatives, often restricted to individual target groups. The qualifications of around 68 million people do not go beyond lower secondary level. They face substantial barriers and are least likely to benefit from learning opportunities. While policy agendas emphasise access for this group, specific targets are rarely set and little is known about the effectiveness of outreach initiatives, which pleads for further monitoring and impact assessment.

As only 6,2% of the participation in adult learning is through the formal education system, adult learning policy should include processes to validate, identify, document, access and certify learning outcomes in line with the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning²¹.

The European Agenda for Adult Learning has a crucial role in addressing these issues, as it reflects Member States' national policy priorities up to 2020.

The national coordinators face challenging tasks that deserves due resources and attention and their status and impact at national level would need to be raised to reach the desired goals.

Priorities for further action

European Agenda for Adult Learning 2015-2020

Governance

- Improve the coordination and effectiveness of adult education and training policies and their coherence with other policy areas including initial education and training, social, environmental, welfare and employment;
- Ensure the relevance of adult learning provision to the needs of society and the labour market;
- Develop equitable, shared solutions to increase investment in adult learning.

Supply and take up

- Significantly increase the supply of high quality adult learning provision, especially in literacy, numeracy and digital skills, including by closer partnership with providers, social partners and civil society;
- Significantly increase the take-up of adult learning, particularly in the workplace, including through effective outreach, guidance and motivation strategies targeting groups at risk, older adults and migrants and people with a migrant background.

²⁰ Adult Education and Training in Europe: Widening Access to Learning opportunities, Eurydice, 2015.

²¹ Source: Eurostat, Adult Education Survey (2011), online table: *trng_aes_100*.

Flexibility and access

- Widen access to provision by encouraging providers and employers to increase significantly the availability of workplace-based learning, and by making effective use of ICT in adult learning;
- Put in place procedures to identify and assess the skills of low qualified adults inside and outside the labour market, to stimulate adult participation in learning, in line with the Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- Provide sufficient second-chance opportunities leading to a recognised EQF level qualification for those without a level 3 qualification (upper secondary education).

Quality

- Quality assurance, including monitoring and impact assessment;
- Significantly raise the quality of the initial and continuing education of adult educators;
- Keeping policy and provision under review and ensuring collection of necessary data on needs to effectively target and design provision.

2.1.3. European transparency and recognition tools

Policy context at EU level

Most Member States regard European transparency and recognition tools as a priority and a significant challenge for the future, on the backdrop of high levels of unemployment and skills bottlenecks and mismatches in certain regions or sectors.

Under the 2012-2014 ET 2020 work cycle a large majority of Member States have already developed a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and have referenced their NQF to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Some NQFs encompass formal and non-formal learning, but several countries prefer to focus in the first place on formal qualifications.

A revision of European tools and policies on skills and qualifications is ongoing. The aim is to better enable learners and workers to have skills and qualifications recognised by employers and educational institutions within and across national borders, for purposes of employability and further learning. This can also help to better use the skills of those having acquired qualifications outside of the EU.

Reporting

Five Member States²² propose to take **implementation of the EQF** forward to the next ET 2020 work cycle, focussing on the learning outcomes approach (CZ, DK, FI), or on the validation and recognition of skills and qualifications (HR), and advocate cooperation on assigning EQF levels to international qualifications (MT). Several stress the link between recognition tools, such as the EQF, and quality tools such as EQUAVET, or the

²² CZ, DK, FI, HR, MT.

need to focus on the implementation of the EQF and validation of non-formal and informal learning (DK).

Some Member States (HR, IT, MT, RO) see the promotion of the **recognition and validation of skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning** as an essential part of an integrated lifelong learning strategy.

According to the European Inventory on Validation, three Member States (FI, FR, ES) have a comprehensive national strategy in place, eleven have a national strategy but with some missing elements²³, and thirteen are preparing a national strategy²⁴. Fifteen Member States have adopted measures related to the **learning outcomes-based approach**²⁵, which is sometimes driven by the NQFs²⁶. The degree of implementation varies from Member States where it is anchored in all levels of education (EE, MT, PL) to those where it is only in primary and secondary education and VET (LU).

Remaining challenges

The EU and the Member States have launched several initiatives to promote the transparency, quality assurance, validation and recognition of skills and qualifications. But **challenges** remain, as these initiatives have often been developed for a specific sector and do not sufficiently support permeability and mobility between sectors, nor do they accommodate the needs and opportunities arising from new learning trends such as digital technologies and internationalisation of education. Moreover, tools and services for the transparency, validation and recognition of prior learning are not sufficiently known by the citizens nor by potential users (e.g. European e-Competence Framework and DIGICOMP).

There is a need to improve awareness of and access to European transparency and recognition tools and services among workers, employers and students, and to promote the validation and recognition of learning outcomes acquired in the e-environment. This has to be backed by the implementation of the EQF recommendation, including the establishment of the NQFs, as suggested by several Member States²⁷. The development of NQFs that include all forms of non-formal learning is still a challenge in many countries, and mapping the NQFs to the EQF entails a shift to learning outcomes.

Member States' suggestions for further work include: promoting common procedures, exchanging good practices to reduce distrust in systems, procedures and results, creating a European platform for validation and recognition of skills and learning outcomes.

Priorities for further action

- Fostering **transparency, quality assurance, validation and recognition** of skills and qualifications, including those acquired through digital, online and open learning and the validation of informal and non-formal learning. Facilitating assessment and recognition of skills acquired outside of the EU.

²³ CZ, DK, EE, IT, IS, LU, LV, NO, NL, PL, RO.

²⁴ AT, BE-vl, CH, CY, DE, EL, LI, LT, MT, PT, SI, SK, TR.

²⁵ BE-nl, CY, DK, EE, FI, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, MT, NL, PO, PT, SK.

²⁶ EE, IE, IT, LU, MT, PL, SK.

²⁷ CY, FI, LU, NL, PL.

- **Simplifying and rationalising** the transparency, documentation, validation and recognition tools that involve direct outreach to learners, workers and employers and promoting the use of qualifications frameworks.

2.1.4. Learning mobility

Policy context at EU level

ET 2020 underlines the value of international mobility as a way for learners and teaching staff to develop their skills and employment prospects and calls for action to expand opportunities for mobility in European education and training systems. Recent evidence from a study on the impact of the Erasmus+ programme²⁸ shows that higher education students who study abroad increase their advantage in key transversal competences over non-mobile students, are given greater responsibility in their first jobs and have a greater propensity to work abroad after graduation. The same study found that 64% of employers think that international experience is an important factor in recruitment.

Under the previous ET 2020 work cycle considerable efforts have been made to further specify the overall objectives on mobility included in ET 2020 through target setting and more detailed policy recommendations. In November 2011, Member States adopted a benchmark on learning mobility with the aim of raising the proportion of graduates having spent a period studying or training abroad to 20% in higher education and 6% in initial VET by 2020²⁹.

Member States have committed to promote mobility through implementing the 2011 Council Recommendation ‘Youth on the move — promoting the learning mobility of young people’³⁰.

This Recommendation highlights key issues which affect individuals' motivation and ability to spend time studying or training abroad and where national policy frameworks and institutional strategies can have a clear influence. Important aspects include provision of information and guidance about mobility opportunities and benefits of mobility, financial support (including targeted assistance for disadvantaged students), recognition of credits and qualifications obtained abroad.

Reporting

Member States' National Reports on the implementation of ET 2020 highlight a range of policy initiatives to support mobility reflecting elements in the 2011 Council Recommendation and a strong on-going commitment at national level to expanding mobility opportunities across the EU, particularly as part of wider efforts to internationalise higher education.

Fifteen Member States report specifically on national internationalisation strategies in higher education³¹ and all of these involve promotion of mobility of students and staff to

²⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact_en.pdf

²⁹ Rough estimates situate current mobility rates at 10-15% in higher education and around 3% in initial VET at EU level. Improved Eurostat data will be available from 2015 and onwards.

³⁰ Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 — ‘Youth on the move’ — promoting the learning mobility of young people, OJ C 199, 7.7.2011, p. 1–5.

some extent (typically both inbound and outbound), often through international institutional partnerships. In this regard, many countries explicitly acknowledge their strategic use of EU mobility programmes³² as a tool to help drive forward national mobility and internationalisation agendas³³.

Remaining challenges

The 2014 Mobility Scoreboard³⁴ reveals that the environment for learning mobility varies greatly between Member States and that no single Member State scores highly in all the areas covered by the study. Despite numerous European initiatives to promote the transparency and recognition of skills and qualifications, as well as skills development, obstacles related to transparency and recognition of skills and qualifications still hamper geographical and sectoral mobility.

In the area of information and guidance, the most comprehensive public support systems are found in five Member States³⁵, while four countries have the least developed information and guidance structures³⁶. The degree to which student support can be accessed during study abroad also varies considerably. Higher education students are able to receive public grants and loans when they study in another country on the same terms as when they study at home in several Member States³⁷, while support systems are most restrictive in others³⁸.

Regarding joint degree programmes, experience from Erasmus Mundus (now Erasmus+) has shown the benefits of this approach, but equally the need to address outstanding challenges such as joint quality assurance and funding agreements.

Priorities for further action

- Supporting the mobility of students, staff and researchers and the development of strategic partnerships and joint courses by increasing **internationalisation in Higher Education**.

2.2. Quality and efficiency in education and training

Quality teaching and the effective organisation of educational and training activities received increased attention over the previous ET 2020 work cycle. There is a general acknowledgement that investment in human capital is essential for ensuring growth and competitiveness and Member States argue in favour of maintaining the strategic objective of pursuing quality and efficiency in education and training.

In general Member States see quality as an issue that cuts across general, vocational, and adult education. Regarding efficiency, on the backdrop of recent cuts and continuing

³¹ AT, BE nl, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FI, IE, IT, LT, PL, PT, SE, SI, UK (See also Chapter 2.2 under "Modernising Higher Education").

³² AT, CY, HR, HU, LU, SE, SI.

³³ 'Towards a mobility scoreboard: conditions for learning abroad in Europe', Eurydice 2014.

³⁴ The Mobility Scoreboard monitors progress in implementing the 2011 Council Recommendation.

³⁵ DE, BE, ES, FR, ES.

³⁶ BG, EL, SI, CY.

³⁷ BE-nl and BE-de, CY, LU, SI, FI, SE.

³⁸ BE-fr, BG, CZ, EL, HR, LT, RO, SK.

constraints on educational budgets in a number of Member States, increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of investment in education and training appears essential to avoid deterioration of outcomes.

2.2.1. Basic skills (literacy, mathematics, science and technology), languages

Policy context at EU level

Data from Eurostat, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) show that too many people (young and adults) in the EU have fairly low skills, drop out from education or training, or do not take part in further learning, up- or re-skilling. Underachievement in basic skills among school-age children cause troubles in the transition to work and increase the risk of remaining low-skilled throughout life, which is correlated to a higher risk of unemployment and low productivity. Progress is mixed regarding the ET 2020 benchmark of reducing the share of "low achievers"³⁹ among 15 year olds in reading, mathematics and science to below 15%. The EU as a whole is seriously lagging behind in mathematics. Progress is slightly better in reading and science, but the slow pace of improvement demands that Member States sustain their efforts to tackle low achievement in school education.

<i>Students below PISA level 2 – European Union's averages</i>			
	2006	2009	2012
Reading	23%	20%	18%
Mathematics	24%	22%	22%
Science	20%	18%	17%

Source: EU Commission analysis of PISA 2012 results (PISA 2012, OECD)⁴⁰.

There is evidence that migrants and those with a migrant background have more adverse educational outcomes. In 2012, an average of 30% of foreign-born pupils across the European Union lacked basic reading skills at 15, compared with around 25% of native students born to immigrant parents and 14% of native children of mixed parentage and of children of native-born parents⁴¹.

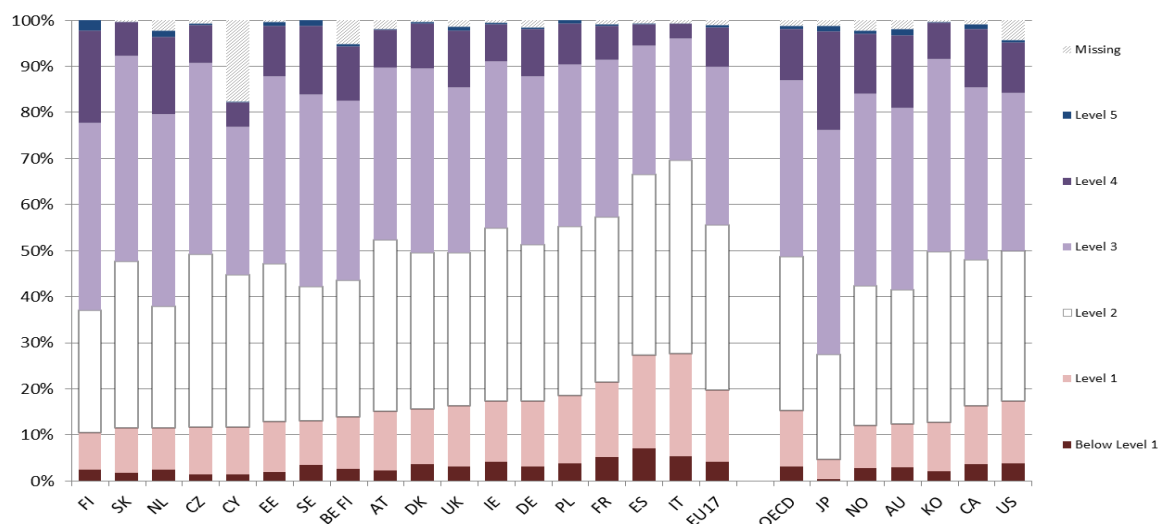
Low literacy and numeracy skills are also revealed by PIAAC among the adult population in 17 EU countries surveyed, representing 83% of the EU28 population. It also showed that 25% lack the skills to effectively make use of ICT.

³⁹ PISA level 2.

⁴⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/pisa2012_en.pdf.

⁴¹ OECD/European Union (2015), Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015: Settling In, OECD Publishing, Paris.

Share of the population 16-65 years old at each skills level per country⁴²



Source: European Commission based on Survey of Adult Skills' results (OECD, 2013). Ordered by the share of level 1 and below. Missing: did not take the test.

National initiatives on basic skills tend to be scattered, instead of embracing a lifelong learning approach. This area continues to attract considerable spending from structural funds, with very unequal implementation results across Member States.

The European added value to addressing the issue of underachievement in basic skills is related to actions that may involve but are not limited to: (i) identify, analyse, and promote policies that work, coupling research evidence with practice; (ii) support these policies through the Erasmus+ programme; (iii) support policy development and experimentation in search of new solutions; (iv) look for inspiring initiatives from outside the education system; (v) create a network for cooperation among stakeholders at various levels in view of strengthening the mission of schools not only as providers of knowledge, but also as centres of local communities; (vi) identify key trends as well as new social and technological developments that might affect education across Europe; and (vii) develop EU-wide standards and frameworks to help reducing underachievement in basic skills.

As a follow up of the Rethinking Education Communication, a report on tackling underachievement in basic skills is expected to be prepared. This report will build on the conclusions of the High Level Group of experts on literacy and of the OMC Thematic Working Group on Mathematics, Science and Technology. It will use information from the PISA 2012 results, the PIAAC Survey, the Study on National Policies on underachievement in basic skills, the Study on Innovative Pedagogies and from numerous other analyses and research articles. It will cover literacy, mathematics, science and digital literacy and extend to early childhood, school and adult education – including formal, non-formal and informal ways of learning.

⁴² See also graphs on numeracy and problem solving in technology rich environments in: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/piaac_en.pdf.

Erasmus+ could support future initiatives, with projects that integrate the teaching of all three domains of basic skills (maths, science and literacy), foster multidisciplinary and inter-disciplinary approaches and promote problem-based learning and innovative approaches to teaching in a technology-rich environment.

Boosting adults' basic skills continues to be the key objective of the European Agenda for Adult Learning. A Call under Erasmus+ was published in Spring 2015 to cover the period 2016-17 with the view to provide grants to support national coordinators to carry out concrete activities which will increase the rate of participation in learning of low skilled or low qualified adults and enhance their basic skills and other key competences.

Regarding the situation of **languages** in the EU, the need to equip the future European population with additional languages to their native language is widely recognized. Support to the acquisition of the language of instruction for children speaking a different language at home needs particular attention.

At European level, the **ET 2020 Thematic Working Group on languages** has produced a Country Comparative Analysis,⁴³ which seeks to identify the main challenges and opportunities in language teaching and learning and delivers elements of methodology to assess the modalities for language teaching and learning in the different national contexts.

The 2014 Council conclusions on multilingualism and the development of language competences⁴⁴ invited Member States to adopt and improve measures aimed at promoting multilingualism and enhancing the quality and efficiency of language learning and teaching. The conclusions also stressed the importance of appropriate assessment methods to measure progress and invited Member States to make greater use of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages. Indeed, developing language skills involves first improving the quality and efficiency of language education within the teaching and learning time available. It also involves developing better testing and assessment methods for learning outcomes and establishing a common basis for national evaluation systems based on the CEFR.

Reporting

In their National Reports on the previous ET 2020 work cycle, Member States listed a number of activities which aim at improving the general outcomes of school education and at reaching the ET 2020 basic skills benchmark.

For example, in-depth country analyses of PISA results, dissemination to the public and discussion with experts were reported by eight Member States⁴⁵. In some cases these analyses were used as a basis for the development of measures and specific national strategies and legislative initiatives⁴⁶. Other Member States took measures to improve school quality, e.g. by emphasising student-centred learning or the introduction of new teaching methods⁴⁷.

⁴³ Available in the document library on the Languages web site:

http://ec.europa.eu/languages/library/index_en.htm.

⁴⁴ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/142692.pdf.

⁴⁵ BE fr, CY, DE, HR, HU, SE, SI, SK.

⁴⁶ CZ, ES, HR, IE, NL.

⁴⁷ CZ, DE, DK, EE, IR, PT.

Measures often focus on improving specific skills, such as literacy⁴⁸, numeracy⁴⁹ or digital literacy⁵⁰. Some countries report measures to support specific target groups, such as high achievers, disadvantaged students, students with low socio-economic background or ESL. Six countries⁵¹ gave priority to individualisation of teaching and learning, which is closely related to the approach of inclusion.

Several Member States reported an increasing number of participants in adult basic education or made efforts to include low skilled groups in adult education⁵². A number of National Reports mentioned diverse target groups, e.g. people at risk of exclusion from labour market, young people, ESLs or NEETs, workers, migrants, prisoners or ex-offenders and disabled people. The main measures reported to reach these groups are: guidance and counselling activities, support to "family learning" and "back to education" as well as the professional development of practitioners working with vulnerable groups.

The publication of PIAAC's results is triggering debate and reforms in a number of Member States. Some increased funding for adult education (FI, DK), others introduced deductibility of training costs from income taxes (NL). Increasing adult skills through a national guidance and counselling project (SK), developing an LLL 2020 strategy (EE) and establishing a permanent observatory to monitor the matching of training and labour market requirements (IT) count among targeted initiatives. Several Member States reported a focus on specific areas for improvement, such as VET and work-based learning (FR, SK) or adult basic skills (DK, MT).

Regarding languages, several Member States⁵³ have implemented or are currently implementing specific action plans and strategies to improve the availability, and to some extent the quality of foreign language learning. In other Member States⁵⁴ foreign language learning and teaching have undergone change as part of broader educational reforms. The initiatives mainly target primary and/or secondary education (no Member State mentions initiatives in higher education). Foreign language teaching is initiated at an earlier stage than in the past and more languages are made available. In all Member States (except BE-nl, IE and UK) English is the first foreign language, either compulsory or chosen. More recent reforms focus on language teaching methodology⁵⁵, teacher training⁵⁶ and assessment of language competencies⁵⁷.

Following the May 2014 Council conclusions on multilingualism, EU Member States agreed to improve measures aimed at promoting multilingualism, enhancing the quality and efficiency of language learning and teaching and to develop measures for assessing language proficiency of secondary school students. To this aim DG EAC launched two studies to be presented on the European Day of Languages⁵⁸: (i) an inventory of national

⁴⁸ BE fr, BE nl, BG, CZ, DE, HR, IE, LU, MT, NL, UK.

⁴⁹ DE, EE, IE, NL.

⁵⁰ CZ, EE, FR, IE.

⁵¹ AT, BE nl, DE, HR, MT, SE.

⁵² BE nl, BG, CY, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, LU, LV, MT, PT, RO, SI, SE, SK.

⁵³ BE nl, CZ, EE, FR, SK, SI.

⁵⁴ DK, ES, FI, HE, HR, IT, MT, NL, SE, UK.

⁵⁵ AT, BEfr, BG, CZ, CY, ES, FR, HE, HR, HU, IT, LV, LT, NL, SI.

⁵⁶ BG, CZ, EE, EL, HE, IT, NL, SK.

⁵⁷ AT, BEfr, DK, HE, HU, LT, PT.

⁵⁸ European Day of Languages - September 26, 2015.

assessment and testing methods in Member States, and (ii) a study on the comparability of national assessment methods.

Remaining challenges

Regarding basic skills, the **challenges** lying ahead are daunting. Many EU Member States have significant and/or increasing number of underachievers in basic skills as measured by PISA and PIAAC.

An outstanding challenge remains to ensure the adequate supply of learning opportunities for adults, particularly tailored to specific groups in specific settings or situations, such as at the workplace, unemployed, migrant, inactive in the labour market⁵⁹. Improving adults' skills levels is prioritised in several Member States⁶⁰ and there is a clear call for providing basic skills as part of a broader set of transversal key competences, including digital skills⁶¹.

Thirteen countries⁶² reported they intend to perform in-depth analysis of the results of the PISA survey. Eleven countries referred to plans to initiate activities in the area of quality enhancement of the teaching and learning process⁶³, support mechanisms for targeted groups⁶⁴, improvement of specific skills as numeracy, literacy or digital skills⁶⁵ and the development of standards and frameworks⁶⁶. Some Member States reported a specific emphasis on primary and compulsory schooling⁶⁷.

Ten countries propose focusing on the challenge of combating early school leaving⁶⁸. The ESL headline target certainly overlaps with underachievement in basic skills. Early school leavers are typically those students who perform poorly in the classroom and on standardised tests. Overall, Member States consider that it is now of key importance to provide high-quality secondary education as a basis for further education or entering the labour market.

Providing learning support for underachieving students, introducing curriculum reforms, promoting new assessment tools and innovative pedagogical practices, developing a more holistic approach to school education are outstanding challenges.

Regarding languages, a number of challenges are still to be addressed:

- Increasing the levels of achievement in languages within the teaching and learning time available in compulsory education.
- Promoting a broader understanding of the CEFR approach: new assessment models, emphasis on productive skills and the ability to communicate effectively.
- Setting ambitious and realistic targets for the 1st and 2nd foreign language: the majority of pupils should have reached the "independent user" level (CEFR level B1

⁵⁹ See also chapter 2.1.1.

⁶⁰ AT, CY, DK, LA, MT, PL, SE.

⁶¹ CZ, EE, FR, HU, NL, PL, SI.

⁶² BE fr, CY, CZ, DE, ES, HR, HU, IE, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK.

⁶³ AT, CZ, DE, DK, EE, FR, HR, IE, LU, PT, RO.

⁶⁴ AT, DE, EE, ES, FR, IE, LU, PT, SE.

⁶⁵ BG, CZ, DE, EE, FR, IE, LU, NL.

⁶⁶ AT, DE, IE, MT, PT, UK.

⁶⁷ AT, DK, FI, MT, SE.

⁶⁸ BG, DE, FI, FR, HU, LV, MT, PT, SK, UK.

or more) at the end of compulsory education in the 1st foreign language and be able to expand and differentiate the acquisition of foreign languages.

- Maintaining and building language competences in ISCED 3 when language learning is likely to be an optional choice for students.
- Promoting the effective acquisition of the language of instruction by migrants.

Priorities for further action

- Enhancing targeted policy action to reduce low achievement in basic competences across Europe, covering literacy, mathematics, science and digital literacy.

2.2.2. Professional development of teachers, trainers and school leaders

Policy context at EU level

Educators are essential to improving the quality of teaching and learning and have the most important impact on the performance of learners within educational institutions. The 2012 PISA survey found that countries that had improved their performance in PISA, such as Estonia and Poland in the EU, had also established policies to improve the quality of their teaching staff.⁶⁹

In their Council Conclusions on **effective teacher education** (May 2014), Education Ministers addressed the issue of teacher education as a key part of broader policies to raise the attractiveness and quality of the teaching profession. The Conclusions focus on action to make Initial Teacher Education (ITE) more effective and stress the need for ITE programmes to offer a balanced mix of subject knowledge, pedagogical competences and practical teaching experience, and to enhance teachers' capacity to support and teach diverse groups of learners effectively.

Initial Teacher Education should prepare teachers with key tools for high quality teaching in a range of learning situations and classroom environments. This includes the capacity to diagnose student problems effectively and to draw from a wide repertoire of possible solutions to create learner-oriented teaching methods and assess learning outcomes. ITE should also ensure that teacher education addresses equality and non-discrimination, potential gender stereotypes and ways of dealing with diversity in the classroom. While ITE cannot give teaching staff all the competences they will require throughout their career, it needs to provide novice teachers with a solid foundation for collaborative, reflective and research-led practice, including an attitude and capacity to engage in **continuing professional development (CPD)**. According to TALIS 2013⁷⁰, the areas where teachers report the highest needs for professional development include teaching students with special needs, developing ICT skills for teaching, new technologies in the workplace and teaching in a multicultural or multilingual setting. The

⁶⁹ OECD(2013): PISA 2012 Results: Excellence through Equity. Giving Every Student the Chance to Succeed. Volume II.

⁷⁰ OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS2013), June 2014, with the participation of 19 EU Member States (BE_nl, BG, CZ, CY, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IT, LV, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SK, UK).

study report Survey of Schools: ICT in Education⁷¹ shows that on average across the EU countries, between 20-25% of students are taught by digitally confident and supportive teachers having high access to ICT and facing low obstacles to their use at school. Differences between countries are, however, very large.

The Council Conclusions on effective teacher education also make reference to the importance of **defining teachers' competences**. By clarifying what teaching staff should know and be able to do, competence frameworks or standards can help raise the quality of the teaching profession in several ways, for instance by improving initial teacher education programmes, recruitment processes and the provision of continued professional development. Member States increasingly acknowledge this, and according to "Key data on Teachers and school leaders" (Eurydice 2013) competence frameworks have been recently introduced in several countries (PL, NO) or have recently been revised⁷².

At EU level, the **ET 2020 Working Group on School Policy** is developing recommendations on the ways and means to improve the relevance and effectiveness of Initial Teacher Education. This work complements new evidence from a range of sources, such as results from the OECD's TALIS survey, including secondary data analysis by Eurydice⁷³ and CRELL⁷⁴, a study on the diversity of the teaching force, the conclusions of the SIRIUS policy network on education and migrants⁷⁵ and of the European Policy Network on School leaders (EPNoSL)⁷⁶. Work could be pursued at EU level on innovative pedagogies and new school organisation through both policy work and the Erasmus+ programme.

The Erasmus+ programme provides support for a range of initiatives including cooperation in the field of teacher education, partnerships for more effective professional support, the introduction of innovative tools and methods of teaching, assistance to the development of leadership in schools. With a view to reducing shortages of qualified teachers and improving the attractiveness of the teaching profession, Erasmus+ could also finance policy experimentation to strengthen recruitment and selection of teachers and develop alternative pathways to the teaching profession.

With the School Education Gateway⁷⁷ the Commission has created a new web-based platform for teachers (and other educational actors and organisations, policy makers, enterprises etc.) which could be continuously developed to improve the links between policy and practice in European education.

Reporting

In the ET 2020 National Reports, Member States list a number of activities which aim at improving the quality of teaching. Thirteen Member States reported measures to improve

⁷¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/sites/digital-agenda/files/KK-31-13-401-EN-N.pdf>.

⁷² GR, IE, NL, SE, UK, TR.

⁷³ Forthcoming Eurydice report "The teaching profession in Europe: Practices, Perceptions, and Policies", June 2015.

⁷⁴ Forthcoming CRELL report on Teaching and learning practices in primary and secondary education, June 2015.

⁷⁵ <http://www.sirius-migrationeducation.org/>.

⁷⁶ <http://www.schoolleadership.eu/>.

⁷⁷ <http://www.schooleducationgateway.eu>.

the quality of teaching by enhancing teacher training or evaluation⁷⁸, while eight reported measures to improve the evaluation of education and training through diverse approaches: external examination through examiners ("critical friends"), scientific research and analysis (PT, SI), new assessment and accreditation methodologies as self-evaluation⁷⁹, monitoring of student progress and graduates (PL).

Remaining challenges

Several remaining **challenges** were highlighted, ranging from shortages of qualified teachers, low job-satisfaction and attractiveness of the teaching profession, to professional development related issues such as increasing ICT skills for teachers and addressing teaching in multicultural environments.

According to school leaders surveyed for TALIS 2013, more than a third of teachers in the European Union work in schools with **shortage of qualified/well-performing staff**. Nearly half of all teachers are employed in schools where there is a shortage of teachers for pupils with special needs.

In the mid-term, such shortages can endanger progress already made on educational performance and equity. Shortages perceived at school level can have different causes. At least 11 Member States⁸⁰ are faced with **global teacher shortages** due to an ageing workforce or high drop-out rates, but none of them has a coherent strategy in place to increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession. In addition, many countries experience shortages of staff in particular subjects or with special profiles. It is often the disadvantaged schools that have difficulties in attracting sufficient qualified and experienced teachers.⁸¹ The **attractiveness of the teaching profession** is in decline in many Member States, and with few exceptions (FI, IE), teaching careers no longer attract the academically best candidates. Although nearly 90% of teachers in the EU say they are satisfied with their jobs, only 19% feel that the teaching profession is valued in society⁸². These trends and perceptions have the potential to further increase the challenges of recruiting high-calibre candidates and retaining good teachers within the profession.

⁷⁸ AT, BG, DE, EE, FR, HR, IE, LU, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI.

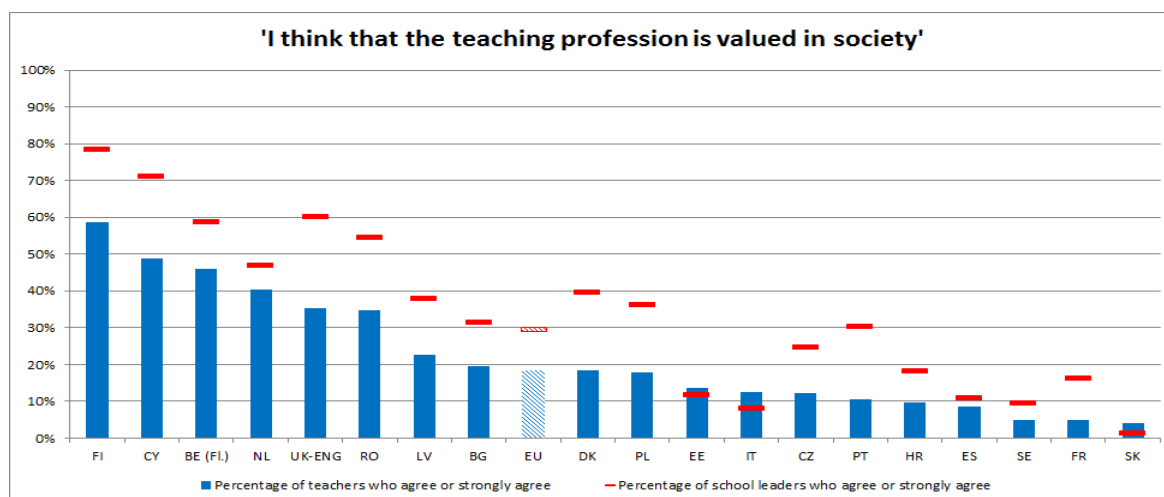
⁷⁹ DE, ES, IT, RO, SI.

⁸⁰ AT, BE-fr, DK, DE, IT, LU, NL, RO, SI, SK, SE, according to the 'Study on policy measures to improve the attractiveness of the teaching profession in Europe' (European Commission, 2014).

⁸¹ OECD (2013): PISA 2012 Results: Excellence through Equity. Giving Every Student the Chance to Succeed (Volume II).

⁸² TALIS 2013: http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/reports/2014/talis_en.pdf.

Percentage of teachers and leaders in ISCED2 who "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" with the statement presented



Source: European Commission analysis of TALIS 2013 The Teaching and Learning International Survey (OECD).

Teachers' professionalisation and competence development was proposed by eight Member States as a priority area for the next ET 2020 work cycle⁸³. Teacher education, including career-long professional development, must be conceived from a lifelong learning perspective and requires solid approaches related to, *inter alia*, modernisation of initial teacher education (CZ), the development of specific teaching skills, such as digital competences (ES) and the ongoing professionalization throughout the career (BE nl).

Priorities for further action

- Strengthening recruitment, selection and induction of the best and most suitable candidates for the teaching profession.
- Raising the attractiveness and prestige of the teaching profession, including through comprehensive strategies, and tackling gender imbalances in the profession.
- Supporting initial education and continuing professional development of educators, especially to deal with increased diversity of learners, ESL, work based learning, digital competences and innovative pedagogies, including through EU tools such as eTwinning, the School Education Gateway and the ePlatform for AL in Europe (EPALE).
- Promoting excellence in teaching at all levels, through programme design, learning organisation and incentive structures, and exploring new ways to measure the quality of teacher training.

⁸³ BE nl, BG, CZ, ES, FR, IT, LT, SE.

2.2.3. Modernising higher education and increasing tertiary attainment levels

Policy context at EU level

Supporting efforts to modernise higher education systems and increase tertiary attainment levels are key elements of ET 2020 and remain an important area for further European cooperation.

Building, in particular, on the Commission's 2011 Communication on the modernisation of higher education systems and the subsequent Council Conclusions⁸⁴, EU-level cooperation in higher education has been structured around five closely inter-related themes: increasing attainment levels; improving the quality and relevance of higher education provision; promoting mobility and cross-border cooperation; linking higher education, research and innovation processes and; improving governance and funding systems.

In the latest round of structured cooperation within the ET 2020 Working Group on the modernisation of higher education, in-depth exchange and peer learning has targeted four important issues: the deployment of new modes of teaching and learning in higher education (early 2014); mergers, consolidation, clustering and specialisation (spring 2014); performance-related funding (autumn 2014) and promoting the employability of graduates (early 2015). Outcomes of these workshops have been presented systematically to the meetings of Directors General for Higher Education hosted as part of each EU presidency.

Progress on each of these themes depends on the priorities set at national level and the ET 2020 stocktaking showed that Member States have elected to focus their efforts on one or more of these strands.

Reporting

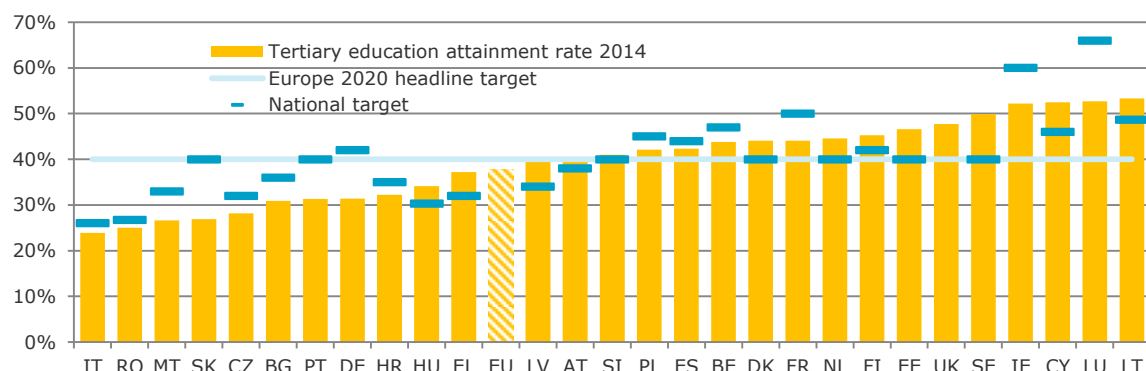
The most recent edition of the Commission's Education and Training Monitor shows that current levels of **tertiary education attainment** vary considerably between Member States. While 16 Member States have attainment rates among the 30-34 year old age cohort above the ET 2020 benchmark of 40%⁸⁵, only 11 countries have already met the national targets they have established for 2020⁸⁶. Expanding graduate numbers in line with labour market requirements remains an important priority in a majority of Member States.

⁸⁴ COM(2011)567, respectively Conclusions of Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting, 28-29 November 2011.

⁸⁵ BE, CY, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, LU, LT, LV, NL, PL, SE, SI UK.

⁸⁶ LT, SE, CY, FI, EE, DK, NL, LV, SI, EL, HU.

Tertiary attainment levels and targets (%), 2014



Source: Eurostat (LFS). Online data code: *t2020_41*. Note: The indicator covers the share of the population aged 30-34 years having successfully completed ISCED level 5 to 8. National targets follow different definitions of the indicator in some countries.

Increasing the proportion of the European citizens that has successfully gained a tertiary education qualification implies both widening access to higher education to people who are traditionally less likely to attend university or college and ensuring that those entering higher education actually graduate. This twin focus is reflected in the National Reports.

Seven Member States report initiatives designed to improve completion rates⁸⁷. The focus is often on improving guidance and support to prospective and current students and/or on developing higher education programmes that are more directly relevant to the labour market.

Ten Member States⁸⁸ report on recent measures to improve **social mobility and access to higher education**, including financial support, the creation of new alternative pathways into higher education and campaigns to overcome psychological and cultural barriers that can stop young people from non-academic backgrounds from entering higher education.

In **Austria**, policy to widen access has focused in particular on expanding capacity in Universities of Applied Sciences (*Fachhochschulen*), which offer courses that have potential to appeal effectively to target groups with historically low rates of higher education participation. Over 50% of programmes can be attended on a part time basis, thus creating flexibility and increasing attractiveness.

In **Denmark**, the institutional development contracts for 2015-2017 include promoting social mobility as a mandatory goal and every institution is expected to demonstrate how they plan to achieve it.

In **France**, a national programme of partnerships between schools, higher education institutions and education authorities focuses on providing counselling to help young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to overcome psychological and cultural barriers that might prevent them from pursuing higher education.

⁸⁷ AT, DK, HU, HR, IS, PT, IT.

⁸⁸ AT, BE-fr, DE, DK, FR, FI, HR, HU, PL, SE.

While raising tertiary education attainment rates remains firmly on the agenda in EU Member States, an arguably stronger focus is placed on **strengthening the quality and relevance of the education that systems provide, as well as developing synergies between teaching, research and innovation**. This focus is clearly reflected in Member States' proposals for fields for further cooperation at EU level.

The last two decades have seen the development of **independent quality assurance (QA) systems in higher education** across the EU. In their national reports, six Member States⁸⁹ report on the introduction of new quality assurance and evaluation systems, including the creation of new quality assurance agencies (CY).

Sweden is in the process of designing a new system of QA that will balance a perceived need for enhanced supervision of quality with the country's strong tradition of institutional autonomy.

In **Denmark**, a new Expert Committee on Quality in Higher Education has been established to provide recommendations on how to enhance the quality of Danish higher education over the next 20 years.

The relevance of higher education to societal and economic needs, in particular in terms of the specific knowledge (from particular disciplines of study) and broader transversal skills fostered by programmes cannot be dissociated from the issue of quality. In this area, many EU countries⁹⁰ report on initiatives to improve the match between higher education provision and the needs of the economy. Other common areas for policy development are the development of higher vocational education and professional higher education⁹¹ and establishing better links between education, research and development and the broader economy⁹².

Half of EU Member States reported specifically on the development of **internationalisation strategies in higher education** to support quality and openness of national systems⁹³. The national strategies typically cover mobility of students, teachers and researchers (including attracting more students from outside the EU), the creation of international partnerships between institutions, including, in some cases, the development of joint courses and participation in European or international projects and obtaining funding from "international" sources. Five Member States explicitly mention efforts to increase provision of higher education programmes in English to support mobility⁹⁴. As part of the internationalisation strategies, there are signs of a growing engagement with higher education in emerging economies.

⁸⁹ BE-fr, CY, CZ, FI, LV, PT

⁹⁰ AT, BE-fr, CZ, DK, ES, IT, PL, PT, PL

⁹¹ BE-nl, CZ, DK, ES, IT

⁹² AT, CZ, HR, LV, SK

⁹³ AT, BE-nl, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FI, IE, IT, LT, PL, PT, SE, SI, UK

⁹⁴ AT, BE-nl, CY, HR, PT

The Danish government has supported the establishment of **Innovation Centre Denmark (ICDK)**, with a presence in India, China and Brazil, as well as other strategic markets including Silicon Valley, to support Danish higher education institutions (and companies) to build new innovation partnerships with actors in these countries.

The **UK** has established partnership agreements with India, Brazil and China, which enable UK HEIs to identify and access research and innovation partners, attract international students to the UK, promote mobility exchange and the development of long-term links.

Regarding **funding**, recent work in the ET 2020 Working Group on higher education and in the meeting of Directors General for Higher Education illustrated that designing and implementing higher education funding systems with a stronger performance-based element is a common preoccupation across EU Member States and a field where mutual learning at EU level has a strong added value⁹⁵.

Remaining challenges

A key concern in countries across the EU is to **increase graduate employability** and reduce the risk of unemployment among graduates by ensuring students are as well prepared as possible for the world of work. Twelve Member States suggest developing joint work to improve **monitoring of graduate employment outcomes** and the use of this data to enhance the relevance of higher education provision⁹⁶. Several countries point to a need to improve **skills matching and ask for additional skills forecasting**⁹⁷, while many of these countries also highlight improved links between higher education institutions and businesses and other employers as an important tool in both improving the relevance of education and easing graduates' transition to the labour market.

Increasing the relevance of higher education remains a challenge. To support policy-making at national and institutional level and increase the match between what higher education delivers and what society needs in the short and long term, better intelligence is required on how today's graduates fare in terms of labour market integration (how quickly they find work and in what areas), and what the future labour market is likely to require (in terms of specific knowledge and skills or combinations of knowledge and skills). This is particularly important in an increasingly digital society and for the transition to a circular economy.

Evidence from work to date shows that system-wide skills anticipation and labour market monitoring play an important role in identifying gaps in current higher education provision, as well as areas of over-supply of graduates (in particular disciplines). However, forecasting and monitoring can ever only be part of the picture, especially given the fast-changing nature of the labour market. Helping students to develop transversal skills crucial for employment and long-term adaptability must be a core concern for higher education programmes in all disciplines. There is considerable scope at EU level for more mutual learning regarding effective curriculum design, rewarding

⁹⁵ See also chapter 2.2.5 under "Efficient funding and evaluation".

⁹⁶ DE, DK, ES, FR, HU, IE, IT, LV, PL, PT, RO, SI.

⁹⁷ DK, HR, RO, SE, PT.

and recognising good teaching, effective use of ICT, development of inter-disciplinary working, organisation of work-based learning and cooperation between higher education and employers.

Seven Member States explicitly highlight a need for more work on promoting **quality and excellence in higher education teaching**⁹⁸. This is consistent with a core message of the EU High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education, whose 2013 report looked at this issue.

Supporting digitisation is a key challenge for the future. While clearly linked to the wider goal of enhancing teaching in higher education, the use of ICT in higher education emerges as a priority in its own right. Blended learning makes it possible to rethink the way established higher education programmes are structured and delivered, in particular by freeing up contact time in class for interactive activities. Online delivery also opens greater opportunities for building links between institutions and expanding lifelong learning provision, while digital networks within and between campuses nationally and worldwide support research and innovation activities within higher education institutions.

Many national reports refer to the **exploitation of new technologies** and suggest this as a specific area for further EU-level cooperation. The recommendation is to look specifically at digitisation of content and use of eLearning tools to create new forms of course and cooperation platforms. A number of countries (IT, SI) highlight the particular role of the EU in stimulating higher education institutions and Member State authorities to be innovative in the deployment of ICT, including through use of EU funding programmes. The issue of quality assurance of online courses, as part of wider European quality and recognition systems, is also highlighted by some Member States as an issue worthy of further attention at EU level.

SG comment: the SWD priorities must be fully in line with Joint Report. This alignment was done throughout the SWD. Several Member States (BE-nl, CZ, IE, HR, RO) stress the importance of **developing more effective** mechanisms for allocating public investment in higher education and rewarding good performance by institutions.

Action to support **mobility** was suggested by more than two thirds of countries, with many stressing the importance of ensuring that study periods abroad are as effective and meaningful as possible for students, staff and researchers. Other suggestions included further development of joint programmes (DE, LV, MT, PL, PT) and long-term strategic partnerships between institutions (EE, LU, LV, SE). Some Member States (SE, UK) argue for thorough implementation of existing frameworks such as European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the European Qualifications Framework, as a basis for effective cooperation across Europe in teaching and learning.

Priorities for further action

- Promoting the labour market and societal relevance of **higher education**, including through better intelligence and anticipation about labour market needs and outcomes, new forms of curriculum, more work based learning and enhanced cooperation between institutions and employers.

⁹⁸ BG, CY, ES, FR, IE, NO, SK.

2.2.4. Attractiveness and relevance of VET

Policy context at EU level

Vocational education and training is a key education and training sector that can help address challenges Europe faces today in terms of youth unemployment, structural skills mismatches and rapid technological developments. As an indication of the importance of reforms in this sector, a considerable number of country specific recommendations adopted within the European semester have been related to VET in recent years.

The modernisation agenda for VET as set in the Bruges Communiqué in 2010⁹⁹ proved to be effective in assisting countries in focusing and implementing the reforms, particularly through a set of short-term deliverables defined for the period 2011-2014. The analysis of progress in their achievement carried out by Cedefop¹⁰⁰ shows that the Bruges Communiqué has inspired and supported national reforms. As shown in the Cedefop analysis and in the ET 2020 National reports, countries have focused mainly on overall system reforms, quality, quality assurance, work-based learning and labour market relevance of VET. In most cases national authorities take the lead in reforms, but social partners' involvement becomes more and more common especially in the field of work-based learning. However, in countries with lower engagement of employers and trade unions, their involvement in the governance of VET systems could be strengthened.

In general, topics such as work-based learning, cooperation with social partners, development of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs), measures to make VET more inclusive were at the top of national policy agendas. Less focus was placed on mechanisms to feed the information of labour market outcomes back to VET provision, or on continuing professional development for VET teachers and trainers¹⁰¹. Incentives to prevent early leaving, to encourage providers to use information on VET graduate employability or to promote networks to reduce the cost of modernising technology are not yet very common.

Increasing options for work-based learning in VET as a way to increase the quality and relevance of skills acquired through VET has been a top priority across the EU. The European Alliance for Apprenticeship and the Youth Guarantee have provided an additional boost to increase the proportion of work-based learning in VET.

⁹⁹ The Copenhagen process governs the EU level cooperation in the field of VET and is an important aspect of the ET 2020 strategic framework. The ET 2020 Council Conclusions of May 2009 specifically stipulate that the Copenhagen process should continue to contribute to achieving the objectives set out in the ET 2020 strategic framework.

¹⁰⁰ Cedefop (2015): Stronger VET for better lives – Cedefop's monitoring report on vocational education and training policies 2010-2014.

¹⁰¹ Professional development of VET teachers and trainers was not a specific short-term deliverable in the period 2011-2014.

The ***European Alliance for Apprenticeships*** was launched in Leipzig on 2 July 2013 in the form of a joint declaration between the European Commission, the Lithuanian Presidency and the EU social partners. It was further underpinned by a Council Declaration on 15 October 2013 in which Ministers agreed on a comprehensive approach combining education, training and employment measures, in addition to common guiding principles and Member States commitments. It aims to bring together public authorities, businesses, social partners, VET providers, youth representatives, and other key actors in order to promote apprenticeship schemes and initiatives across Europe. There are three strands of action: a) reform of apprenticeship systems, b) promote the benefits of apprenticeships and c) smart use of funding and resources. On 22 June 2015, a high-level Presidency event was organised in Riga to give the Alliance a new boost. As a consequence, 7 new countries joined (31 in total) and 38 new pledges (84 in total) were made from companies and other organisations. In addition, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia signed a Baltic Alliance for Apprenticeships.

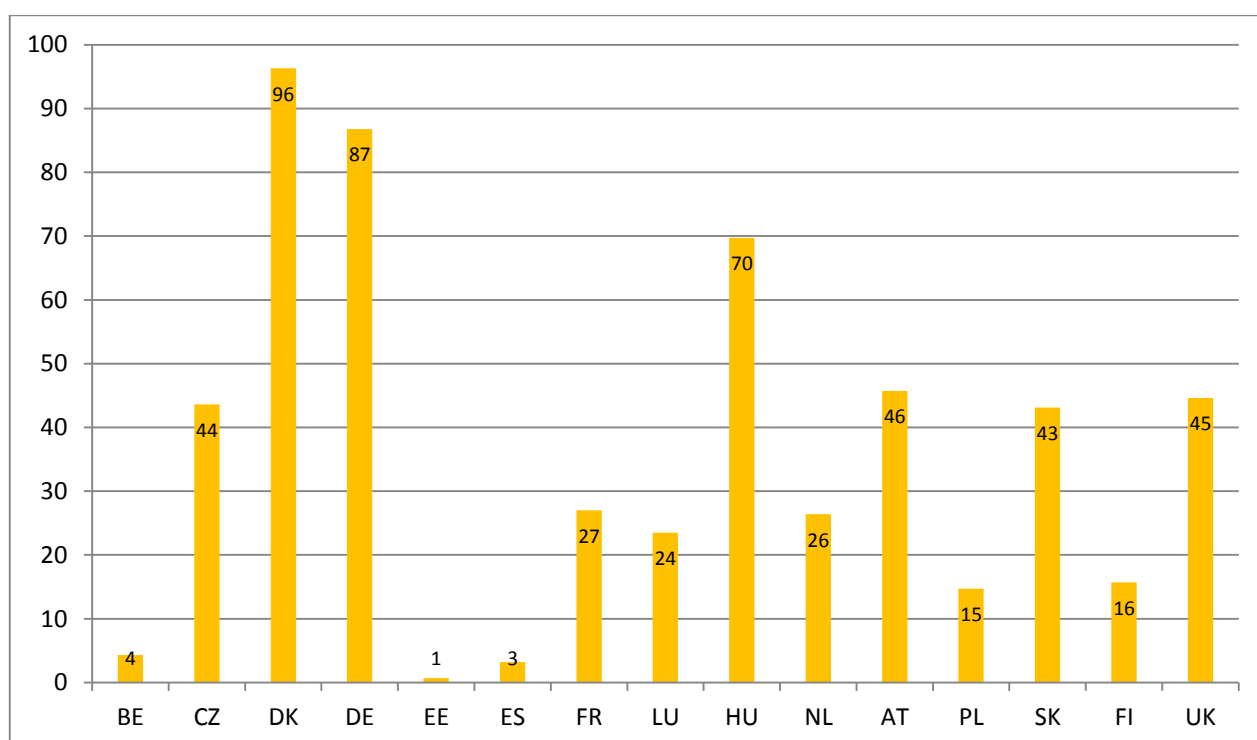
The ***ET 2020 Working Group on VET*** responds to the call to maximise work-based learning, including apprenticeships, and to make related policies more targeted and effective. It also contributes to the objectives of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, which consists in boosting the quality and supply of apprenticeships and in generally improving the attractiveness of VET programmes.

The Working Group focuses on the following four issues: (1) support for companies, in particular SMEs, offering apprenticeships; (2) positive image of apprenticeships and improved career guidance; (3) national governance, regulatory framework and social partners' involvement; (4) quality assurance in work-based learning. The Working Group produced a first guidance framework including 7 guiding principles on how to support companies in offering apprenticeships and is expected to finalise work on the 3 remaining themes by October 2015 with a document covering around 20 guiding principles followed by examples of good practices at national level.

Reporting

Member States have supported the promotion of work-based learning through the introduction of compulsory work experience (BE nl), of funding compulsory work-placements in specific VET curricula (IT), the development of a placement/traineeship system (EE), the widening of possibilities to start apprenticeship trainings (FR), the provision of short-term internships for unemployed youth (BG), (planned) financial support to learners and/or companies (BG, FR, SE, SK), or a planned introduction of a 'Chamber Guarantee' initiative for ensuring that learners perform on-the-job training in real companies (HU).

IVET work-based students as % of upper secondary IVET, 2012



Source: Cedefop calculations based on Eurostat data/UOE data collection on education systems. In the UOE data collection, a VET programme is classified as "combined work- and school-based" if 25% or more of the curriculum is presented outside the school environment.¹⁰²

Measures to boost quality of work-based learning include the modernisation of training models in industry (CY), the implementation of a 'workplace learning website' (BE nl), the support of cooperation between training providers and companies (BG, FI, LV), the training of trainers/mentors (PT, SE).

Governments together with social partners are striving to increase the number of apprenticeship, with subsidies to enterprises being the most popular incentives (grants, or reimbursements of training costs, or allowances) and tax benefits appearing as less popular. There are also training funds to which employers contribute (FR, HU, DK), and social partner and/or sectoral training funds (AT, IT, NL, DE).

Italy has recently overhauled its apprenticeship schemes through major labour market (the "Jobs act") and education reforms ("La buona scuola"). The reforms aim at extending the supply of dual apprenticeship, and ensuring improved "on the job training". A more attractive set of financial support mechanisms for hiring young apprentices is being provided.

Source: Italy, National Commitment to the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, 2015

¹⁰² In several countries, a statistical distinction of vocational programmes between combined work- and school-based, as opposed to school-based, was not applicable, due to the characteristics of their IVET systems (BG, GR, HR, CY, IT, PT). For other data was not available, or have a flag negligible in the source data (SE and TR) indicating that their upper secondary VET system is school-based.

In the **UK**, apprenticeships are increasingly offered in services industries, as in health and social care, business administration, management, customer service and hospitality and catering. Recently, apprenticeships have also been developed in law, accountancy and advanced engineering as an alternative to qualifying for these professions by completing university degrees.

In **Spain**, legislation from 2012 sets the principles for implementing apprenticeship-type schemes and encourages enterprise participation in formal IVET. Sectoral agreements aim at motivating chambers and enterprises to help develop and implement training programmes. One of the main aims is to improve learners' employability and ease their transition into the labour market. The programmes are expected to help the low-qualified and early leavers return to education and training to upgrade their skills. Since 2012, regions have developed dual programmes and are piloting them.

Source: Cedefop (2015): Stronger VET for better lives

VET-enterprise cooperation goes beyond arrangements to enable and promote high quality work-based learning. As shown in Cedefop analysis, employers, in their capacity as social partners, are involved in structures to ensure labour market relevant VET provision and to develop and update VET curricula in many countries.

In Working Groups for curriculum development, employers have a decision-making role in some Member States (DE, NL, RO, ES), while they mainly advise in other (FR, PT, SK).

Employer involvement in curriculum design can also take the form of consultation (FI, IE) or through national, sector and VET programme councils, such as Steering Committees and competence centres (BE fr), tripartite Sector Councils (HR), Vocational Committees (LT), Sectoral Experts Councils (LV) as well as new support structures for enhancing cooperation between VET and labour market (FR, IE, LT, RO).

Measures to achieve stronger employer engagement include regional conferences (PL), the adjustment of opportunities for involving them in examinations (SK) and their engagement in design of apprenticeships and putting apprenticeship funding in their hands (UK). Some countries focused specifically on the development of structures for monitoring and forecasting of skills needs¹⁰³.

Since 2011, the prime concern has been to address youth unemployment and skills mismatch through VET for young people. Promoting lifelong learning and mobility has therefore been somewhat less prominent. However, a major step towards improving access to further learning and individualised and flexible learning paths has been countries' work on establishing national qualification frameworks (NQFs). The EQF has become an accepted reference point for national qualifications.

All Member States have introduced measures to **reduce early-school-leaving** or adapted existing ones during the past few years. These were related to guidance (improved guidance quality and mentoring measures) or career management skills, for instance in transition/bridge or remedial programmes¹⁰⁴. Member States have progressed in raising training participation of the low-skilled and other at-risk groups, but there is scope to do

¹⁰³ BE fr, BG, EE, IE, PT, RO, SK.

¹⁰⁴ CZ, DE, LU, AT, RO, UK.

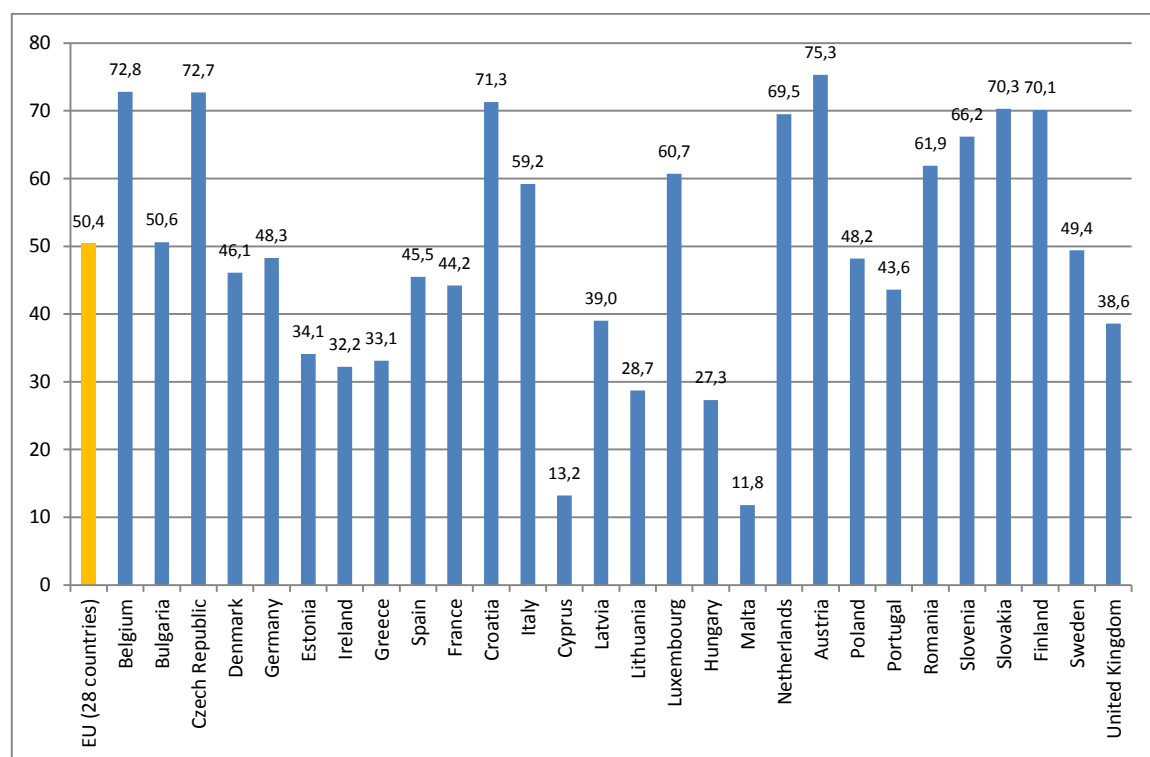
more to offer training opportunities for adults that meet their learning and practical needs. Examples of such measures are offering suitable time arrangements, expanding guidance and support and training VET teachers/trainers to work with adults.

The Youth Guarantees and similar initiatives stress the inclusive aspect of apprenticeships. Many countries devise apprenticeship type schemes and other forms of work-based learning to prevent youth from leaving education and training or to help young people and adults reintegrate and acquire a qualification.

Remaining challenges

According to the ET 2020 National Reports, despite progress in some key areas, Member States face a number of challenges, notably related to the *attractiveness of VET*.¹⁰⁵

Students enrolled in vocational upper secondary education, 2012, as a % of all students enrolled in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3)



Source: Eurostat (UOE data collection)

Favourable outcomes alone are not sufficient to attract learners to VET or to engage enterprises in providing. ***Smart use of incentives*** could contribute significantly to boosting VET attractiveness but according to Cedefop analysis incentives are mainly targeted at involving companies in work-based learning and other options appear to be underused. More needs to be done to set in place incentives (both financial and non-financial) to support people to remain in VET, to influence the actions of VET providers or to stimulate VET stakeholders to cooperate. Incentives to VET providers to prevent early leaving, for instance through performance-based funding are less common, but several countries have taken steps after 2010 to introduce them (BG, DK, IE, HR, UK,

¹⁰⁵ BG, CY, DK, EE, ES, HR, IT, LT, LU, LV, SE, SI.

IS). Few countries have reported on incentives to encourage VET providers' networks and public-private partnerships that could reduce the cost of modernising technology. Only a minority of countries has incentives (funding schemes) in place to encourage VET providers to use information on VET graduate transition data.

Cedefop analysis shows that even if *data on VET outcomes* – such as graduate employability – is available, it does *not systematically feed back into the VET provision*. In fact, the majority of Member States collects data on VET graduate employability and other labour market outcomes¹⁰⁶, but the actual use of such data for VET provision is less common, possibly due to legal limitations. The underlying Cedefop data shows that legislation allowing combining data on learning, labour market entry and career exists in only half of the EU Member States.

These conclusions are strongly confirmed by the ET 2020 National reports. Member States indicate as major challenges: achieving **sustainable partnerships** based on *stronger company or stakeholder involvement* in apprenticeship or internship / work-based learning schemes (ES, HR, IT, LT, SE), developing of curricula and qualification profiles in cooperation with social partners to avoid skills mismatches (EE, PL, SE) or the general absence of a formal agreement¹⁰⁷ between the social partners and the government to reinforce work based learning and provide training places in companies (CY).

Some countries indicated **skills mismatches** as significant remaining challenge (IE, IT, LT) and the need to improve **skills forecasting** procedures (LT, PT, RO).

Monitoring the outcomes of VET graduates is an important tool to *support VET participation for groups at risk*, through identifying which groups are lagging behind in terms of participation, and through providing insight into the underlying causes for this. Measures to monitor at risk groups have been put in place at a slower pace than most monitoring measures in general. For instance, children of migrants rarely have the same chances to access good training places in the apprenticeship systems¹⁰⁸.

The work on learning outcomes based EQF and NQFs has triggered reflections on how to include non-formally acquired qualifications but most countries have yet to link these to their validation arrangements. Skills audits, for instance, are directly relevant to make youth guarantees work. Skills assessment is used in transition programmes from compulsory education to VET (DE), in some countries the validation system has contributed to reducing the number of early leavers as well as the proportion of low-skilled (PT), while a number of Member States still perceive the enhancement of flexible learning pathways and permeability between VET and other sectors of education and training systems as a challenge (HR, IT).

The role of education and training in supporting competitiveness, innovation and growth policies has been so far largely limited to the higher education sector. Apart from being responsive to labour market needs, VET needs to be able to develop skills for innovation

¹⁰⁶ DK, EL, HR, LU, SK and UK-NIR are in the process of implementing such data collection.

¹⁰⁷ To note that in some countries there is a long established tradition that makes a formal agreement unnecessary.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. OECD/European Union (2014), *Policy Brief – Matching economic migration with labour market needs*.

and creativity. The **role of VET in innovation** is increasingly acknowledged but should be further enhanced. There are however some positive developments: new VET programmes for green jobs in the building sector (BE), strategies for smart specialisation that refer to the innovation potential of VET (CY, SK).

The **German** funding programme for innovative SMEs supported cooperation networks until end 2014 and subsidized public-private science and industry partnerships for innovation that include CVET.

In **Slovenia**, local communities, companies, and intercompany training centres financed by the Ministry of Education act as knowledge exchange platforms and increase the capacity to train students, workers and VET teachers.

Source: Cedefop (2015): Stronger VET for better lives

While **entrepreneurship** is increasingly becoming an underlying principle in VET and VET-business links are expanding, support for aspiring entrepreneurs and training for VET teachers and trainers to help learners acquire entrepreneurship skills could be strengthened.

As Cedefop analysis shows, providing **professional development opportunities for VET staff** is a challenge. Introducing new elements into VET in view of an increasingly heterogeneous learner population (age, learning objectives), using new learning methods, and addressing the substantial ageing of the VET teaching workforce requires investments in teachers' and trainers' skills.

Offering professional development to VET teachers and trainers to help them teach key competences and opening up opportunities for them to be trained in enterprises are not yet widespread practices. Creating space for innovation and creativity, for instance, through experiments in VET schools and possibilities to work outside the limits of a 'normal' programme supports teacher and trainer development.

These developments support the call made in the ET 2020 national reports to improving the initial and continuous development of VET teacher and trainers, and of administration and management staff to boost leadership in VET.

Priorities for further action

Based on the Riga conclusions¹⁰⁹, work during the next ET 2020 cycle will focus on the following **medium-term deliverables**:

With a view to developing high quality and labour market relevant vocational skills and qualifications, based on the learning outcomes approach:

- Promote **work-based learning** in all its forms¹¹⁰, with special attention to

¹⁰⁹ Agreed at the informal meeting of Ministers responsible for vocational education and training of countries participating in the Copenhagen process, the European social partners, and the Commission (and supported by the European level VET providers' associations) on 22 June 2015 in Riga.

¹¹⁰ According to Cedefop, work-based learning refers to knowledge and skills acquired through carrying out – and reflecting on – tasks in a vocational context, either at the workplace [...] or in a VET institution. For IVET, according to the Commission report "Work-based learning in Europe: Practices and Policy pointers", 2013, defines three forms of work-based learning: 1) alternance schemes or apprenticeships typically known as the "dual system", 2) work-based learning as school-based VET which includes on-the-job training periods in companies and 3) work-based learning integrated in a school-based programme,

apprenticeships, by involving social partners, companies, chambers and VET providers, as well as by stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship.

- Further develop **quality assurance mechanisms in VET** in line with the EQAVET recommendation¹¹¹ and, as part of quality assurance systems, establish continuous **information and feedback loops to I-VET and C-VET systems based on learning outcomes**.

For people's informed choice of pathways and long-term employability and adaptability to evolving skills needs:

- Enhance **access to VET and qualifications for all through** more flexible and permeable systems, notably by offering efficient and integrated guidance services and making available validation of non-formal and informal learning.
- Further **strengthen key competences**¹¹² in VET curricula and provide more effective opportunities to acquire or develop those skills through I-VET and C-VET.

In support of successful implementation of reforms and to raise the overall quality and efficiency of VET:

- Introduce systematic approaches to, and opportunities for, **initial and continuous professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors in both school and work based settings**.

Due attention will be paid to transversal areas and principles which are crucial for achieving the deliverables and modernising VET: strong *partnerships with social partners and other relevant stakeholders such as chambers and various competent institutions*; efficient *funding* and promotion of *excellence and innovation* in VET; consistent *use of learning outcomes* approach and the commonly *developed tools and principles*. This includes: setting up comprehensive validation arrangements by 2018 as agreed in the 2012 Council Recommendation¹¹³.

The following EU level activities will support the implementation of the above mentioned *deliverables* in the participating countries, as well as *the country-specific recommendations* within the European Semester. They will be supported by funding opportunities under ESIF and Erasmus+.

- *Assist participating countries or clusters of participating countries to implement*

through on-site labs, workshops, kitchens, restaurants, junior or practice firms, simulations or real business/industry project assignments.

¹¹¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1430316040997&uri=CELEX:52014DC0030>.

¹¹² As defined in the corresponding Recommendation from 2006, the 8 key competences consist of communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology, digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression. The Recommendation also refers to fundamental basic skills of language, literacy, numeracy and ICT as essential foundation for learning. Learning to learn, social and civic competences, initiative-taking and entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness and expression are considered 'transversal key competences' (Council conclusions 2010 on competences supporting lifelong learning and the 'new skills for new jobs' initiative).

¹¹³ [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222\(01\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01)).

VET reforms (*depending on their particular needs*) through country specific support, including with the assistance of Cedefop and the ETF for participating countries in the form of country reviews, targeted national activities, policy learning fora, mutual learning and exchanges of good practices notably through the ET 2020 Working Groups on VET and Adult Learning, DGVT Peer Reviews as well as through facilitation of bilateral or multilateral cooperation arrangements between countries. Produce EU level evidence (e.g. study on higher VET in the EU) and policy guidelines (e.g. Guidelines for SME involvement in WBL), and organise EU level events (e.g. European Business Forum on Vocational Training).

- **Monitor and analyse progress** in the area of VET by Cedefop and the ETF, through a streamlined monitoring system with a use of newly developed indicators (related to prevalence and quality of work-based learning and mobility in I-VET) and available VET specific statistical data (implementation of ISCED 2011 in Labour Force Survey and UNESCO/OECD/EUROSTAT data collection), adapted to the new medium-term deliverables; monitor impact of VET initiatives supported by ESIF at national level.
- **Intensify support to the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA)** to boost the quality, supply and attractiveness of apprenticeships across Europe.
- EU level support to ensure **transparency and recognition tools** (EQF, ECVET, EQAVET, Europass and validation of non-formal and informal learning) are further developed and implemented in a more coherent and integrated way.
- Support **transnational mobility of VET learners and staff** (Erasmus+, ESIF, EURES, Your first EURES job), facilitate the development of adult educators (EPALE), address common EU level sector specific skills challenges (Sector Skills Alliances) and support policy reforms in VET (strategic partnerships, forward-looking projects).
- In addition, the European Commission assisted by Cedefop will support Member States in **targeted communication and visibility of the achievements of European cooperation in VET (Copenhagen process)** through concrete activities (visibility events, campaigns, promotional activities).

2.2.5. Efficient funding and evaluation

Policy context at EU level

Despite the general acknowledgement that investment in human capital is essential for ensuring growth and competitiveness and for generating new technological ideas, many Member States reduced their public investment in education and training in recent years.

Public education budgets in real terms have been reduced in 9 out of 27 EU countries in 2010, 13 in 2011 and 19 in 2012. The overall reduction in the EU-27 between 2010 and 2012 was of 2.4%, while the number of pupils and students decreased by just 0.6 percentage points.

In 2012, no less than 20 Member States reduced the share of education expenditure out of primary government expenditure¹¹⁴, with an average cut of 0.2 percentage points. Most

¹¹⁴ i.e. total expenditure minus interest payments.

worryingly, deep cuts were operated also by the countries which already had the lowest levels of expenditure in education.

Fiscal consolidation policies are often blamed for these cuts, but – except for the few countries under financial assistance programmes – the way they are implemented is a choice of national governments. The Commission has consistently recommended to prioritise growth-friendly public expenditure, in some cases with specific reference to education. These past trends are not expected to revert soon.¹¹⁵

Investment to provide opportunities to participate in adult learning is the most important factor in increasing the overall level of participation by adults, as higher rates of investment are linked with higher rates of participation and high training costs are one of the key barriers to adult learning. Total spending on adult learning varies significantly across Member States. A recent study estimated that in most countries it accounts for between 15% and 20% of all spending on education.

Participation in adult and continuing education is mainly funded by companies and learners. The state plays a marginal role, focussing on narrow sections of the population, particularly the less advantaged. Companies pursue the professional development of personnel through off-the-job and – above all – on-the-job training. Individuals also provide complementary funding, in much higher proportion than the State (which sometimes also includes ESF funding): the rate varies from a minimum of 2.7% to a maximum of 14.7%. The share paid by the State ranges from 0.1% to 0.2%, except in Nordic countries where it is larger. This, however, does not include "tax expenditures". In fact, tax policies are an important tool in promoting continuing vocational education and training (C-VET) participation: in 2009, more than half of EU Member States offered tax deductibility from corporate income or from payrolls, while other forms of incentive or subsidies also exist.

Bipartite funds constitute a further tool to foster C-VET activities: they are usually established bilaterally by the social partners at sectorial level and are financed by companies with a proportion of their wage bill, ranging from 0.25% in Poland up to 2% in Belgium.

ET 2020's strategic objective 2 explicitly calls for "the efficient and sustainable use of resources – both public and private, as appropriate" as well as "the promotion of evidence-based policy and practice in education and training". In its 2011 Communication on the modernisation of higher education¹¹⁶, the Commission also reflected this focus, arguing that governments and higher education institutions should cooperate to promote greater diversity in income sources and increased efficiency in the way both public and private investment is used.

From the National Reports and other policy cooperation work in the context of ET 2020¹¹⁷ it clearly appears that funding reform in the tertiary education sector is high on the agenda across the EU. This reflects not only an increased focus on the effectiveness

¹¹⁵ After tightening considerably between 2010 and 2013, the combined fiscal stance of both the euro area and the EU is forecast to remain substantially unchanged between 2013 and 2016 (Cf. European Commission Spring forecast 2015).

¹¹⁶ COM (2011) 567 final.

¹¹⁷ Notably the ET 2020 Working Group on the modernisation of higher education and the meetings of Directors General for Higher Education (DG HE).

of public spending in the wake of higher student numbers and public budgetary constraints, but also a need to adjust funding models in many countries to higher education systems characterised by greater institutional autonomy, less direct State control and an enduring need for public accountability.

Reporting

As far as funding mechanisms are concerned, ten Member States implemented reforms of their funding regime¹¹⁸, while five others planned similar reforms¹¹⁹.

In their National Reports, fourteen Member States explicitly highlighted initiatives to promote equitable and efficient funding of higher education¹²⁰.

While the focus of these initiatives varies, there is an identifiable trend towards linking public investment in higher education more clearly to outputs (for example: the number of graduates, average time taken to complete degrees, drop-out rates, number of research publications, etc.), as opposed to more traditional "input" based systems (which typically fund institutions based on historical patterns and number of students). In this context, several countries (EE, FI, LT, PT) highlight the introduction or amendment of performance agreements between the state and higher education institutions, establishing goals to be achieved over fixed time periods.¹²¹

For higher education, it is clear that implementing performance-based funding instruments brings along many challenges. Leaving aside certain practical aspects such as the need for effective systems of data collection and monitoring, a core issue relates to the choice and definition of indicators of performance and potential impact (including unintended as well as intended consequences). This was a major discussion point in recent policy cooperation in this field and is also highlighted in some National Reports, with FR highlighting the challenge of designing systems to support improving graduation rates and reducing drop-out and HU linking state funding to employment outcomes of graduates.

As systems of performance funding – whether based on output-related formulae or linked to institutional performance agreements – are a comparatively recent development in most Member States¹²², detailed evidence of the effectiveness of these systems remains scarce. Many of the Member States which identify funding of higher education as a priority area for further cooperation¹²³, also directly or indirectly refer to the need for more robust empirical evidence of the effectiveness of different instruments, which can be used as an input to policy making.

This is very much in line with the conclusions of the recent meeting of Directors General for Higher Education, where DGs agreed it is important to maintain on-going exchanges

¹¹⁸ BG, DK, LT, FI, CZ, HR, LU, NL, PT, IT.

¹¹⁹ CZ, DE, ES, PL, UK.

¹²⁰ AT, BE fl, BE fr, BG, DK, EE, FI, HU, IT, LT, MT, PL, PT, SE, SK.

¹²¹ ET 2020 Working Group on the modernisation of higher education organised a country-focused workshop on performance agreements (September 2014) followed by discussion by DG HE (October 2014)

¹²² With the notable exception of DK, FI and to some extent the UK, which have a longer history of implementing performance funding models.

¹²³ AT, BE nl, BG, EE, HR, IE, IT, LV, PT, RO.

on the issue of performance funding, improve the evidence base and return to share the lessons of upcoming policy evaluations and reviews in this area.

Remaining challenges

The recently completed study on mapping the tools to promote efficiency and effectiveness in European education systems shows that most Member States do not focus enough on the efficiency of their education policies and programmes. Without being a policy goal *per se*, a higher efficiency would allow to improve the outcomes of a governments' investment in education, which is essential especially in countries where fiscal sustainability concerns have reduced the resources available for education. The study found that only few European countries regularly measure efficiency, and even fewer use those measures within assessments aimed at increasing the value-for-money of the investment, such as cost-benefit analyses.

Several countries proposed to take forward the issue of effective use of resources in education. Proposed actions for addressing this issue include the implementation of Peer Learning Activities and peer reviews based on the "Stockholm seminar on cost benefit and cost effectiveness 2013"¹²⁴ as well as using the "Analytical Framework" developed by the OECD for policy insights (EE) or the "SGIB indicator expert group" (IT).

The investment plan for Europe, launched by the Commission in November 2014, carries new opportunities to catalyse private capital towards investments in education. Seizing the opportunities offered by the European Investment Plan requires the activation of national and local stakeholders in developing projects that attract private capital investors. This may require shifting the attention from traditional grants, available e.g. through the structural funds or Erasmus+, towards combinations of public and private resources in domains where there can be a return for the private partner contributing to finance, build or manage an education and training facility or programme.

Priorities for further action

- Exploring the **potential of the Investment Plan for Europe** in the area of education and training, including by promoting funding models attracting private actors and capital.
- Encouraging Member States to use evidence based policy-making to **monitor policies and design reforms** that deliver quality education more efficiently.
- Encouraging innovative ways to ensure **sustainable investment** in all forms and levels of learning, including performance-based funding and cost-sharing.

2.3 Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship

The Europe 2020 target to reduce the early school leaving (ESL) rate to less than 10 % by 2020 remains particularly crucial in a post-crisis reality where a high amount of young students leave school and face an unemployment rate that is almost the double compared to the general youth unemployment rate for the same age group.

¹²⁴ Stockholm, 11-12 November 2013.

Regarding early childhood education and care (ECEC), the ET 2020 National Reports confirm that this area is increasingly regarded as an integral part of the education system and as the first step of lifelong learning. Member States stress the importance of equal access to quality ECEC as a measure to decrease socio-economic and other background-related disadvantages and to prevent early school leaving and low performance in school.

Regarding equity and diversity, six years after the 2010 Council Conclusions on the social dimension of education and training, tackling inequality and discrimination in education and training remains a challenge for all Member States. All European education systems remain, to a greater or lesser extent, marked by inequalities. Europe needs more inclusive and equitable education systems that enable everybody to succeed in education and to develop their full potential, irrespectively of their background and according to their specific learning needs.

2.3.1. Early school leaving

Policy context at EU level

The economic crisis has severely hit young people and more dramatically those lacking upper secondary education, which is the recommended minimum entrance qualification when making the crucial transition from education to the labour market. There are still more than five million early school leavers across Europe, (i.e. people aged 18-24) with only lower secondary education or less. They face an unemployment rate of 41%, almost double compared to the general youth unemployment rate for the same age group.

Against this backdrop, the Europe 2020 target to reduce the ESL rate to less than 10 % by 2020 becomes particularly crucial. Although Europe is approaching this target (12.0% in 2013), significant disparities remain between but also within countries.

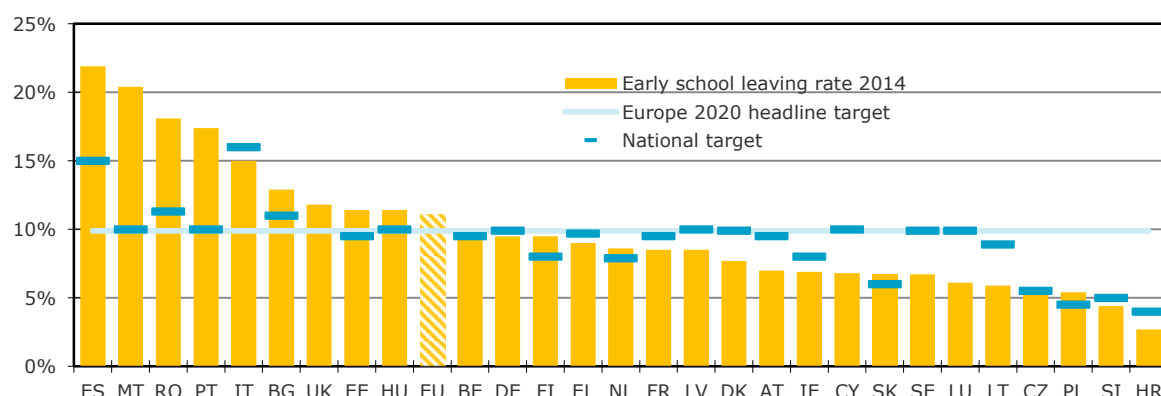
Certain groups are more affected than others: the risk of early school leaving is 33% higher amongst boys compared with the average; 26% higher for the foreign-born¹²⁵; 156% higher for disabled learners, between 50 and 90% higher for Roma; and more than 30% higher in bottom-performing regions.

The latest available data (2014) shows that the EU average early school leaving rate stands at 11.1%, down 0.8 percentage points from 2013. Nineteen Member States have reached the Europe 2020 headline target of an early school leaving rate below 10%¹²⁶, up from eighteen last year. BE joins this group mainly due to methodological changes. EL, furthermore, dropped below 10% for the first time, whereas EE *increased* its early school leaving rate from 9.7% in 2013 to 11.4% in 2014.

¹²⁵ The recent OECD-EU report on indicators of immigrant integration showed that, in the EU, native-born with two foreign-born parents were only slightly more likely to be early-school leavers (11.4%) than native-born with two native-born parents (9.9%). However, the rate was higher among the foreign-born that arrived before the age of 15 (17.1%) and much higher for the other foreign-born (26.2%) (OECD/European Union (2015), Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015: Settling In, OECD Publishing, Paris).

¹²⁶ HR, SI, PL, CZ, LT, LU, SE, SK, CY, IE, AT, DK, LV, FR, NL, EL, FI, DE, BE.

Early school leaving (2014) and target levels



Source: Eurostat (LFS). Online data code: t2020_40. The indicator covers the share of the population aged 18-24 having attained ISCED level 0 to 2 and not receiving any formal or non-formal education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey. National targets follow different definitions of the indicator in some countries (see Table 2.1.1). Data for HR has low reliability due to the small sample size.

The 2011 Council Recommendation on policies to reduce ESL called on Member States to implement coherent, comprehensive and evidence-based strategies against ESL. In the absence of reporting obligations under the Council Recommendation, the information available is partial: around a third of countries/regions now have a national strategy in place that aims to reduce early leaving from education or training¹²⁷ and to address educational disadvantage (IE). Overall, all Member States have introduced policies and measures that have either been developed specifically to address early leaving, or are part of general/ongoing policies which contribute to reducing early leaving rates. The 2014 Eurydice/Cedefop report provides a more completed picture in this regard¹²⁸.

The 2011 Council Recommendation and the work done in the framework of the ET 2020 policy cooperation have identified concrete actions that Member States can implement, taking into account the specificities of their national context¹²⁹.

Reporting

Many countries report initiatives to tackle different aspects of ESL, including individualisation of teaching and learning (AT, BE nl, DE, HR, MT, SE), reinforcement of support measures for students from socio-economic disadvantaged background or with special needs (AT, IE, HR, LT, LV, PT, RO, SK), improvement of counselling and mentoring¹³⁰, enhanced access to quality early childhood education and care, establishing more flexible pathways of education (ES, FI, FR, PT, SI), improvement of teachers'

¹²⁷ AT, BG, B/NL, FR, HU, MT, NL, RO, ES.

¹²⁸ http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/175EN.pdf.

¹²⁹ 'Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support', Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving (November 2013).

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/esl-group-report_en.pdf.

¹³⁰ AT, BE fr, DE, DK, EE, HR, HU, LU, MT, NL, RO, SE, SI.

competence to deal with at risk students¹³¹. These measures, however, do not necessarily add up to a comprehensive strategy. Some countries are also trying to improve cooperation between various actors inside and outside the education system to fight ESL.

The Netherlands has adopted a coherent approach based on agreements between local authorities, secondary schools and the government for the period 2008-2015. The agreements define the method of financing and it seems successful in reaching long-term goals for the reduction of early school leavers.

Remaining challenges

With some notable exceptions, current Member State policies are not based on sufficiently up-to-date data about the causes and incidence of ESL. Twelve Member States¹³² have reported initiatives to improve data collection and monitoring, but a systematic approach is missing in many others.

Further cooperation between different education sectors and policy areas, such as youth policy, social and employment services, health, housing, etc. is necessary at all levels and across levels of government. Stakeholders and professionals from different sectors need to work together more closely and in strong cooperation with schools. Cooperation with parents and local communities, with actors of non-formal and informal education, school-business cooperation, non-curricular and out-of-school activities are possible ways to reinforce prevention of ESL.

ET 2020 National Reports confirm that reducing ESL should remain a priority for the future and that Member States need to be supported in the implementation of policies. More ambitious national targets can be set in some countries, while those where no progress is visible should intensify their efforts. Member States that approach the target need to sustain their efforts, as experience shows that reducing ESL becomes more challenging as the number of early school leavers declines. More complex and targeted solutions are necessary to reach those young people most alienated from education and training.

As indicated by the 2011 Recommendation, combating ESL can only be effective as a **coordinated strategy** across levels of government and different policy areas. A successful response to early school leaving needs to be comprehensive, based on a long-term commitment and a clear strategy, be informed by accurate data and a good understanding of the scope and reasons of the problem. It requires active involvement and cooperation of all relevant stakeholders at all levels (national, regional, local and school level).

More needs to be done in **prevention** and **early intervention** as these measures are also more cost-effective. Education and training policies that aim to reduce ESL need to establish conditions for successful learning for all, and to improve access to education for socially disadvantaged pupils and students with a migrant background or from ethnic minorities. Persistent inequalities in education should be tackled systematically.

Education and training policies need to **remove obstacles within the school education system** that may hinder young people in completing upper secondary education; ensure

¹³¹ CZ, DE, DK, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE.

¹³² BE nl, CZ, DE, DK, LT, LU, LV, MT, PL, SE, SI, SK.

smooth transition between different levels of education (including from early childhood education and care to school); ensure access to high quality education throughout life and the provision of high quality VET.

Teachers education need to equip teachers with the competences to adopt inclusive and student-focused methods, and with skills and ability to work with other professions and partners. It should also focus on establishing professional continuum so that each educational step builds on the development of the previous educational stage. Teachers need to be supported in dealing with diversity in terms of the social and ethnic background of pupils as well as supporting individuals with special learning needs.

Policies need to support schools to be open, welcoming, conducive and supportive learning environments that focus on the needs of individual pupils; cooperation in and around schools need to be encouraged, in order for schools to become "**learning hubs**" receiving support and offering support to the broader community.

Priorities for further action

- Reducing ESL by supporting school-based strategies and second chance opportunities, emphasizing effective learning environments and pedagogies.

2.3.2. Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Policy context at EU level

In several Member States the governance of ECEC for the entire age group (from birth to compulsory primary school) is the competence of the Ministry of Education¹³³ and a number of others develop in this direction¹³⁴. This trend confirms that ECEC is increasingly regarded as an integral part of the education system, thus strengthening the significance of early childhood education as the first step of lifelong learning.

According to the Eurydice 2014 Key Data on ECEC, participation rates of children between the age of 4 and the start of compulsory education vary considerably, from 70% to 100%, although the EU average rate (93.9%) is very close to the ET 2020 benchmark of 95%. Participation of Roma children in ECEC is consistently below national averages, with on average only one out of two Roma children in ECEC, and participation ranging between 9% and 83%.

Because of the rather fast expansion of the services, the very diverse child population, and strict austerity measures in Member States, the issue of quality (including staff qualifications, working conditions, etc.) and the importance of high-quality accessible ECEC for later learning, employability and social integration cannot be overemphasised.

Even though the role of quality ECEC for children's further cognitive and social development is widely recognised, challenges persist in the implementation of high quality equitable ECEC systems for all children from birth to compulsory primary age.

¹³³ DK, DE, EE, HR, LV, LT, LU, MT, SI, FI, SE, UK.

¹³⁴ HU, RO, AT.

Provision of ECEC services for the children under 3 years is particularly problematic, only ten Member States having reached the Barcelona target¹³⁵.

In addition, there is clear evidence that early childhood education in the host country is particularly beneficial for immigrant offspring. A recent OECD-EU report¹³⁶ showed that among children of comparable socio-economic backgrounds, those who attend preschool in their current host country obtain better reading literacy results at 15 years old than those who do not. The gap between the two groups is 75 points, roughly equivalent to two years at school. Nevertheless, there is still lower participation to pre-school among immigrant children than native-born children in some EU Member States, in particular Italy, Norway and the Czech Republic (with attendance rates that are 10 percentage points lower among immigrant children)

The number of initiatives in ECEC evidenced by the ET 2020 National Reports confirms that significant efforts should be made to further support Member States in implementation of policies that try to expand access and address quality. The Proposal for a **Quality Framework**¹³⁷ prepared by the Thematic Working Group on ECEC could help to address all these issues in a tailor-made manner.

Reporting

As many as 22 National Reports list measures to increase the ECEC participation rates and ensure equal access to ECEC, in particular for the disadvantaged families, who in some Member States have significantly lower ECEC participation rate. Most common measures implemented by the Member States include:

- introducing 1 or 2 compulsory years¹³⁸ and/or free pre-school year(s)¹³⁹ for all children (with additional years or language support for children with a different mother tongue)¹⁴⁰; in some systems introducing a legal entitlement for a place from a very early age¹⁴¹.
- (co-)financing of ECEC places and additional support for disadvantaged children¹⁴²
- improving the quality of ECEC through skills development of all ECEC staff and also as a measure to reduce inequalities and prevent early school leaving¹⁴³.

Some ET 2020 National Reports reveal that a number of Member States focus on particular ECEC-related challenges such as lack of funding on the municipal level for increasing the number of ECEC places, under-representation of Roma children in ECEC and the need for more coherent education policy and cooperation of all stakeholders.

¹³⁵ i.e. by 2010 33% of children under three years should be in ECEC.

¹³⁶ OECD/European Union (2015), Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015: Settling In, OECD Publishing, Paris.

¹³⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework_en.pdf.

¹³⁸ AT, BG, CY, EL, HR, HU, LU, LV, PL.

¹³⁹ BE, BG, CZ, EE, IE, EL, ES, IT, CY, LT, IV, LU, HU, MT, AT, PL, PT, RO, SK, FI, SE, UK.

¹⁴⁰ There is a difference in the hours that are provided for free between 19 or 40+ a week.

¹⁴¹ DK, SE, FI, DE, EE, SI.

¹⁴² Eg. BE, CY, FR, HR, HU, IE, RO, SK, SI, UK.

¹⁴³ DE, DK, HU, LT, LU.

Remaining challenges

Overall, ECEC is faced with the double **challenge** of increasing simultaneously access and quality. Key questions concern:

- improving accessibility and affordability particularly for the disadvantaged children: apart from targeted (co-)funding of ECEC for vulnerable children, there should be progress towards universality. Both have financial consequences, which are difficult to meet in the situation of economic austerity;
- professionalization of staff: competences of child carers, pedagogical staff and teachers are crucial for qualitative ECEC and consequently for children's outcomes;
- improving ECEC governance and funding through comprehensive, inter-sectoral cooperation;
- improving monitoring of systems' quality and systematic data collection on issues of quality.

A number of important challenges remain therefore to be addressed:

- **Ensuring available and affordable access to quality ECEC** for all families. Structural or legislative arrangements should include the right to affordable ECEC provision through additional funds to support access for disadvantaged groups. Moving towards introducing a legal entitlement for a place in ECEC immediately after the end of maternity/parental leave can be a useful way for that.
- The **ECEC workforce** should be professionalised. Initial education and continuing training of all staff in ECEC (pre-school teachers, assistants, educators, child carers, as well as leaders) and professional leadership are key to the quality of pedagogical work and children's outcomes. Additionally, professional leadership creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents, which contribute to the quality of ECEC services.
- Establishing **efficient and effective governance and funding arrangements for ECEC** services. Stakeholders in ECEC systems must have clear and shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities and be prepared to collaborate with partner organisations. Legislation, regulation and guidance can be used to create clear expectations about the importance of collaborative working for high quality outcomes for children, families and local communities.
- **Ensuring smooth transition from ECEC to school**, which proves to be a delicate phase in the learning process and risks to undermine acquisitions from subsequent stages in case of negative experiences. Education systems should provide structural, pedagogical and professional continuity in order to sustain efforts from ECEC. This includes continuity of institutions, of training, of curriculum, building professional capacity of diverse workforce from early years to the end of compulsory schooling, developing systematic monitoring and exploiting the results for policy development, empowering all parents to support their children's learning process.

Priorities for further action

- Fostering access to high-quality **ECEC**, especially for the disadvantaged, and implementing the quality framework on ECEC.

2.3.3. *Equity and diversity*

Policy context at EU level

"Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship" was the focus of specific Council Conclusions in 2010 and 2013. In this context, the Commission's work has focused *inter alia* on the reduction of early school leaving, on improving accessibility and quality of ECEC, on supporting the education of children from a migrant background with advice from the SIRIUS policy network and on promoting inclusive education through cooperation with the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. Also, education is one of the four pillars of the EU Framework on National Roma Integration Strategies.

Wide disparities in education and training persist both *across* and *within* Member States¹⁴⁴. Compelling evidence suggests that a learner's socio-economic background remains the strongest determinant of educational success or failure in all Member States and levels of education and that the intergenerational inheritance of educational disadvantage remains strong¹⁴⁵. Disability, ethnicity, migrant/traveller status, gender, age, sexual orientation and geographic location continue to impact strongly on people's chances to access and succeed in education and training. Whole social groups or sub-sets of the population persistently achieve less well in education – despite the presence of policies aiming to redress these inequities.

There is wide variation between different Member States in their success at addressing the problem, suggesting that some education systems are much more inclusive and equitable. Recent evidence¹⁴⁶ shows that equity in education is compatible with strong learning outcomes and high performance. It also shows that the highest-performing countries allocate educational resources more equitably among advantaged and disadvantaged schools.

Educational poverty severe consequences for individuals, for economic growth and for social cohesion. Policies to remedy these disparities are urgently needed and renewed efforts are necessary at European level to help Member States deliver on formal commitments: in 2014 ten Member States (AT, BG, CZ, DE, DK, HU, LU, RO, SE and SK) received country-specific recommendations on education inequalities affecting disadvantaged learners.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ *Education and Training Monitor 2014*; OECD, *PISA 2012 Results: Excellence through Equity*, Vol. 2, 2013; *Mind the Gap – education inequality across EU regions*, 2012; the European Commission's *EU Sixth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion*, 2014; the *Education and Training Monitor 2014*.

¹⁴⁵ *Education and Training Monitor 2014*; OECD, *Education at a Glance 2014*; *Social Inclusion Monitor Europe*, 2014;

¹⁴⁶ OECD, *PISA 2012 Results: Excellence through Equity –giving every student the chance to succeed*, V.2, 2013; *Social Justice in the EU –a cross-national comparison*, 2014.

¹⁴⁷ AT, BG, CZ, DE, DK, HU, LU, RO, SE, SK.

Following the terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen in 2015 there is a growing perception in Europe that education can contribute to fostering tolerance, solidarity, respect for diversity and human rights, intercultural understanding, equality and active citizenship in European societies. In this context, European Education Ministers met in Paris on 17 March 2015 and reaffirmed their determination to nourish these fundamental values through adopting a Declaration on "Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education"¹⁴⁸.

The Paris Declaration highlights the need to "...*cooperate and coordinate, to exchange experiences and to ensure that the best ideas and practices can be shared throughout the European Union*" with a view to:

- Ensuring that children and young people acquire social, civic and intercultural competences, by promoting democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion and non-discrimination, as well as active citizenship;
- Enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, particularly in the use of the Internet and social media, so as to develop resistance to all forms of discrimination and indoctrination;
- Fostering the education of disadvantaged children and young people, by ensuring that our education and training systems address their needs;
- Promoting intercultural dialogue through all forms of learning in cooperation with other relevant policies and stakeholders.

To reflect the Paris Declaration, the ET 2020 policy focus will be re-calibrated to reinforce the role of education and training in promoting equity and non-discrimination and in imparting fundamental values, intercultural competences and active citizenship. ET 2020 activities in follow-up of the Paris Declaration will build on **previous work** carried out in the ET 2020 policy framework¹⁴⁹, as well as exploit synergies with youth policy, culture and sport.

Erasmus+ could be mobilised, inter alia to increase support to mobility of teachers and youth workers, youth exchanges and volunteering, strategic partnerships in the field of education and youth policy, transnational networks, school cooperation platforms, joint projects on citizenship education, and collaborative partnerships in sport. Actions could be embedded in comprehensive, cross-sectorial approaches and implemented through reinforced cooperation with the civil society and social partners to ensure appropriate outreach and engagement at local level.

Reporting

In the context of the Commission's ET 2020 stock-taking consultation many European-level education stakeholders, other important institutional actors and scholars expressed concern

¹⁴⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019/navracsecs/announcements/education-help-tackle-radicalisation-eu-commission-and-ministers-agree_en.

¹⁴⁹ e.g. outputs of the ET 2020 Working Group on Schools in relation to early school leaving; cooperation with Council of Europe on human rights education; the concept of social and civic competences as defined in the 2006 Council recommendation on key competencies in lifelong learning; the structured dialogue with sport stakeholders addressing problems like violence, racism and xenophobia.

about the lack of progress in improving equity in education systems across the EU. They argue that work in this area should become a priority in the next ET 2020 cycle.

15 Member States¹⁵⁰ took measures to improve access to education for socially disadvantaged students and migrant learners. Some countries¹⁵¹ report measures targeting Roma in particular.

Eight Member States¹⁵² report action to promote essential values in the education system such as tolerance, respect for diversity and democratic citizenship. The measures include education-related legislation and curricular content. However, key education stakeholders, other important institutional actors and scholars across the EU voiced strong concern about the lack of attention to the civic objectives of education in the framework of European level cooperation in education and training, arguing that the civic dimension of the strategic objective on "Equity and diversity" should become a priority in the next ET 2020 cycle.

Remaining challenges

Significant **challenges** remain to be addressed in the area of equity, diversity and the promotion of fundamental values. Europe needs more inclusive and equitable education systems that enable *all* citizens to succeed in education and to develop their full potential, irrespectively of their background and according to their specific learning needs. The challenge is to create inclusive learning environments where disadvantaged learners receive the support they need to succeed and feel respected and valued. Our education systems need to actively seek to promote justice, tolerance, solidarity, intercultural understanding, active citizenship, respect for diversity and fundamental rights – values and attitudes which are just as fundamental for the cohesion, success and well-being of our societies and can be best promoted through education and training.

In addition, despite important progress in recent years, gender inequalities persist in European education systems - in terms of study subject preferences, performance and patterns of participation. For example, currently across the EU:

- Boys drop out more from school, are more likely to repeat years and outnumber girls in VET.
- Women are more likely to have a higher education degree but are under-represented in STEM studies and careers, in research and in senior posts at all levels of education, including higher education.
- Boys perform much worse than girls in reading in all Member States.
- Gender stereotypical subject and career choices persist.
- Women are not making labour market gains commensurate with their educational achievements.
- There are strong gender imbalances in the teaching profession

¹⁵⁰ BE fr, CY, EE, FI, HR, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK.

¹⁵¹ HR, LT, PT, SI, RO.

¹⁵² BE fr, BE nl, CZ, ES, FI, FR, RO, SI.

Priorities for further action

- Addressing the increasing diversity of learners and enhancing access to good quality and inclusive mainstream education and training for all learners, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with special needs, migrants, and Roma, while tackling discrimination, racism, segregation, bullying, violence and stereotypes.
- Tackling gender gaps in education and promoting more gender balanced educational choices.
- Facilitating the effective acquisition of the language of learning and employment by migrants.
- Promoting civic, intercultural, social and relational competences, mutual understanding and respect, and ownership of democratic values and fundamental rights.
- Enhancing critical thinking and cyber and media literacy.

2.4. Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training

Creativity and innovation sustain economic development and competitiveness and can help prepare for the transition to a circular economy. To this aim, the acquisition of key competences such as digital skills, including coding, the ability to continuously update knowledge, a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, as well as cultural and green awareness are essential. Strong partnerships between education, research and innovation policies and between institutions, business and civil society are effective patterns to get there.

All Member States reported initiatives in one or more of the aforementioned areas over the previous ET 2020 work cycle. Many reported an array of initiatives across the educational system, addressing various transversal skills, either separately or focused on one particular type of skills, most prominently entrepreneurship.

As most of the initiatives reported have been launched within the current decade, there is little evidence about their effectiveness and impact. The ET 2020 stocktaking showed however that a number of Member States would like to engage in knowledge sharing about specific issues of systemic and/or institutional change through digital readiness, using innovative pedagogies and MOOCs, closer linking of education to research, business and society, and expanding entrepreneurship education.

2.4.1. Building partnerships between education, business and civil society to promote entrepreneurship education and employability

Policy context at EU level

A key element to stimulate innovation in and through education is engagement with relevant stakeholders, in particular with business and civil society. This is important at all levels of education and training, but while this work is progressing in higher education,

much remains to be done to develop this approach and engagement in VET and particularly in schools.

Erasmus+ has placed a significant emphasis on developing partnerships across all levels of education and training. **Strategic Partnerships** support links between all types of organisations and bodies working on education, addressing one of the identified priorities which include entrepreneurship education and employability.

This funding offers the opportunity to forge concrete projects with organisations that bring together expertise and strengths, to deliver projects, new knowledge, innovative actions or other initiatives. This is the primary funding mechanism to encourage and support partnerships for schools, VET and higher education.

TOPIC	KA 200 Higher Education	KA 203	TOTAL For Higher Education
Labour market issues incl. career guidance / youth unemployment	4	9	13
Enterprise, industry and SMEs (incl. entrepreneurship)	5	13	18
Overcoming skills mismatches (basic/transversal)	1	5	6
Entrepreneurial learning - entrepreneurship education	12	20	32
TOTAL	22	47	69

Knowledge Alliances (higher education) and **Sector Skills Alliances** (VET) are transnational projects also funded under Erasmus+ for the advantage of both business and education partners. **Knowledge Alliances** are designed to involve higher education institutions and companies in new models of cooperation that lead to behavioural change among students, academics and company staff.

The main added value of the Knowledge Alliances lies in their focus on innovation in and through higher education rather than on a given sector and or activity; all disciplines and sectors can be addressed through a Knowledge Alliance.

The interest for Knowledge Alliances is extremely high leading to very strong competition for funding. For the pilot calls and for the first Erasmus+ call the success rate was below 5%.

Knowledge Alliances	Proposals	Budget	Funded Projects
2011 pilot call	93	1 Mio €	3
2012 pilot call	103	1 Mio €	3
2013 LLP	69	5 Mio €	14
2014 Erasmus+	229	8,4 Mio € (initial budget was 6,1 Mio € - additional 2,3 Mio € were provided allowing the funding of 3 additional projects that were on the reserve list).	10
2015 Erasmus+	200	7,5 Mio € (initial budget)	Evaluation process on-going

Sector Skills Alliances aim to identify and close skills gaps in occupations by enhancing the responsiveness of initial and continuing VET systems to sector-specific labour market needs and demand for new skills. They endeavour to agree on sector-wide training content for European professional core profiles based on commonly defined competence standards, and to integrate work-based learning, thus facilitating cross-border certification and therefore easing professional mobility in the sector. An Alliance should include networks of VET providers including companies, representative sector organisations or sectoral social partners.

Four pilot projects launched in 2012 were recently finalised and cover the following fields: automotive industry, health and social work, tourism and catering and energy saving technologies.¹⁵³

In higher education, partnerships between institutions and business are further supported through the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA).

The **European Institute of Innovation and Technology** EIT aims at reinforcing the innovation capacity of Member States and at creating the entrepreneurs and innovators of tomorrow. The EIT achieves its mission by fully integrating all three sides of the 'Knowledge Triangle' (higher education, research and innovation) in Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs). There are five KICs operating in key areas of economic and societal relevance for Europe: Climate-KIC, EIT ICT Labs, KIC InnoEnergy, EIT Raw Materials and EIT Health. They bring together more than 700 organisations from higher education, research and business from Europe and abroad. In the future, three

¹⁵³ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/sector-skills_en.htm.

additional KICs will be created in the areas of added value manufacturing, food for the future and urban mobility.

The EIT promotes excellent and relevant education responsive to both business and societal demands and focused on the delivery of innovation, entrepreneurship and creativity competences. EIT KICs educational programmes at Master and Doctoral levels are distinguished by an EIT quality label, expected to become an internationally recognized brand of excellence helping to attract talent from Europe and abroad.

EIT labelled degrees are built on a set of specific quality criteria, overarching learning outcomes and an internal Quality Assurance and Learning Enhancement Model. This model is based on the learning outcome paradigm as brought forward by the Bologna Process with the aim to move from ‘teacher driven’ to ‘student centred’ teaching and learning, changing higher education from being just knowledge based into also being competence based. As such, EIT-labelled Masters and PhD programmes combine excellent science and multidisciplinary curricula with entrepreneurship education, business creation services, and mobility and outreach schemes. EIT labelled programmes are designed and implemented together with business across boundaries. They offer students the possibility of carrying out internships in industry and of learning directly from professionals, so they end up with the necessary set of skills for the labour market and for innovation in global competition.

Together with the KICs, the EIT is expanding its portfolio of educational activities beyond post-graduate education to a greater variety of study modes, involving online education, professional development and executive education, and tailor-made training courses.

Scale of EIT KIC educational activities:

The EIT KICs designated in 2009 (Climate-KIC, EIT ICT Labs and KIC InnoEnergy) have attracted more than 24,000 applicants from all over the world to their more than 100 education programmes. There are 1028 graduates from EIT KICs education programmes. It is expected that by 2020 the EIT, through the different KICs, will have trained more than 20 000 masters' students and PhD candidates. The results of a survey conducted among 300 students from the three EIT KICs show that the experience is enhancing their career potential through adding a set of hard and soft skills in working, interacting across academia and business and building greater confidence to start a business.

The **Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions** (MSCA)¹⁵⁴ aim at strengthening researchers' skills, training and career development and notably foresee to fund 25 000 PhDs that combine excellent and interdisciplinary research with entrepreneurial skills, international exposure and a reinforced involvement of future employers.

The various actions are open to researchers of any discipline regardless of their experience, age or nationality, and offers lifelong training opportunities.

Cooperation between universities and the non-academic sector alongside with trans-national and cross-sectoral mobility are important features of MSCA. Business and non-

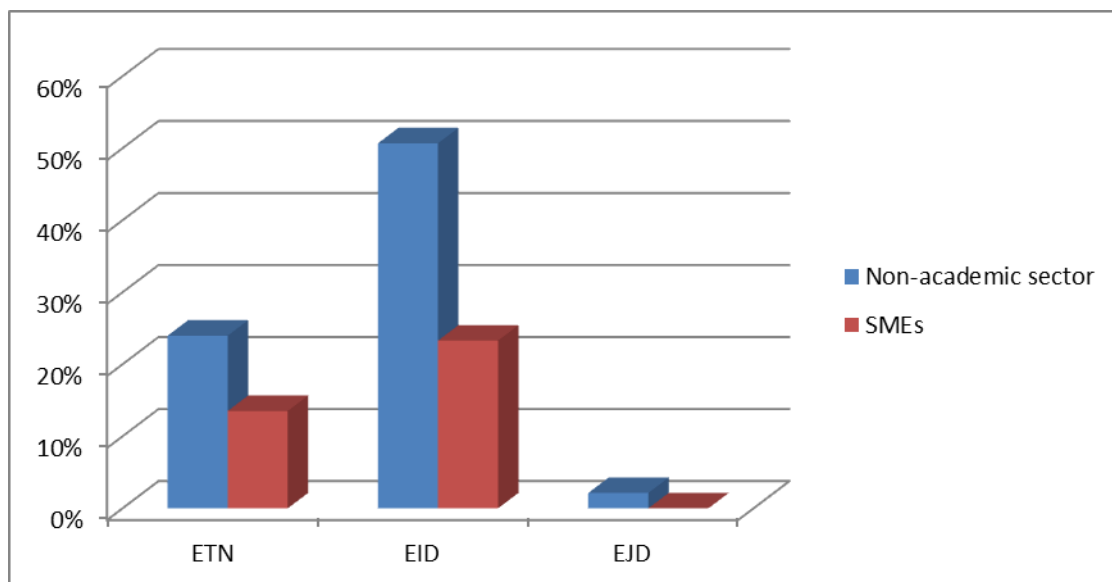
¹⁵⁴ For details on the FP7 period of MSCA 2007-2013 see the final report “FP7 Marie Curie Actions Interim Evaluation” (Specific contract EAC - 2011 – 0517 Implementing framework contract No EAC/50/2009).

academic participation is particularly emphasised during the MSCA doctoral training (ITN), when researchers develop 'transferable' skills such as entrepreneurship, thus increasing their employability.

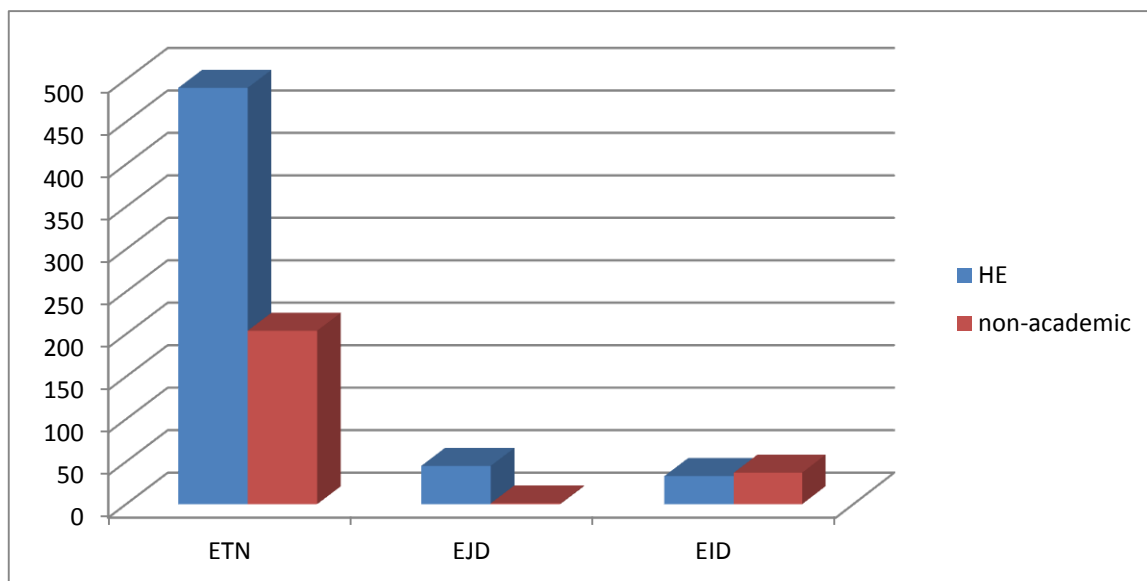
In this respect, the 2015 call finances 107 European Training Networks (ETN), 9 European Joint Doctorates (EJD) and 22 European Industrial Doctorates (EID) where academic and non-academic organisations cooperate. For example, in EID at least one academic participant and one participant from the private sector team up to provide doctoral training. The researcher is enrolled in a PhD programme within a university and spends at least 50% of his/her time within the commercial partner. The joint supervision of fellows by supervisors from each sector is mandatory.

In the 2014 MSCA ITN call, around 40% of all successful participants are from the non-academic sector, including over 550 companies. In ETN, higher education institutions count for roughly 57% of the beneficiaries, while non-academic sector organisations amount to 24% of the total beneficiaries.

Non-academic and SMEs beneficiaries in MSCA 2014 ITN projects (%)



Higher education and non-academic beneficiaries in the 2014 ITN call



The MSCA also include a specific action for the short-term exchanges of staff at all career levels, including administrative and technical staff, as part of the Research and Innovation Staff Exchanges (RISE). RISE is open to partnerships of academic and non-academic organisations, including businesses and SMEs.

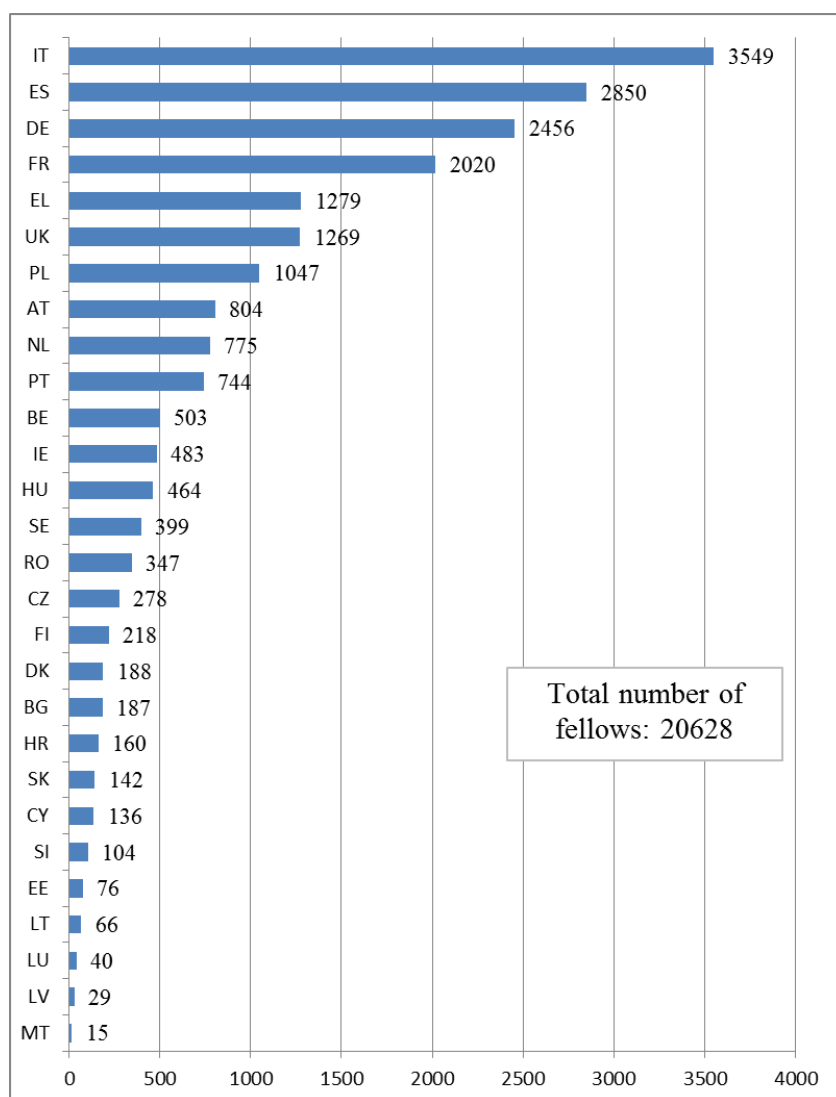
The 2014 RISE call finances 89 projects in which 57% of participations come from higher education institutions, while 30% from non-academic sector organisations, including 13% from SMEs.

Research institutions involved in MSCA have to comply with the principles of the *European Charter for Researchers* and *Code of Conduct for the recruitment of researchers* when recruiting researchers.¹⁵⁵ The Charter and Code promote high quality employment and working conditions for researchers (fair and transparent recruitment, parental leave, etc.). The MSCA has a true international dimension, as demonstrated by the high number of non-EU fellows.

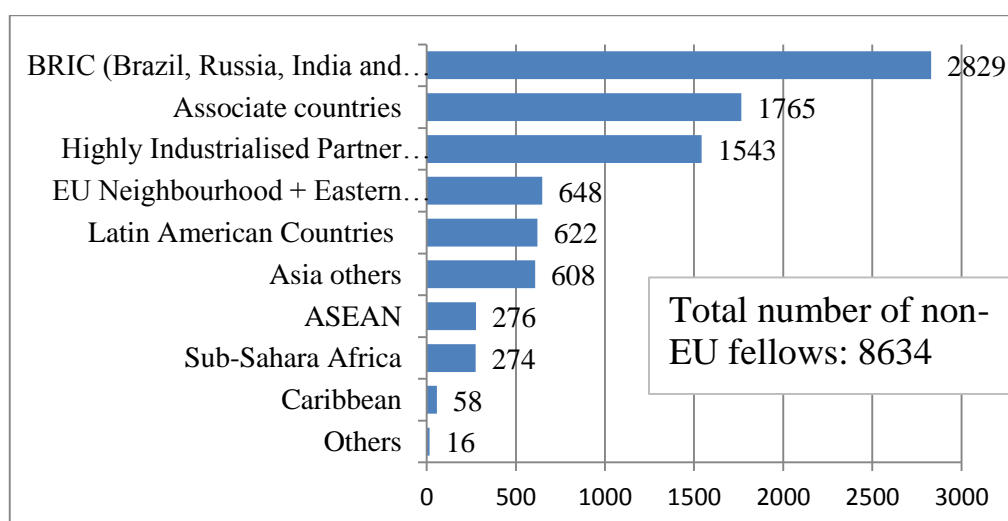
Furthermore, under the COFUND scheme of MSCA in Horizon 2020, national funding agencies **as well as individual universities** will be able to fund **doctoral programmes implementing the seven principles for innovative doctoral training (IDT)**. These principles, as endorsed by the Council of Ministers in 2011, are defined as: research excellence, an attractive institutional environment, internal quality assurance, exposure to industry and other relevant employment sectors, interdisciplinary research options, international networking and transferable skills. The increase in scientific production, the growing competition for young talents and the consideration for the non-academic job market have partly triggered and been accompanied by the development of new forms of doctoral training provision in many European **higher education** systems.

¹⁵⁵ Details available under <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/europeanCharter> and <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/codeOfConduct>. EURAXESS is a pan-European initiative providing access to a complete range of information and support services to researchers wishing to pursue their research careers in Europe.

Number of MSCA fellows with EU28 nationality 2007-2014 FP7 period



Number of MSCA fellows with non-EU nationality 2007-2014 FP7 period



The Commission has established the *European University–Business Forum*, and the *VET–Business Forum*. These two fora are platforms at European level for structured dialogue between relevant education and business stakeholders at higher education and VET levels respectively, stimulating exchange of good practice and mutual learning and supporting the participants in developing further action in their respective countries.

In order to respond to the specific needs at national and/or regional level the Commission and Member States have co-organised Thematic University–Business Forums¹⁵⁶. The higher education forum is well-established and has already proven to be an effective tool for initiating concrete action through new initiatives such as HEInnovate and the Knowledge Alliances.

Finally, three studies have been commissioned. Beside the general objective of getting a better understanding of the issues and challenges, raising awareness and encourage institutional change in higher education, the studies generate evidence for future undertakings. Tools, platforms and activities could be further developed and explored, supporting an increasing number of institutions and national higher education systems to be more responsive to the ET 2020 challenges. The request of setting-up a European University-Business Working Group or Council, with representatives of National Rector Conferences and Business Representatives could also be explored.

Reporting

First evidence on the development of university-business cooperation in EU Member States was delivered as a result of the EC study "The State of European University-Business Cooperation".¹⁵⁷ The outcomes of the European and of the Thematic

¹⁵⁶ Thematic University-Business Fora BE and FR, in 2012; PL in 2013; SE, UK, ES, IT and DE in 2014.

¹⁵⁷ <http://www.ub-cooperation.eu/>.

University-Business Forums - such as best practice examples, findings and recommendations, -have been regularly summarized in comprehensive reports.¹⁵⁸

A monthly update of country fact sheets and statistics is available on the MSCA web page.¹⁵⁹ Further reporting on policy and implementation is due through the ERC/FET/MSCA Configuration of the Horizon 2020 Programme Committee.

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology submits Annual Activity Reports to the EIT governing board.¹⁶⁰

Remaining challenges

- Going beyond the examples of good practice and making the cooperation between HE and business a normal feature in the National HE systems.
- Further developing the knowledge base on university-business cooperation in Europe, its state of development and its impact.

Priorities for further action

- Fostering participatory education governance by stimulating engagement of learners, educators, parents and the broader local community such as civil society groups, social partners and business.
- Increasing synergies between education, research and innovation activities, with a sustainable growth perspective, building on developments in HE, with a new focus on VET and schools.

2.4.2. Transversal key competences, entrepreneurship education, e-literacy, media literacy, innovative learning environments

Policy context at EU level

Enabling and encouraging citizens and in particular young individuals to be entrepreneurial, innovative and creative are an issue of strategic importance for many governments. In its Communications on "Rethinking Education", "Modernisation of Higher Education" and in particular "Opening up Education", the Commission has stressed that attention should be focused on these core issues. The Commission continues to support the Member States through a variety of actions and funding opportunities to include these elements in teaching and learning throughout their education systems.

The Commission and the Member States have cooperated within a Working Group to issue policy guidance on how to embed entrepreneurship as a key competence of cross-cutting relevance. The Working Group's final report¹⁶¹ outlined a number of challenges and ways forward, which constitute the basis for work in the current ET 2020 **Working Group on Transversal Skills**, with an emphasis on languages, entrepreneurship and

¹⁵⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/university-business_en.htm.

¹⁵⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/funded-projects/statistics/index_en.htm.

¹⁶⁰ <http://eit.europa.eu/interact/bookshelf/annual-activity-report-2013>.

¹⁶¹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/entrepreneurship-report-2014_en.pdf.

digital skills¹⁶². The discussions in the thematic group helped to define the priorities for the Erasmus+ Prospective initiatives Call¹⁶³. The Working Group is expected to deliver feasibility reports on a European reference framework for entrepreneurship, on a digital competence skills framework and a citizen tool for self-assessment of transversal skills.

In the sector of higher education, the Commission in cooperation with the OECD launched in November 2013 **HEInnovate**, an online tool designed to help institutions of all types assess their performance as "Entrepreneurial Higher Education Institutions". This tool serves the purpose of assessing the status quo and of providing advice and action plans on how to improve an institution's activities. The self-assessment cuts across seven key areas common to all entrepreneurial HEI's: Leadership & Governance, Organisational capacity, Teaching & Learning, Pathways for Entrepreneurs, University-Business Exchange, the Internationalised Institution, and Impact measurement.

HEInnovate does not serve as a ranking or benchmarking tool and all data remains the property of the user. Over the span of one year HEInnovate was used by around 600 higher education institutions. More than 1300 self-assessments have been completed and the use goes well beyond the EU. The USA is one of the top ten user countries. A series of workshops and dissemination events took place in 2014¹⁶⁴. In addition, a country review based on HEInnovate was organised in cooperation with the OECD in Bulgaria.

Using HEInnovate for strategic purposes:

In **Denmark**, VIA University College used HEInnovate to shape strategy and corporate culture AFTER a merger of six higher education institutions.

In **Ireland**, Dublin's three institutes of technology used it to PREPARE their merger to create a technical university.

Porto Polytechnic in **Portugal** based the REVIEW and update of the university strategy on the HEInnovate methodology.

(These examples have been discussed at the European University-Business Forum 2015)

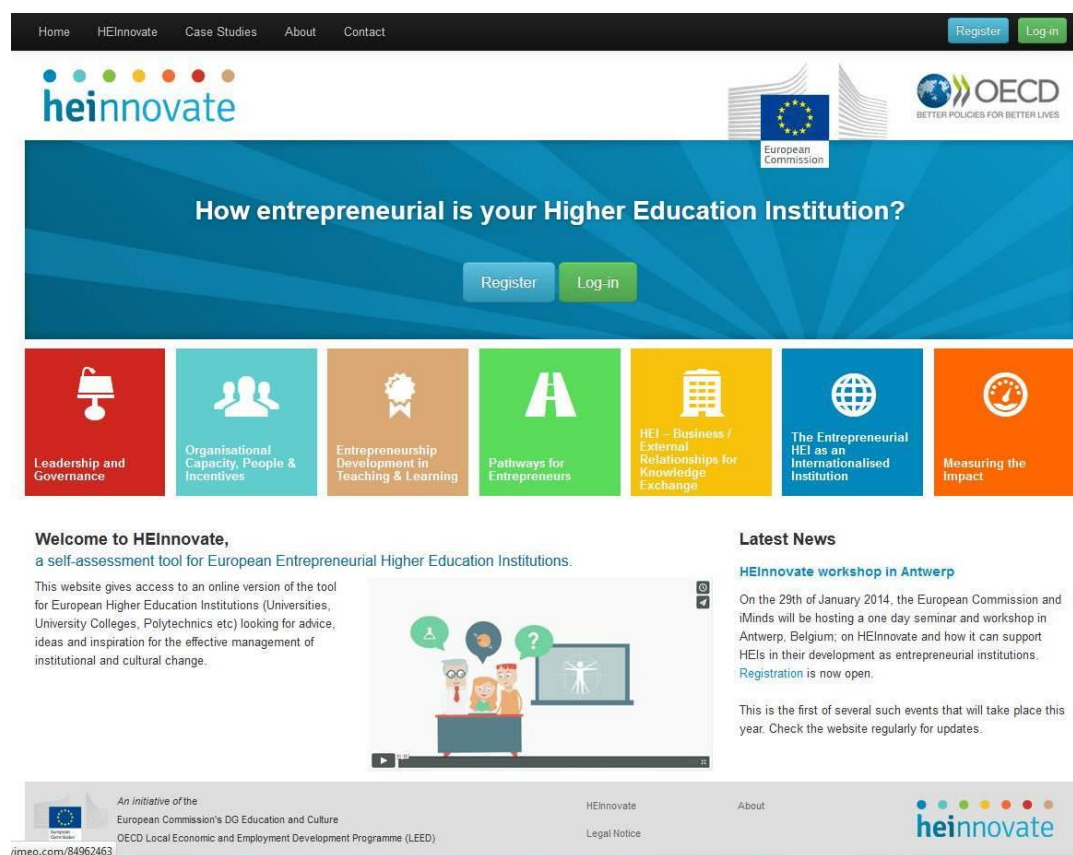
The Commission is working with OECD to explore the feasibility of developing a similar tool for primary, secondary and VET (ex-Entrepreneurship360). This initiative brings

¹⁶² With a reference to the "Rethinking Education" Communication, the Working Group mandate defines transversal skills as follows: "Transversal skills have cross-cutting dimensions and give people a high degree of transferability in both life and work, adding value to job-specific knowledge and skills. They are skills that do not stem from a specific vocational context, but are instead relevant as both a citizen or in employment. Transversal skills have been shown to positively impact on employability, active citizenship and levels of new business creation (for both social aims and personal profit). They can be drivers for social and economic well-being, supporting Europe's key priority for growth and new job creation through a more employable and productive workforce as well as higher numbers of new business start-ups. During this mandate, the WG will concentrate on three transversal skills: Entrepreneurship, Digital Skills and Languages".

¹⁶³ The Erasmus+ Prospective initiatives Call (EACEA 10/2014) are: Assessment of transversal skills in basic and secondary education/Practical entrepreneurial experience at school/ Cooperation on innovative methods for fast and smooth academic recognition across borders in higher education/ Reducing the number of low skilled adults/ Encouraging the development and internationalisation of young people's volunteering.

¹⁶⁴ BE, UK, SE, ES, IT, CY, BG, DE, CR, EL, IE, LT, RO.

together over 70 stakeholders and 50 pilot schools and is expected to encourage entrepreneurial ecosystems at all these levels of education and training.



Reporting

In 13 countries¹⁶⁵ transversal skills, and in particular entrepreneurship and innovation skills, have played a role in educational reforms. Four Member States¹⁶⁶ report specific legislative changes to support the introduction of transversal skills, while the remaining ten report curricula reforms which give emphasis to transversal skills.

Entrepreneurship has been introduced at all levels of education. A fourth of EU Member States¹⁶⁷ report about planned or existing initiatives specifically targeting primary and pre-primary education. Examples of these initiatives are: introduction of a framework for entrepreneurship education at primary and secondary level, support for teachers and schools, special subsidies for schools running entrepreneurship programmes, price competitions and challenges for individual students, groups of students, or schools, support for partnerships between primary schools, research and companies.

¹⁶⁵ CY, DE, EE, ES, FI, HR, HU, LV, MT, PL, RO, SI, SK.

¹⁶⁶ EE, ES, RO, SK.

¹⁶⁷ IE, LU, MT, PT, SE, SI, UK.

About half of the Member States¹⁶⁸ have initiated or planned initiatives to introduce entrepreneurship in general secondary education. The initiatives vary considerably according to scope, specificity and objectives, but a main thrust is that entrepreneurship and innovation are implemented as crosscutting topics rather than as separated subjects.

Examples include an "Entrepreneurial Skills Certificate" offered as a supplementary qualification, integration of topics and working methods to enhance entrepreneurial skills into the syllabuses of other subjects¹⁶⁹, direct collaboration between schools and employers as well as social partners and universities, a "Forum on Entrepreneurship in Education" to raise awareness of entrepreneurship initiatives.

The Entrepreneur's Skills Certificate® in **Austria** is offered as a supplementary qualification from grade eight in school. The Entrepreneur's Skills Certificate® comprises four modules. Each module is concluded with a standardised examination and a certificate.

Several Member States¹⁷⁰ mention having introduced entrepreneurship skills in vocational education and training. In some countries (ES, FI, PL, SK) compulsory modules on entrepreneurship have been integrated into all VET programmes, while in others (MT, NL), such modules are offered on an optional basis.

Many Member States¹⁷¹ report initiatives to strengthen entrepreneurship in higher education. Most of the initiatives concern educational content (introduction of new programmes or courses), while a few aim at creating stronger links between universities and businesses. These initiatives range from setting up specialised bodies to disseminate innovation and entrepreneurship in higher education (DK, UK) to making entrepreneurship education an optional course (ES, LV) or even a Master's degree (LU, MT) or setting up business incubators in universities (MT, PL) and using structural funds to co-finance project activities of students involving partnership with businesses (SI).

The **Creative Classrooms Lab** project carried out a series of policy experimentations to collect evidence on the implementation, impact and up-scaling of 1:1 pedagogical approaches using tablets.

The project aimed to:

- (1) Provide guidelines, examples of good practice and a training course for schools wishing to include tablets as part of their ICT strategy.
- (2) Support capacity building within Ministries of Education and regional educational authorities and encourage them to introduce changes in their education systems.
- (3) Enable policy makers to foster large-scale uptake of the innovative practice that is observed during the project.<http://creative.eun.org/>

Remaining challenges

Although there has been a real uptake of entrepreneurship education across Member States, some **challenges** are still ahead. First, as entrepreneurship education is fairly

¹⁶⁸ AT, EE, ES, FR, IE, IT, LU, LV, MT, PL, PT, RO, SI, UK.

¹⁶⁹ AT, EE, ES, LV, MT, RO.

¹⁷⁰ AT, CY, EE, ES, FI, IT, MT, NL, PL, PT, SK.

¹⁷¹ DK, EE, ES, FI, HU, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, SI, UK.

recent, there is a lack of coherence and a fragmentation of policy and implementation at national level. Reforms are often not systemic across all levels of education and training, nor is the understanding of what is meant by entrepreneurship education coherent across different European countries. Second, the definition of entrepreneurship skills wavers between an equity model (transversal skills) and a market model (business knowledge), with a tendency to apply the market model in VET and higher education. Third, educators are not supported or trained properly and lack awareness of the relevance to their own teaching. Finally, data and monitoring of progress hardly exists.

More work is needed to support effective and high quality implementation of entrepreneurship-related initiatives. Exploring the interim impact and reach of HEInnovate as an established development tool for higher education at EU level is essential. European models of educator training could be developed, particularly online or MOOCs, to enable cost-effective and high quality professional development opportunities, that can be embedded into national/regional policy approaches. Links need to be made between the learning/skills agenda and entrepreneurship as a career destination, linking schools to their wider ecosystem.

Priorities for further action

- Strengthening the development of transversal skills and key competences, in line with the Reference Framework on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, in particular digital, entrepreneurship and linguistic competences through common EU frameworks and self-assessment tools such as HEInnovate.
- Mainstreaming innovative and active pedagogies, such as inter-disciplinary teaching and collaborative methods, to enhance the development of relevant and high-level skills and competences while fostering inclusive education, including for disadvantaged and learners with disabilities.

2.4.3. An agenda for digital learning

Policy context at EU level

New technologies provide opportunities for open and innovative pedagogies. In the context of the Digital Single Market initiative, which aims create a frictionless European digital economy and society, the Commission committed itself to support the supply of digital competences and skills among the workforce as well as the general population and to innovate and improve education systems. This will ensure, that Europe's youth –and Europe's adult learners – learn through the most effective and engaging means as well as that they learn those up-to-date and relevant knowledge, skills and competences that will aid them to be full participants and creators in the social, civic and economic life of an increasingly digital Europe. As the digital revolution is changing our lives and the way we live, interact, learn and do business, it is in particular essential that education systems contribute to develop and enhance digital competences of learners. These two objectives of ICT in education must be kept in mind.

Digital technologies are changing our lives and the way we interact, learn and do business. It is therefore essential that education systems also contribute to develop and enhance digital competences. Indeed, to harness the opportunities of the digital economy and society, new skill sets will be necessary for (i) citizens to be able to take active part and benefit, (ii) young people to develop the skill set they need for employability and (iii)

entrepreneurs as well as established companies across economic sectors to find the skills they need, to invest in digital, grow and create jobs. These developments create an enormous challenge for education and training systems, which cannot be tackled by individual stakeholders on their own.

To help educators and learners benefit from the opportunities offered by innovation through the adoption of technology and open practices, the Commission has launched in 2013 the **Opening up Education initiative**. The initiative proposed several actions to be taken by the Commission, the Member-States and educational institutions. It recognised the need for a comprehensive approach to technology use and openness in education and thus focused on three areas that should be addressed simultaneously to fully reap the benefits of technology in education: **open learning environments; open learning resources; connectivity and infrastructure**.

Opening up Education has led to a number of developments:

- The issue of openness, open educational resources and digital technologies in education has gained significant attention and traction across the EU, leading to Council conclusions¹⁷², a European Parliament Resolution¹⁷³, positive comments and action from Member States and even inspiring a dedicated initiative on the issue in Slovenia, 'Opening up Slovenia'¹⁷⁴
- Erasmus+ includes an open access requirement, according to which any teaching and learning materials produced within a project must become Open Educational Resources
- Erasmus+ is funding partnerships for institutions to explore new organisational models to include open resources and practices
- a digital competence reference framework for educators, learners and institutions is being developed
- the "Open Education Europa" website has been launched as the European gateway to innovative and open learning¹⁷⁵
- a guide for institutions to include OER among recommended learning materials is being prepared by the ET 2020 Working Group on digital and online learning.

¹⁷² http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/141138.pdf.

¹⁷³ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2014-0395&language=EN&ring=A7-2014-0249>.

¹⁷⁴ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-464_en.htm.

¹⁷⁵ <http://www.openeducationeuropa.eu/>.



The ET 2020 Working Group on Digital and Online Learning put its primary focus on mutual learning and the identification of good practices. Expected outcomes are related to effective organisational change in educational institutions towards innovative and open learning environments, as well as guidelines transferring these to national and local contexts. To increase the uptake of innovative practices, a proposal for a quality assurance model for open and innovative learning environments should be conceived taking into consideration the implications for EU transparency and recognition instruments.

Coding, as an important part of digital competence education, is another issue of importance also for education cooperation.

In its narrow definition, coding or computer programming is the process of developing and implementing various sets of instructions to enable a computer to perform a certain task, solve problems and provide human interactivity. The term "coding" has also been used in a broader sense, referring to "computing science", including programming as well as learning about other online activities

Coding skills are increasingly important: knowing how to code is empowering. It allows to understand the digital world we live in and to shape it. Basic coding skills are essential for accessing the jobs of tomorrow and today. Whether analysing healthcare data, designing security software, developing apps, communication tools, social platforms or special effects for movies, coding is the red thread that runs through future professions. Coding skills help to elaborate specifications of what we want the system to do. Last but not least it helps to develop skills such as analytical thinking, problem solving, and creativity.

Coding has been pushed so far mainly through grass root movements and other organisations (e.g. EU Code Week, the European Coding Initiative and its All you Need is Code campaign, Coderdojo). Although some Member States have started introducing mandatory coding or computing science classes in schools (e.g. UK), the several scattered initiatives within and across Member States would benefit from more coordinated approaches also in terms of recognition of qualifications. However, for coding to be accessible to all kids, teaching could take place around schools, during or after school hours.

The "**Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs**" was announced by the 2012 Employment Package, launched in March 2013 and endorsed by the European Council. It aims to tackle the lack of digital skills in Europe and the estimated 825.000 unfilled ICT-related

vacancies by 2020 across all industry sectors. It is the largest collaborative effort in Europe to date to gather offerings in ICT training; implement job placement programmes; provide more aligned degrees and curricula at vocational schools and universities; and motivate young people to study ICT and pursue related careers. These are achieved through "pledges" made by more than 80 stakeholders and by the work of "national coalitions" (national employment, education and industry actors) which have been launched in thirteen countries (BE ,BG, CY, EL, IT, MT, NL, LT, LV, PL, PT, RO, UK) while many more are under formation.

Reporting

Initiatives reported by Member States under the previous ET 2020 work cycle focus on teachers, learners and resources.

Two thirds of Member States¹⁷⁶ report initiatives to **strengthening teachers' digital skills**, for instance by promoting continued training of teachers in the use of ICT, by integrating ICT competences into new professional standards for teachers or by establishing networks of innovative teachers who can promote digital skills regionally. In many of these countries, the provision of these skills is strongly linked to the development and use of open education resources, in the sense that potential and existing teachers are trained in developing and using materials for virtual material platforms.

Several Member States¹⁷⁷ report about initiatives to **enhance the digital skills of learners**. These initiatives focus mainly on ensuring that teachers have the right skills and that the technological infrastructure is in place, but also on describing and assessing the relevant learning outcomes. In a number of countries, work has been done to set targets for improving learners' digital competences.

Initiatives to **open up education and support the provision of learning resources** using online platforms are mentioned in 24 National Reports¹⁷⁸. The scope and content of the initiatives reported vary considerably, from initiatives to deliver courses to registered students online or through blended learning, over MOOCs (massive open online courses), to repositories and databases for teaching materials.

Whereas online or blended learning is implemented in most countries, particularly in higher education, MOOCs is an area of great interest but still not so widely used.

Finally, nine Member States¹⁷⁹ indicate the existence of a **national strategy for digitalisation of education** covering skills and infrastructure and learning resources.

Opening up Slovenia, a Slovenian initiative inspired by Opening up Education¹⁸⁰ is a bottom-up created and top-down supported initiative to create a unique nationwide research environment in open education. The initiative is carried by a coalition of all Slovenian universities, compulsory and vocational education institutions with technical, research and industry partners.

¹⁷⁶ AT, BE fr, BE nl, CY, DK, EE, FI, FR, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, PT, RO, SI.

¹⁷⁷ AT, BE fr, BE nl, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IT, LT, NL, PT, RO, SE.

¹⁷⁸ AT, BE nl&fr,, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, P L, RO, SE, SI, UK.

¹⁷⁹ AT, FR, LT, LV, MT, PL, RO, SE, SI.

¹⁸⁰ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-464_en.htm.

Remaining challenges

Though many experiments are being successfully implemented by many innovative institutions all across Europe, some **challenges** are clearly ahead.

- Beyond those institutions and individuals who are leading the path, many institutions, administrators, educators and policy makers are still uncomfortable, unaware or not prepared for a greater adoption of digital and open practices and resources. Many reasons contribute to adoption lag, among which clarifying the implications, potential and challenges, for an institution has a clear role. Lack of awareness on the subject is also an important factor;
- Education institutions must revisit their organisational models to become more innovation driven and increase their level of e-maturity;
- The lack of visibility of the quality and relevance of learning materials is an obstacle to the usability of digital and open teaching and learning materials and learning opportunities (eg MOOC);
- At the moment, there are not enough possibilities for recognition and validation of digitally acquired knowledge and skills.
- There is a need to reach beyond the early adopters policy tools; communication and best practices should be adapted in order to reach out to the average practitioner and ensure more active use of innovative pedagogies and digital tools
- The uptake of ICT and OER in education should be increased - educators at all levels must be given the opportunities to enhance their digital competences and skills (including coding); students must be provided the necessary digital competences and skills (including coding) to adapt to a digital era

The proliferation of emerging technologies to deliver education in an open format (such as MOOCs and other online learning offers) demonstrates the need to focus on digital open education. Both MOOCs and digital skills were raised among the initiatives to be brought forward to the next work cycle.

With regard to the provision of MOOCs, equity, and quality assessment are issues that several countries feel should be addressed. Some Member States expressly pointed to the need to make MOOCs an area of knowledge sharing at EU level.

Priorities for further action

- Promoting the use of ICT as a driver for systemic change to increase quality and relevance of education at all levels.
- Boosting availability and quality of open and digital educational resources and pedagogies at all education levels, in cooperation with European open source communities.
- Addressing the development of digital skills and competences at all levels of learning in response to the digital revolution.

3. GOVERNANCE OF THE ET 2020 STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Achieving the full potential of the ET 2020 strategic framework requires a well-functioning governance system which respects Member States' competences for the content and organisation of their education and training systems but provides opportunities for further cooperation in education. Since the 2012 Joint Report progress has been made in improving ET 2020's working methods and tool box. In particular ET 2020 Working Groups have been successfully reorganized to produce useful outputs in support of Member States' policy.

3.1. ET 2020 Governance

In their National Reports, Member States suggested that further steps could be taken to ensure that the existing ET 2020 governance arrangements are used to their full potential, in particular to increase involvement of the political level and improve coordination and transparency between the formal and informal dimensions of governance.

3.1.1. Making the most of the formal governance structure

In the National Reports, more than a third of the Member States call for a closer involvement of politicians in the design and implementation of European cooperation in education and training. Several Member States stress the importance of enhancing the involvement of the Council of Education Ministers in the steering of ET 2020 and in the exploitation of ET 2020 results. Member States also suggest strengthening the relation between ET 2020 and the European Parliament's Culture and Education Committee. These are constructive ideas to enhance the political impetus behind ET 2020.

As suggested in the independent evaluation (recommendation 10), the evidence basis for a more systematic political steering of ET 2020 could be the annual Education and Training Monitor. As proposed in the draft Joint Report, it would inform policy debates at Council level ahead of the European Semester as well as with the European Parliament.

3.1.2. Bridging ET 2020 formal and informal governance

In addition to steering by the Council, ET 2020 benefits from the direct input by senior Member State officials at the informal meetings of the High Level Group on Education and Training and of Directors-General (School Policy, Vocational Education and Training, Higher Education). These meetings are chaired by the Council Presidency. They contribute to create a strategic vision on education and training, steer ET 2020 activities (in particular the ET 2020 Working Groups) and identify ET 2020 issues which should be signalled to the Council.

As suggested by the independent evaluation (recommendation 12), for these informal structures to play their role and fulfil their potential, it is important that Member States improve the way in which they interact with these structures at senior level.

During the stocktaking, several stakeholders also underlined the need for a streamlined communication and greater coherence between ET 2020's formal governance (within the Council) and these informal governance structures. In this respect, a number of Council

Presidencies have taken the good initiative, at the end of their mandate, to draw up an information document summarising the salient elements of the informal ET 2020 senior officials meetings to the Council.

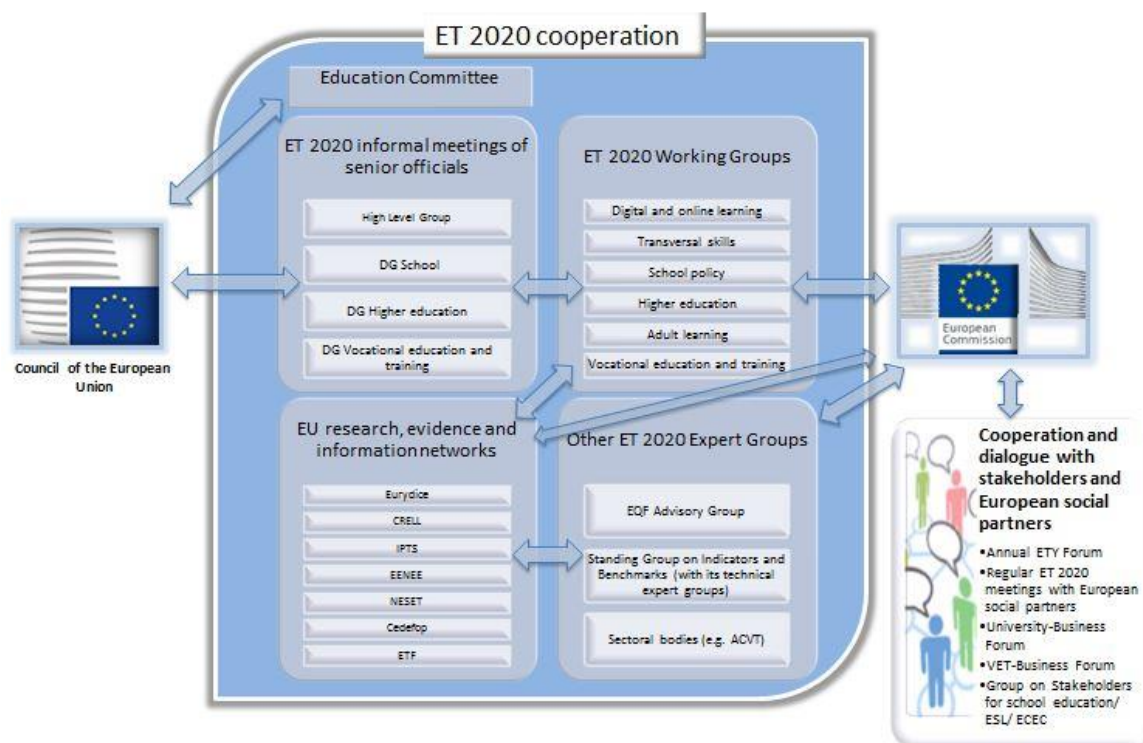
To improve transparency and coherence in implementation, the draft Joint Report proposes to establish **an ET 2020 indicative rolling Work Plan**. Prepared by the Commission, in cooperation with the Member States, it would integrate *inter al.* the key activities planned in the ET 2020 Working Groups as well as in the ET 2020 informal groups of senior officials. The Work Plan would be discussed at the High Level Group on Education and Training and in the relevant meetings of Directors General to ensure that they are given a clear overview of regular joint activities of the new streamlined ET 2020 (independent evaluation recommendation 14).

3.1.3. Improving the transparency of ET 2020 governance

The need for greater transparency and clarity in ET 2020 governance was highlighted by the National Reports, the consultation of senior officials and the independent evaluation. This need for transparency also concerned the relationship between the various ET 2020 actors (see the ET 2020 governance chart below).

In line with recommendation 15 of the independent evaluation, the Commission could prepare a **Guide** which describes the different elements of the ET 2020 framework, the roles and responsibilities of different bodies and their inter-relationships. The Commission is also in the process of enhancing the visibility of ET 2020 through the Europa (DG EAC) website.

Schematic overview of ET 2020 cooperation



3.2. The ET 2020 tool box

ET 2020 is the main instrument to develop "exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education [and training] systems of the Member States" (TFEU, art. 165 and 166). Since 2012, and following the reorganisation of the ET 2020 Working Groups, the ET 2020 toolbox has gained in efficiency. As indicated in the draft Joint Report, it is proposed to launch a new generation of ET 2020 Working Groups. Furthermore, new ideas of peer learning activities and peer reviews have emerged that were tested as pilot events.

3.2.1. A third generation of ET 2020 Working Groups

As part of the ET 2020 Open Method of Coordination the Commission and Member States cooperate in the form of Working Groups. Their primary focus is, for each of the sectors and policy areas, to benefit the Member States in their work of furthering policy development through mutual learning and the identification of good practices. Working Groups are open to all Member States, Candidate and EFTA Countries, as well as invited EU institutional partners (such as Cedefop and ETF), European social partners and some international organisations.

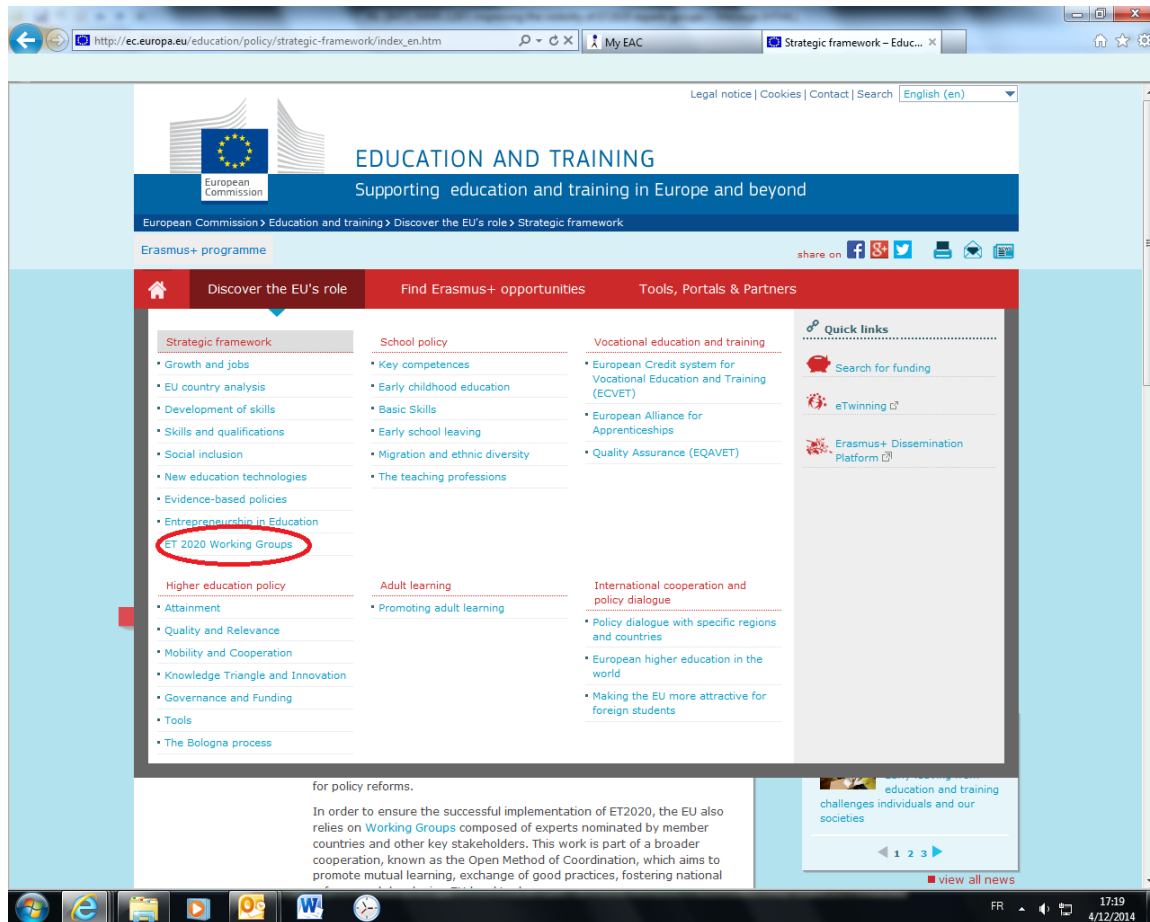
In February 2013, the Education Council asked the Member States and the Commission to establish "clear mandates and standard operating procedures (i.e. terms of reference, deliverables, membership requirements and sunset clauses) for all TWGs". As a follow-up, new ET 2020 Working Groups were put in place (early 2014) and a number of changes were made, concerning the number of groups (a reduction from eleven to six), the adoption of standard operating procedures (with mandates) and the definition of precise outputs directly linked to the objectives of ET 2020 and contributing to Europe 2020, to be delivered by October 2015. The six new Working Groups concentrated on the following subjects:

- (1) Schools, including Early School Leaving and the Teaching Profession;
- (2) Modernisation of Higher Education;
- (3) Vocational Education and Training, with an initial focus on apprenticeships and work-based learning, as key elements of overall VET systems;
- (4) Adult Learning, with a focus on strategies to reduce the number of low-skilled adults;
- (5) Transversal Skills, including ICT, Entrepreneurial Skills and Languages;
- (6) Digital and Online Learning.

A limited number of horizontal policy issues were mainstreamed in the different Working Groups, notably: sustainable and efficient funding for education and training, social and equity aspects of education and training, and issues around teaching and training of a general nature.

The reorganisation of the Groups aimed at more efficient working methods, relying also on the use of ICT tools. Thus, in 2014, Working Groups held 18 meetings, but also 9 webinars and developed a relatively active social network (Yammer) with more than 400 members, more than 4500 messages posted and 650 files uploaded.

In the National Reports, almost half of the countries¹⁸¹ explicitly stated that participation in Working Groups was useful or was expected to be useful following their recent reorganisation. Outputs from the Working Groups will be available on EAC website (see below).



As proposed in the Joint Report, a new generation of ET 2020 Working Groups will contribute to the implementation of the Priority Areas and Concrete Issues as of 2016. The mandate for the new Groups will be proposed by the Commission, in close consultation with the Member States, and building on the positive experience with the Working Groups created in 2014.

3.2.2. ET 2020 Peer Reviews

Since the last Joint Report, four peer reviews have been held in the ET 2020 context in order to follow up on shared policy challenges emerging from the European Semester. Following a pilot peer review in Brussels in September 2012, three peer reviews have been linked with the meetings of Directors General (DGs) from national ministries; the first one on VET in November 2013 under the Lithuanian Presidency, the second one on schools policy in March 2014 under the Greek Presidency and the third one on

¹⁸¹ AT, CY, DE, ES, FI, HU, IE, LV, NL, RO, SE, SI.

employability and higher education in March 2015 under the Latvian Presidency. In addition to Directors General and Commission services, the peer reviews were attended also by representatives of international organisations and key stakeholders.

External evaluators issued a recommendation that the peer reviews should be established as an intrinsic part of the relationship between ET 2020 and the European Semester. The evaluation suggested that one peer review could be organised under each Council Presidency.

The feedback on the peer reviews mentioned above was generally positive, but a number of improvements is wished for. They are valued for bringing together people with relevant expertise in an open and productive format and offering them a possibility to apply EU policy to particular national contexts. However, a certain number of issues could be addressed by both the Commission and the Member States in order to make the reviews more useful and relevant for EU level and national policy development. Firstly, to encourage more engagement by Member States and a better quality of discussions, the working methods of the peer review could be improved, in particular by increasing the time dedicated to the analysis of each country experience, clustering countries by their similarities and issuing quality guidelines. Secondly, to increase the impact of peer reviews, to allow a better peer learning experience and ensure ownership in the Member States, opportunities for continuity of the review process could be encouraged (e.g. via "twinning" arrangements or an e-platform). Lastly, in order to increase the focus on supporting Member States' national policy development, a follow up of specific policy challenges could be made possible via the Working Groups or the newly developed peer counselling tool.

3.2.3. Improved ET 2020 peer learning activities, including peer counselling

Since 2014, and based on their explicit mandate, the new ET 2020 Working Groups, have held twelve "**country focussed workshops (CFW)**"¹⁸². These "workshops" typically take place in a country volunteering to host the event and with a good practice to demonstrate, they focus on one specific policy issue and gather Member States for which the issue at stake is a national challenge or where they want to reach excellence (with a maximum of twelve Member States). They serve to analyse, compare and contrast different policy options or approaches, to develop new knowledge about the policy area, to exchange policy experience and evidence, to integrate research into policy making and to offer practical guidance to participating countries, thus focusing on excellence as much as on the challenges of education and training systems.

¹⁸² **WG Vocational Education & Training:** 1. Support for companies, in particular SME's, offering company placements; 2. Positive image of apprenticeships and improved career guidance; **WG Adult Learning:** 3. Basic skills; 4. Policy coherence; **WG School Policy:** 5. Governance of Initial Teacher Education; 6. Collaborative Learning Environments (Teacher Education); 7. School Governance and Collaborative Practices (Early School Leaving); 8. Parental involvement (Early School Leaving); 9. Initial Teacher Education in the continuum of teacher education; 10. Whole School Approaches to Early School Leaving; **WG Modernisation Higher Education:** 11. Changing the higher education landscape: specialisation, consolidation and territorial development; 12. Performance-agreements and funding in higher education.

In their National Reports, several countries identified peer learning as the most important and useful area of ET 2020 in support of national reform and development¹⁸³. Most stakeholders, in particular at the 2014 Education, Training and Youth Forum, as well as respondents to the independent evaluation equally identified this as an area with high potential and added value at EU level.

Peer learning is not only one of the main instruments for European policy-development in education but also an instrument which produces and circulates knowledge and ideas. Compared to other knowledge producers in education (mainly OECD, UNESCO and research centers), the EU uses peer learning and sharing of good practices in the field of education and training as a source of knowledge and is mainly concerned with knowledge transfer to policy makers at all levels.

During the stocktaking, it was particularly emphasised that the visibility of peer learning at EU level should be boosted and the effectiveness of this instrument – which includes Working Groups but also goes beyond – should be increased. As proposed in the draft Joint Report, **the ET 2020 indicative rolling Work Plan could be a means to provide an overview of peer learning activities.**

The need to offer Member States tailor-made support for the implementation of their national policy agenda was recognised already in the ET 2020 Joint Report of February 2012 where it was part of a larger package of measures to align the activities under ET 2020 with the European strategy for growth and jobs ‘Europe 2020’. The text was the following: *“The peer-learning instrument could be used better and linked more closely to Europe 2020... Member States that wish to do so could invite peers to an in-depth discussion of specific issues in their country. The Commission would use relevant financial instruments to support this activity, including by supporting the participation of internationally renowned experts.”*

There is a good case for introducing **peer counselling** as a new instrument in the cooperation of EU Member States in education and training. Its aim is to support policy development and design as well as policy implementation and evaluation at national level, by providing high quality, country-specific and tailored policy advice by peers and advisors from other national administrations as well as, optionally, from independent experts. As a demand-driven instrument, peer counselling needs to remain flexible and linked to a specific policy challenge, ongoing reform or strategy in the country.

3.2.4. Better dissemination, knowledge and transfer exchange

According to the evaluation, ET 2020 processes and outputs tend to be rated highly by participants. In contrast, the ability of outputs to influence people and feed into policy reduces quickly beyond the individuals themselves who take part in ET 2020. In the National Reports, several Member States signalled that they are putting in place ideas to ensure a better feedback between participants in ET 2020 activities and national policy-makers, both by bringing together national representatives in the ET 2020 Working Groups and in the ET 2020 senior officials groups with the political level, and by organising **dedicated meetings at political/senior official level** on specific aspects of

¹⁸³ AT, CZ, DE, EE, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, PL, RO, SE, SK, UK.

education modernisation whereby the expertise of the representatives in the ET 2020 Working Groups is specifically valorised.

The stocktaking has also brought to the light the potential disconnect between (a) European cooperation on education and training which links to and reaches the Member States, and (b) sub-national regional and local levels of governance which are not always directly in the loop on developments in European cooperation on education and training, but whose activities are often crucial in setting actual learning frameworks. In this context, Member States are encouraged to extend valorisation and dissemination efforts of what was learned at European level at the **appropriate sub-national regional and local levels**. More flexibility could also be given to the ET 2020 toolbox to reflect needs of mutual learning, for example by organising peer learning activities outside the scope of Working Groups, thematic events and other forms of policy learning exchanges, including by using international evidence.

Cooperation in education is useful only if it manages to produce outputs that are used by Member States. It is proposed to enhance dissemination and valorisation of good practices and lessons learned – at both Member State and EU level – to improve ET 2020 knowledge transfer and exchange, with the aim of providing insights into what works in education.

3.2.5. Cooperation with the stakeholders

To achieve an effective impact through the working methods that can be deployed under ET 2020 requires a close cooperation with civil society organisations active in the area of education and training and with the social partners who have a first-hand knowledge and expertise of evolutions in the field and whose membership basis is an indispensable multiplier for the mutual learning and good practices emerging through ET 2020 cooperation.

Regarding cooperation with civil society and other stakeholders active in education and training, and in follow-up of the ET 2020 Joint Report of 2012, the Commission has organised an annual exchange of views between the stakeholders in the field of education, training and youth in the form of the **Education, Training and Youth Forum**. The Forum has been a constructive platform for exchange and discussion on the priorities for European cooperation.

In October 2013, the Commission strengthened its informal cooperation with **European social partners** in the field of education and training. This cooperation supplements the cross-sectoral and sector-specific European social dialogue as well as the participation of social partner representatives in the ET 2020 Working Groups, the Advisory Group for the European Qualifications Framework, the meeting of Directors General for Vocational Education and Training, and the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training.

Because of the intense links between education and training, skills development, employability, equity and social cohesion, and the activities and expertise of the social partners and relevant civil society organisations, **Member States are encouraged to consult these partners** at national level, whenever they deem it relevant, on ET 2020 activities and inputs. Member States are encouraged to engage in a partnership with the relevant social partners and civil society organisations, notably to best reach out to the learners, educators, and learning providers, also at sub-national regional and local levels.

3.3. Strengthening the evidence base of ET 2020

ET 2020 is accompanied by a set of seven European benchmarks to foster policy developments and monitor outcomes¹⁸⁴. Regular monitoring of the benchmarks supports evidence-based policy-making and facilitates Member States' mutual learning. The Education and Training Monitor provides data and analysis to support policy debates.

Recent years have seen significant progress in availability of quality data on education and training at EU/international level. These improvements are actively exploited by the Commission. However, the interaction between users and providers of data over the last years within the ET 2020 process has also shown that a continuous effort is needed to assess the reporting situation. This is important in relation to a justified approach for EU data demands. The efforts to streamline, optimise and rationalise reporting should therefore continue.

3.3.1. European benchmarks to support evidence-based policy-making

Benchmarks capture trends over time towards a set target and the use of appropriate breakdowns leads to better knowledge of specific features of educational inputs and outcomes.

Data evidence, analysis and progress monitoring in support of the ET 2020 framework is provided by Eurostat (official statistics), the Eurydice network of national units (information on systems and reform processes), CEDEFOP (on VET) and by OECD, as well as by the Commission (Digital Agenda Scoreboard and the Digital Economy and Society Index) and other international organisations, implementing education assessment surveys.

The OECD is a major knowledge provider in the field of education, with its Education and Skills Directorate leading on a number of international surveys, but also thematic studies and country reports. In order to maximise the strategic use of existing cooperation with OECD, the Commission can play a role in facilitating a dialogue with and among Member States. To this purpose, the Commission organises regular meetings with representatives of the Member States in order to exchange opinions on strategic cooperation with OECD; involvement in surveys and other studies; and use of Erasmus+ funding to support EU's participation in OECD projects.

Five years into ET 2020, some benchmarks are forecasted to be achieved at EU level but retain a powerful potential; some will evolve towards a better measurement basis; while work is needed to develop further indicators that capture additional and emerging priorities under ET 2020¹⁸⁵.

Based on current trends, the indicators on **Early School Leaving** and **Tertiary Attainment**, adopted as the education Headline Target under Europe 2020, can be considered within reach by the EU as a whole: early school leaving is in decline (from

¹⁸⁴ Five European Benchmark adopted in 2009 and two Benchmarks adopted in 2011 (Cross-national learning mobility) and 2012 (Education and training for employability).

¹⁸⁵ An overview of progress towards the ET 2020 Benchmarks and framework for indicators is given in the 2014 Monitor.

13,9% in 2010 to 11,1% in 2014) and higher education attainment rates continue to improve (from 33,6% in 2010 to 37,9 in 2014) and are above the Europe 2020 headline target in 16 Member States.

However, striking discrepancies both between and within Member States remain and should be regularly monitored: there are still more than 5 million early school leavers across Europe, facing an unemployment rate of 41% and in countries hit hardest by the crisis, the employability of graduates remains a particularly severe problem.

Early Childhood Education is an area where the existing ET 2020 benchmark has opened up for adopting a wider discourse on the quality dimension in ECEC. To this end, there is ongoing work to develop a framework of ECEC indicators that considers accessibility and affordability of ECEC; the qualification and professional development of staff; the ECEC curriculum; monitoring and evaluation; plus governance and funding of ECEC.

Progress towards the objectives of the benchmark on **low achievements of 15-year olds** has been inconsistent in the last years and Europe is lacking behind, particularly in mathematics. Analyses of key breakdowns as gender, socio-economic and migrant background remain important for direct use to design better policy responses.

Regarding the **employability** benchmark, this target witnesses the close connection between education, employment and economic cycles and the political focus of the European Union over the period 2009-2020, and should be maintained.

The data and statistical methodology for the **IVET and higher education learning mobility benchmark** targets had to be improved substantially following its adoption in 2011¹⁸⁶. This development work has been carried out by Eurostat within the European Statistical System. Data availability is expected to improve substantially during 2015 and coming years allowing for reporting back to the Council at the end of 2015 as asked for in the 2011 Conclusions. This reporting explicitly calls for an assessment of the current formulation of the indicators.

Finally, the methodology for measuring the benchmark on **participation in adult learning** could be improved in the coming years by refining existing data sources as proposed in the context of the modernisation of European social statistics. This concerns mainly a longer reference period for the participation rate, timing of data as well as improved methodological guidance for data collection.

3.3.2. The Education and Training Monitor

The Education and Training Monitor could be strengthened as the ET 2020's key instrument for monitoring and as a basis for evidence-based policy coordination and knowledge brokerage.

The Monitor is an annual publication that reports on the evolution of education and training systems across Europe, bringing together the latest quantitative and qualitative

¹⁸⁶ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/126380.pdf.

data, recent technical reports, studies, policy documents and other developments¹⁸⁷. Since 2012, it has set itself firmly as a flagship publication on trends in education and training at EU level, with positive feedback from a variety of stakeholders.

The Education and Training Monitor provides crucial support to the implementation of ET 2020 by strengthening the evidence-base. Its release date could be brought forward so as to better fit with the European Semester cycle. Publication at the end of October could allow for its use as an analytical contribution to the discussion in the November Council. The key messages at the beginning of the Monitor could be strengthened to become a succinct and powerful executive summary, which distils concrete, evidence-based policy messages for Member States. This could be the starting point for a more systematic use of the Monitor as basis for Council debates and in the European Parliament.

3.3.3. Streamlining, optimising and rationalising reporting

On 24 February 2014, the Education Council adopted the "Conclusions on Efficient and Innovative Education and Training to Invest in Skills", in which it invited Member States and the Commission to *"Increase the added value and optimise the effectiveness of the "ET 2020" strategic framework and its underlying governance and working arrangements, notably by: ... optimising, reducing and simplifying education and training reporting structures so as to avoid duplication."*

In this context, the Commission has provided an overview of reporting obligations under the ET 2020 framework and discussed with the Member States the basic principles underpinning ET 2020 reporting. The five key principles – which are already put in practice – can be summarised as follows:

- 1) Reporting provides feedback on the implementation of a policy initiative, thus contributing to a quality implementation process.
- 2) Reporting is agreed with Member States and should have a legal or political basis. As often as possible, questionnaires are drafted in consultation with Member States.
- 3) The expected scale of Member States authorities' contribution to EU-level reporting is proportionate to its strategic importance.
- 4) There should be neither duplication nor overlap between reporting requests. In particular:
 - a) the NRPs can be used as basis for analysing reforms made in relation to the Europe 2020 targets;
 - b) Eurypedia/Refernet as sources of information on descriptions of national reforms; and
 - c) Bologna reports where relevant as sources of information on reforms in the area of higher education.

¹⁸⁷ Volume 1 of the Monitor provides an analysis from a cross-national and thematic point of view, whereas Volume 2 includes 28 country chapters providing analysis for each of the EU Member States.

- 5) Member States' contributions mainly focus on the following types of information:
- Critical self-assessment of progress made; and
 - Forward looking priorities and actions to be put in place.

3.3.4. The Standing Group of Indicators and Benchmarks and Indicator Expert Groups under ET 2020

In order to make use of appropriate expertise at national level and to develop indicators that are usable and meaningful for EU and MS policy makers, **Indicator Expert Groups** (IEGs) have been set up under ET 2020 (reporting to the Standing Group of Indicators and Benchmarks). The SGIB IEGs are active when needed following specific Terms of Reference as agreed by the SGIB and the Commission.

Regarding **education investment**, the 2012 Commission's Communication "Rethinking Education"¹⁸⁸ proposed to monitor actions taken by Member States to prioritise growth-enhancing expenditure and developing an evidence-based framework to analyse the efficiency of public spending for quality education and training in different education and training sectors. For this purpose, an Indicator Expert Group on Education Investments, was set up, which met four times in 2014. The Group identified a limited set of quantitative information allowing an appropriate monitoring of education spending at EU level, advised on possible areas of improvement or development of data sources, and provided guidance on the development and improvement of quantitative and system level information on education investment. Taking into consideration the importance of the issue in the framework of the European Semester, an appropriate follow-up of the work of the Group could be reflected on. Emphasis could be on improving and streamlining existing data sources (including timeliness of data) as well as exploring possibilities for further work on effectiveness and efficiency.

Following preparatory work undertaken by an Expert Group on indicators on **ICT in education**, and in line with the Commission's Communication 'Opening up Education'¹⁸⁹, there is ongoing work to develop indicators on how ICT is embedded in teaching at different levels of the education system and the use of open educational resources (OER) as well as Massive Open Online Courses. The Commission's follow up focused so far on data development, e.g. improvements to the "Community survey on the usage of ICT in households and by individuals", potential new data collections on digital learning in higher education institutions, and the analysis of results from the first round of International Computer and Information Literacy Study. 2015 and beyond could see further work with experts from Member States and through co-operation with IEA and OECD to propose a concise set of main and sub-indicators in this area.

A need for further data and indicator developments for **entrepreneurship education** and the competence of entrepreneurship has been identified as a key area by the ET 2020 Thematic Working Group in Entrepreneurship Education. Between 2012 and 2014, an Indicator Expert Group concluded on a set of recommendations for a limited set of main

¹⁸⁸ COM/2012/0669 final.

¹⁸⁹ COM/2013/0654 final.

and sub-indicators and produced suggestions for data developments, mainly based on existing data sources. Through the Eurydice network a study is ongoing to provide new qualitative data on entrepreneurship education in schools and higher education.

In addition, given the policy priority areas of ET 2020, improvements of existing data sources or new data are relevant in eight areas. This gap analysis is based on progress in evidence monitoring under ET 2020. These areas are:

- **Inequalities in education and furthering social cohesion and active citizenship.** The terrorist attacks of early 2015 in Paris and Copenhagen demonstrated the need for monitoring equity and inclusiveness in education including the effects of socio-economic and disability status. A better coverage of equity and inclusiveness data aspects could be developed with Eurostat, also by strengthening the knowledge base on education issues related to migration and ethnic minorities (including Roma participation in education).

- **Professional development of teachers, trainers and school leaders.** To improve data on the teachers' workforce, the Commission could work with Member States (including through a SGIB Indicator Expert Group on Teachers) and OECD to improve the country coverage in TALIS 2018 and in a longer perspective (TALIS 2023) assure further data developments (new variables, coverage of upper secondary).

- **Key competences.** Further work could be considered to explore how data from international and national assessments can shed further light on the development of basic competences from lower secondary to upper secondary education (e.g. beyond PISA analysis).

- **High quality early childhood education and care.** Work in the area of data and indicators on access to ECEC may become relevant based on on-going examination of the feasibility of collecting such information through the Eurydice network. Potential work with OECD on an ECEC staff survey would provide key data for policy discussions on the profile of the ECEC workforce and its role for the quality of ECEC provision. Participation of the Commission in activities to measure ECEC learning outcomes could become relevant in the forthcoming period.

- **Fostering learning mobility.** In addition to the ongoing data developments on graduate learning mobility related to the learning mobility benchmark, Eurydice will provide an updated Mobility Scoreboard in 2016.

- **European comparability and national data collections on multilingualism.** Ongoing work on development of a consistent system for monitoring progress in multilingualism follows from the 2014 Council Conclusions on Multilingualism and the development of language competences¹⁹⁰. The current approach to monitoring progress is based on realising an inventory of existing systems of language testing and analysing their comparability in EU Member States and a refinement of the learning input indicator monitored in the framework of official Eurostat statistics. On the learning input side, data on the number of languages taught at secondary level would yield more comparable results if refined.

- **European coverage of existing data sources in adult education.** The Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) brought in 2013 ground-breaking evidence for 17 Member States about

¹⁹⁰ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/142692.pdf.

the skills of the working age population, the use made of these and their relation to educational attainment. Though some more Member States have implemented the survey since then, the challenge is to complete the geographic coverage of the EU. Moreover, there is currently an opportunity for countries for a second data collection five years after the first one in order to measure the evolution over time.

Furthermore, there are on-going efforts to define an education and training survey to be carried out on the adult population to explore the use of education throughout life. This survey could replace the current Adult Education survey. The development takes place in co-operation with Eurostat.

- **VET indicators.** Data availability is the main challenge of monitoring VET, for instance, on vocational educational attainment, ESL from VET and apprenticeships. The new ISCED 2011 classification discriminates between general and vocational strands of educational attainment, but will in 2015 allow to assess VET outcomes more thoroughly. It also offers better definitions of several related relevant indicators. The development of a core indicator on VET with support from the Member States could be useful to improve VET monitoring.

3.4. Funding instruments in support of ET 2020

3.4.1. The Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013)

The Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) with a relatively small budget (representing around 1% of the public money spent on education in Europe), succeeded to act as a catalyst for structural change through support to policy development, cooperation and mobility across Europe. This is partly due to its efficient implementation system based on a triangle between the Member States, the European Commission and the National Agencies.

In the past seven years, some 1 600 000 higher education students have studied or carried out traineeships abroad, while about 500 000 students and apprentices have carried out mobility experience in the VET field. At the same time, more than 520 000 school teachers, professors, lecturers, trainers and staff of educational institutions have delivered or received teaching and training abroad. In addition, 50 000 participations have been registered in various partnership projects (bilateral and multilateral school partnerships, regional partnerships, learning partnerships and Leonardo partnerships).

The Erasmus Impact Study has revealed significant positive impact in terms of employability of young people who have benefited from mobility abroad. Both former Erasmus students and employers report that the Erasmus experience is an advantage in the job market. Young people who study or train abroad are half as likely to face long-term unemployment compared with those who stay at home. They are also given greater professional responsibility and their job environment is more international.

Moreover one in three Erasmus trainees are offered a position in their host company abroad after their traineeship and one out of 10 start their own business.

Beyond its contribution to transnational mobility, the LLP programme also improved policy-making by providing quality tools, analysis and research as well as fora for exchanging best practices under ET 2020.

Despite the overall success of the programme, the interim evaluation, as well as studies and stakeholder consultations identified a number of challenges, which needed to be addressed such as:

- insufficient level and access to funding; limited participation of disadvantaged groups (e.g. those with special education needs); quality of the mobility experience (e.g. for in-company training); limited mobility in VET; and, lack of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning gained during a mobility exchange;
- limited direct influence of LLP actions on the modernisation of education and training system;.
- limited evidence on which actions/elements of the programme have been most effective and having created a high European added-value (e.g. due to lack of critical mass);
- fragmentation and complexity of the rules leading to excessive administrative workload.

3.4.2. The new Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020)

The Erasmus+ programme brought together seven previous sub-programmes under a single programme with a total budget of EUR 14.7 billion over the period 2014-2020, representing a 40% increase compared to previous funding levels.

The programme is aimed at boosting skills, employability and the modernisation of education, training and youth systems and supports actions, cooperation projects and tools linked to policy priorities of ET 2020. By doing so, it also contributes to the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy, in particular the country-specific recommendations in the field of education and training. Investment from Erasmus+ will benefit individuals, institutions and society as a whole, thus contributing to jobs, growth and competitiveness and enhancing prosperity and social inclusion.

The new streamlined programme architecture of Erasmus+ draws on the lessons learnt from its predecessor and aims to address emerging challenges and opportunities, such as high youth unemployment, the growing demand for highly skilled workers, the internationalisation of education and the development of new technologies.

The new streamlined Erasmus+ programme is organised around three key actions, notably learning mobility of individuals (KA1); cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices (KA2) and support for policy reform (KA3). It pursues a substantially new approach to have greater impact and visibility, which can be characterised by:

- closer links between programme and policy objectives;
- more synergies and interaction between formal, informal and non-formal learning;
- more cross-sectoral partnerships with the world of work;
- a streamlined, simpler architecture; and
- a stronger focus on the European added-value.

The clear link with policy objectives and the simplified architecture will ensure that the programme has not only a direct impact on individuals and institutions, but will also trigger structural reforms thus contributing to the modernisation of education and training systems.

The increased funding volume will create opportunities for even more individuals for transnational mobility. Over the next 7 years, more than 4 million people will receive support to study, train, work or volunteer abroad, including 2 million higher education students (of whom 450 000 will be on traineeships), 800 000 school teachers, lecturers, educators, trainers, education staff and youth workers, 650 000 vocational training students and apprentices and more than 500 000 young people participating in youth exchanges or volunteering abroad. Students planning a full Master's degree abroad, for which national grants or loans are seldom available, will benefit from a new loan guarantee scheme run by the European Investment Fund. These transnational mobility actions will help Member States making progress towards the ET 2020 mobility benchmark of 20%.

3.4.3. Cohesion Policy to support education and training

Education and training policies have benefitted from substantial support from the Structural Funds in the 2007–13 programming period, with approximately 10% of the total Cohesion Policy envelope amounting to EUR 37 billion directly spent on investment in human capital (ESF: EUR 28 billion, ERDF: EUR 9 billion)¹⁹¹. The European Social Fund has supported approximately 68 million individuals, including actions aimed at supporting labour market participation, life-long learning and social inclusion. About one third of all ESF participants were young people. An estimated 8.5 million individuals gained a qualification through ESF support, while 5 million young people, 5.5 million individuals with low skills, and 576 000 older people participated in adult learning.

The ESF did not only contribute to the up-skilling of the workforce, but also supported the implementation of structural reforms of education and training systems in most Member States. Over the past 7 years more than EUR 8 billion have been allocated to the design, introduction and implementation of reforms in education and training systems, with some Member States having allocated more than 25 % of their ESF budget to this priority (e.g. CZ, HU). These measures covered all education levels and sectors, including pre-school education (e.g. CZ); tertiary education (CZ, HU, LT, MT and PL); improving teacher education (CZ, HU); and vocational training (DK). In addition, the European Regional Development Fund has invested in education infrastructure in 21 Member States, with significant amounts in some of the Convergence regions (PT: 2.2 bn, PL: 1.2 bn, SK: 706 mio, ES: 674 mio, EL: 637 mio, HU: 598 mio).

¹⁹¹ The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) also promotes training activities and knowledge transfer actions.

European Structural and Investment Funds to support education and training between 2014-20

The European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds will continue to invest in education and training policies over the next 7 years with a comparable magnitude, amounting to approximately EUR 32.5 billion¹⁹², (ESF: EUR 26.3 billion, ERDF: EUR 6.2 billion). If these important amounts are mobilised in a strategically targeted and effective way, Cohesion Policy, particularly in the less developed regions, can make a significant contribution to the modernisation of education and training systems in line with the priorities of ET 2020.

In the 2014-2020 cycle, investments under the ESI funds have been aligned more closely to the Europe 2020 strategy and the challenges identified under the European Semester in the form of Country Specific Recommendations. Moreover to ensure greater impact, Member States have been requested to concentrate a certain share of their ESF allocation¹⁹³ (at Operational Programme level) on up to five investment priorities.¹⁹⁴ ESI funds will be directed at all educational sectors from early childhood to higher education under five investment priorities (IP), mirroring largely the composition of the ET 2020 Working Groups.¹⁹⁵ The outcomes of the programming exercise show that all education related investment priorities have been selected by a great number of Member States at national or regional level, depending on the areas where individual countries face particular challenges:

- 1) **Reducing early school leaving** and promoting access to good quality early childhood and school education (ESF) – selected by **19 Member States**¹⁹⁶
- 2) Improving quality, efficiency and access to **tertiary education** (ESF) – selected by **18 Member States**¹⁹⁷;
- 3) Enhancing access to **life-long learning** and up-skilling of the workforce (ESF) – selected by **26 Member States**¹⁹⁸;
- 4) **Strengthening VET and apprenticeships** and increasing the labour market relevance of education and training systems (ESF) – selected by **22 Member States**¹⁹⁹;
- 5) Investment in education and training **infrastructure** (ERDF) - selected by **19 MS**.

In addition, education and training measures are also programmed under other priorities, for instance apprenticeships and second chance education programmes under the IP on sustainable integration of young people in the labour market, or education measures for Roma under IP on promoting the socio-economic integration of marginalised communities.

¹⁹² Under thematic objective 10: "Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and life-long learning".

¹⁹³ This share is defined according to the category in which the region falls: 60% in less developed regions, 70% in transition regions, 80% in more developed regions.

¹⁹⁴ See Article 4 of Regulation 1304/2013 on the European Social Fund.

¹⁹⁵ See Article 3 of Regulation 1304/2013 on the European Social Fund.

¹⁹⁶ AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FR, HU, IT, LT, LV, MT, PL, PT, RO, SK, UK.

¹⁹⁷ BG, CZ, EE, EL, ES, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, MT, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK.

¹⁹⁸ All Member States, with the exception of CZ and NL.

¹⁹⁹ BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, FR, HR, HU, IT, LV, MT, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK.

ET 2020 priorities have served as a key reference point for the negotiations on the content of **investment priorities of the future Operational Programmes**, thus feeding directly into the programming exercise.

Since the impact of measures implemented under the above investment priorities will ultimately depend on the way ESF funding is deployed, it is important to strengthen further the links between ESF and ET 2020. The regulatory framework for Cohesion Policy provides an excellent basis for this, notably, through the establishment of **ex-ante conditionalities**, which requires Member States to put in place a strategic policy framework, taking into account the policy objectives and orientations agreed at EU level.

Education and training policies will be covered directly by four ex-ante conditionalities, which correspond to the four investment priorities established by the ESF Regulation (1. early-school leaving, 2. higher education, 3. lifelong learning and 4. vocational education and training)²⁰⁰.

The assessment of ex-ante conditionalities has been carried out jointly by the Commission and the Member States during the negotiations on the Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes. At the time of adoption of the Operational Programmes, 20 Member States have not fulfilled one or more ex-ante conditionalities in the field of education and training. These countries had to submit an action plan, which set out the necessary measures to be taken and the corresponding timeframe (final deadline is end 2016).

ET 2020 priorities have been well reflected both in the regulatory framework of Cohesion Policy, but also in the programming exercise. Nevertheless, it is important to ensure consistency also throughout the implementation of Operational Programmes. This could inter alia be done through **cooperation between the ET 2020 Working Groups and the ESF Managing Authorities**. For example, the outcomes of the ET 2020 Working Groups could be made available to Managing Authorities, thus bringing policy evidence into the programme implementation reinforcing cooperation at EU level (e.g. presentations to ESF Technical Working Group (TWG); meetings/seminars organised jointly by ET 2020 Working Groups and ESF TWG etc).

Moreover, the impact of EU funding programmes on the modernisation agenda of education and training could be boosted by better exploiting potential **synergies between Erasmus+ and the European Social Fund**. For instance, innovative policy approaches and tools which have been developed and proved successful under the Erasmus+ programme (e.g. through transnational cooperation projects or policy experimentations), could be scaled up with the support of ESF.

This requires a greater awareness of possible linkages and a reinforced cooperation among the stakeholders involved in the implementation of the programmes. To facilitate the process, the Commission has developed guidance tools both for policy makers and beneficiaries on synergies between the ESI funds and other EU funding instruments, including Erasmus+.

²⁰⁰ The applicability of ex-ante conditionalities depend on the choice of investment priorities by Member States.

National Agencies and ESF Managing Authorities could be encouraged to engage in a structured cooperation to share information and facilitate coordination of the timing and content of certain calls, as appropriate.

3.4.4. The Investment Plan for Europe

In November 2014, the Commission presented an Investment Plan for Europe, which aims at mobilising at least € 315 billion in 2015-2017. The Plan was endorsed by the European Council in December. The Plan has three building blocks: The first is the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI) providing guarantees based on the EU's and EIB's budgets to private investors participating in strategic projects. The EFSI regulation was adopted on 25 June.²⁰¹; The second block is the increase of the information available to investors, through an Investment Project Portal where promoters can advertise their projects to potential investors; Finally, the Plan aims at improving the business environment and reducing the administrative and tax burdens for the private sector.

Education and training feature prominently among the strategic policy objectives of the Investment Plan. To maximise financial leverage, the Plan will predominantly use loans or other lending instruments, which need to be reimbursed. Among the suitable types of intervention that can benefit from it are: long-term loans for building educational infrastructure; student loan schemes; public-private partnerships for the design, building and operation of facilities; projects that combine the provision of digital infrastructure and equipment with the development of learning support material, teaching methods and teachers' training. Suitable projects should be developed bottom-up, also using dedicated technical assistance facilities, and apply for funding at the EIB. Smaller projects, e.g. in individual schools, should be pooled with other similar ones, possibly bundled in "investment platforms". The financing can also be intermediated by national promotional banks (some of which have already announced their intention to commit billions of euros to co-finance investments under the Plan).

²⁰¹ <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/PE-34-2015-INIT/en/pdf>.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Synthesis of the National Contributions from the EEA and Candidate Countries

Among the EEA and Candidate Countries, national reports were received from Norway (EEA), Iceland and Turkey (Candidate Countries).

Turkey has undertaken significant regulatory reforms underpinning the adoption of a **lifelong learning strategy**. Compulsory education has been extended to twelve years, and a draft law is being prepared which identifies the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders and providers in the education system. In Norway, the Norwegian Qualifications Framework (NQF) for lifelong learning was adopted in December 2011. In Iceland, the Icelandic Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (ISQF) was referenced to the EQF in 2013.

A comprehensive framework for **validation of non-formal and informal learning** (VNIL) is in place in Norway. There is however no all-encompassing VNIL strategy at national level. One of the most important challenges in this area is the involvement of the private sector in validation strategies. Iceland is confident that the adoption of ISQF will facilitate VNIL to a certain extent, but still sees challenges, in particular as concerns the recognition of non-formal learning.

All three countries are introducing measures to raise quality in education aimed at improving education and training outcomes as documented by the **PISA and PIAAC surveys**. In Iceland, a White Paper on educational reforms was published in 2014, outlining two main objectives until 2018: 90% of all pupils should meet minimum reading criteria, and 60% of students should complete upper secondary education on time. Norway plans to follow up on the recent PIAAC survey results with a White Paper on quality, participation and efficiency of adult learning to be presented in autumn 2015. Turkey participates in the 2nd phase of PIAAC and will monitor results with a view to ongoing reform.

Following the extension of compulsory education in Turkey, the country is in the process of **reforming curricula**, introducing more elective subjects and emphasising mathematics.

All three countries have developed strategies and instruments for **inclusion**, focusing mainly on early childhood education and primary schools. All three countries note that it is a challenge to implement policies throughout all responsible local authorities and institutions.

Entrepreneurship skills are approached very differently by the three countries. In Norway, a set of different national initiatives promotes entrepreneurship at various levels of education. In Iceland, tax deductions for companies that support Master's and doctoral students are introduced to encourage greater cooperation between universities, research institutions and companies. Turkey participates in the iTEC (Innovative Technologies for Engaging Classrooms) project where education ministries, technology providers and research organisations cooperate to transform the way technology is used in teaching and learning.

In Norway, the Educational Reform of 2006 for Primary and Secondary Education introduced a set of five basic skills to be embedded in all subject areas, one of these

being **digital skills**. PCs (laptops, tablets) are being used extensively. Teachers' digital proficiency is an area of concern, though. Iceland is introducing a new information and communication policy for all levels from pre-school to upper secondary education. Turkey has focused on enhancing the digital skills of teachers and has trained a large share of the country's teachers.

In Norway, a government commission was appointed in 2013 to inquire into the possibilities and challenges related to **Massive Open Online Courses** (MOOCs). The final report was published June 2014²⁰². The Icelandic Ministry of Education has launched 'The Educational Resource Centre', an open educational platform for schools and educational organisations and a framework for grassroots activity in education. Open educational resources are under way at universities in Iceland, where a MOOCs programme is currently being developed, and open educational resources have been introduced in teacher education. In Turkey, the strategy towards opening up education is strongly linked to the strategy to raise the level of digital competences in the population. Turkey utilises the eTwinning and scientix platforms to allow teachers in primary and secondary education to download and upload digital teaching materials and communicate and work together with teachers in Europe.

Regarding **language teaching and learning**, Norway focuses on generic language skills by strengthening reading, writing and oral skills in new curricula for Mathematics, English, Norwegian, Social Studies and Natural Sciences. Iceland promotes language teaching and learning through 'The Language Square' (www.tungumalatorgid.is), an open education resource. Turkey considers communication skills in foreign languages as a main priority. The country has adopted the Common European Framework of Reference for Language programmes. Participation in eTwinning projects is a major supporting tool.

All three countries have implemented measures to reduce **drop out and ESL**. Norway and Iceland have both focused on the professional development of teachers as an important prerequisite for reducing ESL, while Turkey is implementing measures to raise the attention of teachers to the problem. In Norway measures to improve the quality of primary and secondary education have been put in place to reduce the probability of ESL later on.

Neither of the three countries participate in the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, nor have agreed to implement the educational dimension of the Youth Guarantee. Norway and Iceland both have long-standing traditions of involving social partners in **VET** policy making, based on negotiated agreements between authorities and the social partners. In Norway, future professional skills needs are primarily identified by the social partners and education authorities. In Iceland, committees composed of representatives from the labour market are appointed to ensure that work-based learning is in line with the needs of companies. Iceland still faces challenges concerning the quality of the company-based parts of dual VET programmes. In Turkey, steps to increase the attainment rate and the quality of vocational and technical education at secondary level have been successful in increasing the uptake in VET. Further, Turkey has passed regulation allowing for the establishment of private VET schools in connection with economic sectors.

²⁰² Available in Norwegian only.

In Iceland and Norway, ongoing initiatives directly or indirectly focus on increasing the quality of higher education (e.g. a White Paper on the institutional structure of Norwegian higher education with a focus on obtaining more efficient and robust HEIs). In Iceland, all HEIs have to be accredited by the Minister of Education, Science and Culture, and HEIs can only operate within their accredited fields of study. A Quality Board for Higher Education has established a Quality Enhancement Framework for Higher Education in Iceland and has carried out institutional reviews. Turkey has focused on access to HE and on internationalisation, investing in infrastructure and human resources. This has led to a significant increase in the number of students and universities, from 27 in 1982 to 93 in 2013. Turkey and Iceland report that they implemented the Bologna Process and participate in Erasmus+. Turkey is in the process of developing a Turkish Higher Education Qualifications Framework.

All three countries have instituted measures to improve the quality of the provision of **adult learning**. In Iceland, all education and training providers must be accredited. Both Norway and Iceland have launched initiatives to improve access to further education and to the labour market for adults lacking basic skills and/or qualifications. In Norway, the 'Basic competences in working life (BCWL)' programme provides the opportunity for adults to acquire the basic skills required in modern working life and society. Demand for funding has been continuously increasing. Competence Goals for Basic Skills for Adults were implemented in 2013. They establish national standards for reading and writing, mathematics, digital competence and oral communication, and can be used as an aid in adapting learning content to the needs of adults.

In Iceland, the social partners and the government announced their joint objective of reducing the proportion of people in the labour market without upper secondary education to a maximum of 10%. Focus is on educational and career counselling. In Iceland, policies further focus on methods for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Turkey reports that recent research has shown that adult learning as a concept is not sufficiently known and valued by the society, that expectations are low, that supply is not sufficient and that the qualifications gained through adult education are not sufficient for individuals to adapt new scientific and technological developments into daily activities. Therefore, a newly designed adult learning project will focus on awareness raising, provision of basic skills to adults and developing e-courses to increase participation rates.



Interim Evaluation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)

Final Report to the Directorate-General
for Education and Culture of
the European Commission

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Executive Summary

This Final Report presents the findings of the interim evaluation of ET 2020 – the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training – which was commissioned by DG EAC and undertaken by Ecorys.

The main aim of the ET 2020 framework, adopted through Council Conclusions of May 2009, is to support Member States in further developing their educational and training systems. ET 2020 is underpinned by the lifelong learning concept and covers learning in all contexts – whether formal, non-formal or informal – and at all levels: from early childhood education and schools through to higher education, vocational education and training and adult learning. Four strategic objectives guide the work under ET 2020:

- *Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality*
- *Improving the Quality and Efficiency of Education and Training*
- *Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship*
- *Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.*

European cooperation under ET 2020 is implemented making use of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). Fully respecting Member States' responsibility for their educational systems and the voluntary nature of European cooperation in education and training, the OMC draws on: (i) the four strategic objectives for European cooperation; (ii) common reference tools and approaches; (iii) peer learning and the exchange of good practice; (iv) periodic monitoring and reporting; (v) evidence and data from all relevant European agencies and networks and international organisations; and (vi) the opportunities available under EU programmes, particularly in the field of lifelong learning.

The bodies involved in ET 2020 are many and varied, encompassing both formal governance structures at political level through to informal bodies with no legal basis and time limited activities. There are: formal governance structures where political decisions are made on the ET 2020 objectives; the important role of the European Commission in working with these political structures and in steering the entire OMC process; and, the informal groups which make up the bulk of the ET 2020 processes.

Since the overarching strategy Europe 2020 was launched in 2010, the relationship between ET 2020 and Europe 2020 has become increasingly important. In the ET 2020 Joint Report of 2012¹, Council and Commission identified a stronger link between the ET 2020 OMC peer-learning activities and Europe 2020. ET 2020 activities have since become partly focused on assisting (clusters of) Member States in dealing with education and training issues identified in the European Semester.

ET 2020 has a number of direct outputs both at EU and Member State level. Types of output at EU level are for example the inclusion of specific calls for action to Member States in Council Conclusions, based on the work done by the Working Groups or research and projects commissioned by actors under ET 2020. This leads to outputs and effects at Member States, notably policy reforms to improve education and training systems. This ultimately leads to longer-term results, through the modernisation of systems, improving employability, and achieving the Europe 2020 headline targets.

1.1 Aims of the Interim Evaluation

The interim evaluation supports the wider stocktaking exercise of ET 2020 by reviewing and improving its relevance, coherence, effectiveness and efficiency in order to both optimise and prioritise the achievements of concrete and Europe 2020 relevant deliverables for the next work cycle. The interim evaluation also supports the development of governance process, working methods and instruments attached to ET 2020. The evaluation responds to the following key evaluation questions:

Evaluation Question (EQ)	Sub-questions
EQ 1 RELEVANCE AND COHERENCE OF ET 2020 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND EVOLVING PRIORITY AREAS IN LIGHT OF Europe 2020	To what extent are ET 2020 strategic objectives and priority areas (2009-2011 and 2012-2014) relevant and coherent with the needs of : (a) Europe 2020 (incl. the content of the CSRs); (b) The Youth Employment Package (incl. the Youth Guarantee); and (c) The European sectorial policy agendas for schools, VET, adult learning, higher education, and relevant transversal questions (entrepreneurship, ICT and multilingualism)
EQ 2 OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF ET 2020	To what extent have the objectives of ET 2020 been achieved at (a) European and (b) national level, thus fostering the modernisation of the education and training systems of the Member States? How much do the main achievements (i.e. concrete outputs, initial results, longer-term impacts) correspond to the ET 2020 objectives?
EQ 3 EVALUATION OF THE ET 2020 GOVERNANCE METHODS AND POLICY INSTRUMENTS WITH A VIEW TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF Europe 2020 PRIORITIES – AT BOTH THE EU AND MEMBER STATE LEVEL	To what extent have ET 2020's governance methods and policy instruments been relevant to, effective and efficient in the implementation of the Europe 2020 priorities (including the implementation of the CSRs)? What is the overall added value resulting from ET 2020 policy cooperation and from the instruments/measures?
EQ 4 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ET 2020, THE LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMME/ERASMUS+, THE ESIF AND OTHER FUNDING PROGRAMMES	To what extent are the Lifelong Learning Programme and Erasmus+, the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and other EU's funding programmes (such as the 7th Framework Programme/Horizon 2020) relevant and coherent, effective and efficient sources of financing for the Member States that are implementing ET 2020 reforms in line with the Europe 2020 agenda?

1.2 The Evaluation Methodology

The methodology undertaken for the interim evaluation involved desk research, stakeholder consultations and interviews, an online e-survey, and country-level research and consultations. A literature review was undertaken which was linked to the various ET 2020 policies, actors, and processes (particularly the OMC and the groups that participate in it). The interviews were mainly on a face-to-face basis with a wide variety of stakeholders working at the EU level who are directly or indirectly linked to the EU education and training policy agenda. The e-survey was undertaken with various individuals linked to ET 2020 who were sent an online questionnaire linked to the main evaluation questions consisting of mainly closed questions. The stakeholders included those directly involved in ET 2020 including people from DG EAC, attendees of Working Groups, the Education Committee, the HLG on Education and Training and Directors General Grouping. Those indirectly involved in ET 2020 were also key ~~consultees~~ in the evaluation, including DGs that have a link to education and training (e.g. DG EMPL) as well as EU agencies (e.g. CEDEFOP), and 'actors' with a focus on this policy area (e.g. CIDREE, European Trade Union Confederation, European University Association, and European ~~Schoolnet~~). Country level research studies were undertaken to understand in more detail the views which education and training policy actors in Member States had around the main evaluation questions. In total 151 stakeholders were consulted on a face to face basis and a further 420 people responded to the e-survey.

1.3 Main Findings and Recommendations

Nine conclusions were developed from across the evaluation findings, with 23 recommendations.

Conclusion 1 – Objectives and priority areas: the objectives and priority areas of ET 2020 are broad and many, and provide a framework within which activities take place, rather than being a consistent and strong driving force for change across education and training systems. On the one hand, ET 2020 fulfils an important need in education and training at European level for an integrated strategic framework that covers all the objectives relevant to the field and encompasses diverse Member State needs. On the other hand, the breadth and generality of the objectives and priorities do not clearly meet the requirements of the 2009 Council Conclusions to make European cooperation 'concrete' and to produce 'clear and visible outcomes'. Lessons from early school leaving do, however, demonstrate how ET 2020 can be an effective driving force for change.

The need for close interaction between the different sectors of education and training to deliver lifelong learning, the key underpinning concept of ET 2020, remains as strong as ever. Knowledge of the lifelong learning objective among survey respondents was high, reflecting the importance of this topic in respect of European cooperation. Most survey respondents were in favor of modernising the objectives to achieve a closer connection between education and employment. ET 2020 is the only framework covering all sectors and although it is flexible it fails to specify why tackling issues at European level brings added value. Giving greater priority to lifelong learning and transversal issues would give ET 2020 added value to sectoral agendas. Early school leaving demonstrates how ET 2020 can drive policy change through clarity of focus, strong political imperative, well-organised open method of coordination activities and high quality outputs.

Recommendation (1) in light of the continuing need for lifelong learning, ET 2020 should remain the integrated overall framework steering European cooperation in education and training but with objectives that are streamlined and more tightly focused via sharpened priority areas. In order to generate new objectives, consideration should be given to: (a) urgent social and economic priorities such as already expressed through Europe 2020 and the European Semester; (b) the added value of European cooperation; and, (c) the added value ET 2020 could bring to sectoral agendas by providing a broader context that can help to ensure synergies and coherence between sectors by emphasising lifelong learning and transversal issues.

Conclusion 2 – The operational dimension: mechanisms have not been systematically put in place to enable ET 2020 to deliver the 'clear and visible outcomes' specified in the 2009 Council Conclusions. The use of benchmarks and indicators is not systematically applied, and those that have been devised do not effectively serve as a tool to monitor direct progress in the achievement of the strategic objectives. More detailed intended outcomes need to be specified for each objective, which it is feasible to both monitor and measure without an undue reporting burden. The operational nature of ET 2020 thus needs to be enhanced, building on recent developments including the new Working Groups and the Education and Training Monitor.

The benchmarks and indicators that have so far been developed for ET 2020 do not provide systematic coverage of all the objectives and priorities. Most survey respondents stated that the operational nature of ET 2020 should be enhanced, with strong support for the introduction of a concrete work programme. The ongoing development of the Education and Training Monitor shows the potential for gathering both quantitative data and qualitative evidence in relation to the types of measures being put in place in Member States to deliver on the ET 2020 objectives.

Recommendation (2): a more tightly focused set of objectives should be linked to concrete and clear intended outcomes which can be systematically monitored. **Recommendation (3):** a work programme should be added to ET 2020 which sets out a coherent package of activities to be undertaken at European level and with milestones and goals for Member States in order to be able to better measure progress. **Recommendation (4):** to accompany the work programme, and to ensure clarity and visibility of outcomes, a monitoring framework should be implemented, drawing on good practice from elsewhere, e.g. the monitoring of PROGRESS, the EU employment and social solidarity programme (2007-2013) and the framework currently being developed for the successor to PROGRESS. **Recommendation (5):** the new ET 2020 Working Groups should be part of this framework, with reporting linked to their common mandates in terms of deliverables and timelines. **Recommendation (6):** the Education and Training Monitor should continue to be developed as a mechanism to monitor the ways in which Member States are seeking to address the issues they face, further improving the analysis of policy measures.

Conclusion 3 ET 2020, Europe 2020 and the European Semester: the relationship between ET 2020 and Europe 2020 and the European Semester has evolved and become closer over time. Europe 2020 and the European Semester provide important political impetus to what happens within the context of ET 2020, by prioritising the most urgent issues linked to acute economic challenges. For its part, processes within the ET 2020 framework support the delivery of the Europe 2020 headline targets and national reforms to increase the performance of education systems with intelligence and the development of innovative thinking. The introduction of annual peer reviews through DG meetings have been valuable at providing detailed and expert debate on the implementation of education and training issues identified in the CSRs (though with scope to make improvements), and have the potential to strengthen the implementation of the challenges identified in the CSRs. At the same time, there is scope to improve political level interactions between the two domains, and to clarify the linkages between ET 2020, Europe 2020 and the European Semester for ET 2020 participants and Member States.

There is strong political impetus in employment at European level because of the standing of employment policy and the Employment Committee, and governance is more straightforward than in education and training where several sectors operate. Opportunities for political discussion on ET 2020 are limited, e.g. the Education and Training Monitor does not have formal status in Council level decision-making. Although Education Committee members attend Employment Committee discussions of the CSRs, there is scope for still closer co-operation. Linkage to the headline targets of Europe 2020 is one factor accounting for the more rapid and comprehensive progress in some ET 2020 priority areas than others. ET 2020 is increasingly contributing knowledge that is helping Member States to tackle their education and training-related CSRs and most e-survey respondents wanted a closer connection between education and employment. The annual peer reviews, organised through Director-General meetings, have generated valuable inputs into EMCO and Council deliberations on the subject. Feedback indicates opportunities to improve the annual peer reviews.

Recommendation (7): cooperation should continue to be enhanced between the education side of the Council and the Employment Committee so that there can be a more level "playing field" between the employment and education and training domains. **Recommendation (8):** the annual ET 2020 peer reviews organised through Director-General meetings should be established as an intrinsic part of the relationship between ET 2020 and the European Semester. **Recommendation (9):** there is a need for greater clarity regarding the relationship between ET 2020, Europe 2020 and the European Semester for stakeholders. This should be reflected in the current revision of Europe 2020 and also be part of the improved communication and visibility of ET 2020 recommended below in Conclusion 6. **Recommendation (10):** the political impetus behind ET 2020 should be enhanced by integrating the Monitor into a policy Communication from the Commission. This could be the basis for an annual ET 2020 policy debate with the Education Council and the European Parliament.

Conclusion 4 Formal and informal governance: ET 2020 comprises both formal and informal governance elements, both of which are essential to its effectiveness. However, the way in which these elements relate to one another has been loose and not well-understood by some participants or part of the wider community. In the absence of the type of political structures that exist in the employment domain, the High Level Group and Director-General groupings have a pivotal role in completing the circuit between political decision-making related to ET 2020, Europe 2020 and the European Semester and the work of Member States in the Open Method of Coordination that should be enhanced.

There is no formal relationship between the Education Committee, the High Level Group and the Director General groupings, which places the onus on the European Commission to play a strong coordination role. At the same time, the informality of the High Level Group is widely valued by participants. The relationship between the High Level Group and the Director-General groupings is unclear, especially in respect of whether the former has, or is supposed to have, authority over the latter. The sending of substitutes to meetings by Member States is not uncommon and adversely affects the level of debate. Steps are already being made to improve the interface between formal and informal governance and to set up effective feedback loops between the Director-General groupings and Working Groups that could be built upon.

Recommendation (11): in light of the pivotal role that can be played by the High Level Group between the informal and formal governance of ET 2020 and between ET 2020 and the employment policy domain, its role in terms of general oversight of ET 2020 should be strengthened, building on recent enhancements to its role in respect of Working Group oversight and in determining the results to be presented to the Council via the Education Committee. The High Level Group should be responsible for developing and implementing the ET 2020 monitoring framework recommended above, and be given a more general oversight role regarding ET 2020's overall development. This would reduce the onus on the European Commission to have the coordinating function and has the potential to strengthen Member State ownership in ET 2020. For this new role to be effective the HLG membership should comprise Secretary-Generals of Ministries of Education only since they have requisite expertise and authority. **Recommendation (12):** Member States should improve the way in which they interact with both the formal and informal structures at a senior level. Member States also need to ensure that the right people are sent to the right meetings and that minimal use is made of substitutes wherever possible.

Conclusion 5 – ET 2020 and sectoral agendas: While the range and generality of the ET 2020 objectives has enabled it to be relevant and coherent in respect of sector-based communities and agendas, it has not enabled ET 2020 to be implemented in a consistent and coherent manner.

The breadth and flexibility of ET 2020 objectives means that different sectors have been able to use the mechanisms available to suit their own needs. ET 2020 has probably been most useful to sectors which, for reasons of subsidiarity, do not have strong governance at European level, i.e. the school and adult education sectors. However, there are no formal linkages between ET 2020 and sectoral agendas, and mechanisms have not been systematically put in place to enable ET 2020 to deliver “clear and visible outcomes” as specified in the 2009 Council Conclusions.

Recommendation (13): the new objectives which it is recommended should be formulated for ET 2020 need to have greater clarity about the added value of ET 2020 in respect of sectoral agendas by emphasising lifelong learning and the need for cross-sector policy development on important transversal issues such as entrepreneurship and innovation in education (see Conclusion 1). **Recommendation (14):** in order to strengthen the linkages between sectoral agendas and ET 2020, the Directors General groupings should be given a clearer oversight role in respect of regular joint planning and reporting on sectoral progress against the new streamlined ET 2020 objectives recommended above (Conclusion 1).

Conclusion 6 Transparency and visibility: ET 2020 processes are complicated, involving different bodies with different formal/informal statuses. It is difficult for those not involved in running the system to understand it in its entirety, and hence to understand their role. This lack of transparency deters participation and undermines the effectiveness of processes and outputs. ET 2020 also lacks adequate levels of visibility in the context of the 2011 Council Conclusions which invited the Commission to 'strengthen the visibility and transparency of measures taken in the context of the OMC by ensuring effective operational coordination': outside of those directly involved, awareness tails off dramatically.

While most e-survey respondents had a good awareness of ET 2020 there is scope to improve it. Many interviewees commented on the complexity of ET 2020 processes and the difficulty involved in understanding their contribution. Member States stated it could be difficult for them to know what work was being done in which group within ET 2020, making it difficult for them to coordinate contributions. Even within the European Commission, knowledge of ET 2020 was limited outside DG EAC. No overall description exists of how the different components of ET 2020 fit together.

Recommendation (15): a 'Participant Guide to ET 2020' should be produced and made available which describes the different elements of ET 2020 processes, the roles and responsibilities of different bodies and their inter-relationships. It should also elucidate the relationship between ET 2020, Europe 2020 and the European Semester (see Conclusion 3). **Recommendation (16):** the visibility of ET 2020 should be improved through the introduction of a communication action plan to ensure that outputs, such as reports, tools, and peer review reports, are easily accessible to the wider public both through the Europa (DG EAC) website (see next point) and through the use of effective and innovative dissemination methods such as the use of social media, with a timetable of actions based on key events, e.g. related to CSRs, Presidency events etc. Working Groups should seek to engage wider stakeholders through the use of web-based communication platforms. **Recommendation (17):** Member States should improve their capacity to interact effectively with ET 2020 by implementing the proposals put forward to the High Level Group in the spring of 2014 to coordinate the work of their national representatives in the various bodies of ET 2020. The above guide should detail (through good practice examples) how Member States can maximise their internal coordination and ensure that ET 2020 outputs flow effectively around their national stakeholders (see also Conclusion 8).

Conclusion 7 Modernisation and excellence: While ET 2020 embraces the needs of all Member States, there is naturally a tendency for the focus to be strongest on issues and Member States where there is the greatest need for modernisation. ET 2020 should more clearly express the diversity that exists and ensure that ET 2020 has a focus on excellence as well as modernisation, on exceeding targets and not just achieving them.

Member States with the greatest reform needs are more likely to demonstrate the greatest benefits from ET 2020 participation. Often such countries are deficient in terms of national research capacity and therefore particularly value outputs from ET 2020. Although countries with advanced systems report positive benefits, they are, at the same time, often in a position of being "donors" rather than "receivers" of new ways of thinking.

Recommendation (18): ET 2020 processes should ensure that they focus on excellence as much as on enabling the modernisation of education and training systems. The clustering of countries, as happens through peer learning activities and CSR's, should be developed further to enable all countries to benefit from ET 2020 and so that countries with well-developed systems can continue to learn from one another. **Recommendation 19:** A central database of national good practices should be created to stimulate a focus on excellence. The database under the Mutual Learning Programme of DG Employment could be used as a model.

Conclusion 8 – Effectiveness and added value: The effectiveness of ET 2020 in delivering change in Member States depends on a balance of factors, those intrinsic to ET 2020 and those internal to Member States. However, a lack of impact in Member States is likely to be due less to the effectiveness of ET 2020 processes and outputs and more to weaknesses in the take-up of ideas within Member States themselves.

ET 2020 processes and outputs tend to be rated highly by participants. In contrast, the ability of outputs to influence people and feed into policy reduces quickly beyond the individuals themselves who take part in ET 2020. While three quarters of e-survey respondents use materials themselves “very much”, only two fifths of policymakers do so. One in 10 survey respondents stated that they never disseminate ET 2020 outputs “back home”. Barriers to implementation were experienced by around two thirds of Working Group respondents. Some countries are much more highly organised to discuss and disseminate outputs than others, from which others could learn.

Recommendation (20): Peer learning activities should be organised on this topic to enable countries to benefit from the experiences of others. This should take into account differences between countries in terms of their internal government structures, especially between regionalised and centralised countries. **Recommendation (21):** The European Commission should devise and implement support measures beyond the current OMC processes which Member States can draw upon to help them put into action lessons emerging from ET 2020 activities. Measures could include development of networking and opportunities to experiment or pilot new and innovative approaches, country-specific action plans, and capacity-building support. Resources in current funding programmes should be made available for these purposes.

Conclusion 9 Peer learning activities: Participants' opinions on ET 2020 processes and outputs are generally very positive, with a clear set of critical success factors identifiable. Peer learning activities are especially valued and this is because they meet a broad set of needs. However, a systematic approach to peer learning has not yet been put in place.

Critical success factors identified for ET 2020 processes include their openness and informality, their focus on actions rather than words and on ensuring they are not an end in themselves, and the balance between strategic actors and practitioners. The critical success factors for outputs such as reports include focusing on practical action, ensuring that learning draws on Member States' experiences and ensuring deliverables do not sit on shelves. An important obstacle to effectiveness in ET 2020 can be a lack of energy, motivation and drive. Peer learning activities are especially valued by participants for generating practical outcomes of direct use. The Director-General annual peer reviews are valued for bringing together people with relevant expertise in an open and productive format.

Recommendation (22): a more systematic approach should be adopted to peer learning using good practice examples from elsewhere, such as the DG Employment Mutual Learning Programme. **Recommendation (23):** a wide range of peer learning activities should be used. Some parts of ET 2020 now have extensive experience in using peer learning activities, such as the Working Group dealing with higher education, and this could be a valuable source of expertise upon which other WGs could draw.

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Annex 3: Riga Conclusions on a new set of medium-term deliverables in the field of VET for 2015-2020

RIGA CONCLUSIONS 2015

ON A NEW SET OF MEDIUM-TERM DELIVERABLES IN THE FIELD OF VET FOR THE PERIOD 2015-2020, AS A RESULT OF THE REVIEW OF SHORT-TERM DELIVERABLES DEFINED IN THE 2010 BRUGES COMMUNIQUÉ

PREAMBLE: Declaration of the Ministers in charge of vocational education and training – of EU Member States, Candidate Countries, European Economic Area Countries

We, the Ministers in charge of vocational education and training (VET) met in the Baltic city of Riga on 22 June 2015 to renew our efforts in raising the overall quality and status of VET in the context of the Copenhagen process, in order to meet the ET 2020 strategic objectives and to reaffirm our support for the wider European growth and jobs agenda.

We hereby recall the importance of investing in VET and skills' policies that, on one the hand, raise the employability of people, help to reduce current skills' mismatches and allow for smoother transitions into employment and, on the other hand, promote personal development of individuals and thus contribute to increasing quality of life. **We remain convinced** that all groups merit our full attention and commitment in this respect.

We will build on the achievements of our cooperation agreed in the Copenhagen declaration (2002) and reaffirmed in the Communiqués of Maastricht (2004), Helsinki (2006), Bordeaux (2008) and Bruges (2010). **We commit ourselves** to implement VET reforms in compliance with national, regional and local developments and demands. Where applicable, our actions in the period 2015-2020 will focus on **five medium-term deliverables** as defined in the **Riga Conclusions**. **We will reiterate** these five deliverables in the discussion on the future priorities of the ET 2020 Strategic Framework.

We highly value the existing dialogue and cooperation with social partners and other relevant stakeholders, such as chambers and various competent institutions. **We will continue contributing** to raised quality and attractiveness of accessible and inclusive VET at all education levels by encouraging further cooperation between social partners, VET providers, learners, parents, companies, public employment services, chambers, teachers and trainers, guidance personnel and other stakeholders.

We will step up efforts to better understand the skills needed in the labour market, including by closely monitoring sectoral and regional trends, and to exploit this understanding to improve education and training policies and underpin learning and career guidance and counselling.

We will commit ourselves to long-term policies through effective investment, enhanced strategic partnerships and increased cooperation to promote innovation and excellence in VET, as well as to strengthen permeable and flexible pathways for a competitive European VET.

We will combine our efforts to encourage the effective use of EU transparency tools, and in particular of the European Qualifications Framework, as a common reference for EU comparison and transparency to facilitate mobility of students and workers in Europe. In this respect we invite the European Commission to explore ways to make

such tools more effective and easily accessible to individuals and relevant stakeholders.

We are determined to further contribute to the international competitiveness of the labour force developed by the European VET systems and to improved recognition of VET qualifications in Europe and global context.

We, the Ministers:

- **Firmly intend** to implement the commitments expressed in the Riga Conclusions and explore alternative ways of funding and partnerships to meet the five medium-term deliverables;
- **Invite the future EU Presidencies** to build on the discussions held in Riga on 22 June 2015 and the Riga Conclusions, when setting out future priorities for European cooperation in VET.
- **Invite the European Commission** to develop, in cooperation with Member States, social partners and stakeholders, a VET and skills agenda with a view to strengthening European cooperation in VET and to boosting employability and competitiveness.
- **Express our resolution** to continue our discussion on the current and future challenges for a competitive European VET in the light of the Copenhagen process in the period 2015 to 2020 and beyond.

The RIGA CONCLUSIONS:

Agreed by the Ministers responsible for Vocational Education and Training of countries participating in the Copenhagen process (hereafter: 'participating countries'):

- of the EU Member States (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark²⁰³, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom);
- of the EU Candidate Countries (Albania, Montenegro, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey);
- of the EEA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway).

Agreed by the European Social Partners (ETUC, BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP).

Agreed by the European Commission, and

Supported by the European level VET providers' associations (EVTA, EFVET, EURASHE, EUCEN, EUproVET, EVBB) by issuing a joint Declaration in support of the Riga Conclusions

FROM COPENHAGEN TO BRUGES AND RIGA

The **Riga Conclusions**²⁰⁴ present the role of vocational education and training (VET) in the context of the growth and jobs agenda and the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020). It aims at reaching agreement among the participating countries, EU level social partners and the European Commission on a **new set of medium-term deliverables for the period 2015 – 2020** in the context of the Bruges Communiqué²⁰⁵ adopted in 2010 as part of the overall Copenhagen process launched in 2002²⁰⁶.

The new deliverables **reinforce the 2020 vision for VET**. They contribute to the key challenges and the progress to be made. Compared to the period 2011-2014, they are substantially streamlined and reduced in number. At the same time, the continuity with previous deliverables is maintained.

Due attention will be paid to transversal areas and principles which are crucial for achieving the deliverables and for modernising VET: strong **partnerships with social partners and other relevant stakeholders such as chambers and various competent institutions**; efficient **funding** and promotion of **excellence and innovation** in VET; consistent **use of the learning outcomes** approach and the commonly **developed tools and principles**. This includes: setting up comprehensive validation arrangements by 2018 as agreed in the 2012 Council Recommendation²⁰⁷. In addition, the European Commission and the Member States should also commit, in cooperation

²⁰³ Subject to government endorsement.

²⁰⁴ These Conclusions include Annex 1, Annex 2 and Annex 3 that form an integral part of the Riga Conclusions. The socio-economic and institutional background in Annex 1 gives an overview of the foundations of the new medium-term deliverables. The EU level activities, listed in Annex 2, will support the implementation and monitoring of the above mentioned deliverables in participating countries. Annex 3 provides a list of examples of policy options linked to the new deliverables

²⁰⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/brugescom_en.pdf

²⁰⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/copenhagen-declaration_en.pdf

²⁰⁷ [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222\(01\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01))

with all VET stakeholders, to targeted **communication** and appropriate **visibility of the achievements of European cooperation in VET (Copenhagen process)**.

THE PROPOSAL FOR A NEW SET OF MEDIUM-TERM DELIVERABLES 2015-2020

With a view to developing high quality and labour market relevant vocational skills and qualifications, based on the learning outcomes approach:

1. Promote **work-based learning** in all its forms²⁰⁸, with special attention to apprenticeships, by involving social partners, companies, chambers and VET providers, as well as by stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship.
2. Further develop **quality assurance mechanisms in VET** in line with the EQAVET recommendation²⁰⁹ and, as part of quality assurance systems, establish continuous **information and feedback loops in I-VET and C-VET systems based on learning outcomes**.

For people's informed choice of pathways and long-term employability and adaptability to evolving skills needs:

3. Enhance **access to VET and qualifications for all through** more flexible and permeable systems, notably by offering efficient and integrated guidance services and making available validation of non-formal and informal learning.
4. Further **strengthen key competences**²¹⁰ in VET curricula and provide more effective opportunities to acquire or develop those skills through I-VET and C-VET.

In support of successful implementation of reforms and to raise the overall quality and efficiency of VET:

5. Introduce systematic approaches to, and opportunities for, **initial and continuous professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors in both school and work based settings**.

²⁰⁸ According to Cedefop, work-based learning refers to knowledge and skills acquired through carrying out – and reflecting on – tasks in a vocational context, either at the workplace [...] or in a VET institution. For IVET, according to the Commission report from 2013 (Work-based learning in Europe: Practices and Policy pointers), there are three forms of work-based learning: 1) alternance schemes or apprenticeships typically known as the "dual system", 2) work-based learning as school-based VET which includes on-the-job training periods in companies and 3) work-based learning integrated in a school-based programme, through on-site labs, workshops, kitchens, restaurants, junior or practice firms, simulations or real business/industry project assignments.

²⁰⁹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1430316040997&uri=CELEX:52014DC0030>

²¹⁰ As defined in the corresponding Recommendation from 2006, the 8 key competences consist of communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology, digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression. The Recommendation also refers to fundamental basic skills of language, literacy, numeracy and ICT as essential foundation for learning. Learning to learn, social and civic competences, initiative-taking and entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness and expression are considered 'transversal key competences' (Council conclusions 2010 on competences supporting lifelong learning and the 'new skills for new jobs' initiative).

ANNEX 1

THE CONTEXT FOR DEFINING THE MEDIUM-TERM DELIVERABLES

VET's role in the European growth and jobs agenda

As in 2010, Europe still faces enormous economic and social challenges with very high levels of youth unemployment in many Member States, an adult workforce of which one quarter lacks basic skills, a strong need for up-skilling of the workforce due to changes in labour market requirements, including increasing use of new technologies, an evident mismatch of skills supply and demand that hinders economic growth and job creation, and reduced public and private financial resources due to budgetary consolidation processes.

Given these challenges, a much more prominent role has been attributed to ***VET in the overall growth and jobs agenda***. The contribution of VET, particularly work-based learning and apprenticeships, to fight youth unemployment, to ensure better match between training and labour market needs and to ease transitions to employment is now more widely recognised. As an indication of the urgency of reforms in this sector, a considerable number of country specific recommendations adopted within the European Semester are related to VET. The Rethinking Education Communication (2012)²¹¹ stressed the need to invest in building world-class VET systems and increase participation in work-based learning. The European Alliance for Apprenticeships, Youth Guarantee as well as the Youth employment initiative – all launched in 2013 – confirmed the crucial role of VET in increasing the employability of young people. Learning in the workplace is also an effective way to re-train and up-skill adults. Ensuring learning opportunities for all, especially disadvantaged groups, remains a major challenge, as the renewed adult learning agenda underlined. The potential of continuing VET, which can respond flexibly to short-term needs and helps improve citizens' employability and enterprises' competitiveness, is not yet fully used.

The President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker has identified growth and job creation as the first priority objective of the European Commission (2014-2019). Development of skills and competences of the European workforce is key to this objective, including promotion of quality VET and lifelong learning. Candidate Countries also share these aspirations.

From Copenhagen to Bruges and Riga

Work on modernising VET does not start from scratch. It has been subject of enhanced political cooperation between Member States, EEA and Candidate Countries, European level social partners and the European Commission for more than a decade – known as Copenhagen process. They committed themselves to supporting mobility for work and learning and making access to lifelong learning easier through: more transparency and easier recognition of qualifications and competences, improved quality of VET and better information and guidance. A series of Communiqués has guided this work on common priorities.

The Bruges Communiqué, adopted in 2010, combined a long-term vision with short-term actions. Building on the agreed principles and in line with the overall framework for education and training (ET 2020), it defines an ambitious agenda to contribute to the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy. Aiming to support employability and economic growth and help promote social cohesion and respond to broader societal challenges, it

²¹¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1389776578033&uri=CELEX:52012DC0669>

stresses the dual objective of VET: excellence and inclusion.

The Bruges Communiqué and, in particular, its set of short-term deliverables for the period 2011 - 2014, has helped EU and Candidate Countries focus and implement reforms, as Cedefop's and ETF's progress analyses show.²¹² The review points to a focus on overall system reforms, quality assurance, work-based learning and labour market relevance of VET, also apparent from the ET2020 National Reports.²¹³

The work on learning-outcomes based national qualifications frameworks has facilitated many of these reforms. Frameworks that cover all types and levels of national qualifications have helped clarify how those acquired in VET relate to those obtained in general/academic programmes. National qualification frameworks are increasingly being linked to validation of non-formal learning and support countries in putting comprehensive validation systems into place. To help people progress in learning, find, maintain and advance in work within and across countries, the next step should be to move from a 'tool by tool' to a more integrated approach focused on user needs, make them widely known and use them systematically.

While most national agendas have focused on making VET more inclusive to help reduce early leaving and promote further learning among those at risk, less attention has been paid to promoting VET excellence through creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship – which could aid enterprise performance and job creation. Information on labour market outcomes is not yet sufficiently used to guide VET provision and continuing professional development for VET teachers and trainers²¹⁴ has also been less visible in national policies. Social partners have increasingly been involved in developing and implementing VET policies. However, involvement of employers and trade unions in VET governance and management could be strengthened.

The new deliverables should support the work of the countries and social partners endorsing the Riga Conclusions in implementing VET reforms, and in the case of EU Member States the developments called for in the country-specific recommendations issued in the area of VET in the framework of the European Semester. They are also an integral part of the Education and Training 2020 Strategic Framework and its priorities with a proposed identical policy cycle up to 2020. The links between the Copenhagen process as the European cooperation platform for VET and the ET 2020 Strategic Framework are of particular importance in ensuring consistency between VET and other sectors of education and training.

²¹² The text in this section provides a summary of the main findings presented in Cedefop (2015): *Stronger VET for better lives* – monitoring report on vocational education and training policies 2010-2014. This report includes ETF's monitoring on achievements in the candidate countries. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3067>

<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/9096>

²¹³ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/index_en.htm#stock

²¹⁴ Professional development of VET teachers and trainers was not a specific short-term deliverable in the period 2011-2014.

ANNEX 2

EU LEVEL SUPPORT TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MEDIUM-TERM DELIVERABLES

The following EU level activities will support the implementation of the above mentioned **deliverables** in the participating countries, as well as **the country-specific recommendations** within the European Semester. They will be supported by funding opportunities under ESIF and Erasmus+.

- **Assist participating countries or clusters of participating countries to implement VET reforms** (*depending on their particular needs*) through country specific support, including with the assistance of Cedefop and the ETF for participating countries in the form of country reviews, targeted national activities, policy learning fora, mutual learning and exchanges of good practices notably through the ET 2020 Working Groups on VET and Adult Learning, DGVET Peer Reviews as well as through facilitation of bilateral or multilateral cooperation arrangements between countries. Produce EU level evidence (e.g. study on higher VET in the EU) and policy guidelines (e.g. Guidelines for SME involvement in WBL), and organise EU level events (e.g. European Business Forum on Vocational Training).
- **Monitor and analyse progress** in the area of VET by Cedefop and the ETF, through a streamlined monitoring system with a use of newly developed indicators (related to prevalence and quality of work-based learning and mobility in I-VET) and available VET specific statistical data (implementation of ISCED 2011 in Labour Force Survey and UNESCO/OECD/EUROSTAT data collection), adapted to the new medium-term deliverables; monitor impact of VET initiatives supported by ESIF at national level.
- **Intensify support to the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EaA)** to boost the quality, supply and attractiveness of apprenticeships across Europe.
- EU level support to ensure **transparency and recognition tools** (EQF, ECVET, EQAVET, Europass and validation of non-formal and informal learning) are further developed and implemented in a more coherent and integrated way.
- Support **transnational mobility of VET learners and staff** (Erasmus+, ESIF, EURES, Your first EURES job), facilitate the development of adult educators (EPALE), address common EU level sector specific skills challenges (Sector Skills Alliances) and support policy reforms in VET (strategic partnerships, forward-looking projects).
- In addition, the European Commission assisted by Cedefop will support Member States in **targeted communication and visibility of the achievements of European cooperation in VET (Copenhagen process)** through concrete activities (visibility events, campaigns, promotional activities).

ANNEX 3

EXAMPLES OF POLICY OPTIONS LINKED TO THE NEW MEDIUM-TERM DELIVERABLES 2015-2020

The new deliverables provide more flexibility in their implementation at national level which is crucial given the considerable differences in VET across participating countries. Some of the deliverables will be more pertinent than others depending on each country's specific situation and needs. Similarly, a specific medium-term deliverable can be implemented in a different way depending on national circumstances. To cater for these differences, the medium-term deliverables are further supported by a second level of policy options which present an indicative and not prescriptive list of possible relevant measures that could be pursued to address a specific deliverable.

1. Promote **work-based learning (WBL)** in all its forms, with special attention to apprenticeships, by involving social partners, companies, chambers and VET providers as well as stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship.

Concrete actions could, for example, include mobilising initiatives at national level to boost the share of WBL in VET programmes in school-based programmes and those combining learning in schools and enterprises, as appropriate; mobilising actions to strengthen, review or introduce apprenticeships in the context of the EAfA, and integration of apprenticeships provided under Youth Guarantees in national VET systems; creating a clear regulatory framework (for WBL) taking into account existing regulations, industrial relations and education practices; setting up institutionalised intermediary support structures with involvement of chamber, business and sector organisations to manage administration related to work-based learning in companies; assist VET providers in finding training places for trainees and VET teachers and trainers in enterprises, and support SMEs in providing apprenticeship places (including incentives), etc.

2. Further develop **quality assurance mechanisms in VET** in line with the EQAVET recommendation and, as part of quality assurance systems, establish continuous **information and feedback loops in I-VET and C-VET systems based on learning outcomes**.

Concrete actions could, for example, include further developing quality assurance (including a specific focus on work-based learning and C-VET), introducing incentives to VET providers to upgrade technological equipment, use information on VET graduate employability and a combination of data on learning, labour market entry and career; establish coherent systems for data collection and analysis and mechanisms to feed back the results of the monitoring to adapt VET provision; develop capacities of local and regional authorities and VET providers to use the information for designing curricula, development of occupational profiles and the content of VET qualifications at all levels in response to new economic and technical requirements; ensure that the use of outcomes of VET is systematically used as part of quality assurance systems, including those in C-VET, use new opportunities for data collection and analysis such as big data, etc.

3. Enhance **access to VET and qualifications for all** through more flexible and permeable systems, notably by offering efficient and integrated guidance services and making available validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Concrete actions could, for example, include stepping up efforts to: set up systems for validation of non-formal and informal learning (agreement in the 2012 Council Recommendation to set such arrangements up by 2018); expansion of modularised

offers of C-VET as a way to enable up-skilling of workers and a rapid response to emerging skills requirements; tackle the well-known barriers to accessing training for groups at risk, in particular low-skilled adults; expand training offers by using ICT tools, better integration of C-VET and active labour market policies; promote work-place learning and the creation of learning conducive work environments in companies for the working population; integrate guidance and counselling services provided by both education and employment sectors for both I-VET and C-VET, promote measures to foster inclusiveness of VET systems (including preventing early leaving or second-chance-VET programmes leading to qualifications), continue work on implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks, linked to EQF, by embedding also qualifications obtained outside formal education and training systems; ensure greater institutional synergies between I-VET and C-VET providers (at regional, national and European levels), guidance and employment services and validation centres, etc.

4. Further **strengthen key competences** in VET curricula and provide more effective opportunities to acquire or develop those skills through I-VET and C-VET.

Concrete actions could, for example, include assessing the place of key competence in VET curricula, work on improving levels of basic skills of VET students as exemplified by PISA and PIAAC, strengthen provision of key competencies in VET, particularly in work-related training, promote innovative approaches to provide combined key competencies and work-specific skills, devote special attention to the development of entrepreneurial skills, etc.

5. Introduce systematic approaches and opportunities for **initial and continuous professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors in both school and work based settings**.

Concrete actions for supporting initial and continuous professional development of VET teachers and trainers could, for example, include development and implementation of policies addressing VET teachers and trainers competence development underpinned by sustainable use and complementarity of national and EU funding (Erasmus +, ESIF, etc.); systematic approaches towards ensuring professional development of VET staff (including knowledge gathering, needs analyses, provision of learning opportunities, creating and expanding opportunities for validation and certification of trainers' prior learning and competences acquired at work as valid alternatives to formal training); effective partnerships of all relevant stakeholders (particularly companies) to support professional development of VET teacher and trainers (including arranging training placements for VET teachers directly in companies, incentives to support companies to invest in their trainers professional development); empowering and supporting bodies responsible for the professional development of VET teachers and trainers (including European and National networks of VET providers); promotional, information and awareness raising activities (through information services, sharing good practices, promotional events and awards for best training companies and VET trainers), etc.