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**Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the  
European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions**

**on achieving the European Education Area by 2025**

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## 1. Introduction

The present Staff Working Document is composed of four main chapters: the first one introduces the broader context that underpins the proposal for a coherent vision of the European Education Area; the second presents long-term trends and societal changes that exert a transformative effect on education and training; the third reflects on the legacy and achievements of the ET 2020 strategic cooperation framework and presents progress on the ongoing European Education Area initiatives; finally, the last chapter identifies future priority and issue areas and puts forward options for the enabling framework of the European Education Area.

### **The fundamental place of education in our European way of life**

Education sets the foundation of the society's progress across generations. It is a right of every child<sup>1</sup>. It helps young people take up the accumulated body of knowledge and introduces them to society's norms and practices. Learning in all its forms (formal, non-formal and informal) plays a pivotal role in ensuring that all people, irrespective of their socio-economic background, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, sex or gender can discover their talents and become valuable members of societies. Education enhances social cohesion and fosters democracy, enabling stronger and more meaningful social and economic interactions.<sup>2</sup> Individuals with higher levels of education participate in political activities to a greater extent.<sup>3</sup> Education underpins democracy in Europe and the world, and forms the bedrock of the European way of life.

Education also stands at the heart of Europe's social market economy as the **foundation for economic and social convergence**. It helps strengthen people's employability, which not only affects the labour market and society but also positively influences individuals' lives.<sup>4</sup> By equipping people with the right skills, knowledge and competences, education and training can improve productivity as people learn how to perform tasks more effectively. Higher productivity is key for Europe to retain its competitiveness in the global market where the Union must compete against lower wage regions.<sup>5</sup> A scenario that considered a modest increase in student achievement on the OECD PISA survey of basic skills showed that, if all EU countries achieved this target in 15 years, the aggregate impact would be faster economic growth and an increase in GDP of EUR 71 trillion compared to the no change scenario.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 28.

<sup>2</sup> Muenich, D., Psachaopoulos G., *Education externalities: what they are and what we know*, European Expert Network on Economics of Education (EENEE), Analytical Report No. 34, 2018

<sup>3</sup> Persson, M, *Review Article: Education and Political Participation*, British Journal of Political Science, Volume: 45, Issue: 3, Pages: 689-703, 2015

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, *The Economic Case for Education*, Background paper prepared by the Commission services to inform the policy debate of the Council on 12 December 2014, 2014

<sup>5</sup> European Commission, *The Economic Case for Education*, Background paper prepared by the Commission services to inform the policy debate of the Council on 12 December 2014, p. 2, 2014

<sup>6</sup> The increase is equivalent to one quarter of a standard deviation, or 25 points. In: Hanushek, E.A. and Woessmann, L., *The Economic Benefits of Improving Educational Achievement in the European Union: An Update and Extension*, European Expert Network on Economics of Education (EENEE), Analytical Report No. 39, 2019

High quality education and training also helps build **societal and personal resilience** and bring other non-economic benefits. It helps people, across all stages of life, to gain the competences to manage transitions spurred by demographic change, digital transformations, climate change, inequality and globalisation by providing skills and competences to adjust to societal and economic changes. Better education and skills correlate positively with better health, high levels of civic engagement, lower welfare use and help reduce propensity to commit crime.<sup>7</sup> Beyond its benefits for personal development, the whole society benefits from higher education levels.<sup>8</sup> For an individual, the average global rate of return to an extra year of schooling is about 9% a year; for the society this figure stands at more than 10% at the secondary and higher education levels.<sup>9</sup> Children and young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds, in particular, strongly benefit from good quality education and training as they reduce socio-economic differences with those from more affluent families.<sup>10</sup>

Education and training also helps the EU play a **stronger role in a global, increasingly digital and knowledge-based world**. It contributes to strengthening innovation capacity as people learn to generate and adopt new ideas that spur technological progress.<sup>11</sup> It plays an important role in positioning Europe as an attractive destination for global talent and strengthening Europe's research performance. Over the period 2014-2020, international credit mobility will have led to 200,000 higher education staff and students exchanges between Europe and the rest of the world. Each year around 1,000 European higher education institutions have benefitted from these global contacts, each partnering with an average of 4-6 universities around the world.

### **United in diversity: working toward higher quality and more inclusive education systems**

Europe can draw on a **wide richness of education systems** and models. They have been developed to meet the needs of their societies and communities, in line with the national culture and heritage (illustrated below in the models of primary and lower secondary education in Europe).

At the same time, all the systems share the **same common values and objectives** of contributing to personal development, equipping people for their working life, and promoting active civic participation and learning related to democracy, the rule of law, citizenship and a shared identity. They also share the call to succeed in the digital and green transitions.

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<sup>7</sup> Heckman, J.J, Humphries, J.E., Veramendi, G., *The non-market benefits of education and ability*, 2017

<sup>8</sup> European Commission, *Investment in Human Capital – Assessing the Efficiency of Public Spending on Education* – Note for the Eurogroup on 6 November 2017, 2017

<sup>9</sup> Psacharopoulos, G., Patrinos H.A., *Returns to investment in education - A Decennial Review of the Global Literature*, World Bank Group, Education Global Practice, April 2018

<sup>10</sup> European Commission, *Education and Training Monitor 2018*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2018

<sup>11</sup> Woessmann, L., *The Economic Case for Education*, European Expert Network on Economics of Education (EENEE), Analytical Report No. 20, 2017

Europe can build on a **rich tradition of cooperation in pursuit of shared objectives** in education and training. In higher education, each country has its own individual higher education system, but all form part of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), bringing together both EU Member States and other countries in Europe. The EHEA, with EU support, has encouraged the development of common European cycles of study and corresponding tools and principles. It has helped strengthen intra-EU student mobility, employability, and attractiveness for students across the globe.

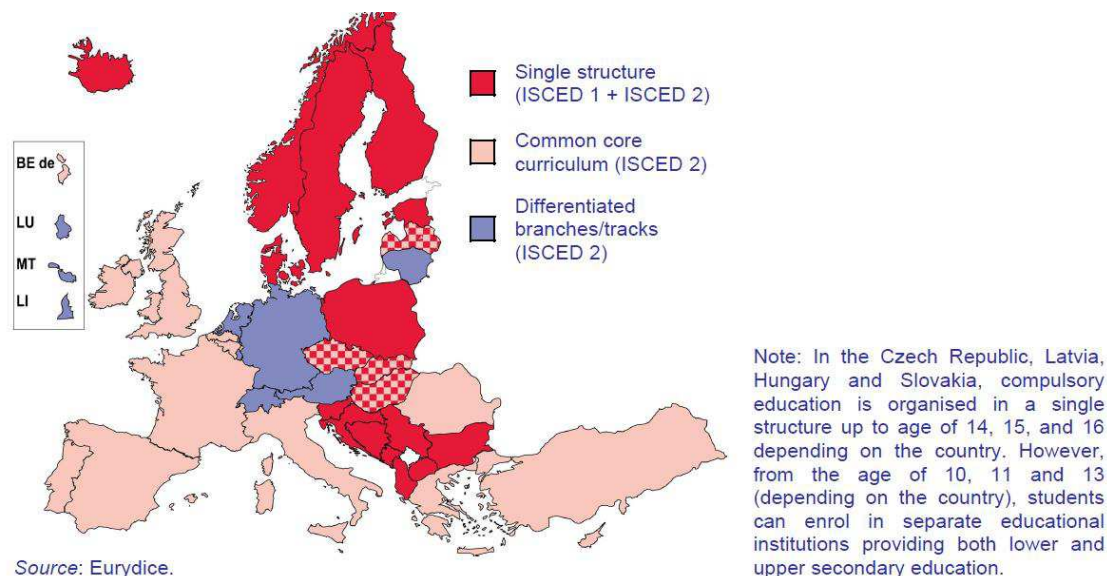


Figure 1. Models of primary and lower secondary education (ISCED 1-2) in Europe, 2019/20

Source: Eurydice, 2019

However, **divergence exists across a number of areas**. In the case of public spending on education, it has remained relatively constant at an overall level in EU27 in the past five years. In 2018, government expenditure in EU Member States amounted to 4.6% of total GDP on education and training, and the EU average share of public expenditure on education as a percentage of total public expenditure was 9.9%. Nevertheless, major differences exist among EU Member States, with certain countries facing difficulties in ensuring adequate resources to cover their investment needs in terms of education and training.

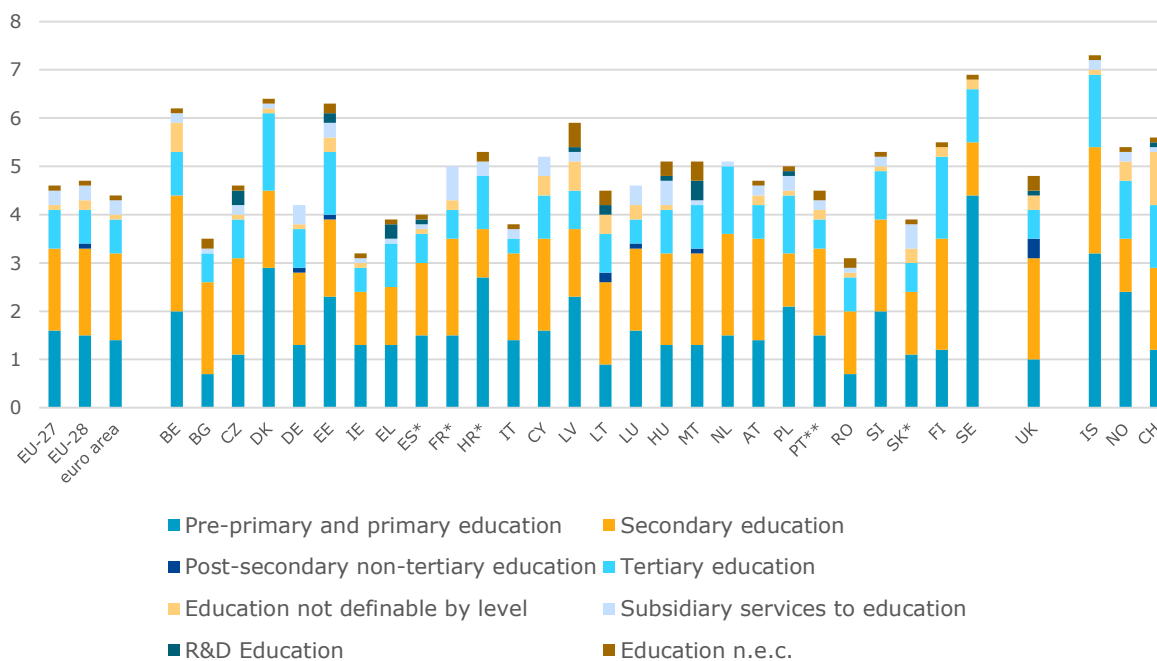


Figure 2. General government expenditure in the EU on education (in % GDP)

Source: Eurostat [[gov\\_10a\\_exp](#)]

Note: \*provisional \*\*estimated

Wide differences across the EU are also visible in the outcomes, as shown in the **OECD PISA survey of basic skills of 15-year-olds**. Around one in five pupils in the EU score as low achievers in the PISA survey (22.5% in reading, 22.9% in mathematics and 22.3% in science), a result that has broadly stagnated or worsened in most Member States over the past decade.<sup>12</sup> Socio-economic background strongly affects pupils' performance and their academic expectations and create a persistent risk of intergenerational transmission of poverty.<sup>13</sup> Overall, the proportion of underachievers in reading is much larger for pupils whose families belong in the bottom quarter of the PISA socio-economic index (see Figure 3).

<sup>12</sup> Eurostat, online data code [[sdg\\_04\\_40](#)] (Source: OECD)

<sup>13</sup> European Commission, *Employment and Social Developments in Europe*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2018

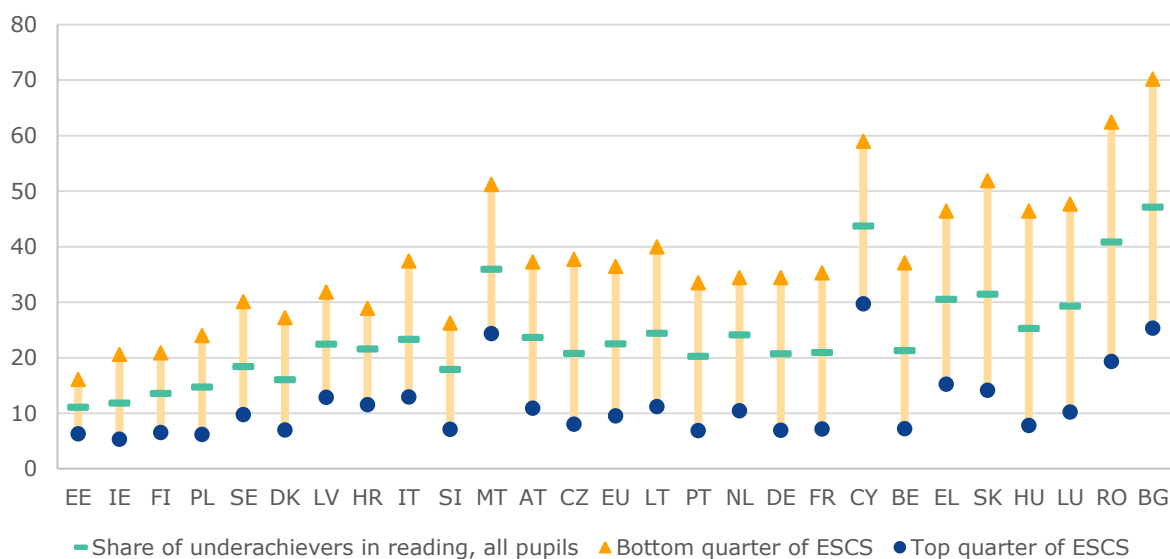


Figure 3. Underachievers in reading (% 15-year-olds) by socio-economic status (ESCS).

Source: PISA 2018, OECD. Note: Countries are sorted in ascending order according to the underachievement gap between the bottom and top quarter of the socio-economic index. Data not available for ES.

### Towards a European Education Area

The shared challenges of Europe’s education systems, and the successful tradition of European cooperation, gave rise to the idea of a common European space of learning. In the Rome Declaration of March 2017<sup>14</sup>, European leaders pledged to work towards a Union where young people receive the best education and training and can study and find jobs across the continent. The European Pillar of Social Rights jointly proclaimed by EU Leaders at the 2017 Gothenburg Social Summit establishes the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning as its first principle.<sup>15</sup>

To make these aspirations a reality, the Commission together with EU countries set in motion actions to achieve a European Education Area, in the Communication on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture<sup>16</sup> and the EU Leaders’ meeting in Gothenburg on the 17 November 2017. Implementing the political mandate, the Commission presented, on the 17 January 2018, a first package of ‘New measures to boost key competences and digital skills, as well as the European dimension of education’ addressing key competences for lifelong learning, digital skills, common values and inclusive education. On 22 May 2018, a second package of initiatives was proposed by the Commission, in the Communication on Building a stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies<sup>17</sup> which highlighted the key role played by education, youth and culture in building the future of Europe. On 24 October 2019, a Council Resolution on further developing the

<sup>14</sup> [The Rome Declaration of 25 March, 2017](#)

<sup>15</sup> Interinstitutional Proclamation on the European Pillar of Social Rights (OJ C 428, 13.12.2017, p.10)

<sup>16</sup> COM/2017/0673 final

<sup>17</sup> COM/2018/268 final



European Education Area to support future-oriented education and training systems<sup>18</sup> was adopted. The Resolution called for taking further the ‘initiatives towards the creation of a genuine European Education Area, aiming to develop further its goals, objectives and scope and to enhance its links with the post-ET 2020 strategic framework for cooperation in education and training; and to take appropriate steps to ensure that all levels and all forms of education and training are promoted on an equal basis’.

President Von der Leyen made a commitment to making the European Education Area a reality by 2025 by bringing down barriers to learning, improving access to quality education for all, enabling learners to move more easily between educational systems in different countries and making lifelong learning integral part of education and training to empower people through education and skills. The ambition to create the European Education Area is the next step in decades of European cooperation in education and training. Between 2001 and 2020, two strategic frameworks for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2010 and ET 2020) provided a forum to realise the EU’s ambitions in education through a structured political steering, technical work guided by common objectives and performance indicators. Work on the European Education Area will take forward the achievements of the previous frameworks.

## **2. Long term trends, social transformation and changing needs affecting the world of education and training**

Major societal shifts – megatrends – have a significant impact on education and training systems across Europe and the individual Member States, most importantly the future of work driven by globalisation, digitalisation and technological progress, climate change and environmental sustainability, demographic change and the global race for talent. The European Education Area presents a vision of education that is future-oriented and is attuned to the ongoing transformation of the world we live in. On top of these long term societal developments, the COVID-19 pandemic accentuates the significance of education and training as an essential human activity, the interruption of which generates far-reaching economic and societal reverberations.

### 2.1. Education, technology and the future of work

#### **Employment**

The EU being one of the most open economies of the world<sup>19</sup>, challenges in the global economy are increasingly affecting the way we work, the distribution of jobs and the demand for skills and competences. In the space of a generation, the average European worker has gone from having a job for life to having more than ten in a career. The high number of career transitions and the increase of the retirement age make lifelong learning essential. The fast

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<sup>18</sup> OJ C 389, 18.11.2019, p. 1–6

<sup>19</sup> In 2017 EU exports supported 36 million, or 1 in 7, jobs in the EU and 19.7 million jobs in third countries. European Commission, *EU exports to the world: effects on employment*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2018

pace of digitisation and automation, together with the sustainability imperative, are reshaping labour market needs across all sectors. Key competences, digital competences in particular, and “soft” transversal skills will be essential to ensure multiple job changes and keep pace with technological progress, while we advance in the digital and green transition.<sup>20</sup>

The effects of the COVID-19 crisis will further change the skills demand in a labour market that is already challenged by major transitions. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, employment rates in the EU were on an upward trend, with older and high-skilled workers as the main drivers of employment growth.<sup>21</sup> In the EU in 2019, some 12 million adults aged 25-64 were unemployed. The COVID-19 crisis is expected to lead to a considerable increase in unemployment. The first forecasts done since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak<sup>22</sup> estimate significant contractions of employment.

About 45 million jobs in the EU-27 labour market (23% of total EU-27 employment) are faced with a very high risk of COVID-19 disruption and another 22% of the EU workforce, mostly medium- to lower-skilled service provision – is exposed to significant risk.<sup>23</sup> The effects of COVID-19 social distancing fall ‘disproportionately on vulnerable workforce groups, such as women, older employees, non-natives, the lower-educated and those employed in micro-sized workplaces.’<sup>24</sup> Cedefop work further suggests that, in terms of actual job opportunities, job openings requiring medium-level qualification will continue to represent the largest share of all job-openings (46% of all job openings over the period of 2016-2030), closely followed in number by job-openings requiring high-level of qualification (43% of all job-openings)<sup>25</sup>.

Education and skills levels continue to be a fundamental factor on the labour market, with higher education and vocational medium-level qualifications being correlated with higher employment rates. On average, only 56.7% of those aged 20-34 with a low level of educational attainment (and not any longer in education or training) were employed in 2019. At the same time, the employment rate of recent graduates with a medium-level general qualification was 62.8%, of those with a medium-level vocational qualification 79.1% and of those with tertiary qualification 85.0%.<sup>26</sup> In other words,

the gap between employment rates of low- and high-skilled workers remains very high. Covid-19 is expected to further exacerbate these inequalities, as preliminary evidence

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<sup>20</sup> European Commission, *10 trends shaping the future of work in Europe*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019

<sup>21</sup> Proposal For A Joint Employment Report from the Commission and the Council accompanying the Communication from the Commission on the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2020, COM/2019/653 final

<sup>22</sup> European Commission, *European Economic Forecast: Spring 2020*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020

<sup>23</sup> Cedefop, [European skills and jobs surveys](#)

<sup>24</sup> Pouliakas K., Branka J., ‘EU jobs at highest risk of COVID-19 social distancing: is the pandemic exacerbating the labour market divide?’ *Working paper series No1*: Cedefop, May 2020. [https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/6201\\_en.pdf](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/6201_en.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> The analysis assumes that occupations classified as ISCO 1-3 require high-level education; occupations classified as ISCO 4-8 require medium-level education; and those classified as ISCO 9 require low-level education.

<sup>26</sup> ESTAT, EU-LFS, online data code [[edat lfse 24](#)]

suggests that high-qualified people are much more likely to work in sectors that are less affected by the crisis, partially as a result of richer opportunities to work from home.<sup>27</sup> The relatively vulnerable labour market position of low- and (part of the) medium-skilled workers points at the need for policy action, particularly through effective upskilling and reskilling, to help them find more sustainable and quality jobs in the green and digital economy.

Lifelong learning will be vital to provide individuals with both transferable and specific skills enabling them to transfer more easily within the job market, while leaving no one behind.<sup>28</sup> Despite progress in a number of Member States, the participation of adults in learning activities (over the last 4 weeks) has increased only to a limited extent in the last decade, and remains particularly low (below 5%) for low-skilled adults.<sup>29</sup>

An important part of the post-COVID 19 recovery process should be met by accelerating the greening of key economic sectors. This includes, for example, “smart circular economy”, the “renovation wave”, clean transport, sustainable food and implementing the “Farm to Fork” strategy, clean energy (such as renewable and energy storage technologies, clean hydrogen, batteries, carbon capture and storage and sustainable energy infrastructure) and health prevention aspects. Protecting and restoring biodiversity and natural ecosystems will also be key to building climate and economic resilience. Greening of economy will also require greening of skills.

### **Technological change and the digital transformation**

Technological progress (robots, artificial intelligence, big data) and the digital transformation increasingly permeate the world of work, economies across the globe become more integrated and jobs’ skills requirement are continuously rising.. Even in sectors so far less impacted by automation, like health, education and the public sector – sectors employing a large share of the workforce<sup>30</sup> people need to operate a growing number of digital technologies in the framework of their job.

The new Commission Digital Education Action Plan goes hand in hand with the EEA to specifically address these challenges.

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<sup>27</sup> European Commission, ‘[Telework in the EU before and after the Covid-19: where we were, where we head to](#)’, *JRC Science for Policy Briefs*, 2020

<sup>28</sup> ‘Even before the outbreak of COVID-19, the EU economy, industry and social model were being affected by climate change, globalisation, demographic challenges and digital transformation. All these factors were shaping skills demands through the creation and destruction of jobs as well as by changing the nature of existing occupations. The resulting changes in skills needs had translated into skills imbalances in various economic sectors and several geographical areas. Such transitions affect every part of our economy and society.’ Council conclusions of 8 June 2020 on reskilling and upskilling as a basis for increasing sustainability and employability, in the context of supporting economic recovery and social cohesion

<sup>29</sup> Proposal For A Joint Employment Report from the Commission and the Council accompanying the Communication from the Commission on the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2020, COM/2019/653 final

<sup>30</sup> OECD, [OECD Employment Outlook 2019: The Future of Work](#), OECD Publishing, Paris, 2019

Digital transformation has an impact on jobs and employability. Today, 85% of the current jobs require a certain level of digital skills<sup>31</sup>; at the same time, new jobs will come into being<sup>32</sup>, while robotisation and artificial intelligence are increasingly replacing routine jobs<sup>33</sup>. Secondly, the very idea of citizenship is re-shaped by the mediation of digital tools, contributing to a debate that spans from disinformation to civic participation. Thirdly, when COVID-19 first hit and education institutions closed down, the extent to which effective education continued depended on the state of the existing digital infrastructure, digital skills, and the combined effort of educators, parents, school heads and other stakeholders to help young people continue learning.<sup>34</sup> A fourth aspect that relates to this megatrend is well-being in a digital age. The excessive and uncritical use of digital technologies can have detrimental effects that relate to cyberbullying, to dependence, to decreased empathy. Down-turning effects of digital technology on empathy are yielded when its content and its use entail antisocial approaches and violence.<sup>35</sup>

Digital skills are seen today as basic skills for life, as important as reading and writing. Today 42% of the EU population lack basic digital skills<sup>36</sup>. In 2014, in OECD countries, 42% of people with no digital competence were unemployed, and around 40% of people thought that their computer skills were not sufficient to find a new job.<sup>37</sup> Also, the digital divide between those with no or only basic digital skills, and others with higher level skills could widen existing gaps in society and further exclude some parts of the population.<sup>38</sup> Besides the need for digital skills for the labour force in general, there is a need to support the development of professional digital skills<sup>39</sup>. New job openings are emerging every year in the green and ICT sectors and start-ups of the economy. However, on the supply side there is no significant increase in STEM graduates. Digital skills have furthermore a great impact on our democracies. The Flash Eurobarometer 464 report (2018)<sup>40</sup> states that a third of respondents (37%) say they come across fake news every day or almost every day, and a further 31% say that this happens at least once a week.

Against this background, a major challenge for the education and training systems is to ensure that all individuals can develop digital competences<sup>41</sup> early on and throughout life.

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<sup>31</sup> Cedefop, *Insights into skill shortages and skill mismatch: Learning from Cedefop's European skills and jobs survey*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019

<sup>32</sup> World Economic Forum, *The future of Jobs Report 2018*, 2018

<sup>33</sup> European Commission, *10 trends shaping democracy in a volatile world*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019

<sup>34</sup> As confirmed by a survey on the challenges and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on vocational education and training undertaken by the Commission in March-May 2020.

<sup>35</sup> NESET analytical report, forthcoming.

<sup>36</sup> [Digital Economy and Society Index \(DESI\)](#)

<sup>37</sup> OECD, *Measuring the digital economy, a new perspective*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2014

<sup>38</sup> See reports published here: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/reports-and-studies/75988/3585>

<sup>39</sup> European Commission, *High-Tech Skills Industry: Increasing EU's talent pool and promoting the highest quality standards in support of digital transformation*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019

<sup>40</sup> [Flash Eurobarometer 464, Fake news and disinformation online](#), 2018

<sup>41</sup> Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning (OJ C 189, 4.6.2018, p. 1–13). Digital competence is defined as the confident, critical and responsible use of and engagement with digital technologies for learning, work, and participation in society.

## 2.2. Population and globalisation

European populations are undergoing profound demographic transformations. Two key drivers behind these trends are *population ageing* and *migration* – both of which carry important implications for education and training systems of the future.

### *Ageing population*

Population ageing implies an overall increase in the median age across the EU from 43.7 years in 2019, to an expected 49 in 2070<sup>42</sup>, as well as changes in the age structure of societies. Longer and healthier lives coupled with low fertility rates are the key drivers behind population ageing. In 2018, the average life expectancy of an EU citizen at birth was 81 years.<sup>43</sup> It is estimated to continue to increase to 86 years for men and 90 years for women.<sup>44</sup> If current demographic trends continue, by 2070, the share of population over 65 years will surpass 30%, compared to 20% in 2019.<sup>45</sup> The relative share of people over 80 years old growing at an even faster pace: it is projected to double to 13%.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, the number of children and young people (aged 0-19) is projected to decrease by 12.6 million.<sup>47</sup>

The latest research shows that EU-27's working-age population (20-64) has been shrinking for a decade and is projected to fall from 59% (2019) to 51% by 2070, with significant differences between Member States and regions.<sup>48</sup> This will mean more dependent people per active worker: from slightly more than three active workers for every person aged 65 or more, by 2070, the EU will see an average of a little less than two workers for every person above 65.<sup>49</sup> Recent projections show that neither higher fertility, nor higher levels of external migration would significantly mitigate the effects of population ageing.<sup>50</sup>

Market transformations linked to demographic change, such as the expected increased participation of older workers in the labour market, increased demands for jobs in the healthcare and social sectors, as well as the increase of age-related public expenditure (including projected changes in public spending on education)<sup>51</sup> will have implications for education and training. One of such is the necessity to ensure high quality initial education and cater to the upskilling and reskilling needs of adults in a lifelong learning perspective to support innovation and labour productivity. Participation in adult learning in the EU remains low (see Section 2.2). Adult participation in education and training currently depends mainly

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<sup>42</sup> Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the impact of demographic change, COM/2020/241 final

<sup>43</sup> Eurostat, online data code [[demo\\_mlexpec](#)]

<sup>44</sup> Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the impact of demographic change, COM/2020/241 final

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the impact of demographic change, COM/2020/241 final

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. The ratio stood at 34.1% in 2019 and is projected at 59.1% in 2070 for the EU-27.

<sup>50</sup> Lutz, W. et al., *Demographic Scenarios for the EU*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019

<sup>51</sup> European Commission, *The 2018 Ageing Report – Economic and Budgetary Projections for the 28 EU Member States (2016-2070)*, European Economy Institutional Paper 079, May 2018, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2018

on participation in non-formal education and training.<sup>52</sup> In the future, it will be important to take into account demographic change for public expenditure, in particular for qualified adult educators and the design of flexible pathways in formal settings.<sup>53</sup>

### *Migration*

On 1 January 2019, there were 21.8 million third country nationals in the EU-27, representing 4.9% of the population.<sup>54</sup> In the last 35 years, each year more people moved into the EU than left, making Europe a continent of positive net migration.<sup>55</sup> People are also on the move internally: in 2018, 1.4 million people moved from one Member State to another<sup>56</sup>, which has implications at the national and local level. There is significant variation in the levels of emigration and immigration across Europe, with certain countries receiving more third-country nationals, refugees and ‘intra-EU’ mobile citizens than others.

Migration and education interact in two ways:

- *Migration-induced demographic changes impacting education:* EU-27 as a whole, the foreign population is younger than the national population: the median age of immigrants to the EU was 29.2 in 2018 (compared to the EU median age of 43.7 in 2019).<sup>57</sup> In some countries, the student population is predicted to grow as a result of immigration.
- *Education as a driver of brain circulation:* the internationalisation of higher education and the pursuit of global excellence are key tools of attracting highly skilled people from outside of Europe.

### *Talent recruitment and retention*

Highly skilled people are an indispensable driver of economic growth, competitiveness and innovation. European countries develop talent through investment in education and training, complemented by talent recruitment from outside Europe. European countries are all, to varying degrees, trying to respond to the pressures created by population ageing, labour and skills shortages, increased global competition and economic integration, and the expansion of digitalisation to all areas of work and life. However, it is also important to note that education opportunities alone do not drive labour migration. Evidence from the 2020 pilot Graduate Tracking Survey shows<sup>58</sup> that graduate migration is mainly related to the labour market situation rather than study abroad experience.

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<sup>52</sup> European Commission, *Education and Training Monitor 2019*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019

<sup>53</sup> European Commission, *Education and Training Expert Panel: Summary of findings and of the discussions at the 2019 Forum on the Future of Learning, Final Report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019

<sup>54</sup> Eurostat, online data code [[migr\\_pop1ctz](#)]

<sup>55</sup> Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the impact of demographic change, COM/2020/241 final

<sup>56</sup> Eurostat [[migr\\_pop2ctz](#)] (this figure includes both EU and third-country nationals)

<sup>57</sup> Eurostat [[migr\\_pop2ctz](#)]

<sup>58</sup> European Commission, *Mapping the state of graduate tracking policies and practices in the EU Member States and EEA countries*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020

The tertiary student population has grown significantly in the last two decades. Overall, the number of higher education students in the world is steadily rising<sup>59</sup>, with particularly strong growth in the developing and emerging economies. In this landscape, Europe remains an attractive destination for mobile learners with a stable share of the internationally mobile student population – France and Germany as the most popular destinations account for approximately 5% of the global share each.<sup>60</sup> As more and more countries are expanding and raising the quality of their higher education offer, European higher education institutions must act strategically to capitalise on Europe’s reputation for top quality higher education.

In addition, the pursuit of excellence in teaching and research should remain top priority for European higher education institutions in a changing geopolitical context. They must increase their attractiveness; actively promote international mobility of students and staff; provide world class innovative curricula as well as research opportunities; and enter into cooperation and strategic partnerships with other higher education institutions, government institutions, the private sector and civil society around the world. Furthermore they must make a stronger contribution to economic growth and tackling social challenges by encouraging innovation and ensuring that higher education responds to labour market needs.

At the same time, Europe needs more digital experts who can develop technologies such as artificial intelligence, high performance computing and cybersecurity helping to address societal challenges such as climate change.

#### *Other demographic observations*

In addition to these large trends and parameters all together in the context of education and training, on a more granular level the following points are worth noting:

1. By 2030, the baseline *student population* (ages 3-16) is projected to shrink by 5.8% on average<sup>61</sup>, and in several Member States (e.g. Spain, Italy, Greece), the change will be closer to -14%; while others (Germany, Austria, Sweden) will likely experience an increase, mostly as a result of migration. These trends will bear implications both for the design of education policies to respond to diversity as well as education expenditure.<sup>62</sup>
2. As reported in the 2019 Education and Training Monitor, the EU’s *teaching workforce* is ageing and Member States face significant teacher shortages, both generally and in terms of specific profiles.<sup>63</sup> Teachers are predominantly women: in 2018 in the EU-27 women represented 96.6% of pre-primary, 84.9% of primary and 64.7% of secondary

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<sup>59</sup> OECD, *Education at a Glance 2020*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2020, p.226

<sup>60</sup> OECD, *Education at a Glance 2019*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2019, p.236

<sup>61</sup> DG EAC/ European Commission 2020, based on Eurostat’s baseline projections (20.7.2020).

<sup>62</sup> European Commission, *Education and Training Monitor 2019*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019, chapter 4.2 « Impact of demographic change on expenditure »

<sup>63</sup> European Commission, *Education and Training Monitor 2019*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019

school teacher.<sup>64</sup> (For further discussion on teacher demography and underlying trends, see Section 3.1.5.).

3. *Other demographic trends*, such as changes in household size and composition, or the regional dimension of demographic change, such as the depopulation of rural areas, impacting people's access to quality services (health, education etc.) will bear important consequences for the planning of education and training provision. Experience with online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has shown the importance of geographical location as well as family environments, and will carry continued relevance in the future.

### 2.3. Sustainable development

A sustainable society is founded on equal access to healthcare, nutrition, clean water, shelter, education, energy, opportunities and employment.<sup>65</sup> The EU has been making significant steps in the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and in the transition towards a greener economy.<sup>66</sup>

The transition to a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable economy that is climate-neutral can have significant employment and social impacts<sup>67</sup>, which can be partially mitigated through education and skills policies. The 2019 Employment and Social Developments in Europe Report<sup>68</sup> highlighted that the environmental goods and services sector recorded above average job creation since 2000. Between 2012 and 2018 the number of jobs linked to the circular economy in the EU grew by 5% to reach around 4 million.<sup>69</sup> In 2016, there were 4.5 million people (full-time equivalent) employed in the environmental economy in the EU, up from 3.2 million in 2000. The report points out that skill requirements and education levels in the green economy are increasing faster than in the economy overall. This shows the need to accelerate action for bridging the skills gap, particularly for vulnerable (e.g. old, low-skilled) workers, and the importance of continuous improvement of transversal competences in the transition towards a greener economy.

As the COVID-19 pandemic containment measures are gradually lifted, Member States start charting sustainable recovery routes out of the crisis. In order to deliver, and bearing in mind the momentum imposed by the recovery and the accelerating transitions, educational shift towards sustainability needs to become a reality affecting all age cohorts.

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<sup>64</sup> Eurostat, online data code [[educ\\_uoe\\_perp01](#)]

<sup>65</sup> United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, 2019, available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>.

<sup>66</sup> Most progress has been made on SDG 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages), and on SDG 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all). The EU has, however, moved away from SDG 10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries), while the latest UN report also showed that no country is on track to fulfilling the goals by 2030; Reflection Paper Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030, COM/2019/22 final; Sustainable Development Report 2019: <https://www.sdgindex.org/#page=22>

<sup>67</sup> European Commission, Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030 (COM 2019/22 final)

<sup>68</sup> European Commission, Employment and social developments in Europe 2019, Sustainable growth for all : choices for the future of Social Europe, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019

<sup>69</sup> Eurostat, online data code [[cei\\_cie010](#)]



In the 2019 Eurobarometer, 67% of respondents identified protecting the environment and fighting climate change as the first priority for the EU in the years to come.<sup>70</sup> However, there appears to be a gap between concern for the environment and actual action. The final report of the European Education and Training Expert Panel<sup>71</sup> emphasised the need to move beyond awareness raising to building understanding about sustainability through education, and generating change in individual habits and behaviours.

The European Green Deal and Climate Pact<sup>72</sup> initiatives stress the importance of accelerating action that triggers social awareness and engagement, and highlight the role of schools and universities where related knowledge and skills can be gained and put into practice. Initiatives stemming from the European Green Deal, as for example the Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 and Circular Economy Action Plan, recognise the need for education and training to reap the benefits of green transition. The Expert Panel advocated that sustainable development needs to be at the heart of Europe's education and training systems, shaping environmental awareness, consumer behaviour and new skills of current and future generations. Curricula and study programmes should promote the acquisition of key sustainability skills (e.g. critical thinking and creativity), cognitive and emotional attitudes (e.g. respect, responsibility and empathy), interdisciplinary knowledge and community learning. The Expert Panel also highlighted the importance of teacher education and of building components of sustainable development into special programmes for teachers.

According to Eurydice's report on citizenship education<sup>73</sup>, education for environmental sustainability is now often considered a specialised topic, fit for higher levels of school education, extra-curricular projects or non-formal learning. The Expert Panel pointed out that the nature of primary education (with flexible timetables) could allow teachers to integrate a sustainable development approach. In the secondary school system, curriculum areas such as civic and citizenship education, geography, science, health education, business studies, could provide opportunities for the integration of education for environmental sustainability.

Schools and higher education institutions play an essential role in addressing the issue of sustainable development by raising awareness and instilling the key competences needed for changing personal behaviours and empowering people to act in their respective communities. Education for environmental sustainability development should be integrated and mainstreamed across all disciplines and all levels in education. There is a need to connect citizens to science and *vice-versa*, to strengthen the link between research and education, between scientists and pupils, and to engage on topics such as climate change, sustainable development, health, and other issues covered under the European Green Deal. Using

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<sup>70</sup> [Flash Eurobarometer 478. How to build a stronger, more united Europe? The views of young people](#), 2019

<sup>71</sup> For a full overview of recommendations, see European Commission, *Education and Training Expert Panel: Summary of findings and of the discussions at the 2019 Forum on the Future of Learning, Final Report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019

<sup>72</sup> Communication From the Commission to The European Parliament, The European Council, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions The European Green Deal (COM/2019/640 final)

<sup>73</sup> European Commission, Eurydice, *Citizenship education at school in Europe*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2017

education for environmental sustainability can increase the performance, interest and motivation for students to study STEM with an interdisciplinary STEAM approach<sup>74</sup> and to pursue careers in STEM and/or sustainable development, which is more and more needed in an economy that respond to the current challenges.

Systematic approaches within education institutions that support learning, teaching, research, community engagement and campus initiatives with dedicated budget allocations and incentives are needed<sup>75</sup>.

#### 2.4. Social cohesion and democracy

Each person has a contribution to make to democratic engagement in Europe; irrespective of their background everyone deserves a chance to succeed and feel that they are valuable members of society. Poverty, youth unemployment, rising inequality, the digital divide, disinformation, racism and discrimination require urgent cooperation and action across Europe, as do the attention to well-being and the integration of migrants. Education and training systems across Europe can deliver the skills that people need to participate fully in society, so Europe can remain globally competitive and innovative and be true to its common values in creating a more equitable and sustainable world.

In 2018, across Europe, 23.4% of children under the age of 18 were at the risk of poverty or social exclusion.<sup>76</sup> Youth unemployment in European regions ranges from 2.8% to 64%<sup>77</sup> and only 50% of persons with disabilities that want to work have a job.<sup>78</sup> Parental education still determines a student's educational attainment to a large degree.<sup>79</sup> Children from poorer areas and families often begin schooling with an educational disadvantage and make slower progress than children from more economically advantaged backgrounds.<sup>80</sup> Vast disparities can be seen in levels of social exclusion, poverty and unemployment of non-EU citizens as compared to home-country nationals. In 2018, nearly 40% of non-EU citizens were at risk of income poverty after social transfers, compared with only 15.3% of home-country nationals.<sup>81</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated inequalities in education, affecting in particular learners in rural and remote regions and disadvantaged groups. Learners had difficulties

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<sup>74</sup> The STEAM approach for learning and teaching links STEM and other fields of study. It promotes transversal skills such as digital competencies, critical thinking, problem-solving, management and entrepreneurial skills as well as cooperation with non-academic partners and responds to economic, environmental, political and social challenges. STEAM encourages the blending of knowledge that is required in the real world and natural curiosity. Definition by the Peer Learning Activity on STEAM education, Vienna, March 2020

<sup>75</sup> Mallow, S. et al., [Higher Education and the 2030 Agenda: Moving into the 'Decade of Action and Delivery for the SDGs'](#), [IAU 2nd Global Survey Report on Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development](#), International Association of Universities (IAU)/ International Universities Bureau, 2019

<sup>76</sup> Eurostat, online data code [[ilc\\_peps01](#)]

<sup>77</sup> Eurostat, [Unemployment statistics at regional level](#), 2019

<sup>78</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions A Strong Social Europe For Just Transitions (COM/2020/14 final)

<sup>79</sup> OECD, *Education at a Glance 2019*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2019, p.217.

<sup>80</sup> European Commission, *Mind the Gap: Education Inequality across EU Regions*, NESSE network of experts, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2012

<sup>81</sup> European Commission, Eurostat, *Sustainable development in the European Union — Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context* — 2020 edition, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020

coping under the new circumstances, due to various reasons, including a less supportive home environment and motivational factors. Learners with special education needs and vulnerable students need additional, targeted and personalized support, as they are likely to be more prone to the physical, psychological and emotional effects of the lockdown than other learners.

The integration of people with a migrant background<sup>82</sup> bears particular relevance for education and training, especially as immigrants are more likely to be of school or tertiary education age. Addressing the diversity of educational needs is at the core of making education systems more equitable and inclusive, and will be instrumental for the successful integration of newcomers.

Discrimination, racism and intolerance remain a persistent problem. In 2017, 29% of respondents to a large scale EU-wide survey on migrants and minorities felt discriminated against based on their ethnic or immigrant background when looked for a job in the five year before the Survey.<sup>83</sup> Discrimination is not limited to the labour market: in 2019 65% of respondents to a Special Eurobarometer on *Europeans' attitudes toward internal security* were 'concerned' about 'the possibility of being exposed to online material that promotes racial hatred or religious extremism.' In FRA's second LGBTI survey, as many as 43% of LGBT respondents felt discriminated against in 2019 in all areas of the survey they were asked about, as compared with 37% in 2012<sup>84</sup>.

Extremist ideologies and violent radicalisation of young people are another complex phenomenon requiring both in-depth knowledge and a multi-faceted response. Factors furthering radicalisation include personal alienation, injustice or humiliation reinforced by social marginalisation, xenophobia and discrimination. Limited education and employment possibilities or unstructured family ties also contribute to it.<sup>85</sup>

Moreover, issues related to the mental health and well-being of students require urgent attention. Around 10-20% of children and adolescents experience mental disorders such as anxiety and depression, which may severely influence their development, educational attainment and their potential to live fulfilling lives.<sup>86</sup> Schools in general, and educational attainment in particular, are recognized amongst the fundamental determinants of mental health of children and adolescents.

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<sup>82</sup> See Sections 4.1.2 and 4.1.4.

<sup>83</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Fundamental Rights Report – 2020*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020

<sup>84</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *A long way to go for LGBTI equality*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020

<sup>85</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic And Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions supporting the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism (COM/2016/0379 final)

<sup>86</sup> Joint Action for Mental Health and Well-being: [Mental Health and Schools](#), 2016, available online World Health Organisation, *Adolescent Mental Health in the European Region*, Factsheet, available online, 2018 [http://www.euro.who.int/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/383891/adolescent-mh-fs-eng.pdf?ua=1](http://www.euro.who.int/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/383891/adolescent-mh-fs-eng.pdf?ua=1)

Finally, disinformation has a disabling effect on the social fabric of our society. While Member States tried to construct and implement COVID-19 lockdown measures across Europe, the rise of the ‘infodemic’<sup>87</sup> dominated the media. 7 in 10 people followed COVID-19 news at least once a day, while 74% of respondents to a recent survey expressed concern about the presence of fake news and 85% claimed the need to hear more from scientists.<sup>88</sup> Tackling disinformation around the COVID-19 pandemic is of particular urgency and education is the best way forward in helping (young) people understand and assess what the media presents.

Young people have a vital role to play in strengthening democracy. There is some relief in acknowledging that today’s young people are well organised, motivated and active. The European Green Deal was preceded by a global call to action of young people across the planet. Turnout of young people (aged 18-25) increased by 50% for the 2019 EP elections. Their social and civic participation is impressive: 77% of 15-30 year olds have been actively engaged in some form of organised movement or volunteering.<sup>89</sup>

## 2.5. The COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has played a role in each of the above mentioned societal challenges. It is evident that education and training will play a key role for the EU’s socio-economic recovery and long-term growth and rightfully has a prominent place in the European recovery plan<sup>90</sup>. For that reason, it is important to focus current investment priorities on education and training for the sake of wellbeing and personal and professional development of citizens and to build a resilient economy and society.

On top of that, the crisis has exerted a specific and unprecedented pressure on education and training systems and brought about a drastic shift in the teaching and learning process. According to UNESCO, at the end of March 2020, educational institutions shut down in 193 countries, affecting approximately 91% of total enrolled learners on the planet<sup>91</sup>. To ensure continuity of learning in the aftermath of physical closures, education and training institutions had to adapt rapidly to distance learning and teaching, in particular through the employment of digital solutions. The confinement measures presented challenges to operational matters, like admissions; end of the school/academic year; assessment; curricula; and student mobility, particularly affecting 170,000 young people involved in Erasmus+ or the European Solidarity Corps.

To mitigate the short term effects, the Commission provided possibilities for additional flexibility in the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme, as well as facilitation of further

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<sup>87</sup> I.e. the influx of a massive amount of information making it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance. World Health Organization, *Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) Situation Reports*, 2020

<sup>88</sup> Edelman Trust Barometer, [Special Report: Trust and the Coronavirus](#), 2020

<sup>89</sup> [Flash Eurobarometer 478, How to build a stronger, more united Europe? The views of young people](#), 2019

<sup>90</sup> Council conclusions on countering the COVID-19 crisis in education and training (OJ C 212I , 26.6.2020, p. 9–14)

<sup>91</sup> UNESCO, [Education: from disruption to recovery](#), Covid-19 impact on education, 2020

possibilities for exchange of information and cooperation between Member States.<sup>92</sup> In addition, the Commission put in place a number of tools to support the education and training community, e.g. through an online Distance Learning Network for Member States ministry representatives, the School Education Gateway<sup>93</sup> online platform, the e-Twinning<sup>94</sup> online community, the EU Code Week online community<sup>95</sup>, the adult learning platform EPAL<sup>96</sup> and the publication of guidelines<sup>97</sup> to support education stakeholders in their future planning. The EU funded European network of Safer Internet Centres in the Member States provided resources for teachers and parents with children at home in a special Covid-19-related campaign on the EU [betterinternetforkids.eu](http://betterinternetforkids.eu) portal. The Commission also launched a public consultation on the experience of citizens, institutions and organisations, public and private, with the switch to distance and online learning during the pandemic<sup>98</sup>.

Nevertheless, the impact of the pandemic on education systems in Europe will be long lasting<sup>99</sup>. It is imperative that temporary challenges will not turn into structural weaknesses. While the rapid switch to digital teaching and learning showed enormous resilience and adaptability of teachers and learners, it also manifested the irreplaceability of face-to-face, traditional educational practice, in particular for younger learners.

The heightened challenge of social inclusion of all learners during the COVID-19 crisis is likely to leave a lasting imprint. Estimates and reports from selected EU countries indicate that COVID-19 will not affect students equally.<sup>100</sup> On average, students will suffer a learning loss due to less time spent in learning, experience of stress symptoms, changes in student interaction, and lack of motivation.<sup>101</sup> More structured communication between schools, parents and teachers, which emerged during the crisis, needs to be maintained to ensure equal opportunities.

The digital shift has brought different challenges to learners, their families, teachers and trainers, but it also provided a valuable learning experience while accelerating digital transformation of education and training institutions.<sup>102</sup> Distance learning as an emergency measure needs to be optimized and modified to prepare the ground for modern, blended forms of teaching and learning. This could eventually lead to new innovative forms of learning which are more flexible, individualized and inclusive.

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<sup>92</sup> Council conclusions on countering the COVID-19 crisis in education and training (OJ C 212I , 26.6.2020, p. 9–14)

<sup>93</sup> <https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/index.htm>

<sup>94</sup> <https://www.etwinning.net/en/pub/index.htm>

<sup>95</sup> <https://codeweek.eu/>

<sup>96</sup> <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en>

<sup>97</sup> <https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/resources/publications/blended-learning-guidelines.htm>

<sup>98</sup> See Commission Staff Working Document accompanying the new Digital Education Action Plan

<sup>99</sup> Work is ongoing in Member States and at EU level to provide sufficient data for a more complete analysis and evaluation of the impact of COVID-19 on education and training systems.

<sup>100</sup> European Commission, ‘The likely impact of COVID-19 on education: Reflections based on the existing literature and recent international datasets’, *JRC Technical Report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Council conclusions on countering the COVID-19 crisis in education and training (OJ C 212I , 26.6.2020, p. 9–14)

The pandemic highlighted the importance of providing teachers, pupils and students with adequate digital infrastructure and skills. During the pandemic, teachers and trainers have faced unprecedented challenges connected with the required skills and competences to manage digital transitions and the related workload, adapting curricula. The pandemic has reconfirmed that well-trained teachers constitute a driving force in enabling distance learning. European teachers and trainers are the cornerstones of the European Education Area, with a central role to play in promoting the European dimension of teaching, supporting learners in understanding and experiencing the sense of European identity and belonging.<sup>103</sup>

### 3. The legacy of European cooperation in education and training

A strong European Education Area rests on the legacy and achievements of long-standing European cooperation in education and training. It is this cooperation which laid the groundwork for the creation of a European space in education, through the pursuit of shared objectives and targets, mutual learning, building a common knowledge base, and new advances in evidence building and analysis. In the same vein, the ongoing European Education Area initiatives set the track for the work until 2025.

#### 3.1. European Education Area initiatives to date

The launch of the European Education Area in 2018 was accompanied by the adoption of two packages of policy measures in the areas of skills development, languages, higher education and student mobility. These initiatives remain the cornerstone of the European Education Area through their ongoing implementation. A summary table of progress on the initiatives is presented in the Annex.

##### 3.1.1. *Key competences for Lifelong Learning*

In a rapidly changing and highly interconnected world, each person will need a wide range of skills and competences, to be developed continually throughout life. The key competences as defined in the **Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, adopted in May 2018**<sup>104</sup>, aim to lay the foundation for achieving more equal and more democratic societies. They respond to the need for inclusive and sustainable growth, social cohesion and further development of the democratic culture. In comparison to its earlier edition, the Recommendation updates the definitions of key competences<sup>105</sup> and stresses the need to develop teaching practices, assessment tools and innovative learning environments.

The Recommendation proposes a Reference Framework as a reference tool for policy makers, education and training providers, educational staff, guidance practitioners, employers, public

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<sup>103</sup> Council conclusions on European teachers and trainers for the future (OJ C 193, 9.6.2020, p. 11–19)

<sup>104</sup> Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning (OJ C 189, 4.6.2018, p. 1–13)

<sup>105</sup> The reference framework sets out eight key competences: 1. Literacy competence, 2. Multilingual competence, 3. Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering (STEM), 4. Digital competence, 5. Personal, social and learning to learn competence, 6. Citizenship competence, 7. Entrepreneurship competence, 8. Cultural awareness and expression competence.

employment services and learners themselves; it supports efforts at European, national, regional and local level to foster competence development in a lifelong learning perspective.

To support the implementation of the Key Competence Recommendation, the Commission has focused its work with experts and stakeholders on developing new ways to organise learning and usage of different learning approaches and environments. For example, a large conference on the Learning Approaches and Environments in School Education was held in Brussels in November 2019.

The Commission has also developed more detailed, specific frameworks for three of the eight key competences: Entrepreneurial (EntreComp)<sup>106</sup>, Digital (DigComp)<sup>107</sup>, and Personal, social and learning to learn competence (LifeComp)<sup>108</sup>. These reference tools provide additional help to our Member States and stakeholders for the promotion of competence-based education across the EU.

As announced in the Communication on the European Green Deal, the Commission plans to deliver a multidisciplinary competence framework on climate change and sustainable development which will draw on the Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning with a special emphasis on STEM, citizenship, entrepreneurship, and the personal, social and learning to learn competences.

The work on the general Framework and the more detailed ones continues in view of laying the foundation for the ambitions of the EEA, as concerns the development of progression levels, assessment tools, innovative pedagogies, and learning environments that foster the acquisition of the key competences by all European citizens, especially in the basic skills of reading, maths and science where large deficiencies have been found. This effort sits at the core of the overall support for the Member States provided by the Commission in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis.

### 3.1.2. *Promoting common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching*

In aiming to foster more fair and tolerant societies, the Council adopted the Recommendation on *Promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching* in 2018. The Recommendation indicates ways in which education can help young people understand the importance of and adhere to common values set out in Article 2 of the Treaty of the European Union and aims at strengthening social cohesion and contributing to fight the rise of populism, xenophobia, divisive nationalism and the spreading of fake news. It invites Member States to step up their efforts to promote more inclusive education systems, support educational staff and focus on the importance of common European values.

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<sup>106</sup> European Commission, *EntreComp: The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework*, JRC Science for Policy Report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2016

<sup>107</sup> European Commission, EU Science Hub, [Digicomp: Digital competence framework for citizens](#), 2019

<sup>108</sup> European Commission, *LifeComp: The European Framework for personal, social and learning to learn key competence*, JRC Science for Policy Report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020

Education, culture, youth and sport are effective means to nurture societal resilience, pluralism and respect. The implementation of the Recommendation has brought together around 20 EU-level actions across various policies and programmes which underscore the importance of inclusion and provide young people with an opportunity to make a positive contribution to our European democracies.

In the field of education, such actions include the launch of the Jan Amos Comenius Prize, which rewards secondary schools that help their pupils learn about the European Union in inspiring ways; a Network of Role models implemented through the Erasmus+ National Agencies; and the ongoing work of eTwinning relating to fostering a culture of democratic participation in schools. Member States have been actively engaging in mutual learning activities through the ET 2020 Working Group on Common Values and Inclusive Education, on topics such as inclusive history education or the uses and abuses of modern media.

In addition, several actions in the field of culture, youth and sport have been supporting the implementation of the Recommendation. This includes for instance the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange pilot project, which allows young people in Europe and the Southern Mediterranean to connect online improving inter-cultural awareness and soft skills. This initiative will reach over 25,000 young people by the end of 2020 and is expected to become an integral part of the future Erasmus programme. The highly successful #BeInclusive EU Sport Awards rewards organisations in Europe – public or private, commercial or not-for-profit – that have successfully developed sport projects aimed at supporting social inclusion. To sustain the momentum of these achievements, the European dimension of teaching, anchored in common values should remain an intrinsic principle of the European Education Area.

### 3.1.3. *High quality early childhood education and care*

As the first step of the lifelong learning ladder, participation in early childhood education and care is recognised as an important factor for success in later life.<sup>109</sup> It is therefore essential that the European Education Area addresses the provision of high quality early childhood education and care, as defined in the EU Quality Framework, part of the May 2019 **Council recommendation on high quality early childhood education and care systems**<sup>110</sup>:

- early childhood education and care systems should be accessible, affordable and inclusive;
- all staff should be well qualified and benefit of continuing training;
- curricula should be in place, based on pedagogical goals, values and approaches which enable children to reach their full potential addressing their social, emotional, cognitive and physical development and their well-being;

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<sup>109</sup> Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying The Document Proposal for a Council Recommendation on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems (SWD/2018/173 final - 2018/0127 (NLE))

<sup>110</sup> OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 4–14



- monitoring and evaluation processes conceived in the best interest of the child should be in place at every level of the system;
- legislation, regulations and adequate funding should support progress towards a universal entitlement to high quality affordable early childhood education and care.

To support the Member States to achieve such quality systems, the Commission has been facilitating exchange of experiences and peer learning since 2018, in particular on the topics of staff recruitment and training as well as inclusion. The key deliverables of the dedicated ET 2020 Working Group are the following: 1. an ECEC competence profile, presenting the core competences which ECEC staff should possess; 2. policy and practice recommendations on efficient strategies to raise the attractiveness of the profession; and 3. a tool-kit for inclusion in ECEC.

#### 3.1.4. *Teaching and learning of languages*

The Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages, which was adopted in May 2019, advocates *adequate* competence levels by the end of compulsory education. This is based on the Commission’s vision to create a European Education Area, that ‘*by 2025, all young Europeans finishing upper secondary education have a good knowledge of two languages, in addition to their mother tongue(s)*’.<sup>111</sup> This vision is reflected in the Recommendation in three ways:

- 1) First, it recommends Member States to raise the bar for language learning in general. All upper secondary school graduates should master the language of schooling and another European language at a level which allows them to use these languages effectively for social, learning and professional purposes. All graduates should also be able to fluently interact in any third language.
- 2) Second, the Recommendation underlines the importance of fully mastering the language of schooling as a basis for learning and educational achievement, especially for learners from migrant, minority or disadvantaged backgrounds. It therefore recommends that teachers of all subjects should be supported to be able to support the acquisition of the language of schooling.
- 3) Finally, by recognising the increased linguistic diversity in European classrooms as a result of recent waves of migration and increased mobility within the EU, the Recommendation stresses the importance of valuing linguistic diversity. It promotes the assessment, validation and development of languages which are not necessarily part of the curriculum, but that are an intrinsic part of an increasing share of learners’ linguistic repertoires.

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<sup>111</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture (COM (2017) 673 final)

The Recommendation strongly supported efforts to ensure that more language teachers benefit from opportunities to learn and study abroad; Erasmus+ can complement equivalent national programmes. Actions like the European Language Label and the European Day of Languages<sup>112</sup> provide further opportunities for Member States to promote language teaching and learning at school level.

Member States are recommended to identify and promote innovative, inclusive and multilingual pedagogies, using European tools and platforms, such as the School Education Gateway<sup>113</sup> and eTwinning<sup>114</sup>. A broad spectrum of such pedagogies is discussed in a recent report by the European Commission's research network for the social and economic aspects of education, NESET, entitled *The future of language education in Europe: Case studies of innovative practices*<sup>115</sup>.

In order to support the implementation of the Recommendation, the European Commission published in June 2020 a report entitled *Education begins with language*<sup>116</sup>. It focuses on the main challenges and opportunities related to multilingualism in the context of the creation of the European Education Area.

### 3.1.5. *Digital Education Action Plan*

As part of the European Education Area<sup>117</sup>, in January 2018, the European Commission adopted a **Digital Education Action Plan**<sup>118</sup>, which set out 11 actions over a three-year timeframe (2018-2020) to help Member States meet the challenges and opportunities stemming from the use of digital technologies in education and training.

The 2018 Action Plan focused on **formal education** (i.e. primary and secondary schools, VET, and higher education) and presented a coordinated and action-oriented narrative on the use of digital technologies for teaching, learning and assessment. Its **11 actions** were structured **around three priority areas**:

- Making better use of digital technology for teaching and learning (actions 1-3);
- Developing digital competences and skills (actions 4 to 8);
- Improving education through better data analysis and foresight (actions 9 to 11).

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<sup>112</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/multilingualism/european-language-initiatives\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/multilingualism/european-language-initiatives_en)

<sup>113</sup> [https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/theme\\_pages/language\\_learning.htm](https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/theme_pages/language_learning.htm)

<sup>114</sup> <https://www.etwinning.net/en/pub/index.htm>

<sup>115</sup> European Commission, *The future of language education in Europe: Case studies of innovative practices*, NESET analytical report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020

<sup>116</sup> European Commission, *Education begins with language*, Publication Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020

<sup>117</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture (COM/2017/0673 final)

<sup>118</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Digital Education Action Plan (COM/2018/022 final)

Welcomed by Member States, the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions, and stakeholders at large, the 2018 Action Plan brought together for a first time after 5 years<sup>119</sup> various policy initiatives and activities on digital education, which raised their visibility and **improved the overall coordination and coherence in the field at EU level.**

The relevant Communication on the new Digital Education Action Plan and the accompanying Staff Working Document provides a detailed overview of the results achieved.

### 3.1.6. *Erasmus+ European Universities*

The Erasmus+ European Universities initiative, announced in the European Council conclusions of 14 December 2017<sup>120</sup>, is the flagship initiative of the European Education Area in the field of higher education. European Universities are transnational alliances of higher education institutions from across the EU that share a long-term strategy on education, research, innovation and service to society. European Universities strive to boost the transformation of European higher education to enhance its quality, inclusion, digitalisation and attractiveness through deeper cooperation between institutions, their students and staff. Their objective is to pool online and physical resources, courses, expertise, data and infrastructure to leverage their strengths and intellectually empower the next generations in tackling together the current challenges that Europe and the world are facing.

The Erasmus+ European Universities Initiative has been tested through two calls for proposals in 2019 and 2020. Following the **17 European Universities selected in June 2019, 24 more alliances were selected in July 2020**, bringing the total number of European Universities to 41. The **41 alliances now include more than 280 higher education institutions involved across all EU Member States**, and Norway, Serbia, Iceland, Turkey and the UK, thereby ensuring a fair geographic balance. To further support the research dimension of the Erasmus+ European Universities, Horizon 2020 – the EU’s Research and Innovation programme - will already in 2020 complement the Erasmus+ European Universities initiative with a top-up for the research dimension.

Key achievements of the selected European Universities alliances under the pilot calls:

- *A diverse spectrum of higher education institutions*

The selected alliances include a wide variety of types and sizes of higher education institutions. Under the second call, almost 40% of the selected higher education institutions are either a university of applied sciences/art or technical and medical universities, besides around 60% of comprehensive universities.

- *Transformational impact: trans-disciplinary long-term visions and knowledge co-creating teams*

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<sup>119</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Opening Up Education: Innovative teaching and learning for all through new Technologies and Open Educational Resources (COM/2013/0654 final)

<sup>120</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32204/14-final-conclusions-rev1-en.pdf>

The selected European Universities have presented a common long-term strategy on education, with links to research and innovation. As such, they aim for a systemic, structural and sustainable impact. Adopting a challenge-based approach, they will establish transdisciplinary and transnational knowledge co-creating teams of students, professors, researchers, and a wide diversity of associated partners like NGOs, businesses and local or regional authorities. Challenges tackled by the European Universities inter alia include the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, health, climate protection, blue growth, urban coastal development, marine and maritime sectors, big data/robotics and artificial intelligence, space, migration, and social sciences.

- *Diversity of innovative governance models*

In the framework of the related calls for proposals, European Universities have pledged to structurally transform their institutions at all levels. They have created common management (e.g. joint high-level boards/strategy boards, legal entities) and support (e.g. joint mobility offices, libraries and ICT tools) structures. They will also become stronger by pooling and sharing education and research data and infrastructure. European Universities are moreover based on an inclusive co-creation governance model and consider student, staff and stakeholder involvement as essential for success.

- *Embedded and seamless mobility*

The European Universities will come forward with seamless and embedded mobility for students and staff through an integrated European campus. They will facilitate administrative steps leading to physical, virtual and blended mobility; and they will ensure that mobility becomes a structural part of student's learning pathways. They will work towards a 50% mobility target for students within the alliance, through a combination of physical, virtual or blended mobility and a mix of short and long-term mobilities.

- *Student-centred learning and teaching*

The European Universities will offer student-centred and flexible curricula. This includes for instance modular learning, and micro-credentials. This new flexibility will also accommodate the needs of professionals learners faced with changing job content and longer careers. Next to flexibility, innovative pedagogies supported by digitalisation are key. Several European Universities will for instance create pedagogical labs. Teaching will be informed by outstanding research and the teaching will encourage learners to engage in research and creation of new knowledge.

- *Social inclusion*

The European Universities will focus on widening access for diverse student and staff populations, facilitating inclusive admission and recruitment policies, and attracting and retaining successfully talent from less-represented groups.

- *Research excellence with a feedback loop to education*

The Erasmus+ European Universities initiative aims to strengthen and reinforce the link between the European Education Area and the European Research Area by fostering a joint long-term vision and strategy to integrate education, research, innovation and service to society across Europe.

### 3.1.7. *Student Mobility – The European Student Card Initiative*

The European Council conclusions of 14 December 2017 identified the European Student Card Initiative as one of the key actions to further “promote student mobility and participation in educational and cultural activities”. The initiative is an important step in **achieving the objectives of the European Education Area by 2025**, and aims to significantly boost student mobility, be it physical, virtual or blended, and making it as easy as possible for both students and universities, so that no one is left behind.

Through its key components, including the Erasmus+ Mobile App and the digitalisation of the student mobility management, the European Student Card Initiative constitutes a real revolution for the simplification of the way universities manage the student mobility: from information provision to application processes and settling into the host community while abroad. The roll-out of the initiative will start with Erasmus+ student mobility, with the aim of gradually scaling it-up to cover all student mobility within Europe by 2025. By replacing the current paper based processes used across Europe by higher education institutions and students with digital and streamlined processes, the initiative substantially changes the management of student mobility. This would imply a **major simplification for all stakeholders**, ensuring that higher education institutions are able to manage higher volumes of student mobility while also enhancing overall quality of the mobility experience for the students.

In addition, the initiative promotes a **strong European student identity** by ensuring that mobile students can use their own student cards when abroad, and by implementing a European student eID for online cross-border authentication of students’ status and academic records in full respect of General Data Protection Regulation. A Eurobarometer conducted in 2018 revealed that **nine in ten young Europeans think that the planned services offered by the European Student Card Initiative would be useful**<sup>121</sup>.

The European Student Card Initiative is thus also an essential element of the renewed **Digital Education Action Plan** and a main contribution to a **Digital Erasmus**, as it provides the key components for the digital infrastructure required for the organisation and recognition of blended and virtual mobility, as well as online cooperation.

The European Student Card Initiative entails **four core elements** that are inter-connected with each other:

- A digital one-stop-shop for students: the **Erasmus+ Mobile App**

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<sup>121</sup> [Flash Eurobarometer 466: The European Education Area](#), 2018

The Erasmus+ Mobile App (originally launched in 2017 with over 85.000 downloads to date) gives students a single online point of access to all the information and services they need before, during, and after their exchanges abroad.

- A digital one-stop-shop for higher education institutions: the **Erasmus Without Paper Network**

The objective is to simplify the management of student mobility by enabling universities to exchange electronically mobility related data in a secure and streamlined manner, starting with Erasmus+ student mobility. The aim is to make the use of the Erasmus Without Paper Network gradually mandatory for higher education institutions in the context of Erasmus+ funded student mobility, depending on the state of readiness of the IT-tools of higher education institutions.

Over 2200 universities are currently involved in testing the different services, and their feedback is continuously sought to ensure the features meet their needs. Additionally, a large survey among higher education institutions carried out in the context of the initiative found that **90% of them support the concept**<sup>122</sup>.

- Turning existing student cards into **European Student Cards**

The objective is to enable mobile students to access more easily services, museums, cultural activities and special deals when abroad by adding European Student Card holograms and other branding to existing student cards, effectively turning them into European Student Cards. Around 2.3 million student cards have been turned into European Student Cards, with the total expected to grow significantly.

- Enabling students to authenticate themselves online and have their national identity and status recognised automatically across Member States: **European Student eID**

The objective is to ensure the “once only principle” for mobile students when completing administrative steps or accessing services online at the host higher education institution in line with the vision on the Digital Education Action Plan 2018-2020. The development and roll-out of the technical infrastructure necessary to enable the European Student eID is funded with the support of the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF). Within the framework of this action, a blueprint for a European Student eID for higher education was published in April 2020 through the MyAcademicID project.

### 3.1.8. *Graduate Tracking*

As a follow-up to the Renewed Agenda for Higher Education and the 2016 Skills Agenda, the Commission proposed and the Council adopted a **Recommendation on tracking graduates** in November 2017<sup>123</sup>. The **objectives** are to encourage Member States to develop comprehensive tracking systems for tertiary and VET graduates at national level, and to

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<sup>122</sup> European University Foundation, [DESK RESEARCH Erasmus Without Paper](#), 2017

<sup>123</sup> Council Recommendation of 20 November 2017 on tracking graduates (OJ C 423, 9.12.2017, p. 1–4)

improve the availability of comparable EU data to allow more in-depth comparative analyses of graduate outcomes. The **expected impact** is to contribute to a culture of continuous quality improvement and ensure that it becomes an inherent process both for policy-making purposes and for use by the higher education institutions themselves.

To support Member States in the implementation of the Council Recommendation, the Commission concluded a **pilot European graduate survey (2020)**<sup>124</sup>. It was conducted among Bachelor, Master and tertiary short cycle graduates one and five years after graduation in 8 voluntary countries (Austria, Croatia, Czechia, Germany, Greece, Malta, Lithuania and Norway). Results indicate that the pilot survey provides valuable insights, especially on skills acquisition and use, labour market performance and personal and social outcomes of higher education.

To assess the state of graduate tracking in Member States, the Commission also concluded a **Mapping study on graduate tracking practices and capacities across Member States (2020)**<sup>125</sup>. The study shows that graduate tracking is a policy objective (e.g. explicitly mentioned in adopted policy documents) in 24 countries and among them, a legal obligation in 14 countries. Two thirds of countries have a relatively high level of compliance with the Council Recommendation on graduate tracking, but only two countries comply fully.

The Commission also set up an Expert group on graduate tracking in 2018, with a mandate of two years. The group is working on improving and further developing national graduate tracking systems as well as on making EU-level data on graduates more available and comparable, including for cross-border graduates. It gathers around 60 experts representing Member States, social partners, stakeholder organisations and EU services and agencies with expertise in the area (JRC, Eurostat, Cedefop and ETF).

### 3.1.9. *Automatic mutual recognition*

The Commission, together with Member States is working intensively on reaching the goal of having the European Education Area becoming a reality by 2025. Despite work done in the context of the intergovernmental Bologna Process, learners still face hurdles of having their qualification recognised if they want to pursue their studies abroad<sup>126</sup>. The unanimously adopted **Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad**<sup>127</sup> of 26 November 2018 is a big step towards this.

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<sup>124</sup> European Commission, *Eurograduate pilot survey: Design and implementation of a pilot European graduate survey*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020

<sup>125</sup> European Commission, *Mapping the state of graduate tracking policies and practices in the EU Member States and EEA countries*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020

<sup>126</sup> According to the 2018 Bologna Implementation Report, automatic recognition of qualification is in place for all or some EHEA countries in only 13 out of the 48 member states. European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *The European Higher Education Area in 2018: Bologna Process Implementation Report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2018

<sup>127</sup> Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (OJ C 444, 10.12.2018, p. 1–8)

In the Council Recommendation Member States agreed to put in place measures to achieve automatic recognition for further learning by 2025. Automatic recognition is understood in this context as follows:

- a qualification at higher education level gained in one Member State is automatically recognised in any other Member State, for the purpose of granting access to further studies;
- all credits gained during the period of study abroad or during the virtual mobility – as agreed in the Learning Agreement and confirmed by the Transcript of Records - should be transferred without delay and counted towards the student’s degree without any additional work or assessment of the student;
- an upper secondary qualification giving access to higher education in one Member State is automatically recognised in any other Member State, for the purpose of granting access to higher education.

The Council Recommendation proposes to launch a Union level cooperation process in school education to initiate closer cooperation and exchange of practices among Member States to foster transparency and build mutual trust. The objective is now to start implementing the actions in the Council Recommendation, with a view to having the necessary steps in place by 2025. This includes working with relevant stakeholders, in particular on the creation of guidance material and an online information service of school-leaving certificates in the EU. In upper secondary education, the Commission has started the implementation the Preparatory Action ‘Recognition of outcomes of learning periods abroad in general secondary education’, called for by the European Parliament.

In the field of higher education, the Council Recommendation builds on and also enhances the further use of existing transparency tools that can support recognition, such as the European Qualifications Framework, the Diploma Supplement and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). The Commission supports the implementation of the Council Recommendation by working closely with Member States in the context of the ET 2020 framework and through the Erasmus+ Programme. One of the main goals of this support is to strengthen the network of National Academic Recognition Centres (NARIC) and to encourage their work with capacity building, trainings and sharing best practice, by creating a Technical Support Team, among other measures.

The recognition community quickly reacted to the challenges posed by the COVID - 19 crisis. It prepared a reflection note<sup>128</sup> on the effects of COVID-19 on recognition. One of the possible solutions identified to mitigate the negative effects of the crisis is the full implementation of automatic recognition of qualifications.

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<sup>128</sup> The Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee Bureau, ENIC-Bureau and the NARIC Advisory Board, [Recognition of foreign qualifications in times of COVID-19](#), 2020



### 3.1.10. *Skills*

The actions below are being implemented as part of the 2016 Skills Agenda. Most were directly defined in the Skills Agenda, while the Centres of Vocational Excellence and the quality framework for apprenticeships have been developed to implement the Skills Agenda initiative “Making VET a first choice”.

To address the problem of access to education and training for low-skilled adults, the European Council adopted the **Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults** in December 2016. In February 2019, The Commission published a Staff Working Document to take stock of Member States’ implementation of the Recommendation. Uptake in most Member States is low compared to adults’ upskilling needs. The main messages from the report were taken up in Council Conclusions that were adopted in May 2019. An evaluation report to the Council on the impact of the implementation measures is due five years from the adoption (end of 2021). European Skills Agenda 2020 sets new indicators on adult participation in learning activities.

In 2018, the Council adopted the proposal of the Commission for a Recommendation on a **European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships**. Its main aim is to increase the employability and personal development of apprentices and to contribute to the development of a highly skilled and qualified workforce, responsive to labour market needs and a cohesive society. In order to report on its implementation the Commission sent a survey in June 2020 to Member States, as well as other stakeholders of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. Their replies will provide the basis of the Commission’s reporting on the implementation of the Council Recommendation. In addition, an EMCO light review on apprenticeships planned for November 2020 and the first results of the benchlearning<sup>129</sup> process will also feed into the reporting.

The initiative on **Centres of vocational excellence** (CoVE) defines a bottom-up approach to excellence where VET institutions are capable of rapidly adapting skills provision to evolving economic and social needs. The CoVE initiative supports a lifelong learning-based and innovation-driven approach to education and training, while contributing to the objectives of the European Education Area, by bringing together a wide range of partners from different sectors and countries, to develop a skills ecosystems underpinned by high quality and inclusive education and training that responds to the individual’s personal development, labour market, and societal needs.

In 2019, the Commission selected first five CoVE pilot projects under Sector Skills Alliances with a budget of EUR 5 million. In 2020 this was boosted with further 7 fully-fledged Platforms running for 4 years, which closely resemble the future CoVE model to be supported in the Commission’s proposal for the Erasmus programme in the period 2021-2027. The call

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<sup>129</sup> A process combining benchmarking and mutual learning: in the apprenticeships context, the aim is to support wider efforts to improve the quality and effectiveness of apprenticeships.

attracted very strong interest with 55 quality from 52 countries and attracting more than 1300 organisations.

The revised **European Qualifications Framework Recommendation** of 22 May 2017 (replacing the Recommendation of 2008) further strengthened the mobility and recognition efforts of the European Education Area as well as its labour market relevance. By July 2020, 36 countries had referenced their national qualifications frameworks or systems to the EQF. This includes 26 out of 27 EU Member States.

The revised 2017 EQF Recommendation invites Member States to review and update their referencing to the EQF when relevant, which helps to ensure that the information underpinning the referencing is accurate, transparent and reflects any relevant changes at national level. All countries have now adopted National Qualifications Frameworks, and in the majority of countries the NQF is now in an advanced operational stage, meaning that NQFs have become an integrated part of national education and training systems and are based on learning outcomes.

The new **Europass platform**<sup>130</sup> was launched by the Commission on 1 July 2020 as the first stage in the modernisation of Europass as the EU tool for communicating skills in Europe. The new Europass also underlies the efforts of the European Education Area to support peoples' careers and lifelong learning in the context of green and digital transitions.

The new Europass offers online tools and information that help people to present their skills and qualifications and to plan their learning and their career. With new **Europass Digital Credentials**, graduates and job-seekers will be able to share their qualifications quickly and securely, and employers and recruiters can make faster, more confident decisions. As of 2020, 18 countries are piloting Europass Digital Credentials; more countries and education and training institutions will be able to preview the tools shortly as we roll-out the tools for further use.

Under the **blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills**, one of the key initiatives of the 2016 Skills Agenda, stakeholders work together in sector-specific partnerships, called alliances for sectoral cooperation for skills, which develop and implement strategies to address skills gaps in these sectors. Strengthening the employability efforts in the European Education Area, each blueprint alliance will develop a sectoral skills strategy to support the overall growth strategy for the sector, which will then be rolled-out at national and regional level. Until now 15 Blueprint alliances have started work, with funding from the Erasmus+ programme under the activity Sector Skills Alliances. While all alliances are still in progress, the experience gained will provide the basis for upscaling the Blueprint, in the context of the Pact for Skills envisaged in the European Skills Agenda.

The 2012 Council Recommendation on **validation of non-formal and informal learning** asked Member States to take action, at the latest by 2018, so that everybody could have their

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<sup>130</sup> [www.europa.eu/europass](http://www.europa.eu/europass)

skills validated to access further learning or improve their career. The evaluation, released on 1 July 2020 together with the European Skills Agenda<sup>131</sup>, has found that all Member States have taken action and there is evidence of significant progress, with increased validation practices and a higher policy profile in all Member States. However, the ambitious objectives of the Recommendation have not been fully achieved. In particular, a clear lesson is that providing more validation opportunities is not enough, there is a need to provide support to individuals to take them up. This requires more strategic coordination among relevant stakeholders, closer cooperation between guidance and validation services, and coordinated implementation of qualification and validation policies, also to take into account innovative skills recognition practices such as micro-credentials.

In 2018, the Commission launched the **Digital Opportunity Traineeships**, where students from any discipline work as a trainee in a company with digital technologies such as digital marketing, programming, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity etc. In two years more than 10,000 students have taken this opportunity to get hands-on digital work experience. The pilot initiative is financed via Horizon 2020 and channelled through Erasmus+. Due to its success it will be expanded in the Digital Education Action Plan and also include VET students.

### 3.2. Achievements of the Open Method of Coordination in education and training

#### 3.2.1. *The Open Method of Coordination in education and training*

The expiring strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) was the operational format of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in education and training. It helped promote mutual learning in education through common strategic objectives, create a shared understanding of issues and build consensus on solutions and their practical implementation. In 2015, the Council and the Commission published a Joint Report<sup>132</sup> on the implementation of the strategic framework – in line with the commitment to cyclical reporting – which represents an important milestone in the evolution of the OMC. The Joint Report established direct links between technical work and strategic priorities and introduced new and innovative forms of mutual learning. Through the exchange of good practice between EU Member States and other participants, ET 2020 contributed to improving European education policies and helped set the stage for the European Education Area.

The principal forum for mutual learning as well as technical working formation of ET 2020 were the **Working Groups**, composed of representatives of Member States, experts, the members of the European Free Trade Association and the EU candidate countries, and other stakeholders. Between 2015 and 2020, they contributed to the implementation of 6 priority areas and 30 concrete issues, as highlighted in the 2015 Joint Report. In 2020, there are five

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<sup>131</sup> Commission Staff Working Document Evaluation of the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (SWD/2020/121 final)

<sup>132</sup> Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) (OJ C 417, 15.12.2015, p. 25–35)

sector-focused<sup>133</sup> and two issue-focused<sup>134</sup> Working Groups in operation. The mid-term evaluation of ET 2020<sup>135</sup> and other assessments<sup>136</sup> revealed that a majority of Member States appraised mutual learning as one of the most valued element of ET 2020, in particular the **peer learning** activities and **peer counselling**.

The cooperation framework ET 2020 comprised seven EU benchmarks adopted by the EU Member States. Once a year, the Commission published the latest data on all the benchmarks and its accompanying analysis of the state of education in the EU<sup>137</sup>.

ET 2020 links with **European and international cooperation processes in education and training** likewise set the stage for the future global dimension of the European Education Area and enabled deepened sectoral cooperation. These include international organisations such as OECD, UNESCO, Council of Europe, but also Europe-wide intergovernmental processes, such as the Copenhagen Process and the Bologna Process. Via the Erasmus+ programme, the Commission co-financed national education reviews and studies implemented by the OECD, and cooperated on “Education Policy Outlook” country profiles or thematic research studies (such as the ‘School Resources Review’ or HEInnovate<sup>138</sup>). The Commission works closely with the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education,<sup>139</sup> which provides evidence-based recommendations to support inclusive educational policies and practices regarding learners with disabilities and/or special educational needs.

Supporting policy reforms corresponding to national priorities was one of the key functions of the OMC. **Peer counselling** was introduced in 2015 as a demand-driven and tailor-made tool to support policy development, implementation and evaluation at national level. It provided high quality, country-specific and concrete policy advice by peers from other national administrations, European stakeholder organisations as well as, optionally, from independent experts. A total of **13 peer counselling events** took place since 2015 across a wide range of policy areas. Evidence<sup>140</sup> showed clear Member State support to the **peer learning** and the **peer counselling activities**. They have had national impact and follow-up and prompted active dissemination of successful practices.

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<sup>133</sup> Schools, Higher Education (HE), Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), Adult Learning, Vocational Education and Training

<sup>134</sup> Working Group on Promoting Common Values and Inclusive Education and Working Group on Digital Education, Learning, Training and Assessment (DELTA)

<sup>135</sup> European Commission, Interim evaluation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2015

<sup>136</sup> The 2018 Member States and stakeholders surveys, as well as in the 2019 assessment of tools and deliverables and the 2020 mutual learning survey (see Procedural annex)

<sup>137</sup> See the European Commission’s annual analytical report on education and training, the Education and Training Monitor.

<sup>138</sup> A guiding framework to support higher education institutions and systems to develop their innovative and entrepreneurial potential (<https://heinnovate.eu/en>)

<sup>139</sup> <https://www.european-agency.org/>

<sup>140</sup> Targeted consultation event in 2019, the Member State survey, and a 2019 non-paper endorsed by 15 Member States

<b>Instrument/ tool</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Example</b>
<i>Peer counselling</i>	Tailored support to policy development, design, policy implementation and evaluation at national level	<b>Czechia</b> revised its system for allocating funding to higher education institutions in 2018 building on recommendations from a peer counselling held in 2015. The change aims to improve quality, diversification of institutions and programmes as well as completion rates.
<i>Mutual learning</i>	Impact on planning, designing and implementing new initiatives/programmes at national level  Shared understanding, common vocabulary and increased transparency at EU level	ET 2020 peer learning activities impacted the digitalisation of basic education in <b>Austria</b> , notably the development of a European Social Fund (ESF) call to make the training of adult education providers in basic education a profession; the Austrian state prize for adult education in the thematic area of digital literacy; and the initiation of EBmooc, an adult education Massive Open Online Course (MOOC).
<i>Policy deliverables (reference tools and guidance)</i>	Impact on individual and organisational capacity building  Impact on policy action and reform	In <b>Belgium (NL)</b> , the <i>High-performance apprenticeships &amp; work-based learning: 20 guiding principles (2015)</i> provided guidance for the elaboration of a dual learning framework in Flanders.
<i>Monitoring (benchmarks and indicators)</i>	Impact on agenda-setting  Setting national targets  Improvement of national data collection mechanisms	<b>Finland</b> reported that a benchmark on ECEC was frequently cited in the national level policy debates. Awareness of the Finnish performance in comparison to other countries was one of the policy factors in their ECEC legislation reforms and related political debates.

Table 1. The policy impact of ET 2020.

Source: Triangulation of results of the interim evaluation (2014), Member State Survey (2018), External Assessment of ET 2020 tools and deliverables (2019) and report of relevant Commission services

**The ET 2020 and the European Semester** have worked closely together to support Member State reforms in education and training. Education and training have been closely monitored under the Semester, drawing to a large extent on the analytical work under ET 2020, in particular the Education and Training Monitor. The Semester Country Specific Recommendations addressed a series of issues linked to ET 2020 priorities and benchmarks, guiding EU investment and support to Member State reforms. In particular, building on the Semester's findings, Member States have benefitted from technical support to design, implement and/or monitor reforms of their national education and VET systems through the **Commission's Technical Support Instrument (TSI – former Structural Reform Support Programme)**<sup>141</sup> Through the SRSP and TSI, MS have been provided with relevant expertise as

<sup>141</sup> COM(2020) 409 final

well as with a variety of mutual learning activities building on Member States' relevant practices and experiences. Between 2017 and 2020, 64 requests for support from different Member States were selected in the area of education, addressing reforms in early childhood education and care, school education, VET and adult learning, higher education, digital education, monitoring/governance, professional development and careers of teachers, inclusive education, and Roma inclusion. Examples of the supported requests include: development of a support system for the implementation of the comprehensive curricular reform (HR), public loan support system in higher education (CY), support for digital education (EL), development of criterion- referenced tests at primary and lower secondary education (SK), monitoring and evaluation system for the implementation of the Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma Minority Romanian Citizens 2014-2020 (RO), reforming the network of teacher training institutions (LT), early identification of students at risk of early school leaving (MT), supporting the improvement of quality in inclusive education (PL), support to improve the quality of dual VET (ES), setting up a national quality framework on early childhood education and care (BG), accompany the conversion of the professional paths through "occupation and qualification campuses" for a better access to the labour market (FR), and evidence-informed decision-making processes in education (CZ).

The close alignment between **investments under European Structural and Investment Funds, the European Semester and the policy priorities under ET 2020** helped Member States make progress towards agreed strategic priorities. The interim evaluation of the European Social Fund confirmed a strong coherence between EU funds, the European Semester, and ET 2020 policy priorities. For example, early school leaving was monitored under the European Semester and addressed in the country-specific recommendations. It was also subject of an ex-ante conditionality under ESIF, requiring Member States to prepare comprehensive national strategies on early school leaving. At the same time Member States were also supported by policy guidance and mutual learning activities under ET 2020 on the topic. These concerted efforts gave an important push to Member States' policies to reduce early school leaving and allowed the EU as a whole to reach the ESL target by 2020. Similar effects could be seen in other policy areas, such as digital education.

**Civil society and social partner organisations** were important actors in building ownership in ET 2020 and ensuring that policy actions are anchored at local level, reflecting concrete needs. They have been members of the ET 2020 Working Groups, and actively involved in some of the Erasmus+ policy experimentations (in particular the European Schoolnet), where the relevant Working Group served as an incubator to prepare these projects. Many of these organisations have been at the forefront of implementation of EU policies, for instance providing digital learning to migrants or finding solutions for a rapid integration of migrants' children into the host community before a national policy was in place. EU-wide networks of organisations have helped engage the education community through own initiative events

(example: Lifelong Learning Week<sup>142</sup>) or in support of large EU events, such as the European Education and Training Forum and the European Education Summit.

The ET 2020 committed to the dissemination of results among all relevant stakeholders and the public. All ET 2020 working groups have planned dissemination activities as part of their mandates. Working groups' outputs were published on the EU publications portal and promoted through the Commission's regular dissemination channels (social media, web sites, direct mailing, etc.). Annual Education and Training Monitor publications (see Section 2.1.7) were promoted in dedicated EU-level and, occasionally, national events. A dedicated ET 2020 newsletter provided in-depth updates on the Working Groups' and Directors' General activities.

### **Future cooperation**

The assessment of ET 2020 concluded that although OMC and mutual learning are well established across education, there was room for improvement as concerns improving coordination; exploring future policy synergies and methods of cooperation; sharing of good practices and evidence of what works well and strengthening communication and dissemination of outputs. Despite high ambitions laid out in the mid-term evaluation of ET 2020, the 2019 external assessment found that the peer review format was used much less frequently than other OMC tools.

Peer counselling and peer learning activities' impact was, however, limited by the opportunity for dissemination and could have benefitted from stronger links to the other elements of the cooperation framework. Evidence also pointed to strong Member State interest in a more innovative and future-oriented perspective of support to reforms, through a concrete focus on specific current challenges, benefitting all Member States.

#### 3.2.2. Evidence and monitoring

An important part of the Open Method of Coordination in education is the systematic collection and analysis of internationally comparable data. In addition, in the past twenty years, international surveys gained weight in the policy discourse in education. Under ET 2020, several avenues were exploited to gain better knowledge of education and training across the EU:

- EU benchmarks, or quantitative targets to be reached by the EU as a whole, and agreed with Member States as a means of monitoring progress and identifying challenges
- Policy data on the structure and functioning of the EU education systems
- Cooperation with knowledge providers on education, such as for example the OECD, or the International Association for the Evaluation of International Achievements
- The use of thematic studies and academic networks

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<sup>142</sup> LLL Week - <http://lllplatform.eu/events/lll-week/>

Every year, the Commission published a rich analytical report, the Education and Training Monitor<sup>143</sup>, which brought together the latest comparable and country evidence on education and training. The analysis in the Monitor also served as a support to the analytical exercise under the European Semester.

The set of ET 2020 benchmarks in education and training represent the EU contribution to the monitoring of Sustainable Development Goal 4 on quality education for all. Some of the indicators of ET 2020 were also used as main and secondary indicators under the Scoreboard of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The ET 2020 comprised seven benchmarks<sup>144</sup>, six of which were regularly reported and analysed in the annual Education and Training Monitor. The objective of the benchmarks was to:

- increase tertiary educational attainment of those aged 30-34 to at least 40%. The tertiary educational attainment in the EU-27 has steadily increased over the past decade and reached 40.3% in 2019<sup>145</sup>.
- increase participation in early childhood education to at least 95%. With 94.8% of children from age of 4 to the start of primary education enrolled in early childhood education and care, participation in this crucial education level is by now almost universal in the EU.
- reduce early leaving from education and training to below 10%. The rate of young adults (aged 18-24) leaving education and training without obtaining an upper secondary diploma reached 10.2% in 2019.
- Increase the employment rate of recent graduates to at least 82%. After reaching the lowest point in 2013 (75.4%), the employment rate of recent EU graduates has been continuously improving. With 80.9% in 2019, the rate has however not reached yet the 2008 level of 81.8%.
- reduce underachievement in basic skills to below 15%. The OECD PISA 2018 data showed that one in five pupils failed to complete basic tasks in reading (22.9%); mathematics (22.9%); and science (22.3%).
- increase the rate of adult learning to at least 15%. The rate of adult learning, measured as participation in education and training in the last 4 weeks, has increased slowly over the past decade, and only reached 10.8% in 2019.

The seventh officially adopted benchmark is on learning mobility in higher education and in initial vocational education. Learning mobility in higher education was estimated at 13.5% in

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<sup>143</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/et-monitor\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/et-monitor_en)

<sup>144</sup> Even though it was officially developed and proposed, the benchmark on foreign languages has not been adopted, due to political sensitivities across some Member States and the lack of data sources.

<sup>145</sup> All ET 2020 benchmarks were set on the basis of EU-28 data. The newest data reported in this Communication are EU-27 averages, thus without UK.



2018 (ET 2020 target 20%)<sup>146</sup>. The major outstanding obstacle to calculating this benchmark is the fact that data on degree mobile graduates from the EU need to be collected by the concerned receiving countries, including those outside the EU. The data on mobile graduates by origin is collected by EU countries but not available in several non-EU countries that attract significant inflows of foreign students<sup>147</sup>.

The 2018 Member State Survey revealed that ET 2020 indicators and benchmarks have served as reliable sources of information for countries to measure and improve the performance of their education systems. This view is broadly supported by the stakeholders' survey, which showed that the benchmarks help focus national policy discussions and support grassroots-level policy initiatives. The independent assessment of ET 2020 confirmed that the benchmarks have been valuable in encouraging national policy dialogues and ensuring impetus for reforms<sup>148</sup>. The ET 2020 benchmarks helped signalling political priorities and assessing convergence<sup>149</sup>.

The benchmarks provide comparative, high-quality quantitative evidence. Their analysis also require the use of qualitative information on structure and functioning of education systems<sup>150</sup>. In addition, there are important factors in education that cannot be captured by a single quantitative indicator – for example the quality of teaching. This is why the monitoring of ET 2020 also relied on 'structural indicators' (or 'policy indicators') collected by the Eurydice network. Further qualitative evidence was collected in cooperation with expert networks such as EENEE (European Expert Network on Economics of Education) or NESET (Network of Experts working on the Social dimension of Education and Training); EU agencies (such as Cedefop, European Training Foundation); and networks of national education information services (such as Eurydice or National Academic Information Centres).

This combination of qualitative assessments and the quantitative analysis of key education system developments is, so the stakeholders report, considered useful in providing a more evidence-based approach to education and training policy changes/reforms. This was the approach of the annual Education and Training Monitor, with its EU analysis and country profiles. For example, it featured extensive analysis of demographic change and economic crisis (2012); investing in skills and qualifications (2013); migration (2016); citizenship education (2018); teachers and teaching (2019). The 2020 edition, under preparation, has a particular focus on digital education and digital skills.

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<sup>146</sup> Education and Training Monitor 2020 (forthcoming)

<sup>147</sup> For further insights on the methodology adopted to calculate this indicator and data issues, please see Flisi, S. and Sánchez-Barrioluengo, M. *Learning Mobility II. An estimation of the benchmark*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2018

<sup>148</sup> European Commission (ICF and Technopolis), *Assessment of tools and deliverables under the framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) Final Report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg 2019, p. 51.

<sup>149</sup> ET 2020 benchmarks are reference levels of EU average performance. Cf. Annex I of the 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)

<sup>150</sup> European Commission (ICF and Technopolis), *Assessment of tools and deliverables under the framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) Final Report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg 2019, p. 22-23.

Stakeholders confirm the importance of an annual Commission publication (the Education and Training Monitor) analysing and setting out the progress made towards the ET 2020 benchmarks. Member States used evidence provided in the report as a comparative reference point and to inform the national policy debate and the dialogue with stakeholder organisations.

#### **4. Towards the European Education Area**

The challenges identified in section 2 call for new solutions from education and training. At the same time, the strategic priorities defined in the cooperation framework remain relevant. In the years ahead, education systems will need to continue working on core tasks, such as strengthening quality, inclusiveness and lifelong learning, but will also need to address the green and digital transitions, account for increasingly pressing demographic changes and adapt to new modes of learning. In the Member States, these adaptations will take place during the recovery period, in which investment in education is likely to face a squeeze caused by the economic crisis.

ET 2020 has set the foundations: it has generated shared understanding of common issues and contributed to the emergence of communities of policy practice. Europe now needs a step change in European cooperation in education. Moving beyond a challenge based-perspective, EU action should be set in motion based on the positive principles of the freedom to learn and work together across borders, a commitment to common European values, and to support reforms in Member States. Guided by an understanding of a changing global landscape, the European leaders have decided to increase the ambitions of EU cooperation in education and training and work toward a European Education Area.

As outlined in section 3, this step-change was launched through the first European Education Area and other education and training initiatives. As the ET 2020 draws to a close, the time is right to align the enabling framework and common goals to make the European Education Area a reality and work toward a permanent governance framework.

##### **4.1. Future priorities and issue areas**

This section identifies the areas and thematic issues where further work is proposed to meet the ambitions and objectives of the European Education Area. The selection of the issue areas is based on an extensive consultation with Member States and stakeholders, including the European Education and Training Expert Panel. The consultations confirmed the continued relevance of long-term strategic priorities, such as making lifelong learning and mobility a reality or improving the quality and efficiency of education and training. Member States and the education and training community have also called to focus EU action on emerging challenges and opportunities, such as the ones presented by the green and the digital transitions. The topics presented below inform the different work strands of the European Education Area, including EU-level initiatives, mutual learning, cooperation and co-creation.

#### 4.1.1. *Early childhood education and care*

Covering the whole period from birth to primary school, early childhood education and care (ECEC) supports early acquisition of basic skills and the development of social and cognitive skills, hence facilitating later acquisition of knowledge and a fruitful citizen's life. The **number of children participating in early childhood education and care has been on a steady rise for the last decade**. The EU27 average of children from 4 years old to the compulsory primary school age remains floating just below the target of 95%: from 94.9% in 2016 and 2017 to 94.8% in 2018. Under the age of 3, the picture changes somewhat, with an EU average of 56.1% enrolled in early childhood education. Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion have participation rates in education and formal childcare that are 11 percentage points lower than their peers from non-disadvantaged families for the group aged 3 or more (e.g. Roma participation in ECD is only 42%); and the gap is even greater for children aged 0-2.

An expanding body of research associates ECEC attendance with positive cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes that stretch into adulthood, and can be particularly beneficial to children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Data from OECD supports these findings as children who attended ECEC tend to score higher in reading at the age of 15.

However, supply of and access to high-quality provision remain a challenge. Across the EU, the offer of early childhood education and care is characterised by a great variation in financing, participation rates, starting age, quality and duration of programmes and organisation<sup>151</sup>. **Participation, affordability and quality** remain uneven within and between countries. In many countries, the early childhood education and care sector faces difficulties to recruit and retain **well-qualified and competent staff**. It is therefore necessary to make the profession more attractive and to improve initial and continuing training of all staff involved in the sector. A range of strategies and good practices are also being discussed to increase inclusiveness of early childhood education and care systems and settings.

In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, the Commission is particularly attentive to the risks incurred by the early childhood education and care sector, which might hinder the quality process described above. In particular, it is important that early childhood education and care services remain available, in spite of financial difficulties, and that qualified staff is retained and keeps being recruited. It is also important to make sure that investment in the sector keeps increasing, and that the educational impact of these services is not overshadowed by the importance of the childcare dimension which has been evidenced by the crisis. Finally, due attention will need to be paid to the processes needed to ensure learning continuity with very young children, for whom digital learning is not an easy or desirable option, if / when early childhood education and care services need to close for long periods.

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<sup>151</sup> European Commission, Eurydice, *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe: 2019 edition*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019

#### 4.1.2. Key challenges to achieve school success for all

School education plays a twofold role in promoting social fairness and prosperity. First, it can strengthen social cohesion. Second, it can make the EU economy more resilient. A growing body of research has demonstrated that access by children and young people from low-income groups to good quality education helps tackle unemployment and break the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Thus, the EU and its Member States should give all citizens the competences needed to adapt to globalisation and technological change.

School education must now address the following challenges:

##### a. Giving all young people the chance to develop their key competences.

The progress in reducing **underachievement of 15 year-old pupils in basic skills in the last decade has been disappointing**. The OECD PISA test shows that around one in five 15 year-olds in the EU (22.5% in reading, 22.9% in mathematics and 22.3% in science) were underachievers in 2018. While differences between countries exist, in the EU underachievement has increased in reading and science, and remained persistently above the benchmark in mathematics over the past decade<sup>152</sup>. Socio-economic background and migrant background strongly affects pupils' performance and their academic expectations in most EU countries. Gender differences in underachievement are rather small in mathematics and science, but remain sizeable in reading, where girls strongly outperform boys in many countries. A wide performance gap in reading also exists between pupils in **general education** and those in **vocational programmes**.

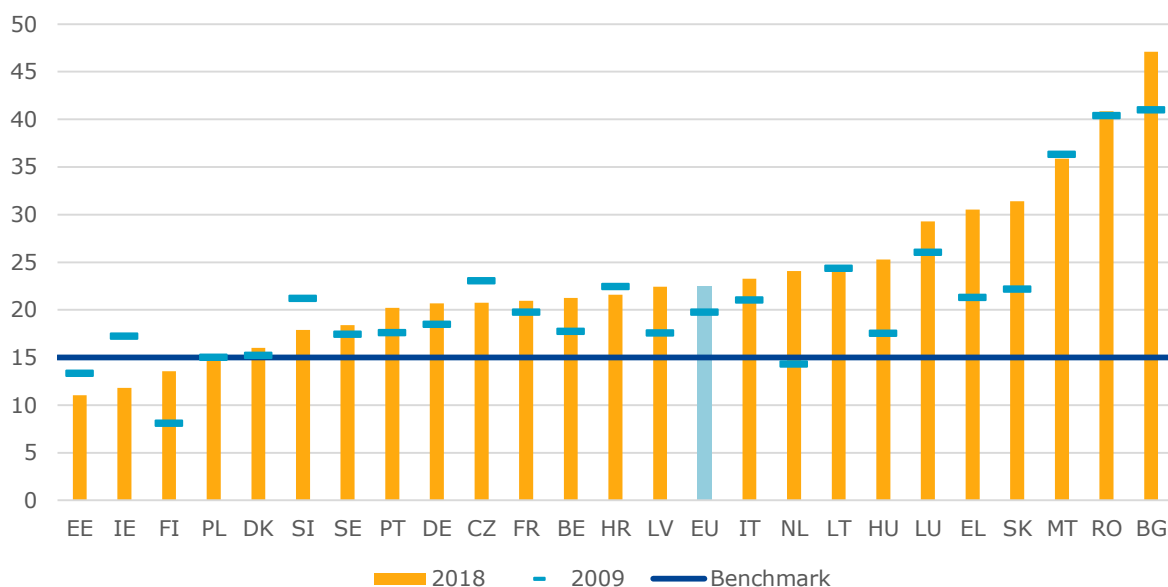


Figure 4. Long-term change in underachievement rate in reading, 2009 – 2018 [%]

Source: OECD: PISA 2018.

<sup>152</sup> See a more detailed report in European Commission, [PISA 2018 and the EU: Striving for social fairness through education](#), 2019

PISA data also shows that overall, countries with small proportions of underachievers tend to have also high proportions of top performers. This means that education systems can pursue excellence and equity at the same time.

On the side of **basic digital skills**, the International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS) compares the results of pupils in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade on Computer and Information Literacy, as well as Computational Thinking. The survey, conducted in 14 EU Member States, shows that being born in a digital world does not necessarily make one digitally competent. Contrary to the common view of the young generation of today as a generation of ‘digital natives’, findings from the first two cycles of ICILS indicate that young people do not develop sophisticated digital skills just by growing up using digital devices. In 9 out of 14 Member States participating in ICILS, more than one third of the pupils achieved scores below level 2 on the ICILS CIL scale, which can be defined as the threshold for underachievement in digital competence. Yet, there is greater variation within than across countries.

Unlike the basic key competences in the area of science, maths, and reading, **there are no commonly accepted principles for developing the Environmental Sustainability** competence. Different Member States use different tools and stress different aspects of education for environmental sustainability. These differences are clearly observed in educational practice in regions, districts and individual schools as well as in academic studies and commentaries<sup>153</sup>. There is no common language with agreed-upon understanding of the objectives and the pedagogical methodology in use. This state of the education for environmental sustainability across the EU makes it difficult for students and teachers to cooperate and exchange ideas and best practices.

Therefore, as stated in the Green Deal, the Commission will propose a **European competence framework on climate change and sustainable development**. It will build on the revised Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, which describes the key competences that underpin the drive towards environmental sustainability, i.e. science, citizenship education, entrepreneurship as well as the personal, social and learning to learn key competences. The goal of the Framework is to establish a shared understanding and a conceptual model of the competences to be acquired by learners with guidelines for implementation. The common definition and practical guidelines should ultimately support the education for environmental sustainability in Member States’ school and higher education systems.

- b. **Minimising the number of young people who leave education without at least an upper secondary degree.**

The rate of **young adults (aged 18-24) leaving education and training without obtaining an upper secondary diploma** decreased continuously over the last decade, down from 14.0%

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<sup>153</sup> Jucker, R., Mathar, R., *Schooling for Sustainable Development in Europe: Concepts, Policies and Educational Experiences at the End of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development*, Springer International Publishing, 2016

in 2009 to 10.2% in 2019. Despite this progress, early school-leavers<sup>154</sup> still represent around 10% of young people in the EU and only 83.5% (aged 20-24) have completed upper secondary education. Men are more likely than women to leave school with low educational attainment. There is a pronounced gap between the migrant and native population, with migrant youth being more than twice as likely, at EU average, to leave education prematurely. Leaving education without an upper secondary diploma exposes youth and adults to a lower employment rate, lower earnings, and lower rates of adult learning. Leaving no one behind would require additional efforts in bringing down the rate of early leaving from education and training.

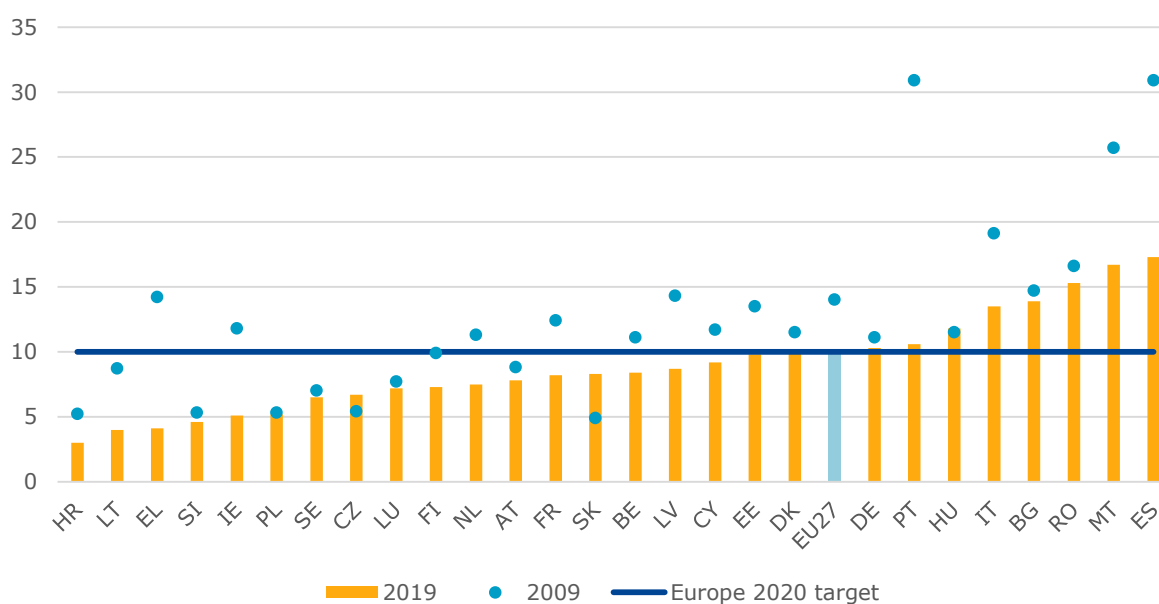


Figure 5. Change in the rate of early leavers from education and training, 2009-2019

Source: Eurostat, EU Labour Force Survey. Online data code: [\[edat lfse 14\]](#).

Note: Break in time series in 2014.

### c. **Creating supportive learning environments for groups at risk of underachievement and students with special learning needs.**

Educational segregation occurs in at least half of all EU Member States,<sup>155</sup> despite evidence that all pupils can benefit when disadvantaged, underachieving and special needs pupils share school with more advantaged peers.

The PISA isolation index measures whether certain groups of pupils are more concentrated in some schools compared to the rest of the pupil population. The isolation index has revealed that the percentage of underachievers in reading tends to be higher in EU countries where underachieving pupils are more concentrated in some schools. The same association exists,

<sup>154</sup> The indicator is defined as the percentage of the population aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary education and who were not in further education or training during the last four weeks preceding the survey

<sup>155</sup> European Commission, *School segregation of immigrants and its effects on educational outcomes in Europe*, EENEE Analytical Report No. 30, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2017

though to a somewhat lesser extent, between the percentage of underachievers in reading and the concentration of socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils in some schools.

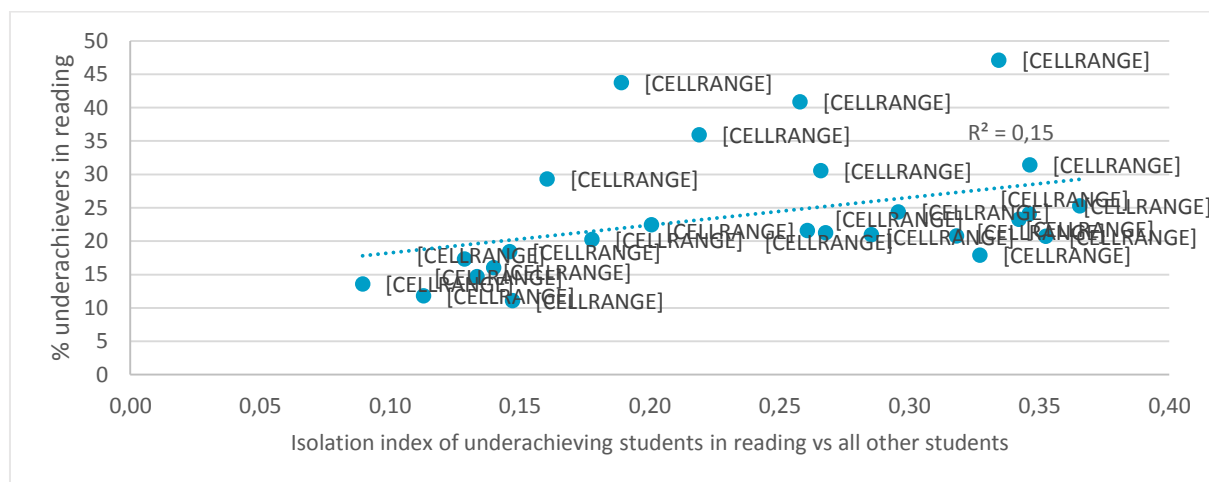


Figure 6. Isolation index of underachieving students in reading vs all other students

Source: PISA 2018, OECD.

These findings are consistent with the literature on the effects of school segregation: some performance differences between schools stem from the composition of the pupil population.<sup>156</sup> Students enrolled in segregated facilities usually display a lower educational performance compared to the national/local average. Closely linked to a high dropout rate, segregated schools also register a lower share of students continuing studies in higher educational facilities. Socio-economic status affects academic expectations of the students: the difference between advantaged students who expect to enrol in tertiary education and their disadvantaged peers exceeds 30 percentage points in the majority of Member States<sup>157</sup>.

Due to specific correlations between socio-economic status and other factors of disadvantage, such as insufficient familiarity with the language of instruction or discrimination; children belonging to ethnic minorities and students with a migrant background are in particular at risk of underachievement.

Non-enrolment, early school leaving, dropping-out and irregular attendance are common challenges for the many education institutions across Europe when it comes to Roma children. Few young people from Roma ethnic background obtain an academic qualification at the level of secondary education: while a 10.2% of the general population<sup>158</sup> leave school before completing secondary education, the figure scales up to 72% among the Roma population<sup>159</sup>, amounting to a gap of 61.8 percentage points. Participation of Roma children (3+) in Early

<sup>156</sup> Reardon, S. and Owens, A., '60 years after Brown: Trends and consequences of school segregation', *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 40/1, 2014, pp. 199-218.

<sup>157</sup> Data from OECD PISA 2018 survey, analysed in European Commission, [PISA 2018 and the EU: Striving for social fairness through education](#), 2019

<sup>158</sup> Eurostat, LFS, online data code [\[edat\\_lfse\\_14\]](#)

<sup>159</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Roma – Selected findings*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2016

Childhood education and care is 42%<sup>160</sup>, compared to 94.8% in the general population (3+) <sup>161</sup>.

Children with a migrant background perform worse at school in the majority of Member States, even after controlling for socioeconomic status and gender. When it comes to pupils born in the EU with immigrant parents, their performance shows improvement compared to the first generation, but the proportion of underachievers among these students remains higher than among their peers with native-born parents (Figure 7).

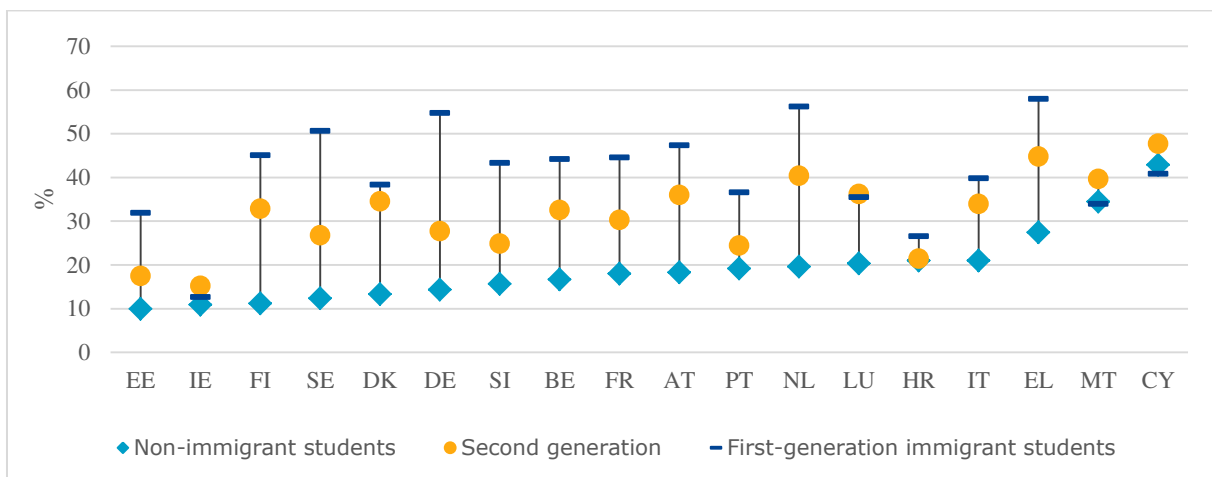


Figure 7. Underachievers in reading by migrant background, 2018

Source: OECD PISA 2018. Note: The countries are sorted in the ascending order of the underachievement rate among the native pupils. Data on reading performance not available for ES. Countries where less than 5% of the pupils have a migrant background are not included in the chart.

Moreover, 5% of the European learners<sup>162</sup> are defined as persons with Special Educational Needs (SEN). This includes learners with disabilities as defined by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006), but also other groups of learners who have educational needs that require specific and extra support and related resources.

In order to address the performance gap between groups at risk of underachievement and the general population and to enable all students to reach their full potential, comprehensive support and responding flexibly to the circumstances and needs of students in mainstream settings is essential, as embodied by the so-called “whole school approach”.

#### d. Ensuring pupils’ well-being at school.

Ensuring pupils’ well-being at school is important for pupils’ school performance, and feeling of respect and of safety. PISA data shows that pupils’ sense of belonging at school is

<sup>160</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Roma – Selected findings*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2016

<sup>161</sup> Eurostat, online data code [[educ\\_uoe\\_enra10](#)]

<sup>162</sup> It concerns all the 31 countries members of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. Number of learners with an official decision of SEN / The number of learners who are enrolled in all formal educational settings x 100. Countries have different forms of official decision-making, often relating to differing mechanisms for accessing additional resources to meet SEN.



declining and bullying is widespread. More than one third of pupils across 14 EU Member States do not feel that they belong at school and the situation has worsened in most EU Member States between 2015 and 2018. Moreover, in a majority of EU countries, more than one in five report that they are bullied at least a few times a month<sup>163</sup>. Promoting and supporting a culture of wellbeing for all at school could be beneficial also for teachers and staff. 10-20% of children and adolescents experience mental disorders such as anxiety and depression, which may severely influence their development, educational attainment and their potential to live fulfilling lives<sup>164</sup>. Cooperation between the health, social and education sectors in the management of mental disorder prevention and mental health and well-being promotion, is therefore pressing. Scientific evidence and best practices are available, efforts should now be concentrated on communication and engagement of stakeholders for an effective and wide uptake of successful measures.

The COVID-19 pandemic can only add to the relevance of these challenges. Research has consistently shown that school interruptions are much more detrimental to disadvantaged pupils, who are already more at risk of underachieving in basic skills and leaving education prematurely. The health crisis can also increase stress levels among pupils and undermine their well-being even when they will come back to regular schooling. Therefore its effects on pupils' educational outcomes may persist over the next few years.

#### 4.1.3. *Challenges in acquiring and upgrading competences for adults*

**On the side of adults**, adult learning benefits the individual (personal development, employment, health), the economy (sustainable productivity and competitiveness), as well as society (democracy, fairness and resilience, less poverty, more social cohesion). Despite some progress in participation in learning, the EU is far from reaching the 15% objectives (10.7% in 2019). However, far too many adults (aged 25-64) are low-qualified, having achieved only a lower secondary education (21.6% of the EU population, ranging from 6% in Czechia to 47.8% in Portugal)<sup>165</sup>. Similar proportions of adults are low-skilled, meaning they struggle with reading, writing, simple calculations and/or using a computer ('basic skills'), according to OECD's Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC)<sup>166</sup>.

Low levels of skills and qualifications are a risk to future economic and social growth and sustainability. People with low skills levels have lower-paid and more precarious jobs, are more likely to be unemployed, in poor health, and have lower levels of well-being, problems which have been accentuated during the COVID-19 pandemic, thus widening social inequalities they experience.

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<sup>163</sup> Data from OECD PISA 2018 survey, analysed in European Commission, [PISA 2018 and the EU: Striving for social fairness through education](#), 2019

<sup>164</sup> Joint Action for Mental Health and Well-being; [Mental Health and Schools](#), 2016, available online World Health Organisation, *Adolescent Mental Health in the European Region*, Factsheet, available online, 2018 [http://www.euro.who.int/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/383891/adolescent-mh-fs-eng.pdf?ua=1](http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/383891/adolescent-mh-fs-eng.pdf?ua=1)

<sup>165</sup> Eurostat LFS, online data code: [\[edat\\_lfse\\_03\]](#)

<sup>166</sup> OECD, *Skills Matter: Additional results from the survey of adult skills*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2019

The changing nature of work is expanding the role of higher education systems in lifelong learning. This is also mirrored in European policies and priorities. European skills forecasts foresee a significant growth in high-skilled occupations<sup>167</sup>, well beyond the current European 40% tertiary education attainment target that has been reached by most EU countries. However, the knowledge and competences acquired through formal education must be updated in a rapidly changing society undergoing environmental, technological, and social transformations.

Innovations in learning pathways and learning environments in higher education institutions are a pre-condition to better accommodate the needs of a wider range of learners<sup>168</sup>, by complementing traditional degrees with new and shorter forms of provision that fit the needs of a wider range of learners, including working adults. A growing number of adults, with a higher education degree or lower, will need to reskill and upskill through more flexible alternatives than a full degree in order to overcome the gap between the learning outcomes of initial formal qualifications and emerging skills needs in the labour market. Furthermore, the current COVID-19 pandemic illustrates the urgency of creating more transparency in the continuing education and training offer. It is expected that the demand for short learning options and their recognition and validation will increase. It is currently unclear how quickly the economy will be able to recover, but it is likely that people will look for more upskilling and re-skilling options. Also, the COVID-19 crisis showed the digital skills gap in society, which may also increase the demand for training in this field.

Continuous learning through **alternative credentials** (certificates, digital badges, micro-credentials) is a **means to overcome skills mismatches**, increase the **efficiency** of higher education systems, encourage **innovation in provision**, and thereby reach **new learners**, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Higher education institutions have a key role in offering alternative credentials, which can help learners acquire new skills, and update their existing skills in changing labour markets<sup>169</sup>. Short learning courses leading to micro-credentials can be useful not only for professionals, but also for students at Bachelor and Master level, in particular to develop transferable skills that students from all disciplines need for their future careers.

However, different constraints are currently limiting the potential impact of alternative credentials. There is a lack of common formats and quality assurance measures attached to alternative credentials, and the recognition process is not always transparent and reliable. Even though micro-credentials are a relatively new phenomenon<sup>170</sup>, they can play a strong **complementary role to higher education degrees** by creating **flexible pathways** into

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<sup>167</sup> Cedefop, *Skills Forecast: key EU trends to 2030*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2018

<sup>168</sup> McGrath, C. H. et al., *Governance and adaptation to innovative modes of higher education*, Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency of the European Union, 2016

<sup>169</sup> Kato, S., Galán-Muros, V. and Weko, T., 'The emergence of alternative credentials', *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 216, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2020

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

tertiary education and by offering attractive solutions to up-skilling and reskilling matched to the needs of the labour market<sup>171</sup>.

In 2019, recent graduates from education and training had the best employment prospects since the beginning of the decade. 80.9% of those who graduated during the past three years were in employment, not too far from the 82% objective set under ET 2020. Furthermore, in a number of EU Member States, the **employment rate of recent graduates** was higher than the employment rate of the general population with comparable level of education and training. Still, challenges persist in some EU Member States and among some population groups. In particular, only 62.8% of those young people who recently entered the labour market holding a general upper-secondary degree, i.e. without acquiring a vocational qualification or tertiary education, were in employment in 2019. From a policy perspective, the ET 2020 benchmark remains relevant as not all population groups face a smooth transition from education to the labour market yet.

In most countries, graduates from VET at upper-secondary level have higher employment rates and lower unemployment rates than graduates from general programmes at the same education level, but lower employment rates (and wages) than university graduates.

#### 4.1.4. *Linguistic and cultural diversity*

Europe's student population is becoming increasingly culturally diverse and multilingual. Global and regional migration, learning mobility and the internationalisation of higher education all contribute to this growing diversity. Diversity in and by itself is an asset, enriching Europe's talent pool. However, recent episodes of humanitarian migration (2015-2016) have highlighted the challenges of education of people with a migrant background.

There is a great variation EU Member States when it comes to the heterogeneity of the student population. In 21 Member States, pupils with a migrant background represent at least 5% of the student body – proportions range between 5.8% (Finland) and 54.9% (Luxembourg).<sup>172</sup> The integration and inclusion of people with a migrant background<sup>173</sup> in education continues to present challenges in Member States with a significant number of new arrivals and traditional immigrant destinations. Roma children's inclusion to mainstream education remains a challenge particularly in Central and Eastern European countries. There are 44% of Roma (6-15 years old) attending schools where most or all children are Roma.<sup>174</sup> Linguistic

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<sup>171</sup> On-line interview with Dr Sean Gallagher, North Eastern University, Insight Centre, the Future of Education, Boston Mass., 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2019

<sup>172</sup> European Commission, [PISA 2018 and the EU: Striving for social fairness through education](#), 2019

<sup>173</sup> The concept of "people with a migrant background" includes both immigrants and their native-born children (the so-called "second generation"). In the EU legal context, we refer to the integration challenges of third-country nationals, i.e. those born outside of the EU (and their children). Notwithstanding, EU mobile citizens and especially their children may experience difficulties similar to those of non-EU migrants when adapting to the education system of another Member State. The OECD definition for pupils with a migrant background comprises all foreign-born students (both EU and non-EU), as well as native-born students with foreign-born parents. It is important to be mindful of the background concept when interpreting OECD PISA data.

<sup>174</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Roma – Selected findings*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2016

diversity in schools is also linked to inequalities and persistent deficiencies in reading literacy, as the latest PISA results convey<sup>175</sup>.

Being able to speak foreign languages is a key condition for studying and working abroad. It also enables learners to fully discover Europe's cultural diversity and truly benefit from a genuine European learning space. However, there is a lack of qualified language teachers in many countries, also for English. Furthermore, many teachers of all subjects feel ill prepared for managing linguistic and cultural diversity in school. On the other hand, language teachers play an important role for the internationalisation of schools, and tend to be keener than their peers to use IT tools and digital platforms to enhance their teaching<sup>176</sup>.

#### 4.1.5. *The multi-dimensional issue of gender in education*

Gender equality challenges in education are multifaceted. Boys have higher early school leaving rates and lower tertiary education attainment rates; they participate less in lifelong learning; and are more likely than girls to fail to meet the minimum standard required in all three PISA subjects. At the same time, although the numbers of girls entering the universities are reported to be at a ratio of 65-35 (65% girls as compared to 35% boys); and despite the fact that women's tertiary education attainment is higher than men, the employment rate of female graduates is lower than men.<sup>177</sup> Also, women only represent 17% of people in ICT studies and careers in the EU-27<sup>178</sup>, despite the fact that girls outperform boys in digital literacy<sup>179</sup>.

Another gender issue is the strong gender imbalance in the teaching profession. In the EU, women represent 96.6% of pre-primary, 84.9% of primary and 64.7% of secondary teachers. The aim should be to reflect the diversity of society and to create a sense of belonging for all students independent of gender, race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation<sup>180</sup>.

In higher education, the EU is approaching gender balance among doctoral students. However, the proportion of women among doctoral graduates still varies among the different fields of education; in 2018, women doctoral graduates in the EU-27 were over-represented in education (67%), but under-represented in the field of information and communication technologies (22%) and the fields of engineering and manufacturing and construction

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<sup>175</sup> See section 4.2.1.

<sup>176</sup> OECD, 2018 TALIS results (Volume II): Teachers and School Leaders as Valued Professionals, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2020

<sup>177</sup> European Commission, Eurostat, Sustainable development in the European Union — Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGS in an EU context — 2020 edition, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020, p. 109

<sup>178</sup> European Commission, *Women in the Digital Age*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2018. Eurostat data source: [[educ\\_uoe\\_enra03](#)]

<sup>179</sup> International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, *Preparing for Life in a Digital World: IEA International Computer and Information Literacy Study 2018 International Report*, Springer, 2018. "Female students demonstrated higher CIL achievement than male students" and "The average CIL scores of female students was statistically significantly higher than that of male students in 10 of 13 countries and benchmarking participants that met the ICILS technical requirements (chapter 3, p. 51).

<sup>180</sup> OECD, '[Gender imbalances in the teaching profession](#)', *Education Indicators in Focus*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2017

(29%)<sup>181</sup>. As they move up the academic ladder, women are less represented. The proportion of women among heads of institutions in the higher education sector in the EU increased from 20.1% in 2014 to 21.7% in 2017 (EU-28)<sup>182</sup>. However, the picture is mixed at the national level, where several countries experienced a decrease in women heads of institutions. As the next step, specific attention should be given to women in decision-making positions at universities, the promotion of gender balance in academic careers and study choice, and integration of a gender dimension in university curricula.

It is not easy for education institutions to address gender issues; there is little evidence-based guidance on how to reverse trends. Hence, a new approach is needed to find the appropriate means of tackling the interlinking aspects of gender in education and education for gender equality. Specific gender issues related to underachievement and gender stereotypes in education and educational careers, and bullying and sexual harassment should be tackled in a holistic manner, including through the promotion of gender sensitive teaching.

#### 4.1.6. *Teachers, trainers and school leaders*

Among all factors in the school environment, teachers and school leaders have the greatest impact on students' learning outcomes. At the same time, 65% of public expenditure in education in the EU is spent on teachers<sup>183</sup>. Any policy effort seeking to improve educational outcomes – or the efficiency of education and training – is bound to take a close look at the role of teachers and school leaders and look for ways to help them excel in their demanding profession. Teachers also play a key role in ensuring inclusive education.

Across the entire EU, education systems are confronted with a number of challenges relating to teachers and school leaders: their **recruitment**, **retention**, and **regeneration** (self- and peer development).

Regarding **recruitment** (joining the profession) and **retention** (remaining in the profession for a number of years), several countries already face or are about to face shortages of teachers, either across the board or in particular subject areas (typically science, technology, engineering and maths); or in particular geographical areas. In view of the proportions of teachers aged 50 or plus, EU countries will have to renew about one third of their teaching population in the next decade or so and at least five EU countries will have to renew around half of their secondary school teachers.

New evidence from the OECD TALIS 2018 survey sheds more light on how EU teachers see their profession<sup>184</sup>. Only 18% of lower secondary school teachers consider their profession as valued by society; and their proportion lowers with longer years of teaching experience. Similarly, the share of teachers would still choose to work as teachers declines significantly,

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<sup>181</sup> UNESCO/OECD/Eurostat data collection, Graduates by education level, programme orientation, sex and field of education, online data code: [[educ\\_uoe\\_grad02](#)]

<sup>182</sup> European Commission, *She Figures 2018*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019

<sup>183</sup> Eurostat, online data code: [[gov\\_10a\\_exp](#)]

<sup>184</sup> European Commission, *Education and Training Monitor 2019*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019

in several EU countries, among more experienced teachers. There are also shortages of teachers with specific profiles. According to TALIS 2018, nearly 40% of school heads in lower secondary schools in the EU declare that the shortage of teachers teaching students with special needs hinders the quality of instruction at their school.

Salaries of teachers do not always compare favourably to salaries of other equally qualified professionals. Among EU countries with available data, in four countries (Czechia, Slovakia, Italy and Hungary) teachers at all education levels earn less than 80% of what other tertiary-educated workers do. In most Member States, primary (and especially pre-primary) teachers earn less than secondary level teachers. In secondary education, teachers' statutory salary tends to be higher at upper-secondary level than at lower-secondary level.

In addition, there is a specific challenge in attracting men into teaching; and particularly so for pre-primary and primary education, where the proportion of female teachers reaches 85% and 96% respectively. At secondary level, 65% are women. In upper-secondary vocational education, across the EU, about 60% are women.

Throughout their careers, teachers and school leaders should be motivated and have the opportunities to develop their competences – and those of their peers – in a collaborative effort to support the **regeneration** of their own profession against an evolving technological and demographic background. These **competences** include embracing cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom, integrating the use of digital technologies, pedagogical approaches to in-school and distance environments, uptake of new competences (as ESD), sharing and developing practices with the education community, and the ability to manage their own career progression. While 92% of teachers surveyed in TALIS 2018 report regular participation in professional development, 21% of them declare a further need for training on teaching students with special needs; 16% report a further need for training on the use of information and communication technology (ICT) for teaching; and about 13% report a further need for training in teaching in multilingual and multicultural environments.

#### 4.1.7. *The need for higher education transformation*

Over the past 10 years, Europe experienced a **sizeable increase in tertiary educational attainment**. In 2009, 31.1% of the population of 30-34 year olds in the EU held a tertiary degree. The rate now stands at 40.3% and has thus reached the ET 2020 target. However, despite the continuing policy focus on inclusion, the evidence from Eurostudent<sup>185</sup> and the Bologna Process Implementation Report<sup>186</sup> shows **persisting under-representation of students with disadvantaged background in higher education**.

Women's tertiary educational rate is on average in Europe 10 percentage points higher than men's, with this gap increasing year after year, except in 2019. Generally speaking, the

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<sup>185</sup> German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW), [Eurostudent VI: Overview and selected findings](#), Social and economic conditions of student life in Europe, eurostudent.eu, 2018

<sup>186</sup> European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *The European Higher Education Area in 2018: Bologna Process Implementation Report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2018

tertiary educational attainment rate is higher in the native population than in those with a recent migration history. With the expansion of the higher education sector, it is timely to examine the role of higher education institutions in society, and the composition of their students, researchers and staff.

In addition, while increased internationalisation of higher education offers opportunities to higher education institutions in Europe, it also challenges them to be able to compete internationally. While Europe has many strong universities, very few of them are considered to be among the world's best in the post-Brexit situation in international rankings<sup>187</sup>. Even though rankings need to be interpreted with caution due to the methodologies used, **international competitiveness** remains key for higher education institutions in Europe. Evidence shows that high quality education, especially where students are exposed to an activating learning environment and work-based learning, prepare higher education graduates the best to enter the labour market<sup>188</sup>.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown **that deeper cooperation across borders, disciplines and cultures** is the only way to recover from the crisis and to build resilience. Nevertheless, a lot of potential remains untapped. A recent survey conducted by the Commission among the more than 110 higher education institutions engaged in the first 17 Erasmus+ European Universities shows that all of them feel that they would have been better prepared to face the COVID-19 pandemic if their European University had already been fully operational by the time of the pandemic's outbreak last winter. But more than 60% of them are already well advanced and consider that being part of a European University has already been helpful and crucial in addressing the current difficulties linked to the COVID-19 crisis.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** has also accelerated the **digital transformation** of higher education institutions, as programmes moved online in an emergency response to lockdowns throughout Europe<sup>189</sup>. While the pandemic has had an impact on specific areas in higher education, such as funding<sup>190</sup>, digitalisation and equitable access to digital infrastructure, innovative pedagogies and student-centred learning, inclusion, student and staff support, and mobility<sup>191</sup>, higher education was already in a process of transformation.

**A lot of potential for cooperation currently remains untapped.** Even though a lot of cooperation is already taking place between higher education institutions in Europe, according to a survey, it appears that partners in only 8% of these transnational partnerships share their

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<sup>187</sup> E.g. [Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2020](#), [QS World University ranking](#)

<sup>188</sup> European Commission, *Eurograduate pilot survey: Design and implementation of a pilot European graduate survey*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020

<sup>189</sup> Surveys carried out in 2020 by European Universities Association ([Survey on “digitally enhanced learning”, preliminary results](#)) and European Students Union ([Student life in the EHEA during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)) show the scale and impact of the switch.

<sup>190</sup> European University Association, *The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on university funding in Europe*, 2020

<sup>191</sup> See results from the surveys carried out by the European University Association ([Survey on “digitally enhanced learning”, preliminary results](#)) and the European Students Union ([Student life in the EHEA during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)) on the initial impact of COVID-19 on higher education.

assets. Only 9% have shared and common campuses<sup>192</sup>. Moreover, according to another survey<sup>193</sup>, around 65% of the partnerships do not offer any mobility schemes at Bachelor level, and embedded mobility is mainly offered at Master level. It appears also that the majority of cooperation occurs mainly only at department/faculty level, on specific topics, and that only a bit more than 40% of the respondents indicated that their partnership involved the entire organisation.

In addition to other funding possibilities for higher education institutions at the national and European level, Member States and stakeholders asked for **sustainable and adequate funding of European Universities at both European and national levels**, as well as for **synergies between European programmes and funds** (Erasmus, Horizon, Digital Europe, structural funds, EFSI/InvestEU) **and national funds**. At the same time, stakeholders and Member States called on the Commission during consultation meetings to **foster an enabling operational environment allowing for deeper and seamless transnational cooperation**.

**Mutual trust in Member States' education systems** is indispensable to achieve the objectives of the European Education Area, which is built on transparent quality assurance systems and automatic recognition of qualifications and learning periods abroad. Work has already started on European and Member State level with the adoption of the Council Recommendation on Automatic Recognition<sup>194</sup> and the transparency and quality assurance tools for higher education developed in the European and Bologna Process context.

Deeper cooperation models, such as the European Universities, have shown the **limits of the current quality assurance systems** that are often not adapted and not flexible enough to such deep transnational cooperation. Although international cooperation is part of each universities' activities, they are still firmly embedded within their country's policies and legislation. According to a survey of the European University Association, 59% cite administrative obstacles to deeper cooperation due to different institutional structures and processes<sup>195</sup>. The COVID-19 crisis further emphasised the need for transnational cooperation in quality assurance.

Notwithstanding progress in this area<sup>196</sup>, brought about by for example the Bologna process and the European Universities initiative, **several legal and administrative barriers remain**<sup>197</sup>. This was recognised both by the higher education institutions and Member States.

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<sup>192</sup> European University Association, [International strategic institutional partnerships and the European Universities Initiative: results of the EUA survey](#), 2020

<sup>193</sup> European Commission, [Mapping of European Transnational Collaborative Partnerships in Higher Education](#), *JRC science for policy report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2018

<sup>194</sup> Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (OJ C 444, 10.12.2018, p. 1–8)

<sup>195</sup> European University Association, [The future of the European Universities Initiative](#), 2020

<sup>196</sup> European Commission/EACEA, *Implementing Joint Degrees in the Erasmus Mundus action of the Erasmus+ programme*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, forthcoming

<sup>197</sup> As evidenced in a recent survey performed by the European University Association, [The future of the European Universities Initiative](#), 2020



Several national legislation and administrative practices are still hampering the effective delivery of joint degrees and programmes across many countries in Europe. This concerns, for example, the accreditation of joint programmes, quality assurance, language requirements and formal requirements to diplomas issued.

This situation creates **difficulties in developing sustainable cross-border cooperation between higher education** institutions across Europe. Currently, an enabling policy framework for transnational cooperation between higher education institutions across Europe is not yet fully available, hampering the development of deeper and closer cooperation models. For this reason, further work is needed for European University alliances and other types of university alliances to be able to flourish.

#### 4.1.8. *Relevance of learning mobility for improved outcomes*

**Learning mobility** is associated with future mobility, higher earnings and lower unemployment. It improves transversal skills such as communication and foreign language skills that are key for adaptation to the globalised economy and labour market. Despite the gaps in data availability on learning mobility, it can be observed that in 2018, 13.5% of higher education graduates in the EU were mobile. These means that these graduates studied abroad, partly or entirely. Overall in the EU, 9.1% of the graduates had a temporary experience abroad, known as ‘credit mobility’, and 4.3% graduated in a country which was not the one where they received their upper secondary school diploma, known as ‘degree mobility’<sup>198</sup>.

Erasmus+ is Europe’s flagship programme providing people with lifelong learning mobility opportunities. Over the last three decades, more than 10 million people have participated in Erasmus+ or its predecessor programmes. However, the 2014-2020 Erasmus+ programme was unable to meet the high demand: only a minority of young people aged 16-30 could benefit from the “Erasmus experience” – less than 4% of young people living in Europe today. In addition, the mid-term evaluation<sup>199</sup> of the programme and stakeholder feedback have pointed to the need to reach out to individuals with fewer opportunities even better and to facilitate the participation of smaller and grassroots organisations to make the programme more accessible.

In addition, many students and learners across Europe still face a wide range of obstacles when they embark upon transnational mobility, in particular if they participate in mobility schemes other than Erasmus+. The Mobility Scoreboard<sup>200</sup> revealed that information and guidance on learning mobility and foreign language preparation for prospective participants in

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<sup>198</sup> Estimation by DG EAC based on extractions from Eurostat, UOE, and OECD. Online data codes: [[educ\\_uoe\\_grad01](#)], [[educ\\_uoe\\_mobg02](#)] and [[educ\\_uoe\\_mobc01](#)] for graduates, degree-mobile graduates and credit-mobile graduates in the EU, EFTA, EEA and candidate countries. Special extraction from the OECD of international graduate data for degree-mobile graduates of EU origin who graduated in non-European countries (Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Israel, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Brazil and Russia). Eurostat, UOE, data extracted on 5 June 2020 and OECD data on 11 May 2020. For an overview of the procedure for estimating graduate mobility, see European Commission, [Learning Mobility II: An estimation of the benchmark](#). JRC Science for Policy Report, Publications Office of the European Union, 2018

<sup>199</sup> Commission Staff Working Document on the Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus Programme (2014-2020), COM/2018/050 final

<sup>200</sup> <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/en/mobility-scoreboard>

mobility schemes is uneven, not all countries allow full portability of public grants and loans, not all countries fully recognise learning outcomes and qualifications, and significant progress is needed in supporting disadvantaged learners. Furthermore, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges to learning mobility including travel restrictions, social distancing requirements and the fast adoption of online learning practices.

#### 4.1.9. *Non-formal and informal learning and volunteering*

Volunteering and solidarity activities are an important tool for strengthening cohesion and solidarity among Member States and beyond, bringing together different people, supporting communities, reinforcing the work of non-profit organisations, and developing young people's skills and personality thus increasing their employability. Youth having participated in European Voluntary Service (EVS)<sup>201</sup> projects report that the experience was beneficial to their personal development (96%) gaining insights about themselves and their abilities, to their language skills (93%), interpersonal and social competences (75%), and helped them identify their professional future and clarify what they want to do in their life and career (80%)<sup>202</sup>. Involving more young people in solidarity could also decrease social effects of exclusion, inactivity, and unemployment that lead to negative sentiments, such as frustration and loneliness increase of which has been reported among the youth. Seeing that volunteering has such varied and positive benefits it is important to involve more young people in solidarity and volunteering activities.

The European Education Area should take into account the full scope of learning, as more and more learning takes place outside schools and without the support of formal institutions and teachers<sup>203</sup>. 7.9% of the young people (aged 15-19) in the EU had taken part in non-formal education and training over the last 4 weeks in 2009, where they were 14.1% in 2019<sup>204</sup>.

Non-formal and informal learning through youth work or solidarity activities supported by the European Solidarity Corps provides unique learning opportunities to many young Europeans. While these opportunities are important for all young people, they can be particularly beneficial to those who are at an educational disadvantage<sup>205</sup>. The Impact Study on European Volunteers from 2017<sup>206</sup> showed that 63% of young volunteers participating in the European Voluntary Service (EVS) mentioned benefits for their career prospects as part of their motivation. Especially those with fewer opportunities said to engage in EVS to improve their

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<sup>201</sup> EVS, formerly part of Erasmus+, converged along with other programmes into the European Solidarity Corps, established in 2018 as a programme in its own right, with a view to providing a greater number of opportunities for young people to express solidarity through volunteering and with an extended scope.

<sup>202</sup> European Commission, *Study on the Impact of Transnational Volunteering through the European Voluntary Service*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2017

<sup>203</sup> European Commission, *Youth work and non-formal learning in Europe's education landscape*, European Commission, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2017

<sup>204</sup> Eurostat, online data code [[youth\\_educ\\_060](#)]

<sup>205</sup> Commission Staff Working Document on The situation of the young people in the EU (SWD/2018/169 final)

<sup>206</sup> European Commission, *Study on the Impact of Transnational Volunteering through the European Voluntary Service*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2017

career prospects and/or enhance their employability. The pilot European Graduate survey<sup>207</sup> also shows that voluntary work carried out during one's study period increases the likelihood of finding a job that matches well the level and field of graduation.

The evolution of the mobility landscape, the introduction of the European Solidarity Corps and other societal changes such as digitalisation, provide strong reasons for reviewing and modernising the current policy framework which is which is mainly set by the 2008 Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers<sup>208</sup>. A recent study on obstacles to volunteering<sup>209</sup> pointed notably to obstacles regarding fragmentation in information and outreach, lack of portability of social welfare support and recognition, all of which mostly would deter young people from disadvantaged background to join the European Solidarity Corps. This comes in addition to evidence<sup>210</sup> showing a growing interest among young people to be active in solidarity.

#### 4.1.10. *The European Education Area in the world*

The role of education in EU external policy is growing. EU programmes, Erasmus+ and the Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions in particular, are internationally well known, recognised and cost effective and have the potential to carry Europe's messages and fundamental values far beyond its borders. They are the vehicles for implementing our policies, as they provide a solid basis for people-to-people cooperation, project a positive image of Europe around the world and reach out to large numbers of stakeholders, including civil society. There is a potential for the various alumni associations of students and researchers having benefitted from EU funding through Erasmus+ and the MSCA to act as ambassadors of the EU, its programmes and values, notably through people-to-people contacts and education-science diplomacy.

Within Erasmus+, there are a number of international cooperation actions covering the whole world. Two actions promote the mobility of students, and academic staff for either short term "credit" mobility, or longer term Master degree mobility. In addition, Erasmus+ funds capacity building actions (around 150 projects every year). These mutually beneficial partnerships with European partners help modernise and internationalise higher education institutions and systems in partner countries, and strengthen the role that higher education plays in the economy society in general. Every year Erasmus+ funds cooperation projects between Europe and the rest of the world worth around EUR 400 million. Jean Monnet actions aim to promote excellence in teaching and research in the field of European Union studies worldwide. With over 90 countries throughout the world and more than 1000

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<sup>207</sup> European Commission, *Eurograduate pilot survey: Design and implementation of a pilot European graduate survey*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020

<sup>208</sup> Council Recommendation of 20 November 2008 on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union (OJ C 319, 13.12.2008, p. 8–10)

<sup>209</sup> European Commission, *Study on removing obstacles to cross-border solidarity activities*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020

<sup>210</sup> [Flash Eurobarometer 478, How to build a stronger, more united Europe? The views of young people](#), 2019

universities offering Jean Monnet courses as part of their curricula, these actions have become truly global, strongly contributing to promoting EU values worldwide.

In addition to short term academic exchanges<sup>211</sup>, Erasmus is committed to excellence in teaching and promoting joint degrees. As such, the Erasmus Mundus action offers around full Master scholarships, typically for two years, to the best and brightest students from around the world. These students study in at least two European countries and graduate with a world class joint or multiple Master degree. In more than fifteen years of activity, Mundus consortia have offered more than 28,000 scholarships to students from 183 countries around the world. The action has showcased the excellence of European Higher Education around the world, with “Mundus” becoming a byword for life-changing scholarships, resulting in vibrant alumni communities in all corners of the globe, who are the best advertisement for European Higher Education.

While the Mundus action has always been open to non-European university partners, to date these partners, present in more than half of all consortia, have played an auxiliary role, largely limited to offering short training opportunities and input into the design of Master curricula. From 2021 this will change and non-European partners are invited to play a full part in consortia: they will be able to host students for up to half the length of the Master degree and will be expected to issue joint or multiple degrees alongside their European counterparts. This is a significant change and reflects the global ambitions of universities in Europe to form consortia committed to excellence in teaching, wherever the excellence is found.

International cooperation is also a very important feature of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), allowing HEIs setting-up strategic and sustainable partnerships worldwide, notably for the development of innovative doctoral programmes. MSCA are also instrumental for attracting foreign talents in Europe and for providing European researchers with access to unique expertise, facilities, testing environments or data available only outside Europe.

In addition to the programme opportunities afforded by Erasmus+, the Commission maintains active policy dialogues with key strategic partners. Separate regional dialogues are held with Eastern Partnership, South Mediterranean, and Western Balkan countries, and individual dialogues engage strategic partner countries such as China, Japan, or South Africa. These dialogues cover the widest range of educational issues of interest to the EU and the partner countries: from early childhood education and care; through digitisation in secondary school teaching; and best practice in VET and higher education focusing particularly on twenty-first century skills and relevance to the labour market.

The European Education Area enabling framework should also help address the role of the EU in the Western Balkans. The strategy “*A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans*” adopted in 2018, recognised the **European future of the region** and called for significant enhancement of the EU’s political,

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<sup>211</sup> The International Credit Mobility (ICM) action has supported over 200 000 participants since 2015 including students and staff.

technical and financial support, to boost the economic growth and support the reforms required to move forward on the EU path. The strategy called for significant enhancement of the EU's political, technical and financial support to the region, including concrete actions in education and training, like the doubling of the Erasmus+ funds allocated to the region for the period 2019-2020.

All Western Balkan countries but Kosovo<sup>212</sup> are members of the EHEA and are making steady progress in the implementation of the Bologna process. With the exception of Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the remaining partners of the region already participate in the different Working Groups of the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020), which however remains uneven both at regional and national level. Alongside strengthening the implementation of the Bologna process in the framework of the EHEA, it will be important to prepare the region to also benefit in the long-term of the EEA.

#### 4.2. Working together towards the European Education Area – a new enabling framework

Experience from ET 2020 points to clear avenues for improvement that the European Education Area enabling framework can take forward, including stronger political guidance, more policy innovation and flexible mutual learning arrangements.

In a targeted consultation in 2019, Member States emphasized the need to strengthen the link between discussions at the political level and the implementation at the operational level (working groups, peer learning activities, etc.). The ET 2020 implementation further showed varying levels of participation on the part of Directors-General, which the later consultations showed was the result of varying levels of policy relevance to the participants. These findings were supported in a separate non-paper endorsed by 15 Member States, as well as the external assessment of ET 2020. The European Education Area enabling framework should address this challenge.

The Member States prefer to **maintain working groups** as a central avenue for operational cooperation and policy learning in the future. At the same time, they emphasized the need for strengthening cooperation between education and training sectors and levels, as well as cooperation between other economic and social policies. Peer counselling and peer learning activities' impact was, however, limited by the opportunity for dissemination and could have benefitted from stronger links to the other elements of the cooperation framework. Evidence also pointed to strong Member State interest in a more innovative and future-oriented perspective of support to reforms, through a concrete focus on specific current challenges, benefitting all Member States.

Future cooperation arrangements should continue to build on **clear mandates**, though not to the detriment of the flexibility that allows them to be relevant for most Member States. The

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<sup>212</sup> This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence

working groups' mandates should remain practice-oriented and focused on concrete issues, but greater care should be taken with respect to the definition of concrete objectives of meetings, and the elaboration of deliverables. The future working arrangements should likewise share clear **agreed outputs**.

The ET 2020 external assessment addressed the use of Yammer **digital cooperation platform** between 2016 and 2018. It found that Yammer was mostly used as an information sharing platform, rather than for collaborative work and webinars. While this did not meet the initial expectations, the existence of a ready-made platform and the experience in its use helped set the stage for the use of Yammer as a cooperation platform during the COVID-19 lockdown. These collaborations helped support the policy responses to the crisis.

Cooperation in the European Education Area will need to support reforms in the Member States. In this regard, the **European Semester** plays an important role in the context of crisis response and recovery and as a driver of just transitions to a more digital and greener Europe. The 2020 European Semester country specific recommendations covered education and skills in 23 Member States. The significant funding made available through the Recovery and Resilience Facility is also expected to add further impetus to education reform and investment in education. Voluntary EU cooperation to establish and develop the European Education Area is separate from the European Semester but the two nevertheless share common goals through alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, the European Pillar of Social Rights and other EU strategies. Future European Education Area efforts will therefore need to work hand in hand with the European Semester.

Despite strong potential for synergy and complementarity, EU-level cooperation in ET 2020 remained largely separate from that in the fields of research and innovation. Joint efforts – such as through shared meetings or calls for funding – remained an exception rather than the norm. The 2019 external assessment and the Member State non paper both emphasized the need for stronger cooperation in the future. The European Education Area should therefore strengthen links with the **European Research Area**.

The ET 2020 mid-term evaluation and the 2019 external assessment found **mixed results of dissemination efforts in ET 2020**, a concern shared also by Member States and stakeholders. For example, there was a lack of consistent dissemination at the Member State level, and language accessibility was mentioned as a challenge<sup>213</sup>. The stakeholder survey emphasized in particular the importance of maintaining a dedicated annual stakeholder forum, both as a dissemination and a co-creation opportunity. The 2019 external assessment of ET 2020 recommended more regular and systematic **dissemination of the cooperation deliverables**, potentially in several languages, and a common portal where all stakeholders could find the dates, agenda and other documents of different meetings. It likewise recommended developing a communication strategy consisting of general and key dissemination roles between the European Commission and Member States.

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<sup>213</sup> The national analysis portion of the Education and Training Monitor being a notable exception.

### *Preparing for a new generation of targets*

As regards future work on targets, monitoring and evidence, Member States supported the overall approach of EU targets but voiced the request<sup>214</sup> to keep the number limited in order to maximise their effectiveness. They also called for continuity to the current cooperation framework. Beyond this, Member States emphasised the importance of subsidiarity on common targets, to varying degrees. They have also expressed an interest in a continued annual review of education and training policy updates across the EU, as well as continued cooperation among Member States experts in evidence-based policy making in education and training (the SGIB).

To match these requests, starting from 2017, the European Commission has engaged in technical preparatory work for developing a new set of education and training targets, in cooperation with experts from Member States in the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks (SGIB). The exercise consisted in reviewing the policy priority and robustness of international data in twelve areas, including the Europe 2020 headline targets in education (early leaving from education and training and tertiary educational attainment), all the other ET 2020 benchmarks (see section 3.2.2) and other emerging priorities (multilingualism; digital competence; participation in vocational education and training; entrepreneurship education; expenditure in education). For each area, existing measurement tools and possibilities for indicator development were explored.

The European Commission proposes a set of targets to be achieved by the EU as a whole by 2030 in the following areas:

#### **The share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science**

This indicator captures an essential element of quality of school education and puts the spotlight on one of the main challenges that education faces today – ensuring high learning outcomes for all. To note that qualifying as an underachiever in PISA means failing to complete basic tasks and is essentially a measure of educational poverty. Underachieving pupils will likely have difficulty building on knowledge and skills that are more advanced, developing critical media literacy and, later in life, finding and maintaining work.

The data source for this target is the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA), as collected and administered by the OECD<sup>215</sup> every three years. The benchmark measures the share of 15-year-olds who fail to reach level 2 on the PISA scale for reading, mathematics or science (three separate measures). **The share of low-achieving eight-graders in computer and information literacy**

It is no longer enough to consider mathematics, reading and science as basic skills. Digital skills are a requisite for learning, interacting and working – and the covid-19 pandemic has

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<sup>214</sup> Through the external assessment of ET 2020 tools and deliverables, and through the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks.

<sup>215</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/>

only increased what was an already ongoing digital transformation of life and work. Out of 14 countries who participated in the first two rounds of the International Computer and Information Literacy Survey, only one had a share of underachieving pupils lower than 15% (CZ, tested in 2013). Therefore, the proposal is to construct a package of ‘basic and digital skills’ and set an equivalent threshold level for the two.

The indicator is based on the Computer and Information Literacy (CIL) measure from the International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS) executed by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) every five years. The scientific soundness and international comparability of the data collection is undisputed.

### **Participation of children between three years old and the age for starting compulsory primary education in early childhood education (or ISCED 0.2).**

Participation in high quality early childhood education correlates with better learning outcomes and increased social mobility later in life. Its positive contribution proves particularly beneficial for children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. While participation in early childhood education is overall high in Europe for children above the age of 4, there is scope to broaden the age range to the 3+ group. In that group, 12 EU countries are below the 98% participation target. Setting a target in ECEC would also help maintaining a high policy attention on this particularly important education level.

Data for monitoring enrolments in early childhood education are collected by Eurostat (UNESCO-OECD-Eurostat or UOE data collection)<sup>216</sup>.

### **The share of people aged 20-24 with at least upper secondary education**

People with low levels of education are exposed to lower employment rates, lower earnings, and lower rates of adult learning. Under ET 2020, there was an indicator on early leaving from education and training. The objective was to bring the EU average below 10% by 2020. In the last years, this proportion has moved slowly – often by .1 per year. Keeping virtually everyone in education at least until they complete upper secondary schooling is a main objective of the EU’s strategy for sustainable growth and employment (Europe 2020). Hence, the EC is proposing monitoring upper secondary achievement. This places a greater emphasis on completion of formal education and also points to the idea that completing upper secondary education progressively became ‘a minimum standard’. To note also that the new indicator gets rid of distortions created in the ELET indicator by participation in short-term training experiences. The threshold level was set as a reference to the latest EU average, which is 83.5% (2019 data).

The data source used for evaluating Member States’ progress with regard to this benchmark is the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS), administered on a yearly basis by Eurostat.

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<sup>216</sup> UOE Statistics are compiled based on national administrative sources, reported by Ministries of Education or National Statistical offices according to international standards, definitions and classifications.



## The share of 30-34 year-olds with tertiary educational attainment

A changing European labour market needs more people with tertiary education that can easily up-skill and re-skill. In addition, graduates from higher educational levels can better contribute to economic and societal innovation. Higher educational attainment is associated to higher earnings, lower unemployment risk, better health and more active participation in society. Setting a target on tertiary education will help countries continue to invest in this education sector, which also risks being hit by the coronavirus pandemic. The message that the EC intends to give is that participation in education and educational attainment matters. The 2018 Monitor has demonstrated that it matters not only for employability reasons, but also for the degree of an active participation in democratic life.

The indicator is based on the EU Labour Force Survey, covering all EU countries<sup>217</sup>. ***Boosting smart investment***

Scholarly discussion is still ongoing on **quality investment in education and training**, balancing effectiveness and efficiency and smart investment approaches. Nevertheless, evidence shows that certain policy choices have a higher impact on education outcomes. For example, high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) sets the foundations for children's lifelong development and success in education<sup>218</sup>. Making the teaching profession more attractive, enhancing school autonomy and preventing or redressing school segregation stand out as promising measures to increase the effectiveness and equity of school education<sup>219</sup>. Nevertheless, **more work is needed to support smart investment in education** and the Council has invited more work in this regard at the EU level<sup>220</sup>.

In order to respond to the COVID-19 crisis that affected Europe in the first half of 2020, the European Commission has decided to present a reinforced, ambitious and innovative EU long-term budget for a European recovery in May 2020<sup>221</sup>. The new package updates the original proposal for a reinforced ***Multi-annual Financial Framework for 2021-2027***, and puts forward a ***European Recovery Instrument ("Next Generation EU")*** that will temporarily boost the EU budget with new financing raised on the financial markets. Funds will be channelled through EU programmes to underpin the immediate measures needed to get the economy back on its feet and foster sustainable and resilient growth.

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<sup>217</sup> The time series is not comparable for Austria due to the reclassification of the qualification upon successful completion of higher technical and vocational colleges, from level 4 in ISCED 1997 to level 5 in ISCED 2011.

<sup>218</sup> Schoon, I. et al., *The Impact of Early Life Skills on Later Outcomes*, UCL Institute for Education, London, 2015

<sup>219</sup> European Commission, *Education and Training Monitor 2019*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019

<sup>220</sup> The Council Resolution on further developing the European Education Area calls on the Member States and the Commission "to promote cooperation and sharing of evidence of the benefits of investing in education and training, as improved knowledge, data and analysis regarding the benefits of efficient public investment in education and training can help Member States to develop more inclusive, effective and responsive education and training systems, while avoiding additional administrative burdens on the Member States" (OJ C 389, 18.11.2019, p. 1–6).

<sup>221</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, The European Council, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on The EU budget powering the recovery plan for Europe (COM(2020) 442 final)

The reinforced Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 and the Next Generation EU channel more funds than ever before into education and training, as well as digital skills, through several programmes. The new **Erasmus Programme**<sup>222</sup> will be a key funding instrument in achieving the European Education Area by 2025 through learning mobility opportunities to all generations, facilitating digital transformation, strengthening cross-border cooperation and policy innovation, and supporting educational institutions at all levels. Together with other EU flagship programmes, such as Horizon Europe or Digital Europe, Erasmus will help drive the EU-level work on the European Education Area. The Commission has also announced support to education and training reforms in the Member States through the **Recovery and Resilience Facility**<sup>223</sup>, the **Technical Support Instrument (TSI)**, and the European Structural and Investment Funds, including the **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)**<sup>224</sup> and the **European Regional and Development Fund (ERDF)**<sup>225</sup>. The **InvestEU programme**<sup>226</sup> will be another possibility to mobilise public and private investment to further strengthen support to education and training.

## CONCLUSIONS

Education and training is a powerful tool for transcending challenges and opening new frontiers. Learning throughout one's life is a fundamental human experience that is a critical ingredient of 21<sup>st</sup> century European society and economy. It enables children and young people to thrive, no matter their circumstances; and equips adults with the skills that they need to succeed in the job market and foster innovation, creativity and resilience across all aspects of life. The benefits of education transcend the individual, but also purely material considerations – they resonate through our society and culture.

Providing quality and inclusive education for all is a shared endeavour for EU Member States – while respecting and cherishing the diversity of their educational traditions. Transformational trends, such as demographic change, digitalisation and technological advancement, the transition to a sustainable economy and society; present additional demands as well as opportunities for education and training. The Covid-19 pandemic has amplified the need for building future-oriented education and training systems as well as for strengthened European cooperation to tackle old and new challenges alike. Importantly, it is crucial to prevent that measures introduced perpetuate or further entrench structural inequalities in educational settings.

The European Education Area encapsulates a coherent vision for education and training that adapts to and evolves with the changes of our times, but keeps a focus on learners, teachers and institutions – the human dimension. Actions at European level enable students, teachers, trainers, school leaders, youth workers, schools and tertiary institutions

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<sup>222</sup> COM(2018) 367 final

<sup>223</sup> COM(2020) 408 final

<sup>224</sup> COM(2018) 382 final and COM(2020) 447 final

<sup>225</sup> COM(2018) 372 final and COM(2020) 452 final

<sup>226</sup> COM(2020) 403 final

to embark on a mobility experience, associate with each other and engage in deeper cooperation. Further initiatives and tools support the recognition of qualifications for further learning and skills for the labour market. Another category of European Education Area initiatives provide policy guidance for educational authorities and institutions on key competences, teaching and learning languages, high quality early childhood education and care and embracing common values in classrooms. These actions, together with the new ones proposed in the Communication, will continue to form the constituent elements of a genuine European space of learning.

Based on the results of assessments and consultations with Member States and Stakeholders, the expiring Strategic Framework on European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020) has delivered on its objectives to engage participants in mutual learning, and to contribute to the collection of internationally comparable data and the creation of a common knowledge base in European education and training. Together with guidance through the European Semester and other policy support tools, it has also effectively contributed to policy reforms in national contexts. As such, the legacy of two decades of strategic cooperation provides a fertile ground for continued cooperation and for further implementing the European Education Area. The consultations have also revealed that stakeholders support a more flexible approach when it comes to the tools of cooperation and learning, tailored to policy needs and emerging challenges. They also confirmed the need to reinforce political ownership, maintaining strong links with research, business and civil society; and ensure a better dissemination of the results of European cooperation. The preparatory technical work on ET 2020 indicators and other areas of analysis has prepared the ground for a new generation of indicators and targets.

The analysis of key trends in education and training, and the inputs from stakeholders have enabled the European Commission to identify a number of issue areas where European action can bring added value. These include, inter alia, ensuring that all pupils have a fair chance to succeed in school; supporting adults in acquiring and upgrading competences; supporting and valorising the teaching profession; supporting the ongoing transformation in higher education; promote effective practices for gender equality; and enhancing the external dimension of the European Education Area.

## ANNEXES

## ANNEX I – SUMMARY TABLE OF EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA INITIATIVES

### Overview of European Education Area initiatives

#### Initiatives 2016-2020:

Title of the initiative	Title of EU act(s) announcing or implementing the action	Adoption	Progress
<b>Upskilling Pathways / New Skills Agenda for Europe</b>	<a href="#">Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults</a>	19 December 2016	
<b>Revised European Qualifications Framework</b>	<a href="#">Council recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning</a>	22 May 2017	All countries have now adopted National Qualifications Frameworks, and in the majority of countries the NQF is now in an advanced operational stage, meaning that NQFs have become an integrated part of national education and training systems and are based on learning outcomes.
<b>Graduate Tracking Initiative</b>	<a href="#">Council Recommendation of 20 November 2017 on tracking graduates</a>	20 November 2017	An Expert Group on graduate tracking was set up in 2018 with the objective to propose recommendations on how best to collect comparative EU data on graduate outcomes. They will be presented in a report in autumn 2020. In June 2020, the results of the Pilot European graduate survey were published, as well as the study mapping graduate tracking practices in Member States, UK and EEA member countries. Based on the findings of the study, the survey and the work of the Expert Group, The Commission services have launched capacity-building activities to support Member States in their further efforts, through the Erasmus+ programme. The capacity building kicked-off on 25 June 2020. In 2021, a call will be launched for further roll out of the European graduate survey to 16 countries and in 2022, the Commission will take stock of progress made in implementing the recommendation.
<b>European Student Card Initiative</b>	<a href="#">European Council conclusions of 14 December 2017</a>	14 Dec 2017	Starting in 2015, the digital infrastructure, services and various functionalities necessary to achieve paperless Erasmus+ mobility administration have been developed step by step through Erasmus+ cooperation projects and are now being piloted by over 2000 universities across Europe. This is being done via the Erasmus Without Paper Network which connects universities' various IT systems together.

			<p>The full roll-out with the objective of having all 5000+ higher education institutions participating in the new Erasmus programme connected will start in 2021, by implementing the digital administrative workflows and seamlessly exchange of mobility data.</p> <p>During the piloting phase, around 2.3 million student cards have been produced with the ‘European Student’ hologram by 150 entities in 15 Member States. As a next step, a digital version will be developed which mobile students can display in the Erasmus+ Mobile App (which to date has over 85,000 downloads). Another step is to enable students to authenticate themselves online using their national electronic identities through the eIDAS system or home university credentials, wherefore DG EAC cooperates closely with DG CNECT, which is supporting the development of the necessary technical infrastructure for the higher education sector through the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) funding mechanism, by the development and rollout of the EU Student eCard digital service infrastructure for the integration of eIDAS authentication in cross-border student services. A blueprint of the European Student eID for higher education was published in April, and the concept is now being piloted by connecting the eID scheme to the Erasmus+ Mobile App and Erasmus without Paper Network, which should be in production by the end of 2020. With the support of the Erasmus, Connecting Europe Facility and Digital Europe programmes, the Commission will start a gradual rollout of these services starting with Erasmus students in 2021 with the aim of benefitting all mobile students in Europe by 2025, pending the .</p>
<b>Digital Education Action Plan</b>	<a href="#">Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Digital Education Action Plan</a>	17 January 2018	Implementation ongoing until the end of 2020. Update under preparation and scheduled for adoption in September 2020.
<b>European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships</b>	<a href="#">Council Recommendation of 15 March 2018 on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeship</a>	15 March 2018	Implementation report forthcoming 2021.
<b>Key Competences for Lifelong Learning</b>	<a href="#">Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning</a>	22 May 2018	<p>The promotion and further development of the framework is ongoing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A conference was held on 12-13 Nov. 2019 in Brussels: Supporting Key Competence Development: Learning approaches and environments in school education</li> <li>2. A new European Framework for Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Key</li> </ol>

			Competence (LifeComp) was developed (June 2020). 3. Two projects for 2020/21 with JRC have been signed, i.e. on the “Implementation of the LifeComp competence framework (LifeCompintoPractice)” and on the “DigCompEdu Self-Reflection tool for Teachers in compulsory education (DigCompEduCheck-in)”.
<b>Promoting common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching</b>	<a href="#">Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching</a>	22 May 2018	The implementation of the Recommendation brings together around 20 actions across various policies and programmes in education, youth, culture and sport, including the work of the ET 2020 Working Group on Promoting common values and inclusive education.
<b>Automatic Mutual Recognition</b>	<a href="#">Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad</a>	26 Nov 2018	<p>In <b>higher education</b>, the Recommendation builds on the progress already made in the context of the Bologna Process, the Lisbon Recognition Convention, and between groups of Member States (Benelux, Nordics, Baltics). Giving effect to the Recommendation requires the use of existing tools that support recognition, such as the European Qualifications Framework, the Diploma Supplement and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.</p> <p>In <b>school education</b>, less concrete preparatory work exists between the Member States. The Recommendation therefore proposes to launch a Union level cooperation process with Member States and stakeholders to foster transparency and build mutual trust.</p> <p>Work is taken forward through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The new <b>Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE)</b> now includes automatic recognition as a key commitment which the involved higher education institutions have to respect in order to have access to the Erasmus programme.</li> <li>- <b>Peer learning activities</b>, involving National Academic Recognition Information Centres, higher education institutions and ministries, to focus on good practice in implementing the recommendation.</li> <li>- Creation of a dedicated page on ENIC (European Network of Information Centres in the European Region) - NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union) <b>website</b> and use of ENIC-NARIC and <b>Erasmus+ social media</b> to promote automatic recognition.</li> <li>- Cooperation with the existing network of <b>National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARICs)</b>; creation of <b>guidance material</b> and an <b>online information service</b> of school-leaving certificates in the EU.</li> <li>- Implementing a two-year European Parliament <b>preparatory action on recognition of secondary study periods abroad</b>.</li> <li>- The activities on quality assurance in the <b>ET 2020 Working Group Schools</b> (peer</li> </ul>

			<p>learning activities, outputs with key messages and country examples) support the implementation of the Recommendation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Erasmus+ call</b> for proposals for National Authorities to support projects implementing the Council Recommendation. The Erasmus+ Call for the National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC) was launched in December 2019. In July 2020, <b>13 projects</b> were selected worth up to EUR 2 million. The main focus of the selected projects is on <b>implementing automatic recognition</b>. The projects will run from 2020 till 2022. The NARIC Call also supports the creation of a <b>Technical Support Team to strengthen the network of National Academic Recognition Centers (NARIC)</b> and support their work with capacity building, trainings and sharing best practice.</li> </ul>
<b>Centres of vocational excellence / New Skills Agenda for Europe</b>	<a href="#">Proposal for a Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience</a>	1 July 2020	<p>In a pilot phase, a first Erasmus+ call was launched in 2019 to support 5 small scale projects. This was then followed by another Erasmus+ pilot call in 2020 to support 7 large scale projects.</p> <p>The Commission proposal for the Erasmus+ Regulation in the period 2021-2027, includes a specific action to support the Centres of Vocational Excellence.</p>
	<a href="#">Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions: European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience</a>	1 July 2020	<p>The 2020 Commission proposal for Council Recommendation on vocational education and training, calls for action both at member state as well as EU level to support the initiative on CoVEs.</p>
	<a href="#">Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions: Building a stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies</a>	25 May 2018	
<b>A comprehensive</b>	<a href="#">Council Recommendation of 22 May</a>	22 May 2019	Implementation seminars with Peer Learning Activities in 2019, progress report published



<b>approach to the learning and teaching of language</b>	<a href="#">2019 on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages</a>		in June 2020: <a href="#">Education begins with language</a> .
<b>High quality early childhood education and care systems</b>	<a href="#">Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems (including its annex, the EU Quality Framework)</a>	22 May 2019	The Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) ET 2020 Working Group has been reflecting and exchanging experience since November 2018 on the best practices to implement the EU Quality Framework for ECEC. By the end of 2020, it will publish an Inclusion Tool-kit as well as Policy recommendations to a) increase attractiveness of the profession b) further professionalise ECEC staff.
<b>Erasmus+ European Universities</b>	<a href="#">Call for proposals 2019</a> <a href="#">Call for proposals 2020</a>	2019 and 2020 for the selection of European Universities and full roll out in 2022	Pilot launched: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Two Erasmus+ pilot calls launched in 2019 and 2020, with 41 "European Universities" alliances selected, involving more than 280 diverse higher education institutions across the EU and beyond.</li> <li>- Full roll-out under the next Erasmus programme, in synergy with other EU instruments, such as Horizon Europe and the structural funds.</li> </ul>

# PROCEDURAL ANNEX – SYNOPSIS REPORT OF STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS

## Procedural Annex: Synopsis report of stakeholder consultations

A comprehensive stocktaking exercise on the future of European education and training took place between 2018 and 2020. It has captured viewpoints on the challenges, role and objectives of the future of European education and training, while getting input about the tools, governance arrangements and funding options that can best help reforms on the ground. It consisted of the following *stakeholder consultation activities*:

- Targeted Member State and stakeholder surveys;
- Member State consultation in High Level Group meetings;
- Three workshops organised by Member States on key topics for cooperation in education and training;
- Informal consultations at ET 2020 Working Group meetings;
- A survey of ET 2020 Working Group members on mutual learning;
- An external assessment of the ET 2020 tools and deliverables;
- An education and training Expert Panel;
- Three targeted consultations with the Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth (Rectors, youth organisations, MEPs);
- Public events, such as the Forum on the Future of Learning, the Second European Education Summit and the Civil Society Day;
- Two Eurobarometer surveys;
- An opinion of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training;
- A report of the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks.

In addition, results of the public consultation for the updated Digital Education Action Plan concerning the experience with Covid-19-provoked disruptions on education and training systems, as well as ad hoc feedback and position papers submitted to the Commission have also informed the Commission's proposal. This includes a non-paper on the post-2020 EU strategic framework for cooperation in education and training, coordinated by the Netherlands and endorsed by 15 Member States.

### **Consultation strategy and methodology:**

Member State authorities at national and regional level, stakeholder organisations in education and training, social partners, representatives of youth organisations, leaders of higher education institutions, members of the European Parliament, and experts and academics were consulted in a targeted way. The public stakeholder events and conferences gathered feedback from teachers and trainers at all levels; pupils and students; parents; education and training providers; civil society organisations; social partners and business

organisations; beneficiaries of EU funding programmes; international organisations; research institutions and academics; as well as the wider public.

Stakeholders who were expected to provide direct input into the process of policy-making, were consulted in a targeted and structured manner, for instance in the form of working groups established via formal mandates. Stakeholders that have a wide membership base, as well as individuals participating in education and training either as providers or learners were given the opportunity to express their views at dedicated public events. The targeted surveys ensured a broad coverage: the stakeholder questionnaire was made available to approximately a hundred civil society organisations and social partners, selected based on involvement in ET 2020 processes and structures and working history, while the Member State survey reached 82% of the target group.

Scoping questions:

1. What should be the key objectives for the future of European education and training, including the development of the European Education Area?
2. What will be the most important issues for national systems over the next decade?
3. How can education and training help tackle the main challenges in today's and tomorrow's societies?
4. How has the ET 2020 cooperation framework performed?
5. How can cooperation at the European level add value to the development of education and training policies in Member States?

## SYNOPSIS OF KEY RESULTS

Detailed findings from consultation activities are presented in the respective sections of the Staff Working Document. A summary of key findings is presented below.

- ET 2020 has delivered on its objectives
- Future European cooperation should pursue a holistic approach to education and training, across all levels and sectors and modes of learning
- The new cooperation framework should support the implementation and further development of the European Education Area
- Objectives should be focused on quality, inclusive and future-oriented education systems anchored in a lifelong learning perspective
- The governance of European cooperation in education and training should include strengthened political guidance, flexible working methods and effective dissemination

### IMPACT AND RESULTS OF ET 2020

Member States and stakeholder have unequivocally pointed to the usefulness and impact of ET 2020 across all consultation activities. While several suggestions were made for further improvement of the tools and methods of cooperation, the consultation activities raise no doubt about a globally positive assessment, which confirms that the framework *has delivered on its objectives*.

In the external assessment of ET 2020, Member States praised the pronounced focus of life-long learning in ET 2020, and the setting of clear, ambitious and concrete common long-term goals. In general, the majority (92%) of Member States considered ET 2020 very useful for *preparing, testing and implementing reforms*, although a handful of them saw no immediate link to national reforms (DK, IE, NL and SE). All Member States highlighted the value of mutual learning and sharing of good practices facilitated by the Commission, as well as the networking that resulted from it. Working groups and peer learning activities succeeded in bringing policy closer to different stakeholders and raised awareness of other Member States' education systems, promoting high quality discussion and a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in education today. ET 2020 was commonly seen as *promoting increased transparency in education policy, encouraging a common vocabulary, developing a common knowledge base and facilitating the transfer of good practices across countries*.

The non-paper on the post-2020 EU strategic framework for cooperation in education and training, prepared by the Netherlands supported by 14 Member States, reconfirmed the *added value* of European cooperation in education and training and reported a clear improvement in comparison to ET 2010 in terms of coordination and tools, echoing the findings of the earlier survey of Member States.

With regard to the role of individual tools and deliverables of ET 2020 for reforms on the ground, the external assessment has found that they have had impact on the planning, design and implementation of new initiatives/programmes at the wider country level. While it is often difficult to establish direct causality between a concrete ET 2020 activity and national policy reforms, 40% of Member States cited concrete ET 2020 effects at the national level. In cases when impact was not reported, it was often an issue of timing (the national reform preceding the ET 2020 discussion) rather than misalignment. ET 2020 has had strong influence on the organisational level, in particular on discussions and on the development of new initiatives. On the wider systemic level, the direct influence of ET 2020 was less pronounced, nevertheless Member States cited several examples of the influence of ET 2020 deliverables in the elaboration and revision of national legislation and policy. Peer counselling and peer learning activities have proven to be particularly influential in terms of national impact and follow-up and prompted an active transfer and dissemination of successful practices. Benchmarks and indicators were equally found useful for both agenda-setting and monitoring. The Education and Training Monitor is widely considered by Member States and stakeholders as providing a regular and reliable source of evidence about education and training systems in a comparative perspective.

Stakeholder organisations and social partners praise ET 2020's fostering of cooperation and proximity between governments and civil society. This is mainly achieved through the Working Groups, which promote dialogue and help connect civil society organisations and government representatives at different levels. Another valuable path for dialogue was the Education, Training and Youth Forum.

## **ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

Complementary to the public events where all stakeholders were consulted on the topic of key issues and challenges in education and training; a dedicated Expert Panel composed of 18 international experts was set up in 2018, with the mandate to assess the impact of six societal challenges on the future of education and training<sup>227</sup>. Emerging themes from the findings of the experts, as well as from discussions with Member States, education and training stakeholders, civil society and the wider public were the following.

Demographic changes, including ageing societies, declining birth rates and migration are found among the greatest challenges in Europe. Stronger action is needed on the accessibility of lifelong learning and adult learning opportunities – including upskilling and reskilling of all citizens – as response to these challenges, while non-formal, informal and intergenerational learning should be reinforced, for example through engagement in civic

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<sup>227</sup> The six topics were based on the JRC's work on global challenges: demographic challenges; challenges of inclusion and citizenship; technical change and the future of work; digitalisation of society; environmental challenges and challenges of investment, reforms and governance

community action. Making targeted efforts to support learners with a migration background should also be promoted.

On the theme of inclusion and citizenship, the following issues were highlighted: diversity of mindsets and identities, enduring and persisting inequalities that need to be tackled, and risk of alienation from democratic institutions. In response to these challenges, encouraging inclusive teaching methods and creating inclusive community learning spaces seem important, whereas citizenship education should build on common values, aligned with the European reference framework for democratic culture and the European reference framework of key competences for lifelong learning.

Technology is rapidly and continuously changing all aspects of today's society and will continue to do so in the near future. Both digitalisation and further technological advancement will have a significant impact on several aspects of our lives, particularly on the very concept of a 'career'. Following the upcoming changes of the world of work, a shift in learning that will transform education and training and foster cooperation between public and private education and training providers on the one hand and business on the other should be actively supported. Encouraging adult learning by meeting individualised learning needs, re-examining education and training systems and promoting VET are of high importance, in order to provide individuals with the right skills and competences.

Digitalisation, also referred to as digital transformation, is a multi-layered topic because different types of digital technologies and the practices that are related to their use have significant implications for society. The recent rapid digital transformation of the economy and society means that all EU citizens need increasing levels of digital skills and competences in all aspects of their lives, both at work and at home. Digitalisation can be also challenging for educational systems simply because of the speed at which it is advancing, which makes it difficult for educational systems to adapt. In response to the digitalisation of society, narrowing the digital skills gap by the development of digital competence in a lifelong learning perspective, based on both formal and non-formal education and training is vital.

Sustainability is a wide concept that is not restricted to environmental issues, but can and should also be framed in broader economic and social terms. Of course, climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time and its adverse impacts undermine the ability of all countries to achieve sustainable development. In response to that, it is important to support the acquisition of sustainability skills through formal and non-formal learning opportunities. A holistic approach to environmental sustainability should be communicated through all education sectors and levels. Furthermore, it is of high importance to broaden the scope of sustainability education, including social and economic dimensions of societies.

Education systems are complex by nature, and governing multilevel education and training systems has become an increasingly important issue in political and policy agendas. Complex

changes such as the increasing internationalisation and decentralisation of decision-making in education and training, increasing focus on both quality and responsiveness to individual needs of learners, and changes in available resources have raised significant questions about the governance traditions in different sectors and countries, and their need to modernise. Education and training funding mechanisms have also grown in complexity. In response to the challenges of governance, there should be targeted and evidence-based policymaking built on research, transparency, communication and collaboration. There is a role for indicators and benchmarks to measure performance and establish good practices. As regards the implementation of reforms, peer learning, mutual observation and discussion are options that could be explored further in order to support reforms, both at the level of institutions and of systems. Finally, in accordance with investment in education and training systems, there is no one-size-fits-all approach applicable, although reforms should be supported with appropriate financial investment.

### **FUTURE PRIORITIES FOR EUROPEAN EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

The strategic objectives and priority areas set by ET 2020 strategic framework were commonly deemed flexible and broad enough to encompass all national situations and confirmed the wide consensus in favour of continuity in strategic objectives and priority areas by all Member States and several stakeholder organisations. As far as the level of innovation needed for the future cooperation is concerned, it was pointed out that many priorities of the current strategic framework are still relevant, but mechanisms for facing new challenges should be foreseen: evolution and not revolution is needed. Member States would also prefer a smaller number of priorities and asked for aligning objectives more closely with other international frameworks, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

A majority of stakeholder groups called for a holistic approach to education and training, which would support the establishment of seamless, continuous, learner-centred and collaborative learning opportunities in all education sectors. In addition, the need for an inclusive, lifelong-learning-based and innovation-driven approach to education and training is considered as inevitable, while increased European cooperation is seen as another key factor to support quality education and training for all. Synergies across different policy areas (with areas such as employment, industry, research) were also considered as inevitable by Member States for a successful cooperation on a European level. In this regard, Member States have repeatedly called for a close link between the development of the European Education Area and the continuation of voluntary cooperation between Member States, the latter taking forward the implementation of the EEA and setting the ways of working together.

Regarding the focus of the period ahead, it was generally suggested by all stakeholder groups involved in public consultation activities that a common understanding on core, overarching goals should be reached, but the strategic objectives for future cooperation should be more flexible, forward looking and focused on urgent challenges, in addition to more common

education-specific issues. Stakeholder groups also suggested that strategic goals and priorities should reflect common EU challenges and have a clear EU added value, as well as a clear value and impact for citizens, and should be determined based on evidence. It was also highlighted in the public consultation activities, that not only labour market relevance, but also the societal dimension of education and training should be taken more into account. In a 2019 Eurobarometer on youth, more than half of young Europeans consider education and skills as the top priority that the EU should tackle. Environmental protection and fighting climate change come second, followed by employment, and the management of migratory flows and integration of refugees.

Stakeholders consider that the main priorities for European cooperation in education and training over the upcoming years should focus on supporting the development of responsive, high-quality, efficient education and training systems, with a special focus on teachers and trainers as the main driver of education and training, as highlighted by the European Expert Panel and the professionals in the field. In order to better support teachers and find solutions to existing challenges, it is important to initiate a closer dialogue with teachers and trainers and involve them in the co-creation process. Promoting participation in formal and non-formal learning activities shall remain a priority across all age groups, while closely linking the validation of non-formal and informal learning - as well as prior learning - with overall education and training policies is a key way to recognise and encourage this participation.

Based on several consultation activities with Member States, education and training providers and civil society organisations, providing quality education and training for all, strengthening key competences and skills recognition, addressing changes in skills demand, developing transversal and transferable skills, narrowing the digital skills gap and supporting language learning shall be treated as top priorities in education and training. Furthermore, promoting social inclusion, thus developing innovative and inclusive teaching methods, acquiring sustainability skills, building citizenship education on common values and strengthening the European identity should be at the centre of future initiatives in the field of European education and training. According to Eurobarometer survey results and consultation activities with civil society organisations, international mobility and volunteering opportunities could highly contribute to the achievement of these objectives.

In order to provide individuals with the right skills and competences, European cooperation should support a shift in learning that will transform education and training, and foster cooperation between public and private education and training providers and business. It is also fundamental to develop a coherent and coordinated approach that link the world of education and the world of work, giving value to the full range of learners' skills and competences, including critical thinking, entrepreneurship and financial competences, and not only those which immediately correspond to short-term labour market demands. Finally, more attention should be paid to investment in education and training systems and school



infrastructure development at European level, supported by an integrated approach between policy, pedagogy and investment.

## **GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE OF FUTURE EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

Member States and stakeholders alike found the tools and methods of cooperation under ET 2020 appropriate and effective in addressing the ET 2020 objectives and priorities, and expressed the desire to continue the formats and working configurations following a bottom-up approach based on mutual learning, exchange of information and evidence building. At the same time, Member States called for stronger political guidance in order to ensure better alignment between national priorities and European objectives in education and training, as well as to assure coherence across deliverables and tools. Member States and stakeholders also wish to strengthen the monitoring and dissemination components of the governance structure in the future.

### *Political guidance*

Consultations with Member States revealed an expressed desire to reconceptualise the governance framework with the aim of further strengthening the link between European tools and deliverables and national priorities. Discussions at the political level should have a stronger focus on links to the broad EU context and other international fora (OECD, UN).

Member States emphasised the need to better define the roles of different bodies of governance and ensure a stronger alignment between steering at the political level (Council, Education Committee, High Level Group) and implementation at the technical level (working groups, PLAs, etc.). Especially, a strengthened political guidance for the implementation of the cooperation framework by the Education Ministers' Council (prepared by the Education Committee) was pointed out as important. A stronger mandate as well as a revised membership of the High Level Group was also proposed, with the aim to strengthen its political steering role. Links with the European Semester process as well as with EU financial instruments are to be further clarified.

The idea of a high-level rapporteur to assure a link between expert groups and the Council was supported by a number of Member States, whereas the procedure of appointment and the mandate remained an open and highly debated question. With regard to the appointment of the rapporteur, a possible role for the outgoing Presidency Trio was brought up. A scenario with a strategy-building European Education Area summit did not gain broad support at the Member State workshops.

### *Working methods and tools*

Following the principles of continuity, flexible architecture and transparency, Member States consider that PLAs, Peer Counselling and Working Groups (WG) should be maintained. There is a sense of agreement surrounding the structure of the Working Groups, especially in relation to the composition of sectoral groups. The mandates of the WGs need to continue to have a clear focus on a limited number of strategic issues of core interest to a critical mass of Member States.

However, a fast track peer counselling/learning option to cover immediate political needs could be introduced. This could take shape for instance in the form of sub-groups, or a fast-track peer counselling/learning option, whereby 3-4 Member States (MS) work on one topic, supported by the European Commission, for a period no longer than 6-8 months. The goal is to introduce a more innovative and future-oriented perspective, through a concrete focus on specific current challenges, benefitting all Member States. Furthermore, a need to explore synergies across activities through more connectivity between the Working Groups and more flexibility in instruments and monitoring methods was expressed.

The quality of membership and participation in working configurations, tools and deliverables were highlighted as a critical point. Continuous and stable WG membership with increased involvement of external experts and stakeholders are favoured to promote in-depth and data-driven discussions.

### *Monitoring and evidence*

Stakeholders agreed that the use of qualitative and quantitative evidence to underpin cooperation in education and training should be further supported. Member States are in favour of the continued use of the annual Education and Training Monitor reports and common European benchmarks and indicators. This should be accompanied by a more qualitative analysis of the education and training systems' context. Member States, social partners and stakeholder organisations also recommended greater alignment between EU data and the data provided by international frameworks, including UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Bologna and the Copenhagen processes.

There is a general agreement among Member States on the use of common European quantitative targets (benchmarks) are effective in driving policy change and therefore should be continued. Benchmarks should be limited in number, politically relevant and methodologically sound.

As part of the evaluation of the ET 2020 Monitoring Framework, an expert group (the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks) performed a technical analysis of existing and possible future benchmarks and indicators for the post-2020 period. According to the Expert

Group: i) not all areas of indicators and benchmarks are equally policy-relevant and benchmarkable; ii) the number of benchmarks should be kept in single digits; iii) several ET 2020 indicators and benchmarks are very valuable and should be continued (early leavers from education and training; tertiary educational attainment; early childhood education; underachievers; and adult participation in learning); iv) further development should be done on indicators on learning mobility, digital competences, entrepreneurship competence and VET; and v) it would be important to report on equity aspects (gender, social/migrant background, regional aspects) as far as possible for every indicator/benchmark.

### *Dissemination and communication*

Member States and other stakeholders shared the view that the dissemination and communication of the results of European cooperation in education and training should be strengthened. This could involve a communication strategy, the translation of key messages and outcomes into national languages, and establishing an interactive online platform to increase the accessibility and transparency of deliverables. A strong emphasis was placed on dissemination at the national level.

### **Procedure, methodology and key results of each consultation activity**

*The presentation of the activities follows a chronological order.*

#### **1. Member State survey on ET 2020 (2018)**

24 replies from 23 Member States<sup>228</sup> were received on the activities and tools of the ET 2020 framework (strengths, weaknesses, improvements) and Member States' interests regarding the successor framework.

- Positive outcomes:
  - Lifelong learning approach;
  - Framework helps to orient national agendas;
  - Mutual learning and exchange of experiences, building up of networks;
  - Creation of a common conceptual framework and knowledge base;
  - Awareness-raising of current challenges
  - Visibility of indicators helping to steer national policy
- Points for improvement:
  - Need to improve links between:
    - technical and political levels;
    - various subject-specific working groups;
    - workstreams led by different COM DGs;
  - Dissemination effort at COM and MS level;

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<sup>228</sup> Belgium submitted two replies.

- Support for increased participation of stakeholders;
- Support for learning from failure as well as successes;
- Need for enhanced PLAs with more intense follow-up
- Priorities for the future framework:
  - A few common, clear, ambitious, long-term goals;
  - Continuity, building on existing experience;
  - Based on global challenges, not traditional approaches;
  - Nuanced approach to indicators and benchmarks;
  - Alignment with international frameworks, including UN SDGs, Bologna and Copenhagen processes;
  - Platform(s) for dissemination

## **2. Survey of stakeholder organisations and social partners on ET 2020 (2018)**

The responses to this survey are the result of a query sent out from DG EAC to stakeholder organisations and social partners, many of whom participated in the Education and Training 2020 Framework (ET 2020) working groups, or were recipients of Erasmus+ funding.

In this survey, two questions were asked:

- (1) In what way do stakeholder organisations and social partners consider the activities under the scope of ET 2020 to have been helpful to their goals and mission so far?
- (2) In what way do they think ET 2020 would need to change in order to better respond to present and future challenges?

19 stakeholders replied to the survey, out of 91 (21%). Other stakeholder organisations did not reply as their contributions were included under that of umbrella organisations, such as the Lifelong Learning Platform. Five social partners replied to the survey, out of six (83%).

- Positive outcomes:
  - Fostering cooperation between governments and stakeholders
  - Systematic collection of information
  - Mutual learning and compendia of good practices
- Points for improvement:
  - The Education, Training and Youth Forum needs to include stakeholders again
  - Greater civil society participation in mutual learning
  - Dissemination strategy
  - Streamlining the bureaucracy of Erasmus+
  - Collection of information should be more qualitative and contextual
    - ET 2020 monitor shadow report through civil society's eyes
- Priorities for the future framework:
  - Tuning the balance between a focus on the job market and holistic education
  - More Joint Working Group meetings and Peer Learning Activities

- Greater focus on non-formal and informal education, as well as on lifelong learning
  - This is particularly useful to integrate migrants and refugees
- Greater mobility of younger students as well as teachers and VET students
- Greater focus on the digital dimension of learning
  - Greater focus on MOOCs and blended learning, especially in higher education
- Combating low skills, as lifelong learning often does not reach low-skilled individuals

### **3. Flash [Eurobarometer](#) on the European Education Area (2018)**

The survey asked more than 8.000 young people across the EU (between 15 and 30 years) about their mobility experiences and knowledge of languages. They also gave their opinion on a number of European Education Area initiatives to improve teaching and learning environments in Europe.

Key findings:

- 90% of young Europeans consider it important to have an experience abroad.
- 91% agree that automatic recognition of academic qualifications and learning periods abroad would be useful to young people.
- 93% think that it would be useful to create EU degrees delivered by networks of European universities, offering students the chance to study in different EU countries, with a flexible choice of courses or modules offered within the network.
- 97% of young Europeans polled agree that it would be useful to give students the chance to work on innovative projects alongside academics, researchers and companies from different countries. They would also welcome more opportunities to study and work together across disciplines and departments.
- At least nine in ten (90%) young Europeans think that a range of services provided by a European Student Card would be useful.
- One third of all respondents declare themselves unable to study in more than one language. Yet, 77% of young Europeans say they would like to learn a new language, while 84% would like to improve the knowledge of a foreign language they have previously learnt.

### **4. Member State workshop on future-oriented education and training systems (8 November 2018)**

The aim of the workshop, organised by the Finnish Permanent Representation with support of the Commission, was to informally discuss on future-oriented innovation in the context of the preparation of the post-ET 2020 cooperation framework. The workshop drew on the extensive experience of Finland with innovation in education. It gathered around 60 participants including education attachés, the Commission and the EESC.

Key topics of discussion included:

- The social and value-driven embeddedness of innovation in education
- Investment in innovation
- Relevant topics for innovation: socio-emotional skills, technology, AI, neurosciences, changing roles in education, demography and mobility, the intercultural and interdisciplinary dimensions, schools as learning communities and the learning culture
- On ET 2020:
  - Continuity of cooperation
  - Need for a shared vision and reduced number of priorities
  - Strengthened mutual learning (more efficient & flexible)
  - Qualitative assessment to complement benchmarks
  - Increased use of evidence to increase relevance of themes and benchmarks
  - More involvement of education representatives in European Semester
  - Permanent policy forum/ expert panel to discuss innovation
  - Stronger guidance from policy-makers, including the Council
  - Need to address the role of teachers and the use of technology

#### **5. The opinion of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (2018)**

The Advisory Committee has the task of assisting the Commission in implementing a Community vocational training policy; which includes governments, trade unions and employers' organisations from EU Member States and partner countries. On 3 December 2018, the Committee issued an [opinion](#) on the future of vocational education and training post-2020.

The ACVT opinion sets a shared vision of governments, trade unions and employers' organisations from EU Member States and partner countries on how to make vocational education and training (VET) systems fit for addressing the future societal and economic challenges.

The opinion stresses:

- the dual objectives of VET for fostering social inclusion and excellence,
- the role of VET in supporting acquisition of job specific and transversal skills, and
- calls for a better balancing of investment and funding between initial and continuing VET.

The opinion calls for the set up of excellent, inclusive and lifelong VET and defines:

- the building blocks of future fit vocational education and training
- three key objectives to achieve this vision related to the
  - content of VET,
  - provision of VET and

- governance of VET systems.
- stakeholders views on the main features of the future European cooperation in VET and possible actions to be carried out at European level.

#### **6. The Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks consultation on the new monitoring framework (2018 and 2019)**

In 2017, in cooperation with the EU Member States (via the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks), the Commission has started reviewing the impact of benchmarks on national reforms, and preparing proposals for a renewed benchmark process. Starting from a comprehensive list of priority areas, and in consultation with experts in the Member States, it was decided to select 12 areas for further ‘benchmarkability’ analysis. These include the current ET 2020 benchmarks, in addition: digital competences; entrepreneurship education; multilingualism; education expenditure; and vocational education and training. This body of work resulted in an initial classification of ‘benchmarkable’ policy areas. ‘Benchmarkable’ indicators are variables that can be measured quantitatively; and benefit from existing, regularly updated, and internationally comparable data sources. The results of this work are presented in Section 3.2.4. of the Staff Working Document.

#### **7. Member State consultations in High Level Group meetings in Vienna (June 2018), Bucharest (February 2019) and Helsinki (October 2019)**

The debate in the high-level group was focused on the overall structure and possible priorities, as well as a forward look at both the working methods and targets & indicators for post-ET 2020. The purpose of the discussions was to develop ideas for European cooperation, in the context of a future European Education Area and to conduct a more in-depth discussion on the above mentioned topics.

#### **8. ET 2020 Working Group consultations (2018 and 2019)**

Within the ET 2020 coordination process, national education and training experts discussed future priorities at Working Group meetings held during 2018 and 2019. [An example of a discussion paper](#) is publicly available in the Register of Expert Groups.

#### **9. External assessment of the ET 2020 tools and deliverables (2019)**

Two stakeholder surveys, 88 individual interviews and 10 case studies in the context of the [external assessment of ET 2020 tools and deliverables](#). The objectives of the analysis was to evaluate 1. the performance of ET 2020 tools and deliverables in addressing the ET 2020 objectives and priorities; 2. The impact of such tools and deliverables at the MS and EU levels.

Key recommendations:

- Successful elements
  - Composition of ET 2020 Working Groups should be maintained, mandates with a clear focus on a limited number of strategic issues

- The use of qualitative and quantitative evidence to underpin the ET 2020 processes should be further supported
- Alignment of future ET 2020 deliverables with EU priorities and the work of the European Commission
- Further strengthening the link between ET 2020 tools and deliverables and national priorities
- ET 2020 tools should become even more flexible and agile
- Points for improvement and future actions
  - Further attention is needed to fully exploit synergies, and improve coordination and collaboration between the Working Groups
  - Continuous and stable Working Group membership should be encouraged for improved results and dissemination
  - Participation in the ET 2020 activities should also be increasingly opened to include external experts and stakeholders
  - Dissemination of ET 2020 outcomes at the national level should be strengthened
  - New interactive tools and formats could include enhanced peer counselling and adopting a tailored approach to MS needs
  - Interaction between the technical and political levels of stakeholders should be improved.

#### **10. Expert advice from the Education and Training Expert Panel on the future education and training challenges (2019)**

The [European Education and Training Expert Panel](#) – composed of 18 international experts – was set up to assist the Commission in the preparation of the future framework for cooperation in education and training, by developing a set of "issue papers" in order to feed the discussion at both EU and national level.

The Panel was asked to focus on six thematic blocks:

- demographic challenges
- inclusion and citizenship
- technological change and the future of work
- digitalisation of society
- environmental challenges
- investment, reforms and governance.

These themes were selected by the Commission from a pool of analyses of long-term strategic trends. For each block, the Expert Panel was invited to address the following scoping questions:

- 1) What are the major societal developments that will have an impact on how education and training are delivered in Europe in the medium- to long-term? How can EU cooperation best respond to these challenges?



- 2) What should the strategic objectives of European cooperation in education and training be for the next decade? Which should be the priority areas and themes?

### **11. Stakeholder Forum on the Future of Learning (24 January 2019)**

The [Forum](#) provided an open platform for over 360 policy-makers, stakeholders, experts and the general public to discuss key issues that education and training will be facing in Europe and beyond until 2030.

The outcome of the discussions were taken up by the Commission in the [European Education and Training Expert Panel Final Report](#).

### **12. Civil Society Day (25 January 2019)**

The Civil Society Day, co-organised by the European Commission and the Lifelong Learning Platform back-to-back with the Forum on the Future of Learning, gathered representatives of 32 stakeholder organisations in education and training.

Key conclusions:

- Promote participation in formal, non-formal and informal learning activities - at an equal footing - as a priority across all age groups – close link with validation
- Support people of all ages to acquire basic skills which involves developing curricula that are flexible, built around the learner and relevant for real life (i.e development of life skills, key competences, transversal skills)
- Recognise universal access to quality education as a common good which should form the basis for establishing the European Education Area.
- Invest in spaces of co-creation that bring and link together all education sectors and stakeholders, building on existing practices
- Adopt a holistic approach to embedding the sustainable development agenda in education and training policies
- Integrate learning “about Europe” as a transversal priority for all education sectors that would facilitate the sharing of common values
- Develop a coherent and coordinated approach that link the world of education and the world of work
- Promote alternative/flexible pathways
- Embed the concept of Community Lifelong Learning Centres as a forward-looking approach towards opening up educational establishments to local communities and a more diverse range of learners.
- Promote trainings for teachers and educators about how to deal with diversity
- Support EU-wide networks in their efforts for better outreach to deprived areas of our societies.

- Promote multilingualism and learning of languages across all education sectors.

### **13. Eurobarometer on Youth (2019)**

[Flash Eurobarometer](#) titled “How do we build a stronger, more united Europe? The views of young people”, which includes input from young people in the EU (aged 15-30) on the future of education and training.

Key findings:

- The five most mentioned priorities for the European Union in years to come according to young people are protecting the environment and fighting climate change (67%), improving education and training (56%), fighting poverty and economic and social inequalities (56%), boosting employment (49%) and improving health and well-being (44%).
- Considering the competences of the EU, in the area of education and training the most useful actions for young people would be connecting schools or universities in their country with others abroad (44%), funding projects or activities for young people (41%) and increasing participation in European programmes among young people with fewer opportunities, for instance in rural areas (39%).
- Considering the competences of the EU, in the area of education and training the most useful actions for young people would be connecting schools or universities in their country with others abroad (44%), funding projects or activities for young people (41%) and increasing participation in European programmes among young people with fewer opportunities, for instance in rural areas (39%).
- Respondents say that the most important things school should offer young people are preparing them for employment (49%), giving everyone a chance to succeed and have access to the same opportunities (45%) and promoting creativity, adaptability and an entrepreneurial mindset (38%).
- The topics respondents most often say are not being taught sufficiently in schools are critical thinking, media and democracy (42%); climate change, environment and eco-friendly behaviours (41%) and entrepreneurship and financial competences (41%).

### **14. Member State workshop on investments in education and training (5 June 2019)**

The Flemish General Representation within the Belgium Permanent Representation to the EU and the Flanders Department of Education and Training, in collaboration with the European Commission organised an informal workshop on school infrastructure, and the place of the issue in future European Cooperation.

Key conclusions:

- Strengthen mutual learning between Member States on approaches to school infrastructure development
- Reinforce EU investment in school infrastructure across financial instruments – including through stronger synergies between funds

- Recognise infrastructure as a priority and a new theme.

### **15. Member State workshop on the link between the European Education Area and the future cooperation framework (16 July 2019)**

Organized by the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Croatia and the Federal Republic of Germany in collaboration with the European Commission, the workshop provided a platform for further discussion on the post-ET 2020 cooperation framework for education and training. It included several sessions, on strategic goals, on the implementation of the future cooperation framework in terms of governance structures and instruments, as well as a discussion on quantifiable targets and monitoring.

Key topics and conclusions:

- Close link between the future cooperation framework and the European Education Area
- Synergies between policy areas (employment, industry, research,)
- Alignment of the future cooperation framework with the existing tools and processes
- ET 2020 priorities still relevant, but need to respond to new challenges
- Need to invest in individuals and the ability to learn
- Common understanding of overarching strategic goals with flexibility to focus on specific challenges
- Governance: strengthened political guidance and flexible implementation
- Priority areas: high-quality, efficient education and training systems, learning mobility, seamless and continuous learning enabled by flexible pathways, learner-centred and collaborative learning, societal dimension of education and training, digitalisation and artificial intelligence, common values and diversity, sustainability and environment, the role of teachers and trainers.

### **16. Second European Education Summit (26 September 2019)**

The [2<sup>nd</sup> European Education Summit](#) provided the opportunity for teachers, ministers, academics and civil servants to discuss the future of the teaching profession in Europe, in view of the future European initiatives in this area. The summit gathered 675 participants, including 13 Ministers of education. The digital outreach of the event was close to 20,000 views on diverse social media platforms.

Key topics included continuous professional development, teaching foreign languages, inclusive education, innovation and creativity in the classroom, European Universities, the STEAM approach, vocational excellence and many others.

### **17. ET 2020 mutual learning survey (July 2020)**

To triangulate views on mutual learning in ET 2020 towards the end of the mandate, the Commission prepared a short anonymous survey for members of the 7 ET 2020 Working

Groups on the relevance and the usefulness of mutual learning tools. 69 replies were received, representing a response rate of 12%.

The results clearly indicated that there is almost unanimous support as concerns the relevance of themes addressed in that 98% of respondents were of the opinion that the themes covered by the Working Groups were “very relevant or somewhat relevant” to their country, organisation or work.

In terms of the usefulness of the various different types of tools offered through mutual learning, physical Working Group meetings were deemed the most useful (97%) followed by Peer Learning Activities (86%); webinars (72%); Online Working Group meetings (69%); joint Working Group meetings with other groups or bodies (58%) and; PLA Lights (49%).

As concerns the types of activities most conducive to learning about new policy approaches and practice, the top three replies included keynote sessions/plenary presentations (70%); workshop/breakout session (65%) and; visits to schools, higher education institutions or others (51%).

The types of tools and deliverables which were found to be most helpful to support mutual learning, the top three replies included thematic reports (72%); policy guidelines or frameworks produced by the Working Groups (62%) and; good practice compendium or good practice collections (43%).

Furthermore, as relates to how successful respondents felt in sharing and disseminating the learning and information they obtained in the Working Group to their country or organisation, 78% were of the opinion that they were successful.

### **18. Online consultation events with Commissioner Gabriel (July 2020)**

Three online targeted consultation events were organised with key stakeholder groups with the aim to discuss the Commission’s planned initiatives for making the European Education Area a reality. The events were hosted by Commissioner Mariya Gabriel and convened between 10-20 participants each.

1. The first event gathered rectors of universities and higher education institutions, and representatives of university and student networks. Participants highlighted the importance of inclusion; physical mobility; strengthening synergies between the European Education Area and the European Research Area; and a global perspective to higher education cooperation.

2. The second consultation took place with the participation of representatives of youth organisations across the EU. The event was livestreamed. Key take-aways included:

- The need for a strengthened budget for the future Erasmus programme in view of making it more inclusive, sustainable and digital;
- Equal access to high quality education for all and ensuring that no one is left behind and this includes young people in both urban and rural areas as well as marginalised youth;

- The importance of digital literacy and the urgent need for young people, educators and teachers to improve their digital skills;
- Making the case to create synergies between formal, non-formal and informal learning as a means to provide a more flexible way of learning. Also, the need to formally recognise non-formal and informal learning.
- Updating curriculum to ensure that it reflects the learning needs of today's societies including sustainable development, values, digital literacy and civic education;
- Relevance of European identity, diversity and cultural heritage when looking at the future of learning.

3. Finally, the Commissioner held a discussion with Members of the European Parliament. Key points raised during the discussion:

- The European Education Area vision must be supported with appropriate funding.
- The MEPs reiterated strong support for the European Universities initiative and emphasized that the European Education Area must encompass all sectors and levels of education and training.
- The European Education Area should be developed in a lifelong learning perspective. It must work together with the Skills Agenda to support adult learning and labour market skills, while strengthening actions that prepare people for personal fulfilment and an active role in a democratic society.
- Education can support the digital future of Europe across multiple fronts.
- The European Education Area and the European Research Area must work hand in hand. Also related are the efforts to ensure a balanced regional development, including by actions that promote balanced brain circulation.

<b>Consultation activity/ Thematic scope</b>	<b>ET 2020 effectiveness and results</b>	<b>Education and training challenges</b>	<b>Future priorities and actions</b>	<b>Future governance and working methods</b>	<b>EU added value</b>
Member State Survey	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Survey of stakeholder organisations and social partners	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Opinion of the advisory committee on vocational training		✓	✓		✓
Informal Member State workshops	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks	✓			✓	
Consultation with Member States in High Level Group meetings	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
External assessment of tools and deliverables of ET 2020	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Education and Training Expert Panel		✓	✓		
Forum on the Future of Learning		✓	✓		
Civil Society Day		✓	✓		
Second European Education Summit		✓	✓		
Eurobarometer on Youth		✓	✓		
Eurobarometer on the European Education Area		✓	✓		
ET 2020 mutual learning survey	✓			✓	
European Education Area online targeted consultations		✓	✓		✓