



Brussels, 18.11.2022  
SWD(2022) 750 final

PART 1/3

## **COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT**

### *Accompanying the document*

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

**on progress towards the achievement of the European Education Area**

{COM(2022) 700 final} - {SWD(2022) 751 final}

## Table of contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Actions and (policy) reforms towards the EEA.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>I.1. Progress in implementing EEA actions at the EU-level.....</b>	<b>5</b>
I.1.1. Policy objectives and EU actions to promote cooperation and reforms towards the EEA – state of play and overall assessment .....	5
I.1.2. State of play on implementation of EEA actions.....	9
I.1.2.1. Quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality in education and training.....	9
I.1.2.2. Green and digital transitions.....	13
I.1.2.3. Teachers and trainers.....	16
I.1.2.4. Higher education.....	18
I.1.2.5. Lifelong learning and mobility.....	20
I.1.2.6. Geopolitical dimension.....	22
<b>I.2. More and better investment for implementing action and reforms towards the EEA at national and local level.....</b>	<b>23</b>
I.2.1. Ensuring quality of investment through an evidence-informed approach to policy design and evaluation in education .....	23
I.2.2. Mobilising EU funds.....	26
I.2.3. Implementing actions and reforms towards the EEA in the Member States.....	28
I.2.3.1 Quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality .....	29
I.2.3.2 Green and digital transitions.....	34
I.2.3.3 Teachers and trainers .....	36
I.2.3.4 Higher education.....	38
I.2.3.5 Lifelong learning and mobility .....	40
I.2.3.6 Geopolitical dimension.....	41
<b>Improving EEA governance .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>II.1. Reformed EEA governance and co-creation processes .....</b>	<b>44</b>
II.1.1. Introduction: context and rationale for governance reforms.....	44
II.1.2. Towards a stronger political steer, more synergies and impact.....	44
II.1.3. EEA strategic framework working groups and other Commission expert groups as key pillars of co-creation.....	46
II.1.4. Other fora and channels for co-creation.....	52
II.1.5. EEA Portal for enhanced transparency, dissemination and impact.....	53
<b>II.2. Improved performance monitoring and analysis of progress towards EU-level targets .....</b>	<b>54</b>
II.2.1. Introduction.....	54
II.2.2. Three domains for new EU-level indicators or targets.....	55
II.2.2.1. Inclusion and equity .....	55
II.2.2.2. Teaching profession.....	57
II.2.2.3. Sustainability and greening of education and training systems .....	57
II.2.3. Supporting indicators for the existing EU-level target domains .....	58
II.2.3.1. A toolbox for early childhood education and care .....	59
II.2.3.2. A toolbox for early school leaving.....	59
II.2.3.3. A toolbox for work-based learning in VET.....	60
II.2.3.4. A toolbox for tertiary educational attainment.....	60
II.2.3.5. A toolbox for adult learning .....	61
II.2.3.6. A toolbox for key competences and basic skills.....	61
II.2.3.7. A toolbox for digital skills.....	62
<b>Summary of main findings .....</b>	<b>63</b>

## Introduction

The **vision of a European Education Area** in which learning, studying and doing research would not be hampered by borders was set out for the first time in 2017 in the Commission's contribution to the Gothenburg Social Summit,<sup>1</sup> and is rooted in decades of European cooperation in education and training. The first initiatives towards the European Education Area were launched in 2018,<sup>2</sup> but it was the Commission [Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025](#) (EEA Communication) that set out a comprehensive and detailed agenda for the European Union to improve access to quality education for all. This approach includes a framework of cooperation, clear focus areas with dedicated objectives for action, cooperation and reform, concrete EU-level initiatives to support Member States in achieving the European Education Area, and a set of proposed EU-level targets. The [Digital Education Action Plan \(2021-2027\)](#) was also adopted in September 2020 as an integral part and key enabler of the EEA vision, and a major contributor to [Europe's recovery and resilience strategy](#). Its ongoing implementation supports the long-standing digital transformation of our education and training systems and the acquisition of digital skills and competences.

Putting in place such an ambitious agenda requires the **ownership and active involvement of Member States, EU institutions and stakeholders, as well as education and training institutions, teachers, trainers and students** alike. The **Council of the EU** endorsed the achievement and further development of the European Education Area as the overarching political objective of the 2021-2030 strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training.<sup>3</sup> Member States, in cooperation with the European Commission, also agreed on governance reforms to help promote effective solutions and policy reforms on the ground and to live up to the ambition of achieving the EEA.<sup>4</sup> The **European Parliament** also made a significant contribution and endorsed the holistic approach to realising the shared EEA vision.<sup>5</sup>

An **unprecedented scale of EU funding**<sup>6</sup> can be mobilised for reforms and investment in education and training in line with EEA objectives. It is estimated that the total EU spending on education and training will triple between 2021 and 2027 compared to the 2014-20 period. The EEA connects with the **European Semester** and which provides guidance for Member States' programming of EU funds (under the Recovery and Resilience Facility, as well as 2021-2027 EU cohesion policy Funds) for actions and reforms in education and training. It also engages and intersects with other policy areas and initiatives, such as the European Skills Agenda, the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Research Area, the Bologna Process, the Green Deal, the Digital Decade and EU equality strategies. It also interlinks with some key recommendations from the Conference on the Future of Europe and the European Year of Youth.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** demonstrated the importance of developing resilient education and training systems that deliver accessible, high-quality and inclusive education for all. School lockdowns and the sudden switch to online and blended learning made pre-existing inequalities more visible, laid bare the importance of digital skills (in addition to basic skills), and underlined the key role teachers and trainers play, not only in terms of learning outcomes, but also well-being at school.

The **Russian war of aggression against Ukraine** and the arrival of very high numbers of refugees, many of them children and young people whose education and life has been severely disrupted, served as a major stress

<sup>1</sup> [Communication on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture - The European Commission's contribution to the Leaders' Meeting in Gothenburg](#), 17 November 2017, COM(2017)673 final. European Council Conclusions of 14 December 2017 invited Member States, the Council and the Commission to take forward several initiatives.

<sup>2</sup> [Communication on building a stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies](#), COM(2018) 268 final; [Communication on the Digital Education Action Plan](#), COM(2018) 22 final.

<sup>3</sup> [Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond \(2021-2030\)](#) (EEA Strategic framework Resolution), February 2021.

<sup>4</sup> [Council Resolution on the governance structure of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond \(2021-2030\)](#) (Governance Resolution), 29 November 2021.

<sup>5</sup> [Resolution on the European Education Area: a shared holistic approach](#), November 2021. The Committee of the Regions issued its opinion ([Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – Achieving the European Education Area by 2025](#)) in May 2021.

<sup>6</sup> See section I.2.2.

test for education and training systems. The EU Education Solidarity Group for Ukraine<sup>7</sup> that the Commission has set up to support Member States hosting displaced children and young people from Ukraine has mobilised all levels of governance, tools and mechanisms under the EEA, by pooling expertise, providing guidance and organising peer learning based on identified needs.

The EEA progress report, in the form of a Commission Communication accompanied by this Staff Working Document (SWD), provides an early snapshot of where we are on the trajectory towards building a genuine European Education Area. It highlights first results and experiences with implementing action and reforms at EU and national levels.<sup>8</sup> The report refers to preparations underway for forthcoming initiatives announced in the 2020 EEA Communication and still to come by 2025. It reports on the results of work that the Commission has undertaken to support Member States by ensuring quality of investment through an evidence-based approach to policy design and evaluation in education. It reviews how Member States are using the Recovery and Resilience Facility and EU cohesion policy Funds to modernise their education and training systems along EEA objectives. It assesses the first experiences with the reformed governance and co-creation processes put in place in autumn 2021 and spring 2022. It takes stock of the work on new and improved indicators and data analysis to support evidence-based policymaking towards EU-level targets. The Communication and this report is complemented by the 2022 Education and Training Monitor that tracks progress towards EU-level targets and other key policy trends in the Member States.

---

<sup>7</sup> Under the EU Education Solidarity Group for Ukraine, Member States and the Commission mobilised several levels of the EEA strategic framework governance, from the Council, through the High Level Group, its new Coordination Board, to EEA strategic framework working groups.

<sup>8</sup> Given the recent adoption and launch of even the more advanced EU-level EEA initiatives, this progress report could not yet look at measurable evidence on the national impact and take-up of these initiatives.



## Part 1

# **Actions and (policy) reforms towards the EEA**



## I.1. Progress in implementing EEA actions at the EU-level

### I.1.1. Policy objectives and EU actions to promote cooperation and reforms towards the EEA – state of play and overall assessment

The [EEA Communication](#) set the ambition of creating a genuine European Education Area by 2025, by proposing new and consolidating ongoing efforts across **six dimensions**. Building on the EEA Communication, on 18 February 2021 the Council adopted its [Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond \(2021-2030\)](#) (EEA Strategic framework Resolution). The Resolution put forward **five strategic priorities** to support the implementation of the European Education Area.

Table 1: Six dimensions of the EEA Communication and five priority areas of the EEA Strategic framework Resolution

Six dimensions of the EEA Communication	Five priority areas of the EEA Strategic framework Resolution
Quality	Quality, equity, inclusion and success for all
Inclusion and gender equality	
Green and digital transitions	Green and digital transitions
Teachers and trainers	Teachers and trainers
Higher education	Higher education
Geopolitical dimension	Lifelong learning and mobility

The strategic priorities and concrete issues and actions identified by the Council under each priority area largely correspond to the six dimensions, objectives and proposed actions under the EEA Communication. The main differences are two-fold:

- **Lifelong learning and mobility** – is a dedicated priority area under the Resolution, while it has not been proposed as a separate dimension by the EEA Communication, which has treated it as an important cross-cutting aspect most closely linked to quality of education, including also educational mobility and lifelong learning-related objectives under the dimensions on teachers and trainers, higher education, as well as inclusion and gender equality and the geopolitical dimension.
- **Geopolitical dimension** – While not including it as a strategic priority, the Resolution also stresses the importance of the global perspective, considering cooperation in education and training as an important instrument for implementing EU external policies and cementing the links between the European Education Area and the rest of the world.

The **correspondence** between the six dimensions proposed in the EEA Communication and the five priority areas set out in the Council Resolution can be ensured for operational purposes, including the current progress reporting, by covering the following broad policy goals – that serve as focus areas for action and reforms:

Table 2: Reconciling dimensions and priority areas for reporting

Improving <b>quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality</b> for all in education and training
Supporting the <b>green and digital transitions</b> in and through education and training
Enhancing competence and motivation in the education profession – <b>teachers and trainers</b>
Reinforcing European <b>higher education</b>
Making <b>lifelong learning and mobility</b> a reality for all
Education as part of a stronger Europe in the world – <b>geopolitical dimension</b>

In each of the above broad policy goals, the EEA set out a series of more specific objectives (see Table 3 below) to guide European cooperation and national reforms in education and training. Table 3 summarises EEA objectives, that will help assessing the connections between the 40 EEA actions.

Table 3: EEA objectives

QUALITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION& GENDER EQUALITY		GREEN & DIGITAL	TEACHERS & TRAINERS	HIGHER EDUCATION	LIFELONG LEARNING AND MOBILITY	GEOPOLITICAL
Master basic, including digital, skills	Decouple educational attainment and achievement from socio-economic and cultural status	Enable change in people's behaviour and skills, foster sustainable education & training infrastructure	Overcome teacher shortages	Promote cooperation between higher education institutions	Promote the dual freedom for learners and teachers to be mobile and institutions to freely associate within Europe and beyond (link to Quality)*	Strengthen international cooperation
Master transversal skills	Maintain education and training institutions as safe environments, free of violence, bullying, harmful speech, disinformation and discrimination	Increase the number of professionals working towards a climate-neutral and resource-efficient economy	Increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession	Develop a policy framework across borders for transnational cooperation between institutions	Make international mobility of students, teachers and teacher trainers part of teacher education (link to Teachers & Trainers)*	Promote European interests and values in the world
Bring a European perspective in education	Support teachers in managing linguistic and cultural diversity	Integrate environmental sustainability perspectives across natural and human sciences, support shifts in skills, methods, processes and cultures	Support teachers' continuous professional development	Support higher education institutions as central actors in the knowledge square	Support robust and inclusive lifelong learning strategies to enable people to re-enter education or update skills (link to Inclusion)*	Roll out ambitious partnerships with partner countries across the globe
Promote language learning and multilingualism	Help Member States to comply with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	Equip people with competences needed for a labour market transformed by technological change		Support specialised education programmes in advanced digital skills	Promote inclusive higher education institutions for lifelong learning (through recognition and portability of short courses/ micro-credentials, automatic recognition, quality assurance of joint transnational activities) (link to Higher Education)*	Support ongoing reform processes in Africa, the Western Balkans and the Neighbourhood countries
Make vocational education and training systems more agile, resilient and future-proof	Strengthen cross-border cooperation in youth work and promote non-formal learning				Promote collaboration between education institutions to attract the best talent worldwide, peer learning and joint international research and innovation (link to Geopolitical)*	Widen the association of non-EU countries with the EEA, especially those of the Western Balkans
	Improve gender sensitivity in education and dissolve gender stereotypes					
	Promote gender balance in leadership positions					

\*EEA objectives under Lifelong learning and mobility were grouped from under relevant dimensions set out in the EEA Communication. The objectives derive from the EEA Communication (Section 2) and the EEA Strategic Framework Resolution (Annex 3). While each objective is listed under a specific focus area (i.e. broad policy goal to which it is most closely connected), in practice most EEA objectives are multi-purpose, serving several broad policy goals.

The EEA Communication has also proposed a total of 40 **EEA actions**: These are transnational EU initiatives initiated and/or managed by the European Commission, to promote cooperation and co-creation with Member States and stakeholders and to support reforms along the EEA objectives and vision (See Annex 1 for an overview of the state of play on all 40 EEA actions). Steps under all 40 actions have been launched and their preparation or implementation is under way. The 40 actions are complemented by governance reforms (see Part II.)

There are **different types of actions** among the 40 initiatives:

- Examples of **strategic EEA initiatives requiring a corporate-level decision** include Commission proposals for Council Recommendations (e.g. on blended learning approaches for high quality and inclusive primary and secondary education), Communications setting out a strategic approach in a specific sector (e.g. the European strategy for universities); and Commission implementing decisions (e.g. on the framework of inclusion measures for the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes).
- Other **high visibility flagship actions and EU-funded projects** have also been identified as ‘strategic’. For example in the focus area of teachers and trainers these include for example the Erasmus+ Teacher Academies that are networks of initial and continuous education providers for teachers, working to improve teacher education policies and enhance the European dimension and internationalisation of teacher education.
- Other EEA initiatives include **cooperation or co-creation processes** (such as mutual learning) resulting in specific **deliverables coordinated by Commission departments**: EEA strategic framework working groups through mutual learning activities have been working on topics ranging from monitoring and evaluating quality of early childhood education and care, through learning for sustainability, to gender equality in and through education (see Box 16 in Section II.1.3 for examples of the interim deliverables and main outputs of EEA strategic framework Working Groups so far). The expert group on tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy (under the DEAP) has launched [guidelines for teachers and educators on tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy through education and training](#).
- Another significant group of actions are **initiatives linked to EU funding** and subject to the governance of funding programmes, such as Erasmus+. These initiatives include for example the European Universities initiative – which promotes deep institutional transnational cooperation in higher education with an indicative budget of EUR 1,1 bn for 2021-2027, aiming to support 60 alliances gathering over 500 higher education institutions across Europe by mid-2024.

The overall assessment of these initiatives shows that most actions although proposed under one of the broad policy objectives (focus areas), tend to be linked to several areas, contribute to multiple EEA objectives, and build on and reinforce other EEA actions (See Table 4 below for the objectives addressed by the highest number of EEA actions.). Practically all proposed EEA actions aim to lift quality in education, and a big majority aim at making education and training more inclusive and gender sensitive, support the green and digital transitions, strive to reinforce European higher education and to improve competences and motivation of teachers and trainers (24-27 of the 40 actions have objectives along each of these areas).



Table 4: EEA objectives addressed by the highest number of EU-level actions

EEA focus area	Objectives
QUALITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION AND GENDER EQUALITY	Mastering transversal skills
	Mastering basic skills, including digital skills
	Decoupling educational attainment and achievement from social, economic and cultural status
	Developing a European perspective in education
GREEN AND DIGITAL TRANSITION	Equipping people with competences needed in a labour market transformed by technological change
	Enabling a profound change in behaviour and skills
TEACHERS AND TRAINERS	Providing teachers and trainers with opportunities for professional development
HIGHER EDUCATION	Promoting cooperation between higher education institutions
	Developing a policy framework across borders for transnational cooperation
LIFELONG LEARNING AND MOBILITY	Promoting the dual freedom for learners and teachers to be mobile and for institutions to freely associate with one another in Europe and beyond
GEOPOLITICAL DIMENSION	Strengthening international cooperation
	Promoting European interests and values

Many EEA actions have **synergies with other EU policy frameworks**. The highest number of actions connect with the **European Skills Agenda**, **EU equality strategies**<sup>9</sup> or the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion<sup>10</sup>. Several actions also link to the Bologna Process for the European Higher Education Area, the European Research Area, the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, the **Green Deal**, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, or the **European Semester**.

Other efforts implemented under the European Skills Agenda<sup>11</sup>, the renewed VET policy<sup>12</sup> and the European Care Strategy<sup>13</sup>, or the European Child Guarantee<sup>14</sup> also contribute to achieving the objectives of the European Education Area, in particular with regard to early childhood education and care (ECEC), adult learning and vocational education and training (VET) policies. Such efforts are not described in this SWD, which focuses on the actions announced in the EEA Communication.

The EEA actions are also especially well aligned with the use of **EU funds**, in particular the **Recovery and Resilience Facility**, and 2021-2027 **EU cohesion policy Funds**, in particular the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), but some actions also connect with the Technical Support Instrument, Horizon Europe or InvestEU programmes. The more inclusive, greener and more digital **Erasmus+** and **European Solidarity Corps programmes** support the implementation of EEA actions across the board, they are particularly relevant for the EEA focus areas of quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality, as well as the green and digital dimensions. (See section 1.2.2. *Mobilising the Recovery and Resilience Facility and 2021-2027 EU funds.*)

<sup>9</sup> The following EU equality strategies were adopted in 2020-21. They connect closely with the EEA objectives and actions in the quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality focus area:

- [Gender equality strategy 2020-2025](#) (2020 March)
- [EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025](#) (2020 September)
- [EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation 2020-2030](#) (2020 October – March 2021: Council adoption of Council Recommendation)
- [LGBTIQ equality strategy 2020-2025](#) (2020 November)
- [Strategy on the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030](#) (March 2021)
- [EU strategy on combatting antisemitism and fostering Jewish life 2021-2030](#) (October 2021)

<sup>10</sup> [Action plan on integration and inclusion 2021-2027](#) (2020 November)

<sup>11</sup> Commission Communication [European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience](#).

<sup>12</sup> [Council Recommendation on vocational education and training \(VET\) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience](#)

<sup>13</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&furtherNews=yes&newsId=10382>

<sup>14</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1428&langId=en>

Most actions are co-created with multiple actors in the education sector. **Co-creation** with, and support for mutual learning among Member States, and stakeholder involvement in designing and following up the actions, are primarily guaranteed by the **2021-2025 EEA strategic framework working groups**, and other **expert groups established under the EEA**, such as the expert group on quality investment, the expert group on supportive learning environments and well-being at school or the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks (see section II.1. EEA governance and co-creation processes).

### I.1.2. State of play on implementation of EEA actions

The following sections take stock of progress in developing and implementing the EEA actions, as announced by the EEA Communication to support European cooperation and national reforms in education and training in line with EEA objectives. They present the state of play by the main focus areas of action, highlighting in particular the **strategic EEA actions** that require adoption by the College of Commissioners and the Council (strategic EEA initiatives providing a framework for action and policy guidance) or are high visibility transnational EU-funded flagship projects supporting policy reform and/or cooperation between education and training institutions launched at the level of Commission departments.<sup>15</sup>

The text boxes provide a spotlight on (support for) the implementation of more advanced strategic EEA actions (i.e. strategic EEA initiatives that have already been adopted/proposed by the Commission), while the visual overview tables highlight the following for all strategic EEA actions:

- ✓ the **EEA value added**, i.e. the action's (expected) impact
- ✓ the main **EEA objective** that the action addresses
- ✓ other relevant EEA objectives it significantly contributes to
- ✓ **progress achieved**, i.e. implementation milestones, deliverables so far
- ✓ next steps, i.e. **upcoming milestones** and deliverables

Given the early stage of implementation and the fact that efforts in 2021-2022 focused on developing the EU-level policy framework, quantitative and qualitative evidence on impact is not yet available. Such evidence will be collected for the full EEA report planned for 2025, particularly through a policy evaluation. Structured summary information on the state of play of all 40 EEA actions is included in Annex 1 (*Roadmap of EEA actions coordinated by the European Commission*), while the Communication focuses on the one hand on strategic EEA initiatives already adopted (Section 2.1), and those still forthcoming until 2025 (Section 4.1).

#### I.1.2.1. Quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality in education and training

This is the most cross-cutting of the EEA focus areas, with objectives that are relevant for actions in all other, more thematic, focus areas. Across EEA actions, two broad objectives linked to this area emerge as most prevalent: the **mastering of basic, digital and transversal skills** linked to quality, and the **decoupling of educational attainment and achievement from social, economic and cultural status**, linked to equity and inclusion.

Several actions in this focus area – e.g. Commission support for Member States in implementing the Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages, and the European quality framework for high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) systems – have closely interconnected objectives on lifting quality and promoting equity and inclusion. This illustrates that **quality and equity are interlinked and mutually reinforce each other**.

Actions in this area most strongly interconnect – through their objectives – with the focus areas of lifelong-learning and mobility and teachers and trainers. (Actions such as the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps diversity and inclusion framework, the support for language teaching and learning and multilingualism, as well as the Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers have very strong mobility objectives, while

<sup>15</sup> Initiatives to be adopted by the College or of relevance at corporate level (e.g. proposals for Council Recommendations and Commission Communications) are automatically included among strategic actions. In addition, high visibility actions, announced in the EEA Communication, which do not require a decision at the level of the College and are managed by the relevant departments, and projects linked to EU funding, have been included on a case by case basis, based on a political assessment of their importance. As a result, there are a total of 17 strategic EEA actions, between 1 and 4 for each focus area.

the Jean Monnet actions, the Pathways to School Success, and the EU quality framework for high quality early childhood education and care systems have a strong focus on improving the competences and motivation of teachers and trainers.)

Among EEA actions under other focus areas, digital actions have a particularly strong potential to contribute to EEA objectives on inclusion and gender equality. This, however, requires targeted support and safeguards. In their absence, the digital transition might lead to increasing inequalities:

- **Promoting equity and inclusion through blended (including digital and non-digital) tools, environments, spaces and methods:** There is a strong link between the Pathways to School Success initiative (focusing on decoupling educational attainment and achievement from socio-economic and cultural status, underachievement in basic skills and early leaving from education and training) on the one hand, and the implementation of the Council Recommendation on blended learning approaches for high-quality and inclusive primary and secondary education. This synergy has been explored within the EEA strategic framework working group on Schools, which focused its first activities on blended learning for inclusion, supporting the implementation of both Recommendations (see box 2b below).
- **Promoting gender equality through digital actions:** Several EEA actions in the digital focus area have strong gender equality objectives. They promote gender sensitivity in education and training, better gender balance in career choices and leadership positions, or fight gender stereotypes. Most notable are EEA actions aiming to increase participation and support careers of women in digital and STEM fields, including entrepreneurship. The Girls Go circular initiative offers school girls training in digital and entrepreneurial skills, through the European Institute for Technology and its Knowledge and Innovation Communities. Since the launch of the programme in September 2020 a total of 13 500 girls at secondary level across 10 countries participated. An additional 6 500 girls are planned to be reached by the end of 2022. The first 'Women and Girls in STEM' forum took place on 28 October 2021 with over 500 participants, and discussed the challenge of eliminating gender bias from entrepreneurial, digital and STEM-related disciplines. The second edition took place on 26 October 2022 with a focus on 'Empowering Girls in Science and Technology'. Just like in 2021, the event was opened by Commissioner Mariya Gabriel and had close to a 1 000 registered participants. Girls and young women played a pivotal role in the event and were able to meet inspirational mentors, exchange with their peers and compete in a challenge. In addition to the mentoring sessions, a high-level panel took place engaging in discussions on eliminating gender bias from STEM with EU policymakers, scientists, and entrepreneurs and sharing success stories to inspire the future EU action on these themes. Under the 3-year ESTEAM project, which focuses on improving the digital and entrepreneurial competences of girls and women, 11 ESTEAM Fests are being organised in 19 EU Member States, and online ESTEAM communities of practice are being built to boost women and girls' competences. In addition two European Universities Alliances are focusing on gender equality in STEM.<sup>16</sup>

To make sure no learners are left behind, in addition to the above-mentioned targeted actions, other EEA digital (such as the Structured Dialogue on digital education and skills) and higher education flagships (such as the European strategy for universities) have a strong focus on inclusion and gender equality objectives.

The EEA vision and objectives regarding quality, equity and inclusion have provided a framework for education and training systems to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and the trauma felt by many learners and teachers. It has had an impact through the focus on equity (e.g. addressing the overall teaching loss through remote and blended learning, addressing particular learner needs through targeted ICTs, and supporting teachers), and inclusion (e.g. addressing specific learner needs and supporting those at risk of underachievement).

---

<sup>16</sup> [ENHANCE, UNIVERSEH](#)

**Box 1a: Quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality - Spotlight on (support for) implementation of more advanced strategic EEA actions**

**New strand of Jean Monnet actions:** Learning about the EU is an important part of promoting active citizenship and the common values of peace, freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination. The new strand “Jean Monnet for other fields of education and training”, also referred to as “Jean Monnet for Schools”, widened the scope of traditional Jean Monnet actions, reaching out to new groups, such as teachers and learners in schools and vocational education and training (VET) institutes in Erasmus+ programme countries with three types of activities: ✓ Jean Monnet “Teacher Training” enables (future) teachers in schools and VET providers to develop new skills, teach and engage on EU matters, empowering them through a better understanding of the EU and its functioning; ✓ Jean Monnet “School Networks” facilitates transnational cooperation between schools, VET institutions and teacher training institutions and allows for exchanges of good practices and experiences of co-teaching within a group of countries; ✓ Jean Monnet “Learning EU Initiatives” helps schools and VET providers to develop and implement new and creative ways of teaching about the EU, its values and the role its policies play in citizens’ daily life. In 2022 European 9 million have been made available for Jean Monnet for Schools under the Erasmus+ programme.

**Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers** (5 April 2022): Member States will report on progress annually as part of their regular updates on the [Youth Wiki](#) (on the Youth Portal). The Commission facilitates exchange of practices between Member States on tackling possible obstacles to youth volunteering, including through the [EU Youth Strategy Platform](#)<sup>17</sup>. It completes the European Solidarity Corps section on the European [Youth Portal](#) with information on national volunteering schemes, activities and links to national websites, providing information for volunteers on the national rules governing volunteering. The Commission will also further develop existing EU tools that support the validation of outcomes from non-formal and informal learning (e.g. renewed Youthpass certificates launched in early 2022, and European Digital Credentials for Learning, as part of the Europass platform, designed to validate formal, non-formal or informal learning outcomes and support Member States and practitioners in the field).

<sup>17</sup> E.g. in April 2022, in cooperation with Estonia, it held a peer learning activity on how the European Solidarity Corps and national volunteering schemes complement each other.

Visual overview 1: QUALITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION and GENDER EQUALITY in EDUCATION and TRAINING

	New Jean Monnet action for Schools and VET	Mobility of young volunteers across the EU	Pathways to School Success	Framework of inclusion measures Erasmus+ (E+) and the European Solidarity Corps (ESC)
Added value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facts, knowledge, skills about the EU, its values and active citizenship to learners in general education</li> <li>New and better skills to teachers and educators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tackling legal, financial and administrative barriers that hinder youth cross-border volunteering and solidarity</li> <li>More inclusive, higher quality and better recognised cross-border experiences under the new European Solidarity Corps programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comprehensive measures to reduce early school-leaving and underachievement in basic skills through targeted support to disadvantaged learners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More equitable and diverse learning and training systems</li> <li>Dedicated inclusion measures (financial mechanisms, targeted communication and outreach) supporting participants with fewer opportunities</li> </ul>
Main EEA objective	Bring a European perspective in education	Strengthen cross-border cooperation in youth work to promote non-formal learning	Decouple educational attainment and achievement from socio-economic & cultural status	Decouple educational attainment and achievement from socio-economic & cultural status
Other EEA objectives directly addressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revalorise the teaching profession</li> <li>Support teachers' professional development</li> <li>Promote European interests and values</li> <li>Master basic and transversal skills</li> <li>Integrate sustainability perspectives and support shifts in skills, methods, processes and cultures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote the freedom for learners and teachers to be mobile</li> <li>Foster language learning and multilingualism</li> <li>Support MS compliance with UNCRPD</li> <li>Dissolve gender stereotypes</li> <li>Master basic and transversal skills</li> <li>Promote international cooperation, EU values, support reform processes in third countries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Master basic skills</li> <li>Maintain education and training institutions as safe environments</li> <li>Support teachers' professional development</li> <li>Support MS compliance with UNCRPD</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote the freedom for learners and teachers to be mobile</li> <li>Support robust &amp; inclusive lifelong learning strategies</li> <li>Strengthen cross-border cooperation in youth work</li> <li>Support linguistic &amp; cultural diversity</li> <li>Promote inclusive HEI and their cooperation</li> </ul>
Key milestone passed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>First annual calls for <b>Teacher training, Networks, Learning EU actions</b> published (2021)</li> <li>Jean Monnet for Schools and VET campaign (2022)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Study on obstacles to cross-border solidarity activities, expert group final report, public consultations (2021)</li> <li><b>Proposal for Council Recommendation</b> (13 Jan. 2022)</li> <li><b>Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers across the EU</b> (5 April 2022)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consultation and co-creation activities with MS and stakeholders, open public consultation (2021)</li> <li>Council Conclusions on Equity, Inclusion and School Success (May 2021)</li> <li><b>Proposal for Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success</b> (30 June 2022)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Publication of E+ and ESC Inclusion and Diversity Strategy</li> <li>E+ and ESC Regulations in force</li> <li><b>Framework of inclusion measures of E+ and ESC programmes</b> (2021)</li> <li>Erasmus+ 35th anniversary (2022)</li> </ul>
Next milestone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual calls continue under 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(Support to) implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adoption in Council</li> <li>(Support to) implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementation of 2021-2027 E+ and ESC Regulations with inclusion and diversity as a horizontal priority (until 2027)</li> </ul>

### **Box 1b: Quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality - Spotlight on (support for) implementation of more advanced strategic EEA actions**

**Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps Framework of inclusion measures** (Commission Implementing Decision adopted on 22 October 2021): The Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy was published on 29 April 2021. Other relevant supporting documents include the Guide for National agencies, sectoral guidelines on inclusion and diversity, and the European Solidarity Corps and the Erasmus+ Call and Programme Guide, published in November 2021. To support implementation National Agencies have been asked to set up “National inclusion plans”, describing how they intend to translate the measures set at European level into their national context, with a multiannual perspective and a planning of annual activities. The plans are embedded into the yearly programming and reporting round run by the European Commission. A cross-sectoral network of Inclusion and Diversity officers was launched in December 2021. In the same month, a call for expressions of interest was launched for the National Agencies, to appoint a new SALTO Resource Centre<sup>18</sup> for Inclusion and Diversity in Erasmus+ in the fields of education and training. It complements the work of the already existing SALTO for Inclusion and Diversity in the field of youth (Erasmus+ youth and the European Solidarity Corps). The new SALTO was appointed in Q2 2022. A Data collection and analysis of Erasmus+ projects promoting inclusion in education was published in 2022.

**Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success** (adopted on 30 June 2022): The Pathways initiative has been built on the experience gained from implementing the 2011 Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving,<sup>19</sup> which it repeals and replaces. It aims to answer both long-standing and emerging challenges that deeply influence education systems, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the rising number of non-EU migrants and refugees of school age coming to the EU, or the deteriorating trend in the basic skills performance revealed by the results of PISA 2018 (Programme for International Student Assessment). It also takes into account new priorities highlighted by the EEA strategic framework for European cooperation, as well as new research insights. Hence, compared to the 2011 Council Recommendation, it is broader in scope, addressing simultaneously the two EU-level targets on reducing underachievement in basic skills and early leaving from education and training (reflecting the complementarity of these two challenges, their triggers and the measures to tackle them). It then expands to cover dimensions that have a strong impact on educational outcomes, such as well-being at school. The Pathways initiative proposes a renewed framework for action, for Member States to develop their own integrated strategies for school success, supported by effective data collection and monitoring. It outlines a set of policy measures on monitoring, prevention, intervention and compensation, with a stronger focus on prevention and early intervention, which Member States can apply and combine according to their specific circumstances and needs. Follow-up of the implementation takes place within the EEA strategic framework working group on Schools, launched in December 2021.

#### *1.1.2.2. Green and digital transitions*

Building green and digital skills of all learners, to engender a fundamental change in behaviour, methods, processes and infrastructures, is a must for Europe’s resilience and prosperity. Among the green and digital objectives of the EEA, the two that drive EEA actions most strongly are **equipping people with competences needed for a labour market transformed by technological change** and **enabling change in people’s behaviour and skills**. In addition, these objectives are especially relevant for actions in the higher education focus area; in particular, the European strategy for universities and the European University Initiative have strong green and digital objectives.

Actions related to sustainability include the Education for Climate Coalition, the Council Recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development, the European sustainability competence framework, the cooperation with the European Investment Bank to support the greening of education infrastructure, the European Researchers’ Night initiative and the greening of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes. Digital actions range from the Council Recommendations on blended learning approaches for high quality and inclusive primary and secondary education, through the Structured Dialogue with Member States on digital education and skills and two forthcoming proposals for Council

<sup>18</sup> SALTO: Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities

<sup>19</sup> OJ C 191, 1.7.2011, p. 1–6

Recommendations, to actions promoting girls' and women's participation in STEM, to making the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes more digital.

Both green and digital actions usually connect with other areas. However, the linkages between digital actions and EEA objectives in other areas are stronger, with digital EEA actions being strongest on explicitly pursuing objectives related to quality, inclusion and gender equality (as explained in section I.1.2.1. above), but also objectives linked to higher education (e.g. the forthcoming proposal for a Council Recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills).

**Box 2a: Green - Spotlight on (support to) implementation of more advanced strategic EEA actions**

**Council Recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development sustainability competence framework** (adopted on 16 June 2022): The proposal: ✓ Supports Member States' efforts to embed sustainability across education and training systems; ✓ Articulates an EU-level vision and shared understanding on learning for environmental sustainability; ✓ Sets out a coherent approach to the competences, skills and attitudes that people need to act, live and work in a sustainable manner; ✓ Stresses the importance of lifelong learning; ✓ Facilitates the sharing of policy maker, researcher and educator expertise; ✓ Supports initiatives at EU level; ✓ Encourages investment in education and training for the green transition.

The **European sustainability competence framework**: ✓ Supports learners and educators in developing competences on climate change and sustainable development; ✓ Provides a common ground for learners and educators on what sustainability as a competence entails; ✓ Supports education and training programmes for lifelong learning. Sustainability competences, as set out in the European Sustainability Competence Framework (GreenComp) help learners become systemic and critical thinkers, and develop agency to live, work and act in a sustainable manner. The Commission facilitates peer learning on education and training for the green transition through the EEA strategic framework working group on Schools (subgroup on learning for environmental sustainability). Launched in January 2022, the group provides a forum for policymakers from Member States and associated countries, employers, trade unions and international education organisations, including UNESCO and OECD the Council of Europe, to engage in dialogue and exchange experience and good practice related to implementing learning for sustainability. Outcomes support policymakers on effective policymaking and building whole-school approaches for sustainability.

**The Erasmus+ programme has as a key focus area on green education and sustainability.** A call for *Forward-Looking Projects* dedicated to *Supporting education and training systems to adapt for the green transition* received 27 proposals. Successful projects receive grants of around European 800 000 and run for 24-48 months. They address at least one of the three following areas: ✓ Promoting whole institution approaches to sustainability; ✓ Developing sustainability skills and competences of learners and educators; ✓ Empowering citizens to act on sustainability, environment and climate change – including in the context of the Education for Climate Coalition. A data collection and analysis of Erasmus+ projects promoting education for environmental sustainability was published by end 2021.

**Education for Climate Coalition** (launched in December 2020 at the 3rd European Education Summit): The coalition is a bottom-up, co-created initiative aiming to engage the education community at EU, national and local level. As a flagship initiative of the EEA, it is a key instrument for effectively capturing and sharing initiatives and projects of the educational community in support of the transition to climate neutrality, particularly in relation to green skills development and changing behaviour. Based on an extensive mapping of education initiatives during January/February 2021 (online survey with 576 replies), identified participants were guided by the JRC's experts through a participatory design process. The initial design phase of the coalition (running from January to May 2021) was closed by the Education for Climate Conference on 22 June 2021. This led into the outreach phase, with various public events (side-events at pre-COP26 in Milan in September, and at COP26 in November 2021). This phase concluded with the first Education for Climate Day (25 November 2021), gathering activists and (future) community members for workshops and hackathon-like settings to allow for the co-creation of the first concrete community challenges. The [Education for Climate platform](#) informs about the coalition's aims, current pledges and concrete successes and allows the community to directly communicate, cooperate and co-create. In 2022, the coalition spread and contributed (with the Education for Climate Coalition Policy Forum in May 2022) to the policy debate on sustainability skills. The 2nd Education for Climate Days (7-9 November 2022) were a milestone, enabling a broad contribution of community members to work together for three afternoons on new community challenges, after the first 10 have evolved in the year since the 1st Education for Climate Day. Since then more than 5 000 members have registered on the platform and 9 country groups were launched, allowing practitioners from all levels of education to contribute and get active with the Coalition on sustainability education and climate-related projects.

	Visual overview 2a: GREEN		Visual overview 2b: DIGITAL		
	<b>Education for Climate Coalition</b>	<b>Learning for the green transition and sustainable development</b>	<b>Blended learning for high quality and inclusive primary and secondary education</b>	<b>Structured Dialogue on digital education and skills</b>	<b>Improving the provision of digital skills in education and training</b>
<b>Added value</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engagement of and co-creation with education community at local, national and EU-levels supporting the green transition in education</li> <li>Capturing, stimulating, sharing and providing recognition to bottom-up innovative education initiatives on green skills development; teacher training; change in behaviour; citizen science; awareness raising</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmental sustainability embedded in all education and training policies, programmes and processes and learners empowered to act as part of a lifelong learning approach</li> <li>Strengthened cooperation and peer exchange between Member States, schools, higher education and training institutions on learning for environmental sustainability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shared understanding on approaches for effective, inclusive and engaging blended learning environment and tools</li> <li>More inclusive schools, enhanced competence development, support to teachers and school leaders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainable, high-performing, inclusive digital education and training systems</li> <li>Societal awareness on the need of effective digital education</li> <li>Education &amp; training flagged among the key areas of digital transition agenda</li> <li>Connectivity, equipment &amp; capacity gaps reduced to adapt and digitise in inclusive manner, accessibility and availability of assistive technologies, guidelines for digital pedagogy, upskilling of teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital competence and skills development promoted from early on and at all stages of education and training (incl. of teachers)</li> <li>Teachers' continuous professional development</li> <li>Exchange of best practices on instructional methods, including inclusive high-quality informatics</li> <li>Dialogue with industry on identifying new and emerging skills needs</li> </ul>
<b>Main EEA objective</b>	<b>Enable profound change in people's behaviour and skills</b>	<b>Integrate environmental sustainability perspectives across natural &amp; human sciences, support shifts in skills, methods, processes and cultures</b>	<b>Enable change in behaviour and skills, foster sustainable education &amp; training infrastructure</b>	<b>Equip people with competences needed to navigate in a labour market transformed by technological change</b>	
<b>Other EEA objectives directly addressed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrate sustainability perspectives, support shifts in skills, methods, processes and cultures</li> <li>Equip people with competences needed to navigate the labour market transformed by technological change</li> <li>Master transversal skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support robust &amp; inclusive lifelong learning</li> <li>Enable change in people's behavior &amp; skills</li> <li>Equip people with competences needed for the labour market</li> <li>Support teachers' professional development</li> <li>Master transversal skills</li> <li>Bring a European perspective in education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support teachers' professional development</li> <li>Support teachers in managing linguistic and cultural diversity</li> <li>Decouple educational attainment from socio-economic and cultural status</li> <li>Master basic and transversal skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Master basic, digital and transversal skills</li> <li>Support specialised education programmes in advanced digital skills</li> <li>Support teachers' professional development</li> <li>Support robust and inclusive lifelong learning strategies</li> <li>Decouple educational attainment and achievement from socio-economic and cultural status, improve gender sensitivity, dissolve gender stereotypes</li> </ul>	
<b>Key milestone passed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Launch of the Coalition (Dec 2020)</li> <li>Consultations, focus groups, stakeholder workshops (Q1-2 2021)</li> <li>Launch of the Coalition Portal and conference (June 2021)</li> <li>1st Education for Climate Day and <b>Education4Climate online platform</b> (Nov 2021)</li> <li>Joint call for expressions of interest with Bauhaus initiative (February, 2022)</li> <li>Policy and Practice Forum (May 2022)</li> <li>2<sup>nd</sup> Education for Climate Day (Nov 2022)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consultations with MS, stakeholders, wider public; Study mapping national policies &amp; approaches to environmental sustainability education (2021)</li> <li>Proposal for a Council Recommendation &amp; European Sustainability Competence Framework (14 Jan 2022)</li> <li><b>Council Recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development</b> (16 June, 2022)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consultations with MS, stakeholders, students, wider public (2020-2021)</li> <li>Proposal for Council Recommendation (Aug 2021)</li> <li><b>Council Recommendation on blended learning approaches for high quality and inclusive primary and secondary education</b> (Nov. 2021)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Council Conclusions on digital education in Europe's knowledge societies (Dec 2020)</li> <li>Launch of Structured Dialogue with Member States (Oct. 2021), EYCS Council policy discussion (Nov 2021)</li> <li>Meetings of the high level group of national coordinators (March 2022)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Council Conclusions on digital education in Europe's knowledge societies (Dec 2020)</li> <li>Study Reviewing Computational Thinking in Compulsory Education (March 2022), Literature review on the provision of digital skills for adults (May 2022).</li> <li>Targeted stakeholder consultations (April-June 2022)</li> </ul>
<b>Next milestone</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Launch of further national coalitions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(Support to) implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peer learning, resources &amp; professional development opportunities to support implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bilateral exchanges with Member States &amp; stakeholder consultations (until end 2022)</li> <li><b>Proposal for Council Recommendation on enabling factors for digital education</b> (Q1 2023)</li> <li>Adoption in Council and (support to) implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EURYDICE study on informatics in school education (September 2022).</li> <li><b>Proposal for Council Recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training</b> (Q1 2023)</li> <li>Adoption in Council and (support to) implementation</li> </ul>



### **Box2b: Digital - Spotlight on (support for) implementation of more advanced strategic EEA actions**

**Council Recommendation on blended learning approaches for high-quality and inclusive primary and secondary education** (adopted on 29 November 2021): The Recommendation aims to: ✓ Make school education more inclusive; ✓ Improve competence development; ✓ Support teachers and school leaders. The Commission facilitates peer learning, resources and professional development opportunities to support Member States with implementation. The EEA strategic framework working group on Schools (Pathways subgroup) chose blended learning for inclusion as one of the first topics for exchange in 2022. Based on the Recommendation's broad definition of blended learning, the group focused on policy conditions and opportunities for supporting schools and teachers to implement blended learning in teaching and learning practices in an inclusive way. A plenary discussion and a seminar brought together ministry and stakeholder representatives to discuss the pedagogical value of blended learning for inclusion and the related crucial and evolving role of teachers. Enabling factors (policies, initial teacher education and continuing professional development) were also discussed to support teachers' readiness, willingness and competences to fully take advantage of blended learning as a pedagogical approach for inclusion. A number of resources on blended learning for teachers and the wider education stakeholder community, and courses for teachers, have been made available on the [School Education Gateway](#) throughout 2021 - 2022.

#### *1.1.2.3. Teachers and trainers*

Teachers and trainers, school leaders and educational and pedagogical staff at all levels are at the heart of education and training systems and are key to any reforms in line with EEA objectives. Enhancing their competences and motivation has thus been identified as one of the strategic priorities guiding reforms and European cooperation under the EEA. The most prevalent objective in this focus area is to **provide teachers and trainers with opportunities for professional development**. Besides the four dedicated measures in this focus area (Erasmus+ Teacher Academies, European Innovative Teaching Award, European guidance for developing national school education career frameworks and the policy framework for increasing the quantity and quality of learning mobility opportunities for teachers), almost half of the 40 EEA actions include as an objective to provide teachers and trainers with professional development opportunities.

Besides mastering of transversal skills, this is the second most dominant EEA objective. The actions addressing this objective come from all focus areas. (E.g.: Jean Monnet actions for Schools and VET, action to support language teaching and learning, the EU quality framework for early childhood education and care – in the focus area on quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality. Blended learning, learning for environmental sustainability, Structured Dialogue on digital education and skills – in the focus area on green and digital transitions. European strategy for universities and the European Universities initiative – in the higher education focus area. Association of the Western Balkans – under the geopolitical dimension.)

Among objectives linked to this focus area, relatively fewer EEA actions tackle teacher shortages. Besides the dedicated actions in the teachers and trainers focus area (set out above) only two other EEA actions (EU quality framework for high quality early childhood education and care and Structured Dialogue on digital education and skills) address it explicitly. As spelled out in Section 2.3. of the Communication, this is one of the areas requiring further reform efforts which could be supported by mutual learning.

Actions in this focus area strongly complement especially the focus area and objectives linked to quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality: besides improving the competences and motivation of teachers and trainers, these actions also focus on promoting the mastering of basic, digital and transversal skills, bringing a European perspective in education and supporting teachers in managing diversity in the classrooms.

The second strongest connection is with the focus area and objectives on lifelong learning and mobility, as these actions strongly focus on making mobility a part of teacher education, promoting the mobility of teachers and promoting cooperation across institutions within and beyond Europe.

	Visual overview 3: TEACHERS AND TRAINERS	Visual overview 4: HIGHER EDUCATION				
	Erasmus+ Teacher Academies	European Strategy for Universities	Building bridges for European higher education cooperation	Development of a joint degree based on European criteria	European Quality Assurance and Recognition System	
Added value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved teacher education policies thanks to networks of providers of initial and continuous teacher education and professional development</li> <li>Development and testing of effective, accessible and transferable programmes for teachers' professional learning and different (virtual, physical, blended) models of mobility</li> <li>Focus on key priorities in education: digital, sustainability, equity &amp; inclusion, teaching in multilingual and multicultural classrooms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supporting and enabling universities to adapt to changing conditions, to thrive and to contribute to Europe's resilience and recovery.</li> <li>Take transnational cooperation to a new level of intensity and scope and to develop a genuinely European dimension in the higher education sector, built on shared values.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deeper, more sustainable and innovative transnational cooperation between HEI</li> <li>More effective implementation of joint educational programmes and activities</li> <li>Pooling capacity and resources</li> <li>working towards a possible joint degree based on European criteria</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating an internationally recognized brand of European higher education</li> <li>Signaling the added value of qualifications delivered by transnational cooperation</li> <li>Easing the delivery of joint degrees and removing obstacles to cooperation, joint programmes and mobility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transparent and coherent recognition processes at higher education institutions</li> <li>External quality assurance safeguards the autonomy of higher education institutions and maintains public trust for automatic recognition for further learning within and across Member States.</li> </ul>	
Main EEA	Support teachers' professional development	Support HEI as central actors in the knowledge square	Develop cross-border policy framework, Promote deeper cooperation between HEI	Develop cross-border policy framework for transnational cooperation btw. HEI	Inclusive HE for LLL: automatic recognition, quality assurance	
Other EEA objectives directly addressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overcome teacher shortages</li> <li>Revalorise the teaching profession</li> <li>Make international mobility of teachers and teacher trainers part of teacher education</li> <li>Master basic and transversal skills</li> <li>Bring a European perspective in education</li> <li>Maintain education and training institutions as safe environments</li> <li>Decouple educational attainment &amp; achievement from socio-economic and cultural status</li> <li>Enable change in people's behaviour and skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote learner &amp; teacher mobility and institutions to freely associate in Europe and beyond</li> <li>Master transversal skills</li> <li>Bring a European perspective in education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop policy framework, promote transnational cooperation between HEI</li> <li>Inclusive HEI for LLL</li> <li>Decouple attainment &amp; achievement from socio-economic and cultural status</li> <li>Promote gender sensitivity &amp; gender balance in HE leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support robust &amp; inclusive LLL strategies to enable reenter education or update skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote the dual freedom for learners and teachers to be mobile and for institutions to freely associate in Europe and beyond</li> <li>Equip people with competences to navigate labour market</li> <li>Promote collaboration between HEI to attract the best talent worldwide</li> <li>Bring a European perspective in education</li> <li>Promote European interests and values</li> <li>Master transversal skills</li> <li>Support robust &amp; inclusive LLL</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop policy framework, promote transnational cooperation between HEI</li> <li>Promote the dual freedom for learners and teachers to be mobile and institutions to freely associate</li> <li>Support robust &amp; inclusive LLL strategies</li> <li>Make VET systems more agile, resilient and future-proof</li> <li>Master transversal skills</li> </ul>
Key milestone passed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence gathering &amp; consultation (2020-Q1 2021)</li> <li>First call for proposals (€15 mio) published as part of Erasmus+ 2021 Call – selection and contracting (Sept 2021 March 2022)</li> <li>Second call for proposals (€22,5 mio, Nov 2021) for approx. 15 projects</li> <li><b>11 Teacher Academies launched</b> (March 2022)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consultations (Q4 2020–Q4 2021)</li> <li><b>Communication on a European Strategy for Universities</b> (18 Jan. 2022)</li> <li><b>Council Conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions</b> (5 April, 2022)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Council Conclusions (May 2021)</li> <li><b>Proposal for Council Recommendation</b> (18 January 2022)</li> <li><b>Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation</b> (5 April 2022)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Study on the scope, benefits and feasibility of a European degree (April 2021 - 2022)</li> <li>Stakeholder consultations (Q2 2021-Q2 2022 )</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Study assessing the feasibility of a European Quality Assurance and Recognition System (Q4 2021-Q3 2023)</li> <li>Erasmus+ projects on implementation of European Higher Education Area reforms (from Q1 2022)</li> </ul>	
Next milestone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selection and contracting of 2022 call</li> <li><b>Reach 25 Erasmus+ Teacher Academies by 2025</b></li> <li>Support and monitoring of projects launched</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(Support to) implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(Support to) implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects to pilot the provisional European criteria in the form of a European Degree label (from Q1 2023)</li> <li>Co-creation and development of policy options (2023)</li> <li><b>Commission proposal – format tbc</b> (mid-2024)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review of Council and EP Recommendation on Quality Assurance in cooperation with MS and HE sector</li> <li><b>Proposal for Council Recommendation</b> (2023/2024)</li> </ul>	

### **Box 3: Teachers and trainers - Spotlight on (support for) implementation of more advanced strategic EEA actions**

**Erasmus+ Teacher Academies** contribute to the improvement of teacher education policies and practices in Europe by creating networks of providers of initial teacher education and continuing professional development and other relevant actors (such as teacher associations, ministries and schools) to: ✓Develop and test strategies and programmes for teachers' professional learning that are effective, accessible and transferable to other contexts; ✓Enhance the European dimension and internationalisation of teacher education; ✓Address the key EEA priorities for European cooperation and reform, such as learning in the digital world, sustainability, equity and inclusion, teaching in multilingual classrooms and offer teachers courses, modules and other learning opportunities; ✓Develop and test jointly different models of mobility (virtual, physical and blended), to make mobility an integral part of teacher education in Europe. The first call for proposals resulted in the selection of 11 projects out of 56 applications. The selected projects bring together 182 organisations from 23 countries. Of these organisations, 43 are initial teacher education providers, 24 are continuing professional development providers, 47 are practice training schools and 68 represent other organisations with relevant expertise in teacher education and/or bodies defining standards, qualifications or quality assurance criteria for teacher education or research. Project priorities include: STEAM education (based on Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics), education for sustainability, language learning for non-natives, inclusion of learners with special needs and development of teacher competences e.g. via digital platforms. The 2022 call, with its increased budget, will allow 15 projects to be selected, thus helping to reach the target (set out in the EEA Communication) of having 25 Teacher Academies by 2025.

#### *1.1.2.4. Higher education*

Higher education is the sector with highest level of mobility and cooperation within and beyond Europe. The most widespread EEA objective for the sector is to **promote deeper cooperation between higher education institutions** (including through a policy framework across borders for transnational cooperation), creating incentives for an accelerated transformation of higher education institutions and ensuring a top-quality higher education offer with a focus on equity and inclusion, innovation, connectivity, digital and green readiness and international competitiveness.

The EEA's higher education focus area ensures strong complementary links between the EEA on the one hand and the Bologna Process of the **European Higher Education Area** on the other hand.

This is the focus area with the highest number of EU-level EEA actions (several of them linked closely to the European strategy for universities adopted on 18 January 2022), which closely connect with EEA objectives linked to other focus areas, especially to quality and mobility.

On the other hand, among EEA actions from other focus areas, many also have higher education-related objectives, most notably digital EEA actions, but also green and geopolitical actions. With the adoption of (i) the European strategy for universities and the related Council Conclusions and (ii) the Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation, progress in this area has been significant (see visual overview 4 in section above, and box 4 below, with a spotlight on support for implementation and milestones).

#### Box 4: Higher education - Spotlight on (support for) implementation of more advanced strategic EEA actions

The **European strategy for universities** – adopted by the Commission on 18 January 2022 – aims at supporting and enabling all higher education institutions to: ✓ Adapt to changing conditions and respond to the needs of their sector, in order to lead the way forward; ✓ Be more creative and stronger together through cooperation; ✓ Be better equipped to address present and future challenges and anticipate crises, in health, demographics, climate and geopolitical matters. The strategy sets out an ambitious long-term vision for the European higher education sector, recognising excellence and inclusion as its distinctive features. It represents a significant leap forward for delivering on the EEA in synergy with the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area, including through action making academic and research careers more attractive and sustainable.

Building on the European strategy for universities, the Council Conclusions on a European Strategy Empowering Higher Education Institutions for the Future of Europe (of 5 April 2022), put forward four main objectives: ✓ strengthening the European dimension of higher education, research and innovation as well as the links between them; ✓ driving Europe's global role and leadership; ✓ bolstering Europe's recovery and response to the digital and green transitions; ✓ deepening the European sense of belonging, based on common values.

The Strategy is accompanied by a **Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation**. This aims to facilitate deeper transnational cooperation by supporting alliances of higher education institutions, such as the [European Universities](#), to address the current legal and administrative challenges encountered when implementing joint educational programmes and activities. The Recommendation has been developed in cooperation with the higher education sector, which highlighted a number of barriers to their efforts to engage in deeper and more ambitious transnational cooperation. The Recommendation is a first step aiming to offer a broad catalogue of measures, to help alliances of higher education institutions overcome these challenges. The Recommendation aims to reinforce flexibility for universities when trying to implement innovative and creative deep cooperation models, and is structured around: ✓ New measures where needed; ✓ Ensuring optimal implementation of existing initiatives, instruments and tools, such as European Universities, European student card, Bologna tools; ✓ Step-by-step exploratory process, in close cooperation with the higher education sector and Member States, exploring the possible co-development of new instruments that are more adapted to the size and scope of deeper multi-actor cooperation – such as a possible joint degree based on co-created European criteria and institutionalised cooperation instruments, e.g. a possible legal status for alliances of higher education institutions. Both the strategy and recommendation aim to support the entire higher education sector.

**Four flagship initiatives** underpin the implementation of this higher education policy package:

- ✓ **European Universities:** the long-term objective is to expand to **60 European Universities by mid-2024, involving 500 universities** across Europe with an Erasmus+ indicative budget totalling EUR 1.1 billion for 2021- 2027 for the further development of the European Universities initiative following a bottom-up approach
- ✓ Examining the options and necessary steps – in close cooperation with Member States, higher education institutions, student organisations and stakeholders – towards **a possible joint degree based on the co-created European criteria:** Such a degree would be a specific type of joint degree, testifying compliance with the common European criteria that recognise the value of innovative transnational experiences and promote a European identity while facilitating the delivery of joint degree programmes across the EU. To this end, under Erasmus+, co-created common European criteria that could lead to a potential European label for joint programmes will be tested as a pilot in 2022-2023.
- ✓ Examining the need for and feasibility of **institutionalised cooperation instruments**, such as a **possible legal status for alliances of higher education institutions:** pilot as of 2022 under Erasmus+ institutionalised cooperation instruments. The aim is to give alliances, on a voluntary basis, the latitude to act together, make shared strategic decisions, experiment with joint recruitment, design joint curricula and pool resources and human, technical, data, education, research and innovation capacities.
- ✓ Another important flagship action to enable further transnational cooperation is to generalise the use of the **European Student Card** initiative, to facilitate and simplify mobility for both students and institutions.

### *1.1.2.5. Lifelong learning and mobility*

Lifelong learning and mobility was flagged in the EEA Communication as a key objective under several dimensions: e.g. highlighting the freedom for learners and teachers to be mobile and institutions to freely associate as a critical element defining the quality of education; inclusive lifelong learning strategies as a precondition for inclusiveness, or international mobility of teachers and teacher educators as key for enhancing teachers' competences and motivation. The EEA Strategic framework Resolution flagged making lifelong learning and mobility a reality for all as its second strategic priority, regrouping some EEA actions from other areas of the Communication.

Besides the three dedicated actions (European approach to micro-credentials, updated learning mobility framework, and support for the full implementation of the Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition), several other EEA actions falling under other focus areas tackle strong and sometimes multiple objectives connected to lifelong learning and/or mobility.

Notable in this respect are some actions from the geopolitical dimension (e.g. association of the Western Balkans and the internationalisation of Erasmus+, including through making Western Balkan countries eligible to be full partners in the European Universities initiative starting with the 2023 call), and actions in the area of higher education (e.g. the European strategy for universities and the actions it announces, such as exploratory process towards developing a possible joint degree based on European criteria or a European Recognition and Quality Assurance System) are also strong on learning mobility and lifelong learning objectives.

The most dominant lifelong learning and mobility objective across the 40 EEA actions is **promoting the dual freedom for learners and teachers to be mobile and for institutions to freely associate** with one another in Europe and beyond. Over half of EEA actions (21) include this among their objectives. Another three related objectives, including two focusing on lifelong learning, are also quite frequent, driving between a third and a quarter of EEA actions: These objectives are:

- ✓ Supporting robust and inclusive lifelong learning strategies, to enable to people re-enter education or update skills (14 EEA actions);
- ✓ Making international mobility of students, teachers and teacher trainers part of teacher education (14 EEA actions);
- ✓ Promoting inclusive higher education institutions for lifelong learning (11 EEA actions).

While the pandemic had a temporary negative impact on educational mobility trends, it also served as an incentive for innovation and the development of virtual and blended mobility initiatives. At EU-level the adoption of the European approach to micro-credentials (16 June 2022) is a major step towards achieving the EEA by ensuring portability and recognition of micro-credentials by 2025.

#### **Box 5: Lifelong learning and mobility – Spotlight on (support for) implementation of more advanced strategic EEA actions**

The **Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability** (16 June 2022) includes implementation plans on the development and/or adaptation of existing EU tools and services to support the development of micro-credentials by all types of providers: ✓ guidance documents and notes, ✓ technical implementation and adaptation of the European student card initiative, the European digital credentials for learning and the Europass platform. The Commission will also: ✓ promote cooperation between Member States and stakeholders on key aspects such as quality assurance, recognition, transparency and sharing of good practices; ✓ support further research on the uptake of the European approach to micro-credentials, and its added value for learners; ✓ fund projects selected under the 2021 call for proposals to support the implementation of European Higher Education Area (EHEA) reforms, six of them being about developing guidance and sharing good practice around micro-credentials. The Commission will also pursue its cooperation with the OECD in 2023 to gather more evidence on micro-credential systems and the way they can benefit learners the most.

	Visual overview 5: LIFELONG LEARNING AND MOBILITY		Visual overview 6: GEOPOLITICAL DIMENSION
	<b>Micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability</b>	<b>Updated learning mobility framework</b>	<b>EU and MS (Team Europe) as centre of excellence, reference point and a partner for education cooperation and engagement worldwide</b>
<b>Added value</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Widened learning opportunities and increased mobility for a more diverse group of learners in a life-long approach through enhanced quality, transparency and take-up of short learning experiences</li> <li>Up-skilling and re-skilling for better employability to support recovery, and the twin digital and green transition</li> <li>More flexible and modular learning pathways and larger take-up of micro-credentials contributing to social, economic and pedagogical innovations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More accessible, learning mobility opportunities</li> <li>Support to implementation of the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EU a partner of reference and a more attractive destination in the global race for talent</li> <li>Partnership opportunities, services and knowledge for partner countries and regions (e.g. Western Balkans, Neighborhood, Africa etc.) to support the development of inclusive, quality and effective education systems</li> </ul>
<b>Main EEA objective</b>	<b>Support robust and inclusive lifelong learning strategies through recognition and portability of short courses leading to micro-credentials</b>	<b>Promote dual freedom for learners and teachers to be mobile</b>	<b>Strengthen European international cooperation, promote European interests &amp; values, support reform processes in partner countries</b>
<b>Other EEA objectives directly addressed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Equip people with competences needed to navigate in the labour market transformed by technological change</li> <li>Master basic and transversal skills</li> <li>Support robust and inclusive lifelong-learning strategies, to enable to reenter education or update skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support robust &amp; inclusive LLL strategies</li> <li>Make international mobility of students, teachers and teacher trainers part of teacher education</li> <li>Enable change in behavior &amp; skills</li> <li>Equip people with competences to navigate labour market</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Widen association of non-EU countries</li> <li>Roll-out ambitious partnerships with partner countries across the globe</li> <li>Promote cooperation between HEIs and develop policy framework for their transnational cooperation</li> <li>Promote international mobility of students, teachers and teacher trainers</li> <li>Improve gender sensitivity</li> <li>Support lifelong learning and mobility</li> <li>Master basic and transversal skills</li> <li>Support language learning &amp; multilingualism</li> </ul>
<b>Key milestone passed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NESET study (Dec. 2020)</li> <li>Open public and targeted stakeholder consultations (Q3 2020-Q3 2021)</li> <li>Proposal for a Council Recommendation (Dec 2021)</li> <li><b>Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability</b> (16 June 2022)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Launch study to analyse obstacles to learning mobility, propose policy options and support consultations (Q4 2022)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Launch of first Erasmus+ int.nat.actions</li> <li>Implementation of national and regional policy dialogues</li> <li>G20 education and joint education and labour ministerial meetings</li> <li>Study in Europe initiatives</li> <li><b>W. Balkans Agenda</b> (Oct 2021)</li> <li>Association of EEA/EFTA countries, TR, SR, MK to Erasmus+(Q4 2021)</li> </ul>
<b>Next milestone</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(Support to ) implementation</li> <li>All necessary steps in place for the wider use, portability and recognition of micro-credentials (by 2025)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Proposal for Council Recommendation on a European learning mobility framework</b> repealing 2011 Youth on the Move Recommendation (Q4 2023)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementing the WB Agenda: working towards possible association of WB countries to Erasmus+</li> <li>Full roll out of Erasmus+ international actions</li> </ul>

### *1.1.2.6. Geopolitical dimension*

Cooperation in education and training is an essential instrument of EU external policies, with the EEA vision guiding European international cooperation. The two most prevalent geopolitical objectives of EEA actions are to **strengthen European international cooperation** and to **promote European interests and values** in the world. Other geopolitical objectives tackled by several EEA actions include rolling out ambitious partnerships and supporting ongoing reform processes in the Western Balkans, Neighbourhood countries and Africa.

Dedicated EU actions under the geopolitical focus area can be grouped under three main headings:

- 1) Increased cooperation with the **Western Balkans**
- 2) **International dimension of Erasmus+**, promoting staff/student mobility and cooperation between education and training institutions
- 3) Combined impact of EU and Member States – **Team Europe** – educational engagement with the rest of the world.

*(See visual overview 6 above, box 6 below.)*

Besides the dedicated steps in these three areas, other EEA actions with strongest and multiple geopolitical objectives are those from the higher education focus area (in particular the European strategy for universities) and the quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality focus area (in particular the Centres of Vocational Excellence initiative and the Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers).

**Russia's aggression against Ukraine** – and the welcoming of an unprecedented number of refugee children in EU Member States – has put the education systems to a test and mobilised all EEA strategic framework governance levels. At the start of the 2022-23 school year around 500 000 Ukrainian children were registered in the national education system of 26 Member States and Lichtenstein. This is much less than the number of displaced children, which is in the millions. (As of 20 September over 4.26 million persons displaced from Ukraine have registered for temporary protection status, the majority women and children, mainly via neighbouring EU countries Poland, Germany and the Czech Republic currently hosting the highest number of displaced persons. This constitutes a significant number of displaced persons in comparison to earlier refugee flows, especially for some Member States in Central and Eastern Europe.)

After the COVID-19 pandemic, this has been a second major crisis with a significant impact on education and training systems and on European cooperation in education and training. EEA priority areas and objectives have proven highly relevant in guiding European cooperation – especially geopolitical EEA objectives on strengthening European international cooperation and promoting reform processes in Neighbourhood countries, and objectives on quality, equity and inclusion, such as the objective to maintain education and training institutions as safe environments and to support teachers in managing (linguistic and cultural) diversity in the classrooms, as well as promoting language learning and multilingualism. This has involved gathering available expertise, providing guidance and facilitating peer learning to support frontline Member States in hosting a high number of refugees.

Lessons from the COVID-19 crisis, and relevant EEA actions, including on blended learning approaches, have proven valuable in guiding a common European response. The fully reformed governance structure (EEA strategic framework) has been mobilised under the banner of the **EU Education Solidarity Group for Ukraine** – convening demand-driven emergency meetings to collect needs, pool expertise and provide support – from the Council of Ministers for Education, through the High Level Group on Education and Training, and meetings of Director Generals to the 2021-2025 EEA strategic framework working groups, which became the main forum for pooling expertise and promoting peer learning on priority areas identified by affected Member States. The new governance body, the HLG Coordination Board has been convened for the first time to discuss the education impact of the war *(see sections 1.3.6. on Member States' responses, and II.1.2-II.1.3 on the mobilisation of the EEA strategic framework governance)*.

### Box 6: Geopolitical dimension – Spotlight on (support for) implementation of more advanced strategic EEA actions

#### Association of the Western Balkans to Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps, further integration in the EHEA (European Higher Education Area) and the EEA:

In 2021, priority was given to non-EU countries that were already associated with the 2014-2020 Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps (ESC) programmes. For Erasmus+, these are Serbia and the Republic of North Macedonia. The Association Agreements relating to Erasmus+ and ESC entered into force on 22 November for North Macedonia, with retroactive effect from 1 January 2021. Serbia's Association Agreement with Erasmus+ was signed on 24 November. The full association of the Western Balkans region with Erasmus+ and the ESC is one of the deliverables of the Western Balkans Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, launched at the EU-Western Balkans Summit (on 6 October 2021). While Albania has expressed its intention not to associate with Erasmus+ in the medium term, exchanges will start with the three remaining Western Balkan countries – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Montenegro – with a view to their possible full association (an “enhanced partnership” will be an intermediary step). A step in this direction is the eligibility of Western Balkan countries to be full partners in the European Universities initiative starting with the 2023 Erasmus+ call.

**International dimension of Erasmus+:** Much of the international dimension of Erasmus+ has come on track in 2022 during the programme's second call for proposals. By mid-2022 the first selections of mobility and cooperation projects with third countries not associated to the programme were concluded. These are funded by the EU's external cooperation instruments. While they are available for cooperation worldwide, the available Erasmus+ regional budget shows the strong priority attached to the Neighbourhood region (including non-associated Western Balkan countries) as well as a substantial increase in funding for sub-Saharan Africa, compared to the 2014-2020 programming period.

## I.2. More and better investment for implementing action and reforms towards the EEA at national and local level

### I.2.1. Ensuring quality of investment through an evidence-informed approach to policy design and evaluation in education

**Education and training have a strong impact on economic development by improving productivity, stimulating innovation, and strengthening employability.** They play a large role in building a country's human capital. 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 it must compete against lower-wage regions.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, education and training also strengthen innovation capacity as people learn to generate and adopt new ideas that spur technological progress.<sup>21</sup> Finally, they strengthen people's employability, which not only affects the labour market and society as a whole but also positively influences individuals' lives.<sup>22</sup>

**Education and training also create major social benefits and strongly promote equality, tackling poverty and unemployment and stimulating intergenerational mobility.** High quality education and training improves people's employability. This can then translate in higher earnings and reduce the risk of unemployment, which again is the best safeguard against personal hardship and poverty. In addition, the right set of skills, knowledge and competences may prevent and ease (future) labour market mismatches.<sup>23</sup> Children and young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds strongly benefit from good quality education and

<sup>20</sup> European Commission, *The Economic Case for Education*, Background paper prepared by the Commission to inform the policy debate in the Council on 12 December 2014, p. 2, 2014

<sup>21</sup> Woessmann, L., *The Economic Case for Education*, European Expert Network on Economics of Education (EENEE), Analytical Report No. 20, 2017

<sup>22</sup> European Commission, *The Economic Case for Education*, Background paper prepared by the Commission to inform the policy debate in the Council on 12 December 2014, 2014

<sup>23</sup> Ibid



training as they reduce socio-economic differences with those from more advantaged families. In that regard, education serves as means for equality and may support intergenerational mobility.

**The EEA Communication announced that the Commission would help intensify work on investment in line with EEA objectives.** The Council endorsed this proposal in the EEA [Strategic framework Resolution](#), which invites the Commission to work with the Member States and provide specific support to local, regional, and national authorities to facilitate mutual learning, analysis and sharing of good practices on quality investment. Promoting quality investment in education and training becomes even more fundamental in a situation where more EU resources than ever are mobilised for education and training to support the recovery after the COVID-19 crisis through Next Generation EU and the new Multiannual Financial Framework (*see section 1.2.2. below*). It is therefore key to ensure that every single euro is spent properly to boost education outcomes, equity, and learners' well-being.

**In line with these objectives, a Commission Expert Group on Quality Investment in Education and Training was launched in May 2021.** The group's overall mission was to carry out an evidence-based evaluation of education and training policies to identify those that have the potential to boost education outcomes and inclusiveness, while improving the efficiency of spending. The group was asked to provide robust evidence on the expected costs and benefits of selected education and training policies, on the challenges associated with their implementation and on the methodology for their evaluation. The group has focused its analysis on those areas that represent the bulk of current public education and training expenditure, encompass multiple dimensions of the EEA, and may have a huge impact on education outcomes, notably: i) teachers and trainers; ii) management of education infrastructure and related physical and human resources; iii) digital education, both in terms of infrastructure and competence development; and iv) equity and inclusion.

**An interim report was published on 19 January 2022.** The same day, the Commission organised a workshop to discuss its preliminary findings and conclusions with Member States' representatives, key stakeholders, and international organisations. The event was attended by more than 100 participants, who had the opportunity to comment on the report and propose improvements. The interim report was also presented at the ministerial conference "Investing in Education" organised by the French Presidency of the Council of Ministers in February 2022. After these two key discussion opportunities, the expert group has added all feedback and comments received to the final report.

**The final report that was published in October 2022 contains important policy conclusions.**<sup>24</sup> In particular, the experts have identified a series of actions that could be conducted at European level in the next few years to boost a true evaluation culture in the field of education and training. First, the report stresses the importance of running pilot experiences of education policy evaluation based on rigorous methodologies at EU level. Those experiences are rare at Member State level and the advantages would be broader if the Commission succeeds in bringing together this expertise and using it to support local, regional, and national authorities responsible for education and training. Second, there is an urgent need to disseminate knowledge on the best evaluation methods that can be used for each specific policy area. Third, international comparisons show that countries have much to learn from each other to make effective choices about educational expenses. Therefore, peer-learning activities at EU level would be beneficial. Finally, it is crucial to support further efforts on collecting data and gathering evidence on assessment of costs and benefits, which are currently lacking.

**The French Presidency of the Council of Ministers has also encouraged the EU Member States to continue their cooperation and invited them to join an inter-governmental declaration to build a shared vision of effective, efficient and equitable investment in education.** The declaration was issued in April 2022 and signed by most Member States. It recognises that the performance of education systems in the medium and long term is affected by the ability of Member States to maintain an adequate level of investment in education; ensure the effectiveness, equity, quality and efficiency of investment in education, and develop and share evaluation methodologies, allowing each Member State to identify measures that can have high individual and social impact specific to their own national requirements. It also encourages the Commission to draw on the research findings and preliminary recommendations of the expert group mentioned above, thus bedding down the work already undertaken as well as exploring new fields of research in all disciplines that will potentially contribute to creating the tools to help Member States evaluate their education policies at national

<sup>24</sup> [Investing in our future: quality investment in education and training](#)

level. Finally, the declaration invites all Member States to pursue, alongside the Commission, a joint dialogue between the ministers of education and finance, building on earlier initiatives by the Finnish, Slovenian and French presidencies, and in line with the EEA Communication.

**To answer this call from the Member States and address the current challenges, the Commission is launching a Learning Lab on Investing in Quality Education and Training in November 2022.** It will encourage an evidence-based approach to policy design and implementation in education and training and promote education policy evaluations tailored to specific local, regional, and national needs.

**Education policy evaluation is key to understanding how public investment can most benefit education outcomes and equity.** It is an activity that takes place throughout the entire policy cycle: before, during and after a reform, policy or programme is implemented. In the evaluation of educational policies, understanding the context in which the reforms are implemented is a key success factor. Context is critical when reviewing evidence from evaluations, to decide whether (or not) a programme or reform is suitable for implementation in a different education system. Although policy evaluations may show that a particular programme has been successful in improving outcomes in certain contexts, the results are often not transferable when applied in a different context.

**With this Learning Lab, the Commission will not assess the level or quality of investment by Member States.** The Learning Lab will provide relevant authorities with knowledge, tools, methods, and resources they could use for evaluating the cost-effectiveness of their public spending on education and training. It will bring together the Commission (in its supporting role) and the relevant authorities in the Member States, who can participate in this initiative on a voluntary basis. It will improve data collection, test different evaluation methodologies and other evaluation tools and practices, and encourage their use in policymaking.

**The Learning Lab will strengthen evidence-based policymaking through better policy evaluation at all levels of education.** The four focus areas of the Commission's Expert Group on Investing in Quality Education will be prioritised to ensure continuity and build on what has already been done. However, this approach does not prejudge any analytical work on other policy areas, which remains possible. A phased approach is proposed, starting with pilot evaluations and ad hoc activities in the first year, in close collaboration with the relevant authorities, to promote the regular use of educational policy evaluation practices over the long term. To achieve this, work will be organised by level of education, to inform and serve policy design at EU and Member State level.

**The success of the Learning Lab will greatly depend on the Member States' involvement and ownership, and on the Commission's ability to provide flexible but targeted tools and methods for education policy evaluation.** Taking this into account, the Learning Lab is planning to run the following activities:

- **Mutual learning and capacity building activities with the Member States:** one of the goals of the Learning Lab is to facilitate exchanges on specific issues of interest to several volunteering participant Member States and build capacity for education policy evaluation. The final aim is to identify good practices, lessons learnt and success factors to improve the quality of education policies based on robust evidence and build capacity for education policy evaluation in the EU. The Learning Lab could help Member States to exchange information on their educational strategies, policies, and results they have obtained. This would allow Member States to learn from each other, in all the phases of policymaking: from the analysis of needs to the design of the policy interventions, and policy evaluation.
- **Tailored training courses on education policy evaluation:** training designed to give policymakers and education practitioners an understanding of the fundamentals of evaluation practices in education, and support skills development in evaluation design, implementation and administrative microdata collection, to enhance policy evaluation.
- **Carrying out country reviews in close collaboration with OECD:** they would cover the assessment of education policy evaluation capabilities at Member State level and the mapping of existing policy evaluations.

- **Running education policy evaluation:** the focus will be on evaluations of specific policies, programmes or reforms that may lead to actionable policy recommendations to the relevant authorities in the Member States to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their public spending. Different evaluation methods may be selected depending on the aims of the relevant authorities, the scope of the exercise and availability of data, design of ongoing or implemented policy, or national contexts. This activity requires active participation by the interested Member States
- **In-depth analyses of the literature:** an important service that the Learning Lab may offer to Member States lies in providing them with information about what education and training measures are shown to work better for specific policy objectives, bringing together the results of relevant academic studies. This may help reconcile disagreement across empirical studies that are trying to answer the same question and then translate complex technical results into policy-relevant messages.
- **Improving data collection, availability, and timeliness:** the focus of this activity would be on improving the comparability and timeliness of EU countries' data on investment in education, and exploring with the Member States the possibility of further refining current data collections for EU comparison.
- **Nurturing the networking between evaluation providers/expertise centres that will become engaged in the Learning Lab activities:** to help identify the most effective education policies to boost educational outcomes, while ensuring efficient use of resources. This networking would allow those organisations to learn from each other and share their knowledge to facilitate systemic change towards an evidence-based investment cycle involving policymakers, practitioners, and academics in education, and help similar institutions grow in all Member States.
- **Dedicated calls under Horizon Europe:** Horizon Europe can also support education policy evaluation and education research in general, as these research areas are generally under-funded.

**The Learning Lab will build on recent and ongoing analytical work on quality investment in education and training and will use all existing cooperation tools within the European Education Area governance framework.** It will capitalise on existing networks (such as the European Expert Network on Economics of Education; the Network of Experts working on the social dimension of education and training; Eurydice), the work of EEA strategic framework working groups and other Commission expert groups, in particular the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks and the expert group on supportive learning environments and well-being at school (*see sections II.1.3-II.1.4.*). It will also build on collaboration with other international organisations that are active in education and training. Feedback from the sectoral social partners at EU level will be taken on board regularly, in a spirit of openness and co-creation.

## I.2.2. Mobilising EU funds

**Education and skills will benefit from an unprecedented level of EU funding in the coming years.**

Achieving the collective vision of a European Education Area will require structured action, reforms and large-scale investment. EU funds, in particular, The Recovery and Resilience Facility, EU cohesion policy Funds, REACT-EU, Erasmus + and the Technical Support Instrument will provide new opportunities for Member States to address some long-standing challenges in education and training systems, in line with EEA objectives and the priorities highlighted by the European Semester. They will help to further develop education and training in light of the green and digital transitions. According to preliminary estimates, the total funding for education and skills could be triple during the 2021-27 period compared to the previous one.

**The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) will be the most important source of EU funding for education and skills, with an allocation of around EUR 71 bn, representing 14% of the total RRF budget<sup>25</sup>.** As of 30 September 2022, all Member States have submitted their national Recovery and Resilience

<sup>25</sup> The figure is based on the pillar tagging methodology for the Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard. It corresponds to the sum of estimated cost of measures allocated to either "General, Vocational, And Higher Education: Accessibility, Affordability, Quality And Inclusiveness, Including Digitisation And Infrastructure", "Adult Learning, Including Continuous Vocational Education And Training; Recognition And Validation Of Skills"; "Early Childhood Education And Care: Accessibility, Affordability, Quality And Inclusiveness, Including Digitisation And Infrastructure" or "Human capital in digitalisation" as primary or secondary policy area. The calculation is

Plans, and 25 of them have been adopted by the Council based on an assessment by the Commission. Reforms and investments cover all education levels and sectors with a strong focus on digital education.

**The implementation of national recovery and resilience plans is well under way.** As of 30 September 2022 the Commission has disbursed a **pre-financing** payment of up to 13% to 21 Member States which requested it. As a pre-condition to further disbursements, the Commission subsequently agrees **operational arrangements**, which set out technical details for monitoring the implementation of Recovery and Resilience Plans. To date, operational arrangements have been concluded for 16 Member States and ten Member States have submitted their **first payment request**. Spain, Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Slovakia and Portugal have already received the first disbursement, based on milestones achieved.

**The RRF is boosting the digital transformation of education to ensure that young people are given the tools to thrive in a digital world.** Member States will undertake major investment in digital education amounting to EUR 28 bn, which represents 20% of the digital transformation pillar.<sup>26</sup> Several countries will invest in the digital infrastructure and connectivity of schools, in some cases with a focus on disadvantaged schools, to close the digital divide. In a number of plans, investment in digital infrastructure will go hand in hand with measures to develop the digital competences of students and teachers. Such measures can include adapting the school curricula and developing digital resources and content, teacher training on digital as well as modernising the training offer in VET institutions.

**The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) will help mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on education.** Disruptions caused by the pandemic posed major challenges to education systems across the EU, affecting disadvantaged learners most. Several Member States are using the RRF to implement compensatory learning programmes and targeted initiatives that reach out to disadvantaged learners, to prevent growing inequalities. Early research findings show that such compensatory programmes can effectively reduce learning loss and prevent the impact of the pandemic being too long-lasting.

**Member States invest in education infrastructure and the modernisation of education and training.** About half of the Member States are planning to use the RRF to expand early childhood education and care capacities, entailing sizeable infrastructure investment. These can also help address the extra needs emerging from the impact of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Investment in infrastructure is often embedded in more comprehensive reform efforts. The RRF will also support comprehensive modernisation efforts, addressing some of the long-standing challenges of national education systems, such as low level of basic skills, teacher shortages and education inequalities. In some countries it will contribute to major curricular reforms. Targeted programmes are also planned to prevent early school leaving and improve the inclusiveness of education systems focused on disadvantaged areas or target groups, including learners with special educational needs.

**The RRF will help empower universities to become actors of change in the twin transitions and transform higher education in line with the objectives of the European strategy for universities.**

During the pandemic, the digital transformation of higher education received a major boost across the EU. The RRF is expected to further accelerate and consolidate these trends. Member States have planned a broad range of measures to support digital education, such as large-scale investment in digital infrastructure; developing digital teaching resources; adapting study courses and training; digital training for academic staff; developing online courses; strengthening blended teaching and digitalising governance. Effective implementation of these measures could lead to longer term structural changes and help equip students and researchers with the digital skills and competences needed. The RRF will also aim to improve the labour market relevance of higher education, to equip young people with relevant and future-proof skills. Planned investment and reforms include modernising study programmes or launching new study courses, including micro-credentials; developing further

---

based on the 25 recovery and resilience plans endorsed by the Commission and Council by September 2022. These are estimated costs; actual funding will be based on the fulfilled milestones and targets. The Commission assessed the cost estimates when the initial plans were submitted and approved. Member States are not required to submit spending receipts and the Commission will not verify the actual costs of measures supported by the RRF.

<sup>26</sup> The figure is based on the pillar tagging methodology for the Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard. It corresponds to the estimated cost of measures allocated to 'Human capital in digitalisation' as primary or secondary policy area. The calculation is based on the 25 recovery and resilience plans endorsed by the Commission and Council by September 2022. These are estimated costs; actual funding will be based on the fulfilled milestones and targets. The Commission assessed the cost estimates when the initial plans were submitted and approved. Member States are not required to submit spending receipts and the Commission will not verify the actual costs of measures supported by the RRF.

graduate tracking mechanisms; stimulating STEM/STEAM specialisation; improving quality assurance, governance and funding and supporting the internationalisation of higher education. Measures included in the Recovery and Resilience Plans are also expected to support inclusiveness and enhance access to higher education for disadvantaged students.

**Most Member States will undertake investment in education infrastructure.** Member States are using the RRF to modernise existing buildings, improve energy efficiency, or build new facilities, at all levels of education. Infrastructure investment often contributes to larger reform efforts, for instance to improve the quality of education, reduce regional disparities or improve the efficiency of the school network.

**EU cohesion policy Funds will continue to provide major support for education and training policies in the 2021-27 period.** Negotiations between Member States and Commission on the future partnership agreements and programmes for the EU cohesion policy Funds have reached an advanced stage. By 30 September 2022, the Partnership Agreement have been concluded for 22 Member-States<sup>27</sup>. The objective is to adopt all programmes by the end of 2022. Preliminary estimates based on adopted programmes tend to confirm that education, training and skills will remain one of the main priorities for investment for the ESF+ in the 2021-2027 programming period, complemented by support for education and training infrastructure under the ERDF<sup>28</sup>.

Moreover, through the **Technical Support Instrument (TSI)**, the Commission has already provided and will stand ready to offer further support in the area of education and training, upon request from Member States, on a bilateral or multi-country basis. In 2022, 21 Member States have benefitted from the TSI to reform education or training through more than 50 different projects. The support can focus, for instance, on setting up reforms in the field of inclusive education, improving learning outcomes or increasing participation of adults in relevant training. The EU's technical support may include the elaboration of strategies and action plans, monitoring and evaluation frameworks, quality assurance and recognition tools, or reinforced governance, mostly through mapping and engaging the relevant stakeholders.

**EU funds have been mobilised to support the reception and integration of people fleeing Ukraine, including in education.** The CARE (Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe) initiative adopted in April 2022 provides maximum flexibility for Member States to reorient unused Structural Funds from the 2014-20 funding period (approximately EUR 7 bn). In particular, the legislative amendments allow for a 100% EU co-financing and Member States may use ERDF and ESF interchangeably. The FAST-CARE (Flexible Assistance to Territories) adopted in June 2022 further extended support and flexibility in cohesion policy funding, making available an additional EUR 3.5 bn pre-financing for programmes receiving support from the ERDF, the ESF+ and the Cohesion Fund. REACT-EU has provided EUR 50 bn worth of fresh top-up resources to ongoing cohesion policy programmes (ESF, ERDF and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)) for years 2021 and 2022 to be spent by the end of 2023. The total allocation for education under REACT-EU amounts to around EUR 4.9 billion.<sup>29</sup>

### 1.2.3. Implementing actions and reforms towards the EEA in the Member States

Member States have taken initiatives and launched various reforms that are in line with the EEA objectives and vision and support their achievement. While the following chapter cannot present all of them, it looks particularly at national and/or regional approaches that address EEA objectives in a noteworthy way. Reforms in education and training have received a boost in recent years as the pandemic required investment in online learning, prompting both investment in learning infrastructure and reforms in the organisation of learning. The measures included in the national recovery and resilience plans or recently planned with support from other EU or national funds showcase a huge variety of ways to improve education and training in all EEA focus areas (see examples in boxes below).

<sup>27</sup> Negotiations ongoing for ES, LU, HU, BE and LV.

<sup>28</sup> By 30 September, 23 Member States have already programmed ESF+ resources amounting to EUR 21.13 billion to support education and skills. The preliminary allocation from the ERDF to education and training infrastructure, based on adopted programmes in 7 Member States, amount to 2.3 billion.

<sup>29</sup> Some 14 Member States plan to fund education under the ESF with over EUR 3.5 bn. Under ERDF, 5 Member States have allocated EUR 1.4 bn. of REACT-EU resources on measures related to e-Learning & e-Education and 6 Member States have allocated close to EUR 1bn. on support for infrastructure for primary and general secondary education.

### 1.2.3.1 Quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality

Member State initiatives to improve quality, equity and inclusiveness of education range from increasing capacities in early childhood education and care (ECEC), through reforming educational frameworks and curricula and improving teacher training, to guaranteeing better support for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, or with disabilities or special needs. They aim to promote the mastering of basic and transversal skills and decouple educational attainment and achievement from socio-economic, migrant or minority backgrounds and focus on improving education outcomes for all.

**Increasing access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) and providing all children with a good start in education is a key ambition in many Member States.** Participation rates have steadily increased in recent years. Yet in many countries disadvantaged children are enrolled less frequently than their peers. This is partly due to capacity constraints in specific geographical areas or neighbourhoods and shortages of qualified staff. ECEC is often not easily affordable for disadvantaged families. The lack of ECEC capacities could be further aggravated in some countries by the arrival of high numbers of children fleeing Ukraine. Many Member States have launched reforms and investments – often with support from EU funds – to increase capacities and participation rates, improve accessibility for disadvantaged children and improve the quality of early childhood education and care.

**There is an observable trend towards lowering the age of compulsory education, introducing legal entitlement, reducing participation fees or ensuring free access to ECEC.** For example, in 2020–21, the compulsory school age was dropped from 6 to 5 in the French community of Belgium. Slovakia already implemented the compulsory pre-primary education for 5 year-olds in September 2021, and the legal entitlement will be introduced for 4-year-olds in 2024 and for 3 year-olds in 2025. The reforms will be accompanied by an expansion in ECEC capacities, training for ECEC staff in inclusive education, and upgrading of teachers' qualification requirements. Slovakia also plans to reform the financing system for pre-primary education to ensure sustained national public support, which is key for the planned entitlement, as well as to develop a comprehensive ECEC strategy. In Cyprus, under the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the entry age in free compulsory pre-primary education will also be lowered to the age of 4. The measure will be accompanied by the provision of a grant to cover tuition fees in community or private kindergartens for children that cannot be enrolled in public kindergartens due to capacity constraints. Cyprus will also develop, for the first time, a national strategy on ECEC and an accompanying action plan.<sup>30</sup> Some countries are also taking measures to improve the quality of their ECEC provision, for example by reforming educational frameworks and improving teacher training. For example, in Estonia, the ongoing reforms of early childhood education and care aim to increase the quality of the education by determining learning outcomes and identifying learning support needs early on.

#### Box 7: Examples of measures supported by EU funds to enhance access to quality early childhood education and care

- **Spain** will invest in constructing new ECEC facilities and refurbishing existing buildings and equipment to establish at least 60 000 new publicly-owned ECEC places for children under 3. The focus is on providing affordable public places for children in areas of higher risk of poverty or social exclusion and rural areas, notably for the 1-2 year old age group.
- **Austria** will expand its provision of childcare facilities, particularly for children below 3. Language learning will be intensified from the age of 4. The quality of provision will be further developed by improving the staff/child ratio and especially by aligning staff qualifications nationwide. (RRF)
- **Lithuania** will review pre-school curricula to ensure the content is up-to-date, responding to the latest scientific knowledge about the characteristics and needs of pre-school age children. A system for external evaluation of the performance of schools implementing pre-school education programmes is being put in place to ensure the quality of pre-school education. A study has been carried out to map infrastructure needs for ECEC to ensure that all children have equal access in the whole country. (RRF)
- **Croatia** aims to create 22 500 new places in ECEC by building new facilities and renovating existing ones. The investment is expected to raise participation rates for children between 3 years and primary

<sup>30</sup> See Component 5.2, Investment 2 (C5.2I2) of the Cypriot RRP and technical support project REFORM/IM2022/021 - Supporting the expansion and strategic development of early childhood education and care in Cyprus.

school age from 76.3% to 90% by 2026. This will also be complemented by adopting the new financing model for ECEC in 2023, aiming to provide municipalities/local government units with lower financial capacity help from the national level to finance the operating costs of these facilities and ensure that the investment is sustainable.(RRF)

- **Romania** envisages the development of an integrated ECEC framework and a large-scale teacher-training programme to support the professionalisation of staff working in early childhood education. It will also support the construction of 110 crèches for up to 4 500 children under 3. (RRF)

**Member States are taking measures to modernise education systems, to help equip young people with the skills needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.** Modernisation efforts in some countries, such as Latvia and Lithuania, also entail the reorganisation of the school network. Several countries are undertaking comprehensive curriculum reforms to reinforce the acquisition of key competences, often with a focus on digital and STEM skills. For example, in Czechia a major revision of the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education should be completed in 2024; it requires changes in textbooks, teaching and assessment, including applying a gender perspective in education materials and fighting gender stereotypes. Italy aims to integrate into all levels of school curricula activities, methodologies and contents designed to strengthen STEM, digital and innovation skills. In particular, 8 000 schools are expected to follow STEM guidance projects and 1 000 annual language and methodological courses will be provided to teachers by 2025. Greece is also preparing new curricula and updating and renewing textbooks for all subjects in primary and secondary schools. to mainstream focus on climate change. The ministry is also focusing on changing teaching methods and approaches to teaching. For this reason, additional training of teachers in the new curricula is planned, including innovative teaching methods, and the development of students' critical thinking.

**Assessment reforms are widespread and aim at ensuring high quality of education across all education sectors.** In 2020, Belgium (Flanders) launched an academic support centre to develop standardised tests in schools. The standardised tests will serve as a quality monitoring tool for education policy. The aim is to identify the learning gains of young people and measure the achievement of the attainment goals, at individual and at school level. The tests will be taken at four stages during compulsory education, with a focus on Dutch and mathematics. In 2021, the academic support centre began to develop the tests, with a view to introducing them in the first grade of secondary education as of the 2023-2024 school year. Croatia is introducing national tests in 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade of primary schools (at the beginning and end of lower secondary education), to improve monitoring of education outcomes. In Bulgaria, increasing the quality of education is the main priority of the current reform approach in the educational system. Quality will be raised in a holistic way across all levels of education.<sup>31</sup> This includes a new methodology for assessing the added value of teaching in secondary education.

#### Box 8: Examples of measures supported by EU funds to enhance quality of education

- **Greece** has developed Skills Labs for kindergartens, primary and secondary education. Skills Labs' main goal is to equip the students with the skills needed in the 21st century, including soft skills and digital competences. A strategic priority is to also enhance experiential learning and to train teachers in the methodologies of a laboratory approach to teaching. The Skills Labs are organised in four thematic cycles (Living, Environment, Social Awareness and Responsibility, Creative Thinking and Initiative) and include various sub-themes, such as volunteering, ecological awareness, addiction prevention, sex education, entrepreneurship, prevention and protection from natural hazards, mutual respect and diversity, robotics, and new technologies. They are adapted to age groups. Within the framework of the Skills Labs, innovative teaching methods and practices are utilised, the educational material is adapted to each age group according to pedagogical parameters and implementation is mandatory. (ESF)
- **Slovakia** is undertaking a curriculum reform to enhance competence-based teaching and learning, and the use of ICT in schools. The implementation of the reform will be supported by the creation of 40 regional centres that bring support for schools in mentoring, counselling and consultation activities. (RRF)

<sup>31</sup> [https://www.mon.bg/bg/news/4631\\_18.01.2022](https://www.mon.bg/bg/news/4631_18.01.2022)

- **Cyprus** will modernise and update the current teachers' and schools' evaluation system by developing a single evaluation scheme for primary, secondary, technical and vocational education and training, with differentiated elements. (RRF)
- **Austria** will establish a national financial education strategy with common goals and a long-term vision that leads to an increase in financial education. The reform will include setting up a strategy concept and 'competence framework'. Topics that should be particularly pursued by the financial education strategy are basic financial education in schools and for young people, increasing the public's knowledge of capital markets and increasing awareness about the importance of future and old-age provision. Women were identified as one of the specific target groups. Links to the green finance agenda have also been established. (RRF)
- In **Croatia**, the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education is further developing the self-assessment of adult education institutions. The project started in 2019 and includes the development of a model for self-assessment as well as self-assessment tools (an e-tool for self-assessment of adult education institutions, manuals and tools for self-assessment). The initiative also aims to support adult education institutions in implementing the self-assessment process. (ESF)
- **Lithuania** will implement the 'Millennium Schools' programme, aimed at reorganising the school network to ensure equal education opportunities for Lithuanian children, regardless of where they live and their socio-economic background. The measure will transform small schools into units or units in larger schools, which should improve the learning environment for pupils, improve working conditions for teachers, consolidate teaching and learning resources and make more efficient use of school resources. 80% of Lithuanian municipalities will implement the "Millennium Schools" programme, supporting 150 schools. (RRF)

**Despite significant efforts by Member States in recent years, socio-economic background is still the most important predictor of educational outcomes.** Pupils with a migrant background often lag behind their native peers in terms of basic skills. Early school leaving among Roma is particularly high and they tend to learn in segregated settings, further hampering their opportunities. The pandemic has put inequalities in the spotlight, requiring targeted measures to prevent a long-lasting impact on vulnerable pupils. Integrating children from Ukraine in education has yet again subjected some countries to a stress test, calling for effective measures for access to quality and inclusive education. Many countries have already launched initiatives with a long-term view on inclusive education. In Slovenia, migrant pupils have been granted the right to additional Slovene language lessons in their first year of schooling<sup>32</sup>. Schools with more than nine migrant pupils have the option to hire an extra teacher for Slovene language instruction. For Roma pupils, it is now possible to employ Roma assistants in basic schools and kindergartens<sup>33</sup>. The German initiative *Schule macht stark* (School makes you strong) aims to support schools in socially disadvantaged areas.<sup>34</sup> Another programme announced by the new federal government to support socially disadvantaged young people is *Startchancen*<sup>35</sup>: more than 4 000 general and vocational schools with a high proportion of socially disadvantaged students will benefit from this investment programme. In addition to *Startchancen*, the federal government will provide support for up to 4 000 additional schools in disadvantaged regions and neighbourhoods by creating permanent positions for social workers in these schools.<sup>36</sup> The Slovak curricular reform also aims to enhance inclusive and learner-centred education and address the increasing diversity of learners. Focus is on better inclusion of socio-economically disadvantaged learners and Roma. In Finland, a reform extended compulsory education to the end of upper secondary education, aiming to increase also the share of young adults motivated to continue their studies at the tertiary level.

**Member States are also taking targeted initiatives to improve access and participation in education for children and young people with special educational needs.** In Ireland, a full review of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 was announced in December 2021. The purpose of the review is to ensure that legislation on education for students with additional needs is up-to-date, fully operational, and reflective of the experiences of students and families. The review began in January 2022; was

<sup>32</sup> European Commission (2020), Education and Training Monitor 2020 – Slovenia

<sup>33</sup> European Commission (2021), Education and Training Monitor 2021 – Slovenia

<sup>34</sup> [www.schule-macht-stark.de](http://www.schule-macht-stark.de)

<sup>35</sup> [Startchancen-Programme is being designed](#)

<sup>36</sup> [German coalition agreement 2021-2025](#)



followed by a consultation process, as well as input from an Advisory Group, including representatives of key stakeholders. It is envisaged that the full review will be completed by early 2023. In Lithuania, the amendments to the Law on Education adopted by Seimas in 2020 removed restrictive provisions for children with disabilities and special educational needs. As of 2024, all schools must ensure access for children with special needs. They will be able to attend the school nearest to their place of residence. The amendments also envisage that two teachers, together with educational support specialists, will work in any class that has a high number of pupils with special education needs. The position of pupils' assistant has also been regulated. Furthermore, pre-school and general education schools will have to create better conditions for the deaf to learn their mother tongue (sign language). In Poland, the new legislation (the Act of 17 May 2022) establishes the minimum number of specialists and a new post of 'special pedagogue' in mainstream kindergartens and schools. The total number of these specialists in mainstream settings should increase from 22 000 in September 2022 to 51 000 in September 2024. Building on the expertise of special education institutions, Poland plans to create a network of specialised support centres for inclusive education, to support mainstream schools in teaching students with disabilities. In the French community of Belgium, the Decree of 17 June 2021<sup>37</sup> is part of the Pact of Excellence and will allow for better support for students with special needs. This reform plans to create regional hubs ("territorial poles"), designed to replace the current mechanism of social inclusion. Territorial poles will progressively be composed of multidisciplinary teams (teachers, educators, speech therapists, physiotherapists, etc.) and have the remit of improving support for students with special needs. Territorial poles will be structures attached to special education, covering the whole territory of the Walloon-Brussels Federation (WBF). Thus, they will be able to take into account all pupils with special needs. So far 48 territorial poles have been created, and 48 pole coordinators recruited.

**Taking care of the well-being of learners and teachers has received more attention in recent years, also contributing to equity and quality.** Ireland announced a new action plan on bullying in February 2022. It will specifically consider cyber bullying, gender identity bullying and sexual harassment. The Irish Department of Education's 2019 Well-being Policy Statement and Framework for Practice sets out the ambition and vision that promoting well-being will be at the core of the ethos of every school and centre for education in Ireland. The Well-being Policy and Framework for Practice provides an overarching framework for schools to support a comprehensive, multi-component approach to bullying (Department of Education 2022).<sup>38</sup> In Belgium (Flanders), a new postgraduate course is available to become a social-emotional coach in secondary education. In this training, the focus is on the social and emotional development of the teenager, and the provision of growth-oriented support. It covers health policy and development, and pays attention to challenges such as performance anxiety, motivation problems, bullying, eating disorders, depressive and suicidal complaints, and self-injuring behaviour. It examines how a school can focus more on prevention, so that problematic behaviour diminishes. These courses are offered at a number of universities of applied sciences in Flanders.

#### Box 9: Examples of measures supported by EU funds to enhance the inclusiveness of school education

- In **Belgium**, 30 000 students from the French community will benefit from individualised mental, emotional and learning support. (RRF)
- **France** will provide short-term support to early school leavers, notably given their extra difficulties following the COVID-19 crisis and resulting lockdowns. The objective is to offer 16-18 year-olds a solution according to their needs and career choice. The 15-week programme is constructed to provide young people with the opportunity to work on soft skills, discover career options, and receive comprehensive support (social, sports, cultural) in a fully immersive programme that provides meals and accommodation. (RRF)
- **Cyprus** has implemented a project to help students who are at risk of dropping out of secondary education, entitled 'Support to address students' disengagement and school dropout in Cyprus'. The aim was to reduce the number of low achievers and students at risk, in addition to lowering the number of early school leavers in the country. The project should improve the skills of young Cypriots, their well-being and their competitiveness in the labour market. The project undertook a detailed analysis of the root causes for students disengaging and dropping out of secondary education and of the policies in place to address them. The project was completed in April 2021, and the government is currently considering the implementation of the Action Plan proposed by the project. (Technical Support Instrument).

<sup>37</sup> [https://www.gallilex.cfwb.be/fr/leg\\_res\\_02.php?ncda=49439&referant=l01](https://www.gallilex.cfwb.be/fr/leg_res_02.php?ncda=49439&referant=l01)

<sup>38</sup> Minister Foley establishes Steering Committee to develop new Action Plan on Bullying, 21 February 2022, <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/51ad9-minister-foley-establishes-steering-committee-to-develop-new-action-plan-on-bullying/>

- **Poland** will develop solutions to support mainstream schools in providing high-quality inclusive education. A network of 23 centres for inclusive education will be piloted, building on the expertise and resources of special education entities. Experts will develop a working model and training materials for the centres, selected under the grant award procedure. The pilot implementation of the centres will enable the model's assumptions to be evaluated and will help strengthen teachers' competences. The grant will cover additional specialists, equipment and teaching materials for the kindergartens, schools and special institutions, which will become inclusive education centres. The equipment will be made available to mainstream schools as necessary. Furthermore, fostering quality inclusive education is a priority area in the new programming period (2021-2027). (ESF)
- **Spain** will support vulnerable pupils and their families by setting up at least 1 000 support, guidance and psychoeducational service units for vulnerable students in school districts. It will facilitate support for students and their families to overcome educational obstacles to reduce absenteeism and early school leaving. Cooperation with different learning frameworks (both formal and non-formal) will be supported, to improve the development of essential interpersonal, communication and cognitive skills. The investment will be developed through cooperation between autonomous communities, in the form of sectoral conferences, which will set out the criteria for the distribution of funds across the communities. (RRF)

**Gender equality is receiving increasing attention in Member States, with a focus on helping girls and women in areas where they are still underrepresented.** Initiatives include establishing a proper gender balance in leadership positions in higher education institutions, dissolving gender stereotypes and increasing gender sensitivity in the education processes. Initiatives to support boys and young men in learning and educational attainment are still scarce overall. Greece has introduced gender equality committees in universities, tasked with providing annual reports on the implementation of strategies for gender equality. In the French community of Belgium, working groups will address the challenge of inclusion and diversity in higher education institutions.

**Promoting STEAM competences and approaches<sup>39</sup> in STEM education and motivating especially girls and young women to engage in STEAM careers is widespread.** In Malta, initiatives by the eSkills Foundation Malta promote ICT among girls. ICT bootcamps and other courses are specifically designed to promote ICT careers among girls (eSkills Foundation Malta 2020). Likewise, Germany is investing additional funds to expand extracurricular STEM programmes for children and young people. Many of these programmes are addressed specifically at girls. The promotion of women in the STEM sector is also served by the activities of the nationwide STEM coordination office and the around 350 partners networked there in the "National Pact for Women in STEM Professions."<sup>40</sup> Several Bulgarian initiatives (including DigiGirlz)<sup>41</sup> aim to engage girls and women in the ICT sector. In the Netherlands, several actions were undertaken to tackle gender imbalance in STEM subjects, including for example the Science and Technology Incentive Fund to attract and retain more female students and researchers, and the Aspasia programme to accelerate the promotion of female scientists to (associate) professors. In Spain, the Ministry of Education has launched the web portal STEAM Alliance to raise awareness of the gender gap in STEM. It is a hub for initiatives to promote STEM vocation among young girls across all autonomous communities such as *PreparadAs*, *listAs*; *Chicas con ciencia*; *Mujeres tecnológicas*; *Las carreras STEAM también son femeninas*. The Ministry of Education issues Data Equity statistics.<sup>42</sup> STEAM Alliance (a web portal launched by the ministry) also gathers data on gender equality in education.

<sup>39</sup> Science, technology, engineering, (the arts) and mathematics (STEAM) is a multidisciplinary set of approaches to education removing traditional barriers between subjects and disciplines to connect STEM and ICT education with the arts, humanities, and social sciences.

<sup>40</sup> BMBF, (2022c). MINT-Pakt und „Erfolg mit MINT“. [https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/de/forschung/chancengerechtigkeit-und-vielfalt-im-wissenschaftssystem/mint-pakt/mint-pakt\\_node.html](https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/de/forschung/chancengerechtigkeit-und-vielfalt-im-wissenschaftssystem/mint-pakt/mint-pakt_node.html)

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.coderdojo.bg/single-post/diqigirlz-2021>

<sup>42</sup> The report on data equity can be accessed from: <https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/mc/igualdad/igualdad-cifras.html>

### 1.2.3.2 Green and digital transitions

**All education and training systems in the EU have measures in place to foster skills and competences related to environmental sustainability.** However, their integration into curricula at different school levels and in different subject areas varies. Several Member States have made progress by incorporating green education/learning for sustainability into their curricula (e.g. AT, BG, CY, EE, HR, SK) and/or long-term policy strategies, partly with direct references to the UN Agenda 2030 (e.g. AT, BE-nl, ES, PT, FR, SE).

Countries are also investing in teachers and trainer education for green education related to sustainability (e.g. BE-nl, ES, NL, SK, SI). Policies on green education infrastructure, including the renovation of existing buildings, have been launched by BE-fr, CY, ES, IT, IE, RO, SI and SK.

For example in Spain, the *Action Plan on Environmental and Sustainable Education (PAEAS)*<sup>43</sup> defines the strategic outline of environmental and sustainable education for the next five years. Among other measures, the action plan helps develop projects on environmental and sustainable education between schools and aims to adapt curricula to promote competences for sustainability. The plan also envisages expanding initial training for teachers on sustainability, and will support the design and implementation of green projects, coordinated within the national educational community.

The PAEAS also includes a line of action to reinforce sustainability in schools' infrastructure and promoting the greening of education infrastructure. In particular, it envisages converting schools into multi-purpose community spaces for training and ecological and social innovation, as well as providing technical and financial support to boost the conversion of schools into eco-efficient facilities. As a first result, the Government has created the Schools Network towards Sustainability (ESenRED)<sup>44</sup>, with the collaboration and support of the National Centre for Educational Innovation and Research (CNIIE) and the National Centre for Environmental Education (CENEAM).

#### Box 10: Examples of measures supported by EU funds to support the green transition in education

- **Malta** will implement a pilot project to build a new near carbon-neutral school, complying with standard requirements for high energy efficiency, taking into account resource efficiency, climate adaptation measures, adoption of digital technologies and affordability. (RRF)
- **Slovenia's** curricular reform will aim to equip pupils and teachers with new competences on sustainable development at all levels of education and training: in the field of early childhood education and care, primary and secondary education as well as higher education and adult learning. (RRF)

**The digitalisation of education continues to be a priority in all Member States.** The COVID-19 crisis expanded the use of digital tools in education and made digital literacy a necessary competence for both teachers and learners. Reforms to boost digital education are ongoing in all Member States. The Recovery and Resilience Facility is a key funding instrument for realising the ambitious digital education targets set in many countries. Member States have started investing in digital equipment and ICT infrastructure (e.g. BG, CY, CZ, DE, ES, FR, HR, IE, IT, PL, PT, SI, SK). They have also initiated measures to equip learners with digital competences, building on the European 'Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp)' (e.g. CZ, HU, PT, SK). To address the lack of digital skills among educators, in-service teacher trainings programmes are organised in some countries (e.g. AT, BE-fr, CY, IT, PL, PT, LT, SK).

<sup>43</sup> Ministerio para la transición ecológica y el reto demográfico; Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, (2021). Plan de Acción de Educación Ambiental para la sostenibilidad (2021-2025), (Action Plan on Environmental and Sustainable Education (2021-2025)). [https://www.miteco.gob.es/es/ceneam/plan-accion-educacion-ambiental/plandeacciondeeducacionambientalparalassostenibilidad2021-202508-21\\_tcm30-530040.pdf](https://www.miteco.gob.es/es/ceneam/plan-accion-educacion-ambiental/plandeacciondeeducacionambientalparalassostenibilidad2021-202508-21_tcm30-530040.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> More information about ESenRED can be found at: <https://esenred.blogspot.com/p/que-es-esenred.html>

**Box 11: Examples of measures supported by EU funds to improve digital education**

- In **Croatia**, the project Preparing for the Digital Transition of Croatian Higher Education aims to provide an analysis of the digital maturity and readiness of Croatian higher education institutions. To facilitate digital learning and teaching, the project will offer recommendations on necessary investment and development activities for higher education institutions and extend support to institutions, educators and students in online teaching and remote teaching, at both national and institutional level. (TSI) Based on this analysis, the RRP investment 'Digital transformation of higher education' is expected to provide digital infrastructure and equipment for higher education institutions, ensuring that 90% of public higher education institutions are equipped with digital infrastructure by 2026. (RRF)
- **Italy** is planning to create three Digital Education Hubs (DEH) targeting the digital transformation of higher education. In the context of the RRF, 100 000 innovative classrooms will be equipped and laboratories for digital professions in all high schools will be created ('School 4.0 Plan'). The project 'Connected schools' (RRF) is expected to provide approximately 9 000 school buildings with at least 1 Gbps connectivity. Italy will also adopt a national reference framework for integrated digital teaching, to promote the adoption of digital competence curricula in all schools. Approximately 650 000 teachers and school staff will be trained in local training centres. (RRF)
- In **Czechia** training will be provided to teachers in 4 000 primary and lower secondary schools, related to digital skills and IT literacy. This is part of a more comprehensive reform to support the digital transition of the education system, including the development of digital equipment, educational resources and the transformation of curricula. (RRF)
- **Germany** will set up competence centres for digital education, based on a system of collaboration between teacher education and in-service training institutions, universities, and research institutes. (RRF)
- **Spain** will provide portable devices to at least 300 000 students from vulnerable groups in public or publicly subsidised schools. It will also install, update and maintain interactive digital systems (IDS) in at least 240 000 classrooms in public and publicly subsidised schools to enable distance and blended learning and will provide digital training to 700 000 teachers. (RRF)
- **Poland** plans to develop a national digital competences programme and training also for teachers, and a digitalisation strategy and minimum standards for ICT equipment for schools. To ensure equal opportunities in benefiting from digital technologies in learning, primary and secondary schools across Poland will be able to receive state-of-the-art multimedia equipment for use by teachers and students, including 1.2 million laptops, high-speed internet connection, and STEM and artificial intelligence laboratories. (RRF)
- **Bulgaria** will establish STEM centres, which will organise coordinate training for teachers, develop teaching material, set up an electronic portal and library with publicly available education resources and coordinate and support student activities in STEM fields. The RRP investment also covers envisage construction and renovation works for STEM laboratories in schools, including high-tech classrooms. As a part of up- and re-skilling of the workforce, a digital platform for e-learning for adults will be established. Digital clubs, staffed and equipped with computers and open to the public, will provide free access to the platform and its online training courses. One of The objectives is to provide digital skills training for 500 000 people by 2026. (RRF)
- **The Netherlands** plans to further exploit the opportunities of digitalisation for vocational and higher education and to improve students' and teachers' digital skills. The objective is that vocational and higher education institutions together will achieve a standardised, secure and reliable sectoral information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure and a sectoral knowledge infrastructure. In addition, investments in a National education AI lab aim to improve education by discussing and proposing scalable artificial intelligence (AI) solutions for the learning process in primary and/or secondary education. (RRF)

### 1.2.3.3 Teachers and trainers

Member States are seeking to increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession and address teacher shortages. The ageing of the teacher workforce and emerging teacher shortages, particularly in STEM and ICT subjects, are key challenges faced by many Member States. Some geographical areas, especially rural schools and those with a disadvantaged student population tend to be more affected than others. Member States acknowledge that teachers are the most important variable for raising education outcomes and therefore many initiatives aim to strengthen the teaching profession.

**Some Member States are taking comprehensive measures to strengthen the teaching profession and improve teacher education.** Some Member States are increasing teacher salaries and developing work on more attractive career paths. Such measures are often accompanied by more comprehensive reforms, involving changes in initial and continuous teacher education programmes, in some cases with the support of the EU's Technical Support Instrument. Equipping teachers with digital skills and preparing them to address diverse classrooms are also important priorities for Member States. Estonia introduced more flexible pathways to the teaching profession in 2013, but this has not delivered sufficient results. Most recently, in the beginning of 2022, the Estonian government launched the *Plan for the New Generation of Teachers*. Activities will address the quality of management and organisational culture in schools; initial and in-service training for teachers and support staff; career and development opportunities; support throughout the career cycle, including support for novice teachers; involvement of support staff, and attractiveness of the teaching profession. Special emphasis is put on raising the quality of school leadership, since research indicates that one of the reasons teachers are leaving the profession is perceived poor-quality school leadership. The first activity for implementation of the plan will be the creation of a Teachers' Academy, in cooperation with universities. The academy will help newly qualified teachers enter the system and will develop universities' capacity to educate teachers and educational leaders. Another aim is to enhance high-level research in the field of educational sciences. The focus is on teachers of natural sciences.<sup>45</sup> Additional funding for teacher education will be allocated, a career model for school leaders created, and the concept of in-service training for teachers and school leaders updated.<sup>46</sup> In Lithuania, there is a lack of uptake for teacher training programmes in chemistry, physics, IT, mathematics, and the Lithuanian language. To address future shortages, a scholarship has been offered to future teachers of these subjects. According to authorities, students who sign employment agreements with municipalities for 3 years will not be required to repay this scholarship after graduating.

**Developing mentorship and traineeship programmes for late entrants to the teaching profession is widespread in Member States.** In Latvia, the programme "Macitspeks" for late entrants combines teaching supported by an experienced mentor with a 2-year academic part-time course. The programme helps the new teachers remain in the profession. There are 100 places available in the programme every year. In the academic year 2021-2022, 72 participants started teaching at school, and 69 continued by the beginning of 2022.<sup>47</sup>

**National actions also include continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers.** By widening the CPD offer, teachers' competences and general skills will be strengthened. Cyprus is developing teacher evaluation systems and introducing standards for quality of teaching. In Spain, the National Agency for Educational Technology and Teacher Development (INTEF) developed the Teacher Digital Competence Portfolio, promoting the acquisition, development and improvement of digital competences among teachers. In 2022, Italy strengthened the qualification needed to access the teaching profession and reformed the system of training for teachers to foster their continuous professional development. Several countries are educating teachers to better address inclusion. Initiatives in improving teacher education look at supporting teachers who teach in increasingly diverse classrooms, and improving their digital skills.

<sup>45</sup> Ministry of Education and Research, (2021). Tähtsamad tegevused 2021/2022. õppeaastal. (Key Activities in the academic year 2021/2022), [https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/kooliaasta\\_alguse\\_pakett\\_24.08.2021.pdf](https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/kooliaasta_alguse_pakett_24.08.2021.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> Ministry of Education and Research. (2022). Valitsus arutas õpetajate järelkasvu arengusuundasid aastani 2026. (The government discussed the action plan for the new generation of teachers that runs until 2026), <https://www.hm.ee/et/uudised/valitsus-arutas-opetajate-jarelkasvu-arengusuundasid-aastani-2026>

<sup>47</sup> LTV, (2022). Возможная миссия: стать учителем за два года ('Mission possible: become a teacher in two years') <https://rus.lsm.lv/statja/novosti/obschestvo/ctat-uchitelem-za-dva-goda--missija-vozmozhna.a437246/>. In the first admission round (academic year 2020/2021) 98 participants started working at school, and by the beginning of 2022 81 remained.

### Box 12: Examples of measures supported by EU funds for teachers and trainers

- In 2021, the European Commission issued awards to several outstanding projects implemented under the **Erasmus+ programme**, under the **European Innovative Teaching Awards (EITA)**:<sup>48</sup>
  - **Supporting 21st Century Teaching and Learning**:<sup>49</sup> this project sought to: ✓ explore new innovative practices to be utilised by the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDET); ✓ facilitate digital competences; ✓ facilitate blended learning; ✓ encourage the use of social media as a means of communicating with the 21st century student; ✓ implement the ‘flipped classroom’ (a pedagogical model in which the typical lecture and homework elements of a course are reversed, with short video lectures viewed by the learner at home before the class session, and in-class time devoted to exercises, projects, or discussions); ✓ implement the ‘bring your own devices’ (BYOD) initiative; ✓ facilitate interactive learning. This project is a good example of peer-learning activities. Local senior management explored teaching and learning in similar large organisations in the EU, and gained first-hand knowledge of other European education systems, enhancing their professional skills and ensuring their CPD.
  - **European Links to Junior Cycle Reform in Ireland**:<sup>50</sup> This project’s objective was to upskill teachers in the delivery of the new Junior Cycle programme in Ireland, for which they used a multi-disciplinary, collaborative approach, with a European dimension. The topics addressed covered a four-pronged approach: Science and Technology, Languages, Well-being, and Classroom Management. This project shows a good example on how learning and teaching methods can be improved, as the impact has been threefold: ✓ the students have benefited from more diverse teaching styles and strategies, ✓ teachers have benefited from engagement in teaching methodologies and new and innovative ways of delivering the Junior Cycle programme; ✓ senior management have benefited, as in-house CPD saves the school from outsourcing CPD.
  - **Special Education – Looking at the Whole Child**:<sup>51</sup> The rationale for this project was to develop new teaching competences and skills among staff, to enrich the educational experiences of the school’s students. The core objective of this project was that staff, by attending specialised courses and engaging in teacher shadowing in a broader European setting, would be empowered to implement more innovative teaching methodologies towards broader and more holistic education for students. This project is a good example of how parents from different cultures associate more positively with the school, while pupils become aware of the shared European culture and identity, celebrating the school’s diversity with parents and the local community.
- **Romania** trained more than 48 000 teachers from primary and lower secondary schools to obtain a better understanding of the new syllabi. The project also promoted targeted pilot actions focused on disadvantaged schools, offering guidance to teachers and school managers on how to adapt curricula to the needs of students at risk. (ESF)
- **Greece** aims to change teaching methods and set new approaches to teaching. For this reason, additional training of teachers is ongoing, emphasising, among other things, innovative teaching methods and the development of skills. In October 2021, a new initiative called “Pathway to all children in education” was launched, including training courses to improve the skills of teachers and educators in their contact with multilingual and multicultural learning environments. The aim is to support especially refugee or immigrant students, boosting their school attendance rates, reducing their rate of school dropout and improving their learning outcomes. (ESF, UNICEF)

<sup>48</sup> Other awardees include recipients from CY, ES, IE, LV, SE.

<sup>49</sup> [https://innovative-teaching-award.ec.europa.eu/projects/supporting-21st-century-teaching-and-learning\\_en](https://innovative-teaching-award.ec.europa.eu/projects/supporting-21st-century-teaching-and-learning_en)

<sup>50</sup> [https://innovative-teaching-award.ec.europa.eu/projects/european-links-junior-cycle-reform-ireland\\_en](https://innovative-teaching-award.ec.europa.eu/projects/european-links-junior-cycle-reform-ireland_en)

<sup>51</sup> [https://innovative-teaching-award.ec.europa.eu/projects/special-education-looking-whole-child\\_en](https://innovative-teaching-award.ec.europa.eu/projects/special-education-looking-whole-child_en)

### 1.2.3.4 Higher education

Member States take different initiatives to help higher education institutions (HEIs) become drivers of innovation and the digital and green transitions. Measures focus on the quality and the relevance of the academic offer, addressing skills mismatches and labour market access for graduates, boosting the international competitiveness of higher education institutions, as well as their inclusiveness and accessibility. Some Member States are also undertaking major reforms to higher education governance, including introducing new funding schemes. Higher education institutions are cooperating more closely throughout Europe, triggered even more by the European Universities initiative. Several Member States are devoting additional funds to these ends.

**National approaches seek to improve the relevance, quality and competitiveness of higher education.** Initiatives cover investing in the digitalisation and ‘future-proofing’ of HEIs including promoting blended and e-learning, internationalising the teaching and student body, and closer cooperation with businesses, civil society, public actors and other stakeholders. Belgium (Flanders) has set up a Higher Education Advancement Fund (*Voorsprongfonds*) to make higher education more digital, flexible and future-proof (Vlaamse Regering 2021c).<sup>52</sup> The three main goals of the fund are the development of a portfolio of study and training programmes that is future-proof and flexible; the further development of lifelong learning in higher education; and the full commitment to digital education methods. Romania is planning investment in university digital infrastructure and the development of advanced digital competences for students and university teaching staff. There are plans to also support the development of e-learning and hybrid local learning platforms; specific training environments; laboratories, test equipment and consumables; and the creation of a national platform connecting 11 university centres transforming universities into hubs for economic development. In 2017, Germany adopted its strategy for internationalising education, science and research.<sup>53</sup> It sets five guiding goals: strengthening excellence through global cooperation; developing Germany's innovative strength internationally; expanding education and qualification internationally; shaping the global knowledge society together with emerging and developing countries; and jointly overcoming global challenges. In this context, the German government funded the Audit and Re-audit project "Internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions", run by the German Rectors' Conference<sup>54</sup>. The original Audit project has meanwhile turned into a successful series of tools to support HEI in their internationalisation efforts via individualised recommendations.

**To improve inclusion and access to higher education and research,** Member States are developing quality standards and assessment and entry systems within HEIs. Several Member States allocated increased funds for HEIs to expand access to higher education. In Portugal, since 2020, HEIs have been given the opportunity to run special entry exams<sup>55</sup> for VET students and specialised artistic education students. The aim of this measure is to broaden the social base of access to HEI and provide further learning opportunities to VET students.

Under the Recovery and Resilience Facility, Cyprus aims to implement *Graduate Tracking of Cyprus Higher Education*. The programme will collect national data on graduates' pathways after leaving higher education. It will also assemble data from employers regarding labour market needs, thus providing insights on graduates' employability, on possible skills gaps and mismatches, and on graduates' mobility across the EU. Consequently, this information will help to increase the responsiveness of Cyprus's education and training system to labour market needs.<sup>56</sup>

In the Netherlands, with the four-year Acceleration Plan (2019 to 2022) Dutch higher education institutions and SURF (a cooperative association of Dutch educational and research institutions working together to acquire or develop the best possible digital services, and to encourage knowledge sharing through continuous innovation) aim to take substantial steps in the field of digitisation in higher education.<sup>57</sup> The plan entails improving the

<sup>52</sup> Vlaamse Regering, (2021c). Visienota Voorsprongfonds Hoger Onderwijs (Concept paper on the Advancement Fund for Higher Education), Available at <https://docs.vlaamsparlement.be/pfile?id=1672279>

<sup>53</sup> BMBF, (2016). Internationalisierung von Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung. Strategie der Bundesregierung. December 2016: [https://www.bmbf.de/SharedDocs/Publikationen/de/bmbf/pdf/internationalisierung-von-bildung-wissenschaft-und-forschung.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=2](https://www.bmbf.de/SharedDocs/Publikationen/de/bmbf/pdf/internationalisierung-von-bildung-wissenschaft-und-forschung.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2)

<sup>54</sup> [www.hrk.de/audit](http://www.hrk.de/audit)

<sup>55</sup> [Decree-Law 11/2020\\_2/4](https://www.gesetze-bundestag.de/ocds/Bundestag_Gesetze_und_Vorschriften/Sonderauswertungen/2020/2020_2_4)

<sup>56</sup> Republic of Cyprus, (2021). Cyprus Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026. Cyprus, Nicosia

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.versnellingsplan.nl/en/about-acceleration-plan/>

connection to the labour market, stimulating the flexibility of education and enabling smarter and better learning with technology. It involves national cooperation among all HEIs, which is considered unique in an international context.

**Restructuring higher education governance is often used to ensure sustainable and effective change in the way HEIs operate.** Some Member States have implemented reforms aimed at enhancing HEIs' autonomy (AT), as well as reforming governance (LV, RO, SK). In Latvia, amendments<sup>58</sup> to the Law on Higher Education were passed by the Parliament, signalling new opportunities for restructuring university management and offering clarity on the types of HEIs and their goals.<sup>59</sup> National Graduate Tracking results were published for the second year in a row,<sup>60</sup> giving access to comparable data that can be used by future students and HEIs themselves. Latvia participates in the second pilot of the European Graduate Tracking initiative (an EU-level EEA action under the higher education focus area – *see section 1.1.2.4*). At the same time, Latvia has introduced HEI councils, responsible for the sustainable development, strategic and financial supervision of the institutions, as well as their functioning in accordance with their development strategy. The introduction of representatives from industry and the general public aims to make the composition of the councils more diverse and better equipped for dealing with the challenges of modern society. In Ireland, the Higher Education Authority Bill 2022, which is going through the legislative process before enactment, is to replace the Higher Education Authority Act of 1971. The new bill aims to advance equality, diversity and inclusion at HEIs, while ensuring they provide accountability and transparency, as well as value-for-money for public funding. The changes constitute the biggest reform in higher education in 50 years and will (i) significantly slim down university governing bodies; (ii) provide for competency based membership and a majority of external members and an external chairperson; and (iii) provide a legal footing for carrying out reviews into the performance of colleges, if there is an issue of concern. In Croatia, the new Act on higher education and scientific activity will reform the funding system by introducing performance contracts and, together with the Law on quality assurance in science and higher education, improve the quality and labour market relevance of higher education. These Acts (currently in the process of adoption) are part of the RRP reform 'Modernisation of higher education'. At the same time, Croatia is developing a digital register of qualifications, which should eventually lead to the establishment of a graduate tracking mechanism. In the meantime, it is also participating in the second pilot of the European Graduate Tracking initiative.

#### Box 13: Examples of RRF support for the transformation of higher education

- In **Slovakia** performance contracts will be introduced to support the profiling and diversification of universities, based on their specific strengths and potential for development. Performance contracts are to be signed with public universities by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport. On the basis of the agreement with universities, objectives will be set and monitored using the U-Multirank approach, based on a long-term objective for universities and national requirements. Slovakia will also provide scholarships to improve access to higher education for domestic and international students. (RRF)
- **Portugal** aims to raise enrolment rates in science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) courses, including in information technology. Funds will be allocated through an open competition to programmes by HEIs, in partnership with public and/or private employers and other stakeholders. The programme also covers the modernisation and enlargement of facilities to accommodate the rise in the number of students, student incentives, and other expenditures by HEIs associated with the provision of the courses. (RRF)
- **Slovenia** aims to digitalise the pedagogical process and institutional management for all education levels, including higher education. This covers high-speed connectivity; development and operationalisation of new IT solutions and e-services. This includes a high-speed fibre optic backbone network between PoPs (Point-of-Presence) of the Academic and Research Network of Slovenia (Arnes) and data repositories to store open research results. (RRF)

<sup>58</sup> Saeima, (2021). Grozījumi Augstskolu likumā (Amendments to the Law on Higher Education Institutions) <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/324247-grozijumi-augstskolu-likuma>

<sup>59</sup> Saeima, (2021). Saeima atbalsta augstskolu reformu (The Saeima supports the reform of higher education institutions) <https://saeima.lv/lv/aktualitates/saeimas-zinas/29893-saeima-atbalsta-augstskolu-reformu>

<sup>60</sup> MoES, (2021). Prezentē jaunā absolventu monitoringa datus (for the results of the new graduate monitoring, see: <https://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/prezente-jauna-absolventu-monitoringa-datus>)



### 1.2.3.5 Lifelong learning and mobility

Member States are still struggling with low participation rates in adult education and lifelong learning; a situation which tended to worsen during the pandemic. Learning mobility frameworks and micro-credential programmes are undergoing updates, improving the lifelong learning opportunities, employability and cross-border cooperation options.

**Member States are developing national strategies and taking measures to ensure flexible and inclusive pathways for all learners.** This entails the introduction of smaller modules for learners (e.g. micro-credentials, learning bites) that are meeting their needs and abilities (EE), legislative changes to facilitate the labour market relevance of vocational education and training (e.g. BG, CY, FR, SK), facilitating access to resources and toolkits for sharing good practice in the area of adult learning and available training options (e.g. ES, MT, NL, LU), and addressing the risk of disengagement and dropout through research, identifying solutions and education projects (e.g. BE-fr, CY, FR). In 2021, Bulgaria amended the Vocation Education and Training Act with changes including: changing the list of professions for vocational education and training; restructuring VET in wider professional fields, avoiding fragmentation and designing paths to similar sectors; applicability of flexible learning paths and patterns of engagement for various types of learners; reforming curricula and updating national educational standards, with a clear focus on knowledge and skills for digital, green, general and key competences; introducing pre-vocational education, including micro-credentials for VET mobility; and transferring credits between professional fields. The new Education operational programme<sup>61</sup> includes the objectives of setting up Centres of Vocational Excellence as a driving force for reforms in the VET sector, ensuring high quality skills and competences that lead to quality employment and career-long opportunities (see also section 1.1.2.1 on Centres of Vocational Excellence). In France, 20 years after the creation of the Validation of Acquired Experience (VAE) (January 2002), experiments have been launched by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Integration to strengthen and consolidate its use. A key area targeted is the elderly care sector, where recruitment needs are significant. The objective is to remove existing obstacles, make access to VAE simpler and easier to understand, and reduce the time and administrative procedures involved, while also preserving the requirement for and quality of proof of the skills held.<sup>62</sup> In Poland, to better coordinate skills and adult learning at regional level, 'Voivodship coordination teams for vocational education and training, and lifelong learning' will be created, consisting of representatives of educational institutions, regional authorities and social partners. The teams will develop regional skills policies recognising the needs of the local economies. In Cyprus, the reform "Addressing skills mismatches between education and the labour market"<sup>63</sup>, included in the national recovery and resilience plan, addresses the skill mismatch between the labour market and the secondary education system. It will implement key measures including a reform of secondary schools' educational curricula to improve soft and entrepreneurial skills; an in-job shadowing programme for general secondary education pupils, and new programmes of study in both general and vocational secondary education and training tailored to labour market needs. The measure involves providing training to secondary education teaching staff, in close collaboration with labour market experts, as well as upgrading school laboratories with technology and equipment. The implementation of the reform is expected to be completed by 31 December 2025.

**Several projects in Member States have been implemented to promote learning mobility.** Examples include "Ready, Study, GO! Poland" (PL), setting up a European pathway in high schools (FR), adopting guidelines and standards in international university cooperation (DE) or facilitating the exchange of good practices at European level in the field of counselling and guidance (RO). In Belgium, the project "*Developing the motivation of adults at risk of dropout (2018-2021)*"<sup>64</sup> was coordinated by the Institut Supérieur de Formation Continue d'Etterbeek (IFSCF) in Brussels, under the action type: *Strategic Partnerships for adult education*. The project involved four partners from Belgium, France, Hungary and Aruba. It contributed to the achievement of the

<sup>61</sup> <http://sf.mon.bg/?h=downloadFile&fileId=2882>

<sup>62</sup> MTEI, (2022c). Validation des acquis de l'expérience : 20 ans après sa création, des expérimentations en cours pour faciliter son utilisation (Validation of acquired experience: 20 years after its creation, experiments underway to facilitate its use) <https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/actualites/presse/communiqués-de-presse/article/validation-des-acquis-de-l-experience-20-ans-apres-sa-creation-des>

<sup>63</sup> European Commission, (2021). ANNEX to the Proposal for a Council Implementing Decision on the approval of the assessment of the recovery and resilience plan for Cyprus. Brussels, 8.7.2021 COM(2021) 398 final

Republic of Cyprus, (2021). Cyprus Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026. Cyprus, Nicosia

<sup>64</sup> <http://www.stop-drop.eu/>

headline target (under the Europe 2020 strategy) of increasing the share of 30-34 year-olds who have completed tertiary education or equivalent to at least 40%. The main result is a portfolio of tools for developing the motivation of learners in adult education. It includes research about causes of dropout, identified solutions, recommendations and a toolkit for staff with practical tips and tricks, checklists and easy-to-use materials. This output has a great potential to reduce dropout rates, as well as to be transferred to other adult education providers and to make politicians aware of the issue.

**Steps are also being made towards promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications**, by implementing frameworks and systems such as the European Quality Assurance Framework in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) and Reform of Continuing Vocational Education and Training Systems (Re-CVET) (CY, EL).

#### Box 14: Measures supported by EU funds to support lifelong learning and educational mobility

In **Malta** and **Ireland**, the skills assessment tool ‘Check-in Take-off’ was developed as part of an Erasmus+ project. The skills-checker helps adult learners to assess their skills level. It suggests courses in basic skills and orients adult learners towards learning opportunities that recognise their prior skills.

**Poland** plans to create a network of 120 sectoral skills centres. They will provide space for knowledge and technology transfers between business and education – a holistic approach to vocational and lifelong learning that will help students, employees and adults gain new professional qualifications. The centres will also support teachers and work with researchers to provide expertise in specific economic sectors. (RRF)

**Sweden** adopted the **Employment** protection act that includes the launch of a new student Finance Scheme for Transition and Retraining to strengthen employees’ position in the labour market by providing them the opportunity to participate in lifelong learning during the course of their careers. (RRF)

### 1.2.3.6 Geopolitical dimension

The internationalisation of higher education and a more active involvement for schools in strengthening international cooperation are part of Member States’ national approaches to improving education and training. Cooperation in education is being supported and prioritised by diplomatic missions, which are ensuring wider visibility for their national educational institutions (e.g. BG, CY, EL, SK). Schools, VET institutions and universities offer various options to participate in European mobility and cooperation programmes as well as scholarship opportunities for studying abroad, available for different target groups and durations. Finland includes the geopolitical dimension at all levels of education, through the Finnish National Core Curricula (NCC). It also includes international cooperation as part of the transversal skills written into the NCC to cater for cultural competence, interaction and self-expression.

In Cyprus, the ministry of education has been promoting the internationalisation of the higher education sector through constant cooperation and negotiation with other countries to sign a number of educational agreements and memoranda of understanding.<sup>65</sup> The main objective of these agreements is cooperation in sciences, research and higher education. Cyprus has also signed agreements (with Germany, Italy, Romania, Russia, China, Armenia and Jordan) on mutual academic recognition of higher education qualifications, for access to (and continuation of studies in) higher education institutions.

<sup>65</sup> <https://jtest8.schools.ac.cy/index.php/en/diethnopoisi/mnimonia-synantilipsis>

### Box 15 Geopolitical dimension – Examples of flagship national EEA actions

**Greece** uses the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (ICM) programme to expand links between non-EU countries and the European Training Area, in particular the countries of the Western Balkans. To this end, Greek universities are cooperating continuously with non-EU countries. For example, the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki has continued the successful implementation of the programme that it began in 2015, in countries like Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia Herzegovina, Brazil, Moldavia, Montenegro and others.

**One main priority has been support for Ukrainian children and young people, to promote their integration** in the education systems in Member States that are welcoming them, as well as for Ukrainian teachers. In the 2021-2022 school year less than half of displaced of Ukrainian children and young people were enrolled in schools. Reaching out to refugee communities to help their children integrate into schools has therefore remained a central focus of EU support. Most European education systems have promoted the integration of newly arrived children from Ukraine into regular classes, combined with intensive support for learning the language of instruction (and other subjects). Relatively fewer systems favour the initial integration of refugee learners in separate classes (BE-de, EL, CY, LU, MT, NL, AT, FI). These also focus on teaching the language of instruction, and in some cases on the native language of the refugees (i.e. Ukrainian). Most education systems have also provided top-level support for refugee learners who wish to follow distance learning according to the Ukrainian curriculum (e.g. offering spaces in schools and digital tools). All these, however, are considered short-term or extra-curricular arrangements, and there is **general consensus that longer-term efforts need to be focused on integrating these learners into local schools**. In its practical manual "[Supporting the inclusion of displaced children from Ukraine in education: considerations, key principles and practices for the school year 2022-2023](#)" of 30 June 2022, the European Commission provided concrete suggestions to Member States to support the inclusion of Ukrainian refugee children, young people and educators in schools for both short- and long term. All children should have the possibility to attend a local school in the EU. At the same time, activities should allow children to keep a strong connection to Ukraine to help prepare children for all possible future developments, including return when the situation allows. The main focus of the top-level policies and measures is on addressing these learners' educational needs. Around half of European education systems have top-level policies and measures in place that promote learners' social, emotional and mental well-being through the curriculum. There are also a variety of large-scale measures, in most Member States, to support the integration of refugee students in higher education.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>66</sup> See Box 3 in Education and Training Monitor v.1. and 2022 Eurydice reports: [Supporting refugee learners from Ukraine in schools in Europe](#), [Supporting refugee learners from Ukraine in higher education in Europe](#), July 2022.



# Part 2

## Improving EEA governance



## II.1. Reformed EEA governance and co-creation processes

### II.1.1. Introduction: context and rationale for governance reforms

The European Education Area is rooted in decades of cooperation in education and training at EU level. So far, this cooperation has achieved significant results: empowering teachers, improving general education, adapting to the digital transformation and setting new principles for improving VET. The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) has supported the first European Education Area initiatives and national reforms, and has facilitated the education and training community's initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Experience from ET 2020 pointed to avenues for improvement that the new strategic framework governance should take forward, to better help promote effective solutions and policy reforms on the ground and live up to the ambition of achieving the European Education Area by 2025. One of the identified gaps was the need for a stronger alignment between steering at the political level (Council, Education Committee), informal meetings of high-level officials (High Level Group, Directors-General meetings), and implementation at the technical level (such as working groups and other Commission expert groups). Ensuring better use and dissemination of results and improving synergies between education and training and other relevant policy areas were identified as other key areas for improvement. The COVID-19 pandemic and the large numbers of refugees arriving in European countries after Russia's military invasion of Ukraine have accentuated the need for the EEA strategic framework governance to be able to respond quickly and effectively to unforeseen events.

### II.1.2. Towards a stronger political steer, more synergies and impact

#### **The common ambition to achieve the European Education Area by 2025 requires strong governance.**

The Commission has been working closely with Member States, in a spirit of co-creation, to improve the governance structures and processes, in order to enhance the impact of European cooperation, make the best use of the significant EU funding and facilitate the completion of the European Education Area by 2025. Exchanges took place at a number of informal workshops, meetings of the informal High Level Group on Education and Training (HLG), and in the Education Committee of the Council.

In February 2021, the Council adopted the **Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)** (EEA [Strategic framework Resolution](#)). The Council agreed that, during its first cycle till 2025, the strategic framework should maintain all the tried and tested mutual learning arrangements of the ET 2020, such as the working groups, Directors-General formations and other mutual learning arrangements. The Council also agreed that Member States and the Commission will adapt these arrangements to the new strategic priorities and will work together to set up governance solutions to facilitate efficient communication of information from the technical to the political level, and coordinate the work under the strategic framework towards the EEA. Furthermore, the Council agreed that cross-sectoral cooperation should be enhanced between education and training and other relevant policy areas, particularly employment, social policy, research, innovation, youth and culture.

The Council invited the Commission to work with the Member States until the end of 2021 to agree on a suitable governance structure to coordinate the work and steer the development of the strategic framework, within the overarching objective of achieving and further developing the European Education Area. This would include considering the issues that need to be taken further for discussion at a higher political level, without creating additional burdens for the Member States, and ensuring their continued ownership of the process.

This resulted in the adoption in November 2021 of the **Council Resolution on the governance structure of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)** ([Governance Resolution](#)). The Resolution confirmed the central role, alongside the Council's Education Committee, of the informal **High Level Group on Education and Training** (HLG), in linking the technical and political levels and steering European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area. To support the High Level Group and ensure continuity between

Council Presidencies, the Council Resolution called for setting up the **High Level Group Coordination Board**. The Board was conceived as a smaller more agile body, composed of representatives of the two previous Council Presidencies, the current Presidency, the two incoming Presidencies, and the Commission.

The role of the HLG Coordination Board is to support the High Level Group in particular by contributing to its agenda setting, with due respect for the Presidency's priorities, the priorities under the strategic framework, and current trends and challenges, including unforeseen events. The Board should propose topics for discussion at the HLG meetings, including those that could contribute to the preparation of policy debates in the Council. The Board was also tasked with informing the High Level Group and the Education Committee of the progress made under the strategic framework towards the EEA, including through regular updates on the outcomes of Directors-General meetings, the work of the working groups, expert groups, and outcomes of other mutual learning activities. Another task of the Board, as set out in the Governance Resolution, is to support the High Level Group on broad guidance for possible future policies and for interaction between education and training policies and other policy areas. Furthermore, the Board should help the HLG enhance synergies between education and training and other relevant policy areas.

**The High Level Group** has contributed to the development of the European Education Area, in particular improving the EEA strategic framework governance, enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of investment in education and training, and furthering the digital transition. Since March 2022, the High Level Group has met with increased frequency and flexibility, to respond to the need for swiftly coordinated action at EU level to ensure continuity of education for refugees from Ukraine. The High Level Group meeting on 28 March 2022 also contributed to the preparation of the policy debate in the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting in April on strengthening crisis management and anticipation in the EEA. The Group has taken on a new task to respond to the sudden need for joint deliberations.

The 28 March High Level Group meeting was the first meeting for which the preparation was coordinated by the **HLG Coordination Board**, which **met for the first time on 23 March**. The subsequent meetings of the HLG Coordination Board were very helpful in setting the agendas and preparing the meetings of the High Level Group and facilitated continuity between Council Presidencies. In June the Board became a fully-fledged body following the endorsement of its terms of reference by the High Level Group.

**Meetings of Directors-General for Schools, VET and Higher Education** contributed to progress towards the European Education Area by the co-creating various initiatives, including the Council Conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of the Europe; the Council Recommendations on blended learning, learning for the green transition and sustainable development, on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation (, on a European Approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, and the Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success. The meetings of Directors-General for Higher Education also covered supporting Member States in implementing the European graduate tracking initiative, and included joint session (in September 2021) with the European Research Area and Innovation Committee. The exchanges focused on preparing the European strategy for universities and building synergies between higher education, research and innovation. Exchanges at the Directors-General meetings also contributed to ensuring continuity of education for refugees from Ukraine.

The **Council**, including through its preparatory body (the Education Committee), provided a political steer on (i) the priorities of the new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the EEA, (ii) EU-level targets to measure progress, and (iii) improving governance to enhance impact and better manage and anticipate crises. It also provided a steer on a number of strategic priorities and concrete issues such as enhancing equity and inclusion, teacher mobility, digital education, the transformation of higher education, VET and adult learning, and effective and efficient investment in education and training.

The February 2020 [Council Resolution on education and training in the European Semester](#) stressed the contribution of European cooperation in education and training to growth, competitiveness and employment, while also expressing Member States' commitment to continue to contribute to the European Semester process. It also called for closer cooperation between the education and training sectors, including through a better dialogue between the Education Committee and the Employment Committee (EMCO). Education and training policies continue to play a key role in the European Semester and figure prominently in the 2019 and 2020

country-specific recommendations, which in turn have steered the programming of the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

The comprehensive thematic and country-specific data offered annually in the Education and Training Monitor feeds directly into the country reports of the European Semester. The 2022 country reports also contain a dedicated statistical annex on education, based on the EU-level targets. The Employment Committee and the Education Committee have expanded their cooperation beyond the multilateral surveillance exercise on the implementation of the country-specific recommendations, to encompass joint policy debates (focusing on emerging issues, such as national COVID-19 measures and evidence of the pandemic's impact on education)<sup>67</sup>.

### II.1.3. EEA strategic framework working groups and other Commission expert groups as key pillars of co-creation

Building on the ET 2020 working groups, in November 2021 the Commission continued with **tried and tested mutual learning arrangements** by launching seven new working groups (2021-2025) as part of the new cycle of strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, to help meet the EU-level ambition of achieving the EEA:

1. Working group on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)
2. Working group on Schools, including
  - Subgroup on Pathways to School Success
  - Subgroup on Education for Environmental Sustainability
3. Working group on Higher Education
4. Working group on Vocational Education and Training and the Green Transition
5. Working group on Adult Learning: Opening Up Opportunities for All
6. Working group on Digital Education: Learning, Teaching and Assessment (DELTA)
7. Working group on Equality and Values in Education and Training.

The general focus of these EEA strategic framework working groups (2021-2025) is to promote **mutual learning on policy reforms of national education and training systems**, with a view to effectively contribute to the completion of the EEA by 2025, complementing the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) and the European Skills Agenda. In addition, to reinforce **synergies between education and training and other EU policies**, their work takes into account other EU flagship initiatives relevant for education and training, such as the European Research Area, the Bologna Process, the European Pillar of Social Rights, different EU equality strategies, the Green Deal and the European Semester.

Established as [informal Commission expert groups](#), working groups bring together – on a voluntary basis – experts from EU Member States' authorities and other participating countries (candidate countries and EEA/EFTA countries), EU level stakeholder organisations, as well as international organisations, EU bodies, offices and agencies.

---

<sup>67</sup> EDUC-EMCO joint policy debates of 14 March 2021 and 25 March 2022

Table 5: EEA strategic framework working groups (2021-2025) membership composition<sup>68</sup>

Working group	EU Member States	Stakeholders <sup>69</sup>	Other countries <sup>70</sup>	International organisations EU bodies, offices and agencies <sup>71</sup>
Early Childhood Education and Care	27	8	7	4
Schools: Pathways to School Success	27	7	7	6
Schools: Education for Environmental Sustainability	27	3	6	4
Higher Education	27	7	7	6
Vocational Education and Training and the Green Transition	27	10	7	3
Adult Learning – Opening Up Opportunities for All	27	11	6	4
Digital Education: Learning, Teaching and Assessment (DELTA)	27	8	7	7
Equality and Values in Education and Training	26	8	7	6

**Working groups are embedded in the broader governance structure** that coordinates the work and steers the development of the strategic framework for cooperation in education and training, within the overarching objective of achieving and further developing the European Education Area. Working groups report on the state of play and on important intermediate or final outcomes – to the High Level Group in Education and Training, and in the case of the sector-specific working groups, to the Directors-General meetings. The Education Committee is also regularly informed about the state of progress, and can, in turn, bring relevant output to the attention of the Council. Such regular upstream reporting, done directly or via the HLG Coordination Board, provides Member States with an opportunity to give political steering to the WGs in order to ensure that their work is in line with envisaged specific priorities and roadmap towards concrete outcomes.

Working groups provide support to the Commission in **preparing different EEA-related policy initiatives and actions** and also contribute to their **implementation**.<sup>72</sup> This includes addressing the priority areas, concrete issues and actions specified in Annex III of the EEA Strategic framework Resolution.

During the period covered by this report, the working groups covered the following EEA focus areas: quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality in education and training, green and digital transitions, teachers and trainers, higher education, lifelong learning and mobility.

The working groups have been continuously making progress, including for example:

- **Working group on Early Childhood Education and Care** – its main topical focus has been on the [monitoring and evaluation of quality in ECEC](#). The WG is helping Member States implement the *Council Recommendation on high quality ECEC systems (2019)* and its Quality Framework, which is an EEA action in the quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality focus area (see section I.1.2.1. above). It also contributed to teachers and trainers focus area. In addition, the WG had five online meetings to discuss how best to welcome Ukrainian children and families in ECEC systems which are often under-staffed and have been meeting a range of challenges for many years, aggravated by the pandemic. A peer-learning document has also been updated regularly since March and is available to WG members. Finally, the WG has also been

<sup>68</sup> The full list of working group members (and observers) is published in the [Register of Commission Expert Groups and Other Similar Entities](#)

<sup>69</sup> Stakeholders were selected through public calls for applications (29 July and 6 September 2021), open to formally recognised European cross-sectoral bodies and education/training-specific social partner organisations and European civil society/ stakeholder associations whose main activities are in education and training. Based on 72 admissible applications (out of 81 in total), 61 stakeholders have been selected.

<sup>70</sup> Candidate countries and EEA/EFTA countries. Following the granting of the candidate status by the European Council (23 June 2022), the invitation has been extended to the new EU candidate countries Moldova and Ukraine.

<sup>71</sup> UNESCO, OECD, EACEA, FRA, ETF, CEDEFOP, Eurofund, CoE and UNICEF

<sup>72</sup> All Working groups had certain variations in their priorities and planning, due to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.



the place to exchange information on other important initiatives, such as the European Child Guarantee, or developing extra projects for the interested countries, such as the adaptation of SELFIE for Teachers to the ECEC sector.

- The main activities of the **working group Schools, subgroup on Pathways to School Success** have focused on how blended learning approaches can help promote inclusion and school success, as a follow-up to the recent *Council Recommendation on blended learning* and [a contribution to the forthcoming Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success](#). The WG contributed to the focus areas on quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality, green and digital and teachers and trainers (see sections I.1.2.1. to I.1.2.3. above). This working group had the most variations in its priorities and initial planning due to the challenges posed by the war in Ukraine, followed by the unfolding refugee crisis (see *Table 7 below*); as a result, the topics of [competence-based approaches and assessment](#) will be covered at a later stage.
- **Working group Schools, subgroup on Education for Environmental Sustainability** has focused so far on a number of thematic areas, including [whole-school approaches to learning for environmental sustainability, policy design and implementation and sustainability competences in the curriculum](#). The WG contributes to green and digital transition focus area. The WG work is closely related to the *Council Recommendation on Learning for the Green Transition and Sustainable Development* and the *European Sustainability Competence Framework* (a strategic EEA action under the green and digital focus area, see *section I.1.2.2.above*) designed to be complementary to international, national, regional and local efforts and other existing frameworks (e.g. SDG-related frames in higher education; UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development Roadmap etc.).
- The key thematic areas covered by the **working group on Higher Education** focused on the *European strategy for universities*, and on the Council Recommendation on [building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation, two strategic EEA actions under the higher education focus area](#) (see section I.1.2.4. above). The working group also contributed to the transformation of European higher education, the *European Research Area and the Digital Education Action Plan*, and the mutual learning and discussions about the European higher education initiatives. [Lifelong learning and mobility](#) are key topics of the WG, with regular updates on the *European Approach to Micro-credentials for Lifelong Learning and Employability* (a strategic EEA action under the lifelong-learning and mobility focus area – see *section I.1.2.5. above*); implementation of the *2018 Council Recommendation on automatic mutual recognition* and the roll out of the *European Graduate Tracking initiative*. [Green and digital transition](#) has also been a key topic for the WG, with updates on progress in rolling out the *European Student Card* initiative (an action under the higher education focus area, but with an important digital objective) and the *Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Learning for Environmental Sustainability* (a strategic action under the green and digital focus area – see *section I.1.2.2 above*), which were covered in the first and the second WG meetings. The WG contributed to the following focus areas: quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality in education and training, green and digital transition, teachers and trainers, higher education, lifelong learning and mobility (see *sections I.1.2.1 to I.1.2.5. above*).
- In relation to the Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027, **the working group on Digital Education: Learning, Teaching and Assessment** discussed and contributed to [Action 1](#), Structured Dialogue with Member States on digital education and skills and the Council Recommendation on enabling factors for digital education, as well as Action 10, the Council Recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training, . Both are strategic EEA initiatives under the green and digital focus area (see *section I.1.2.2 above*). The WG has had an opportunity to review the six enabling factors for successful digital education and to identify which the ones that are most relevant to them and their organisations and explored approaches and practices relevant to improving the provision of digital skills in education and training. The WG contributed to the following focus areas: quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality in education and training, green and digital transition, teachers and trainers (see *sections I.1.2.1 to I.1.2.3. above*).
- **The working group on Equality and Values** has so far focused on the theme of [gender equality in and through education and training as well as on fighting discrimination](#). It also contributed to the implementation of the *2018 Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching*, thus contributing directly to EEA actions under the quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality focus area (see *section I.1.2.1. above*).

- **The working group on Adult Learning** contributed to four focus areas, quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality in education and training; green and digital transition; teachers and trainers; and lifelong learning and mobility, with the focus on '[Skills for Life](#)', '[Financing of adult learning](#)' and '[National skills strategies](#)' through WG meetings and peer learning activities.
- The main objective of the **working group on Vocational Education and Training and the Green Transition** is to enable technical exchanges and contributions to help countries implement the principles and objectives of the *2020 Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience*, and the *Osnabrück Declaration*, with particular reference to the [green transition](#). The WG contributed to green and digital focus area (see section I.1.2.2. above) and to lifelong learning and mobility (see section I.1.2.5. above).

Apart from contributing to the European Education Area, working groups contribute to various other EU initiatives and strategies, such as European Skills Agenda, EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, European Child Guarantee, European Pillar of Social Rights, Gender equality strategy, EU anti-racism action plan, EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation, LGBTIQ equality strategy, Action plan on integration and inclusion, European democracy action plan, Strategy on rights of persons with disabilities, European Green Deal, EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and Action Plan for the 2030 Digital Compass.

**Box 16 – EEA strategic framework working groups – some illustrative examples of the interim deliverables and main outputs so far:**

- *Input papers/background notes*: input paper on '[Whole-School Approaches to Learning for Sustainability](#)'; input paper on '[Collaboration, partnership and whole-school approaches – Key questions and challenges](#)'; input paper on '[School self-evaluation for sustainability](#)'; input paper on '[Learning for Sustainability: key questions for organising & designing curricula](#)'; background note on '[Monitoring and evaluation of quality in ECEC \(definitions, importance attached and an overview across EU Member States\)](#)'; input paper on '[Digital skills in primary and secondary education](#)'
- *Reports /key messages/policy briefs*: policy brief on '[Effective policy design for learning for sustainability](#)'; survey report on '[Provision of education solutions to support refugee Ukrainian pupils and students](#)'; key messages on '[Organising and designing curriculum and building core competences](#)' (sustainability); key messages on '[Whole school approaches to sustainability](#)'; report on '[Monitoring and evaluating quality in ECEC: purposes, values and principles](#)'

Table 6: Working groups (2021-2025): number of plenary meetings, peer learning activities (PLAs), seminars and other meetings and events (Nov 2021-Nov 2022)

Working group	WG meetings (online/physical)	PLAs	Seminars/ webinars
Early Childhood Education and Care	17 Jan 2022, 17-18 Feb, 31 March – 1 April, 12-13 May, 20-21 June		
Schools: Subgroup on Pathways to School Success	3 and 13 Dec 2021, 1-2 Feb 2022, 19-20 Sept	5-7 October 2022	8 March 2022
Schools: Subgroup Education for environmental sustainability'	31 Jan -1 Feb 2022, 5-6 May, 15-16 Sept, 8-9 December	14-18 March 2022 16-18 November	4 March 2022, 28 April
Higher Education	15 Dec 2021, 16 March 2022 27 April, 13-14 Sept	8-9 June 2022, 27 June tbc	
Vocational Education and Training and the Green Transition	15 Dec 2021, 23 Feb 2022, 7-8 June, 24-25 Nov	24-25 Oct 2022	29 April 2022, 4 Oct
Adult Learning – Opening Up Opportunities for All	27 Jan 2022, 31 March, 20 Sept,	9-10 March 2022 12-13 May, 20-21 Oct	
Digital Education: Learning, Teaching and Assessment (DELTA)*	18 Nov 2021, 26 Jan 2022, 28 March, 12 April, 10 May, 2 June	28-29 June 2022, 26-27 Oct	30 November 2022
Equality and Values in Education and Training	29 Nov 2021, 20 Jan 2022, 10 Feb, 9 June, 22 and 23 Sept	21 April 2022,	

\*WG DELTA: DEAP consultation meetings 28 March, 2 June 2022

Since March 2022, the working groups have also been a **backbone of the EU Education Solidarity Group for Ukraine**, through which the Commission supports EU countries that are hosting children and young people fleeing Ukraine, by pooling available expertise, promoting exchange of good practice and providing guidance. The first dedicated meeting of the Schools working group took place on 24 March 2022, identifying Member State' needs related to ensuring continuity of education of schoolchildren from Ukraine and fine-tuning policy guidance. A number of further working groups' meetings, focus sessions and webinars followed and took stock of Member States' needs and provided a forum for exchanges on effective approaches. In addition, most working groups have set up dedicated online collaboration spaces, which together with the [School Education Gateway](#) further support exchanges within the working groups. (The Gateway provides targeted education and training-related information about displaced children and pupils for schools and teachers, and for those wanting to contribute to refugee solidarity efforts in EU Member States.)

As a result of series of peer learning activities within the EU Education Solidarity Group for Ukraine, in particular within the working group on Schools and the working group on Early Childhood Education and Care, on 30 June the Commission published a Staff Working Document on [Supporting the inclusion of displaced children from Ukraine in education: considerations, key principles and practices for the school year 2022-23](#)<sup>73</sup>, benefiting also from consultation with UNHCR and UNICEF, representatives of ministries of education, stakeholder organisations and NESET<sup>74</sup> experts.

Table 7: Working groups (2021-2025) as part of the EU Education Solidarity Group for Ukraine

WG	Topic	Date
WG HE	Regular WG meeting with a Ukraine-related discussion about Erasmus+ project flexibility and recognition of qualifications.	16 March 2022
WG Schools (Pathways)	Ad hoc WG meeting on welcoming Ukrainian refugee children and young people in schools: identifying MS' needs and fine-tuning policy guidance. Policy guidance document <a href="#">published on SEG</a> .	24 March
WG ECEC	Special WG meeting on welcoming Ukrainian children and families in early childhood education and care (ECEC) across Europe. Taking stock of the needs, identifying the specific challenges for children and their families, exchange of information on measures in place to facilitate access to ECEC across Europe and identifying what the EU can do to support MS and ECEC systems.	25 March 31 March
WG AL	Regular WG meeting with a Ukraine-related discussion focused on support measures to people displaced from Ukraine. Exchange on the main challenges in relation to adult learning.	31 March
WG Schools (Pathways)	Focus session on hiring Ukrainian teachers. Exchange on approaches to/reflections on, for example, identifying and employing Ukrainian teachers, modifications to legislation concerning hiring or professional requirements, refugee student teachers as assistant teachers, and enabling them to continue their initial teacher education.	4 April
WG ECEC	Special WG meeting on providing ECEC in different formats / programmes	5 April
WG Schools (Pathways)	Focus session (open to other WGs) on EU funding opportunities	7 April
WG DELTA	Ad hoc meeting on the provision of digital education solutions for Ukrainian refugee pupils and students	12 April
WG ECEC	Special WG meeting on ECEC staff (supporting staff across the EU + recruiting Ukrainian staff)	22 April
WG Schools (Pathways)	Focus session on how to reach out to and support Ukrainian refugee children not attending school in the host countries and how to link to Ukrainian system	25 April
WG HE meeting	Ukraine-related item on the WG agenda (survey)	27 April

<sup>73</sup> The paper offers a set of suggestions, combining six areas, ranging from reception of displaced children to long-term measures: organising reception and admission processes; preparing education institutions and educational staff to include displaced children; running targeted activities to help include displaced children in education; engaging with displaced families and communities and helping displaced children keep their link with Ukraine; taking long-term measures to promote inclusive education; taking specific measures for early childhood education and care.

<sup>74</sup> Network of Experts working on the Social dimension of Education and Training

WG Equality and Values	Special WG meeting (open to the WG Schools) on talking to children about (the) war, addressing disinformation in wartime, a Ukrainian perspective on history teaching about Ukraine, and preventing segregation of refugees inside and outside the classroom.	28 April
WG Schools (Pathways)	PLA (open to WG Equality and Values) on psycho-social support for refugee children and young people (social and emotional support, ensuring well-being, dealing with trauma, bullying prevention etc.) Repository of tools for teachers and schools in the European Toolkit for Schools.	19-20 May
WG Schools	PLA on language learning support in education for inclusion of children with a migrant background	13-14 June
WG HE WG Schools (Pathways)	Webinar on organisation of entrance exams for students from Ukraine	13 June
WF ECEC	Special WG meeting to review all topics related to welcoming children and families in ECEC; special cooperation project with UNICEF	15 June
WG HE	Webinar on higher education support to Ukraine	27 June
WG Schools (Pathways)	Regular WG meeting with a UA related discussion focused on outstanding issues for the school year 2022-23	19-20 Sept
WG AL	Regular WG meeting with a discussion focused on support measures to persons displaced from Ukraine. Exchange on the main challenges in relation to adult learning	20 Sept
WG Schools (Pathways)	Seminar: Professional recognition of teacher qualifications for people displaced from UA	30 Sept
WG Schools (Pathways)	PLA (Croatia): how can blended learning support inclusion	5-7 October

Working groups' members contribute to the **dissemination of outputs** at European, national, regional and local levels. They have a key role to play in ensuring that exchange of information and the dissemination of the working group results contribute to capacity building and inform policy reforms in Member States and other participating countries. In addition, information about the working groups as well as meetings and main overall outputs and deliverables are published in the [Register of Commission Expert Groups and Other Similar Entities](#) and in the [European Education Area online Portal](#).

In terms of **synergies**, the working groups regularly report on their progress and share their results. This includes consultations on working documents of shared interest or organising joint mutual learning events. Cooperation intensified especially in relation to mobilising support for EU Member States receiving Ukrainian children, pupils and students who have fled Ukraine. The working groups are open to cooperation with other Commission expert groups related to education and training, such as the expert group on quality investment in education and training, the expert group on supportive learning environments and well-being at school, the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks (SGIB), etc.

For example, cooperation with the SGIB concerns identification of evidence and data gaps, development of indicator domains and targets for measuring performance and progress. Another example is the Expert Group on supportive learning environments and well-being at school, feeding into the WG on Equality and Values and the work of the Pathways to school success subgroup on topics such as well-being, learning climate, mental health and fighting bullying and violence. The WG on Higher Education is open for cooperation with relevant European Higher Education Area (EHEA) structures and for creating furtheringsynergies between the higher education dimension of the European Education Area (EEA) and the European Research Area (ERA).

The data from the feedback survey undertaken in June 2022<sup>75</sup> have shown that, overall, members are satisfied with the working group they participate in (9 out of 10 participants reported to be satisfied or very satisfied and have found the working groups to be quite useful or very useful for their work or the work of their organisations). Participants appreciated the opportunity to learn about current and forthcoming developments and practices at EU level and in Member States and to transfer this to their own context. Amongthe most useful

<sup>75</sup> The online survey was conducted by Ecorys, on behalf of the European Commission, across all the working groups, and ran from 8 to 17 June 2022. The main objective was to receive members' feedback on the overall satisfaction and usefulness of the working groups since their establishment, including on methodology, current and possible new priority topics and the work carried out on issues related to the invasion of Ukraine. There was a total of 161 survey responses, with an overwhelming majority (N = 120) from representatives of Member States or other participating countries.

activities, respondents mentioned peer-learning activities, presentations and good practices from Member States and other organisations, and discussions related to Ukraine.

Although in general participants are satisfied with the online meetings to date (almost 9 out of 10 participants have been satisfied with the online meetings), in future most would prefer a mix of online and in-person meetings. However, the responses do not show a clear preference towards one or the other type of meeting (45% of participants said that they would like a mix, but with more online meetings; and 41% of participants wanted a mix, but with more in-person meetings). The overwhelming majority of respondents (86%) have found it 'easy to very easy' to access and participate in the meetings using the online tools used (MS Teams / Webex), and only a small number of them (9%) have found this very difficult. When it comes to using MS Teams as an online cooperation tool, almost 6 out of 10 respondents reported that they have found it quite useful or very useful to the work of the Groups, while approximately 2 out of 10 respondents said they have found it slightly useful. Members confirmed a strong link between the activities under working groups and the six EEA focus areas. The top three focus areas that have been reported to have the closest link with the working groups are green and digital transitions (50% of respondents), quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality (48% of respondents) and lifelong learning and mobility (39% of respondents). Participants identified different European and EU-level initiatives to which the working groups have, in their view, contributed, such as the European Higher Education Area, European Research Area, European Skills Agenda, Upskilling pathways- new opportunities for adults, Action Plan 2030 Digital Compass, European Green Deal, Osnabrück Declaration, Council recommendation on VET, EU Strategy on rights of the child, European Child Guarantee, Anti-racism action plan, Roma Strategy, Rights on people with disabilities, and the Action plan on integration and inclusion. Concerning possible adjustments to the topics being addressed by the working groups in view of future work programmes as of 2023, the vast majority of participants did not report any need for specific adjustments. In relation to the work carried out on issues related to the invasion in Ukraine, a large majority of respondents (85%) reported that their working group have addressed these issues and that they were either satisfied (47%) or very satisfied (30%) with the way their working groups addressed these issues. In terms of future expectations, 59% of respondents reported that their working group should continue addressing the issues related to the invasion of Ukraine (of which 62% reported that their working group should continue addressing the issues related to the invasion of Ukraine with the same weight/focus as now), while 9% believe their working group should not continue to address these issues. Broadly speaking, respondents said there is a need to follow the practices that Member States are implementing to support the inclusion of refugee students, so that useful conclusions could be drawn. Some of the suggestions for potential Ukraine-related issues to be discussed by the working groups include financing, digital learning solutions, skills development and recognition, language learning and psychosocial effects on student performance.

#### II.1.4. Other fora and channels for co-creation

Making the European Education Area a reality by 2025 has been a truly **co-creative process between the European Commission, the Member States and various stakeholders**.

The annual **European Education Summits** represent a major stocktaking moment, and bring together policymakers, stakeholders and European institutions to contribute to the creation of the European Education Area and discuss specific issues related to it.

Furthermore, the wider stakeholder community has been engaged in the process of co-creating the EEA through participating in many **targeted and open public consultations** organised by the Commission.

#### Box 17 – Pathways to School Success – Example of co-creation and consultation

A first consultation of policymakers took place during the Directors-General for Schools meeting (March 2021), where several workshops addressed issues relevant for the Pathways to School Success initiative. From May to September 2021, workshops were organised with representatives from Member States, organisations active in education and experts from academia. From 24 June until 30 September 2021, a public consultation was also open to gather input and hear the views of interested individuals and organisations. This public consultation gathered a total of 309 responses and 25 position papers. Based on this consultation and findings from research, a proposal for a Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success and its accompanying Staff Working Document were adopted on 30 June.

Feedback and interaction with stakeholders and national and local authorities also took place through **various EU online tools and communities of practice** – such as the Pathways to School Success initiative through the [School Education Gateway](#), [eTwinning](#) and the [European Toolkit for Schools](#), 'all of which have been merged with the new [European School Education Platform as well as the EPAL Community of European VET practitioners](#).

Other examples are the **Education for Climate Coalition** (a strategic EEA action – *see section I.1.2.2. above*) and the **Digital Education Hub**. The Education for Climate Coalition is a bottom-up initiative aiming to engage the education community at EU, national and local level. The Coalition is a key instrument for effectively capturing and sharing initiatives and projects from the educational community in support of the transition to climate neutrality. The Digital Education Hub serves as a space for information sharing, exchange and cooperation, enabling innovation in digital education.

The work on EEA initiatives has also benefited from inputs from different **networks supported by the Commission**, such as Eurydice<sup>76</sup> or NESET<sup>77</sup> and EENEE<sup>78</sup>, which provide policymakers and the broad education and training community with data and European-level analysis.

Alongside this, the Commission cooperated closely with relevant **international organisations**, in particular the OECD, the Council of Europe, UNESCO, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE).

Two of the many examples of cooperation with the OECD are the **School Resources Review** and the **Higher Education Resources** projects. This analytical work has fed into the cost-effectiveness analysis carried out by the Commission expert group on quality investment in education and training, and contributes to the EEA's ambition of strengthening the work on investment (*see section I.2.1. above*). Close cooperation continued also with the Council of Europe, for instance with its European Centre for Modern Languages, through the cooperation agreement 'Innovative methodologies and assessment in language learning' or through the INSCHOOL project on inclusive education. Cooperation with UNESCO focused especially on education for sustainable development. The Commission has been using evidence from IEA's studies to support the work towards achieving the EEA. The International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS) is used to monitor progress towards the EU-level target on low achieving eighth-graders in digital skills, as agreed by the Council of the EU (see section II.2. below).

Moreover, the European Commission supports **cross-sectoral cooperation** and mutual learning, for example through the **Bologna Follow-up Group and its working and advisory groups**, of which it is a member. To increase synergies between the higher education dimension of the EEA, the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area, an Ad Hoc Taskforce was established in May 2021. In December 2021, the Taskforce proposed a way forward for streamlined and strengthened cooperation between the EHEA, the higher education dimension of the EEA and the ERA, building on the respective cooperation structures. Areas that were identified as being in particular need of synergies were: academic freedom, academic and research careers, transnational cooperation, innovative and transdisciplinary learning, teaching and research, open science/education, service to society, social dimension and sustainability. It was concluded that synergies should be created, not by adding structures or parallel processes, but rather in a fit-for-purpose and flexible manner – for example in the form of regular exchanges of information, ad hoc invitations to attend meetings which discuss the topical areas for cooperation, joint meetings and events, and, more broadly, by considering the whole higher education sector when developing policies, tools and instruments.

### II.1.5. EEA Portal for enhanced transparency, dissemination and impact

The **European Education Area Portal** was established in January 2022. Its creation came at the request of EU Member States and stakeholders, to strengthen the dissemination and communication of the results of European cooperation in education and training. Since then, the portal has acted as a public gateway to the actions and services of the European Education Area, becoming a key point of reference. It ensures

<sup>76</sup> <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/>

<sup>77</sup> Network of experts working on the social dimension of education and training

<sup>78</sup> European Expert Network on Economics of Education

**transparency and access to information on strategic framework activities and outputs, and encourages cooperation and exchange** among a diverse network of stakeholders by better promoting online community spaces.

Notably, the portal **facilitates access** to:

- Digital education resources for learners, educators and parents
- The outputs of the European Education Area strategic framework working groups and other stakeholders
- Specific online community spaces enabling collaboration and the exchange of information between stakeholders, such as the School Education Gateway and eTwinning
- Engagement opportunities, such as volunteering, taking part in educational exchanges and participating in online events
- Project funding and employment opportunities

The portal has strengthened links between the European Education Area and information on Erasmus+ and other key EU funding programmes, which enable the realisation of the Commission’s vision for barrier-free access to quality education for all. The **dedicated funding section** has been expanded and funding opportunities are now more closely connected to related policy priorities, and more intuitive for users to access. Synergies have also been enhanced with the European Research Area, by connecting information on this initiative to that on the European Education Area’s higher education actions.

By encouraging the exposure of diverse stakeholders to EU education and training opportunities and the European Education Area’s outputs, it has contributed to **enhancing inclusion and strengthened the outreach and impact** of these activities.

The portal has helped to make information available about the **common European response to the COVID-19 pandemic** and how online learning materials have helped ensure that education and training activities could continue. More recently, it has played a central role in **disseminating information to those affected by the Russian invasion of Ukraine** – both in the field of education and training, and beyond.

In doing so, the portal has become a main feature of the European Education Area strategic framework. The Commission will work to further develop this online resource, to **continue to enhance transparency and access to information** on education and training opportunities and outputs, and to **boost the impact** of these activities.

## II.2. Improved performance monitoring and analysis of progress towards EU-level targets

### II.2.1. Introduction

The February 2021 EEA [Strategic framework Resolution](#) mentions two key strands for Commission work on data analysis and indicator development:

*“Conduct work on proposals, based on and with the expert opinion of the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks, for possible indicators or EU-level targets in the areas of inclusion and equity, of the teaching profession as well as of sustainability, including greening of education and training systems.*

*Work with the Member States to analyse how to improve data collection and analysis for existing EU-level targets and indicators, with a view to fostering evidence-informed policymaking, including with the expertise of the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks, and report back to the Council on these discussions.”*

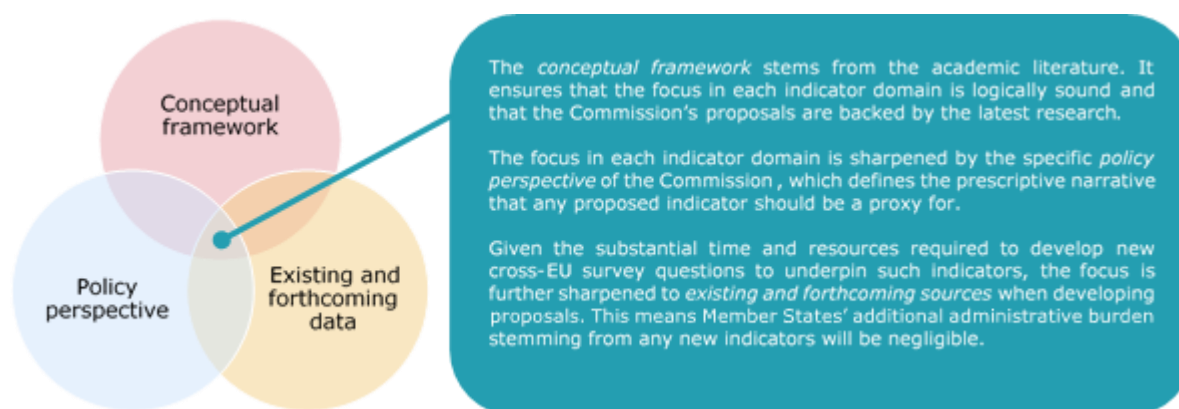
In line with these two commitments, this chapter distinguishes between two different work strands, concerning (a) three domains for new indicators or EU-level targets; and (b) the monitoring of existing EU-level targets<sup>79</sup>. The Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks (SGIB) is “*the first forum of discussion on the shared EU-level targets and indicators and future areas of focus*”<sup>80</sup>. The Commission continues to optimise synergies between the work of the SGIB and the work of, inter alia, the Employment Committee Indicators Group (EMCO IG) and the Indicators’ Sub-Group (ISG) of the Social Protection Committee (SPC). The two work strands detailed below are linked to other frameworks such as the European Pillar of Social Rights’ social scoreboard.

Across the two work strands, the objective is to upgrade the Commission’s performance monitoring of Member States’ education and training systems. The upgrade comprises, firstly, a **more comprehensive set of supporting indicators**, deepening the Commission’s knowledge base. Secondly, the upgrade enables a **more meaningful interpretation** to feed into the Commission’s EEA policy development and communication.

## II.2.2. Three domains for new EU-level indicators or targets

The EEA Strategic framework Resolution invites the Commission to develop possible indicators or EU-level targets in the areas of (a) inclusion and equity; (b) the teaching profession; and (c) sustainability, including greening of education and training systems. Each of the three policy domains may seem broad, but it should be noted that choices are narrowed down when considering in tandem (largely established) conceptual frameworks, the specific angle of Commission policy guidance and a focus on existing and forthcoming sources (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. A Venn diagram to illustrate the potentially minimal overlap between the three enablers of new indicator domains**



The three enablers in Figure 1 codetermine the sequencing of the work strands on the three new indicator domains. First up is the domain of inclusion and equity, for which the Commission has finalised its proposal (see section II.2.2.1 below). Next is the domain of the teaching profession, for which a first proposal has been tabled for a December 2022 SGIB discussion (see section II.2.2.2 below). Third is the domain of sustainability, for which a provisional approach is to be developed in 2023 (see section II.2.2.3 below).

### II.2.2.1. Inclusion and equity

An equitable, inclusive system is about fairness, equality of opportunity and the chance to realise one’s potential. It does not mean that all students achieve the same results, but rather that performance is decoupled from personal circumstances that stem from the randomness of birth.

<sup>79</sup> As per the EEA [Strategic framework Resolution](#), existing EU-level target domains concern: (1) low achieving 15-year-olds in basic skills; (2) low achieving eighth-graders in digital skills; (3) participation in early childhood education and care; (4) early leavers from education and training; (5) tertiary level attainment; (6) exposure of VET graduates to work-based learning; and (7) participation of adults in learning.

<sup>80</sup> EEA [Strategic framework Resolution](#), OJ 2021/C 66/01.



All existing EU-level target domains feature a particular focus on inclusion and equity (and, in addition, feature individual-level background characteristics such as gender and migrant background). These aspects should be explicitly referred to when discussing the new EU-level indicator on equity in education. The new EU-level indicator brings the conversation closer to the root of the problem, thereby supporting future progress also in the existing EU-level target domains<sup>81</sup>.

The underlying data for the new EU-level indicator come from the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which the Commission also uses for an existing EU-level target on the underachievement of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science. Progress on this long-standing "early warning" indicator has been negligible, which may be due in part to the root problem of inequity not being tackled sufficiently,

However, the new EU-level indicator focuses on the relationship between socio-economic status<sup>82</sup> and a broad measure of severe educational underperformance: the share of 15-year-olds recording a low achievement in reading, mathematics and science simultaneously<sup>83</sup>. As documented in the 2022 Education and Training Monitor, the new EU-level indicator illustrates a strong intergenerational transmission of educational poverty and exclusion.

#### Box 18: The new EU-level indicator for equity in education

The share of underachievement in reading, maths and science (combined) among 15-year-olds in the lowest quarter of the index for economic, social and cultural status (ESCS). The two comparators are (1) the country average share of underachievement and (2) the share of underachievement among the highest quarter of the ESCS index.

Source: OECD, Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

Of course, no single indicator can capture the complex, multifaceted concept of equitable education. The main indicator is therefore accompanied by supporting indicators that put a much-needed spotlight on context and policy levers. The collection of supporting indicators is to be strengthened over time.

As regards context, supporting indicators include the out-of-school rate among 15-year-olds<sup>84</sup>, the share of underachievement among fourth graders by their parents' highest level of education attained<sup>85</sup>, the share of 15 year-olds expecting to complete tertiary education by ESCS quartile and a proxy for school segregation<sup>86</sup>. As regards policy levers, supporting indicators highlight various financial and non-financial top-level measures to improve equity in both school education and higher education<sup>87</sup>.

Finally, it is worth noting that, in the domain of inclusion and equity, existing and forthcoming data are still more restrictive than the conceptual framework and the policy perspective. It is therefore inevitable that a number of sub-dimensions prominent in many conceptual frameworks and policy narratives are omitted from the proposal outlined above, at least until data regularity and country coverage improves<sup>88</sup>. It is for this reason

<sup>81</sup> The 2022 Education and Training Monitor features numerous examples. Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion are 7.5 percentage points less likely to participate in formal childcare. Young people whose parents have a low level of education are 9 times more likely to leave education and training prematurely and 48.6 percentage points less likely to attain a tertiary educational qualification when compared to young people whose parents have a high level of education.

<sup>82</sup> In the academic literature, socio-economic status is found to be a key driver of educational achievement and educational attainment. Indeed, the EEA Communication sets "decoupling educational attainment and achievement from social, economic and cultural status" as the primary objective regarding inclusion, and explicitly refers to the "[...] tailored policy support to Member States in their efforts to raise competence levels, with a special attention to decoupling educational attainment from socio-economic background".

<sup>83</sup> It is worth mentioning that the gap in underachievement between the bottom and top quarter of this index has been considered in the context of the European Pillar of Social Rights' "social scoreboard" and the Joint Employment Report (JER). However, using PISA microdata, the main indicator proposed here differs slightly, as it combines the PISA skill domains of reading, maths and science, to create a broad proxy of severe educational underperformance without restricting the analysis to a single skill domain.

<sup>84</sup> This indicator combines UNESCO-UIS/OECD/Eurostat (UOE) demography and enrolment statistics.

<sup>85</sup> This is the share of underachievement in maths and science (combined), using data from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

<sup>86</sup> This indicator follows the "isolation index" of OECD's PISA and captures the extent to which students from the lowest quarter of socio-economic status are concentrated in the same schools.

<sup>87</sup> Underlying data are to be collected regularly through the Eurydice Network as of 2023, based on the [2020 Eurydice report](#) on equity in school education and the [2022 Eurydice report](#) on equity in higher education.

<sup>88</sup> Specific disadvantaged groups are not (yet) covered by the supporting indicators, due to a lack of regular comparative data for a majority of Member States. Examples are young people from racial and ethnic minorities who are marginalised and/or discriminated

that the Commission regards the supporting indicators as an ongoing “work in progress”, subject to new insights and data availabilities<sup>89</sup>.

### 11.2.2.2. Teaching profession

The EEA Strategic framework Resolution recognises teachers as one of the most valuable assets to achieving its aims, with a strategic priority focused entirely on teachers and the teaching profession. EU policy coordination is geared towards a wide array of different aspects, such as strengthening recruitment, selection, training and professional development, and the development of national career frameworks and lifelong career guidance. Indicator development on the teaching profession will be guided by the Commission’s policy perspective<sup>90</sup> and aligned with the findings of the Schools working group. The consultation of the SGIB remains in progress.

The sheer number of policy-relevant sub-dimensions suggests that a dashboard of multiple indicators may suit the domain of the teaching profession better than a single, main indicator. The outcome is envisaged to be a **dashboard of multiple equivalent indicators**, using the attractiveness of the teaching profession as a narrative focus, while capturing its most relevant sub-dimensions (such as teacher supply and demand; professional development; structures and working conditions; and emotional well-being and motivation). Indicators may be of a quantitative or qualitative nature. They capture the central (national or regional) level and should be considered in the context of meaningfully capturing country-level variation in a cross-EU comparison.

Cross-EU sources for quantitative and structural indicators include the [Eurostat data on teaching staff](#), [Eurydice data](#) on national legislation and teaching practices<sup>91</sup>, the OECD’s PISA (with several teacher-related indicators) and – perhaps most prominently – the OECD’s Teaching and Learning International Survey ([TALIS](#))<sup>92</sup>, the next iteration of which is planned for 2024. TALIS 2024 will expand the scope from lower secondary education to cover early childhood education and care, primary education and upper secondary education.

### 11.2.2.3. Sustainability and greening of education and training systems

The [European Green Deal](#) and the [EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#) highlight the key role of schools, higher education and other training institutions for a successful green transition. The [2022 Council Recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development](#)<sup>93</sup> outlines the main policy lines that will place sustainability at the core of education and training.

The development of indicators to monitor progress in this policy area is at a preliminary stage. The aim is to translate the policy perspective into a conceptual framework, which can then be checked against data availabilities and data gaps to be filled by forthcoming collections. Below we outline possible avenues for a future main indicator, as well as for future supporting indicators. A provisional approach is currently planned to be tabled for discussion with the SGIB in 2023.

---

against, and young people with special educational needs/disabilities. Equality of treatment is another major sub-dimension that is not (yet) covered by the supporting indicators. Further investigation remains necessary to be able to capture the sub-dimension of discrimination, as well as notion of self-reported (outcome and experience) data by young people. The sub-dimension of inclusion and equity, as taught in education and training curricula, currently falls beyond the scope of the supporting indicators.

<sup>89</sup> This also links to a longer-term objective to support the Commission-wide push for disaggregated data. Indeed, the Commission is conducting a wider examination of the obstacles to collecting “equality data” and of promoting the exchange of best practices. This is to encourage Member States, in full respect of their national contexts, to move towards the collection of data that is disaggregated on the basis of all the relevant discrimination grounds.

<sup>90</sup> See, most notably, the 2017 Communication “School development and excellent teaching for a great start in life” ([COM/2017/0248 final](#)).

<sup>91</sup> Eurydice also publishes an annual report on teachers’ salaries and allowances, and in 2021 published a [report](#) on careers, development and well-being.

<sup>92</sup> Participation in TALIS by EU countries is co-funded under Erasmus+.

<sup>93</sup> To prepare the Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability, DG Education and Culture commissioned a [report](#) mapping Member States’ relevant policies and approaches for environmental sustainability). Findings indicated that many EU countries embed environmental sustainability in their education and training policy strategies, but clear action plans are lacking. Furthermore, learning for environmental sustainability is rarely a cross-sectoral and cross-curricular issue and few countries provide clear definitions of sustainability competences and related learning outcomes.

The focus of a main indicator<sup>94</sup> could be the development of sustainable competences: knowledge, skills and attitudes to live, work and act in a sustainable manner, as defined in the new [European sustainability competence framework](#)<sup>95</sup> prepared by the Commission.

Additional evidence may inspire further context indicators. The European Expert Network on Economics of Education (EENEE) prepared a [report](#) on the impact of COVID-19 on education for sustainable development. The Commission and the OECD have reviewed the evidence on environmental sustainability competence, drawing on the results of PISA 2018 and earlier assessments<sup>96</sup>. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) has published a [scale of environmental science](#) based on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). The IEA's International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) is also a possible source of evidence<sup>97</sup>.

When it comes to policy levers, the objective is to capture the enabling framework supporting sustainable competences, including dimensions such as curricula and the continuing professional development of staff. Another important policy lever refers to the notion of a “whole-institution-approach”. For instance, do countries encourage networks and partnerships between education providers and local and wider communities, to seek joint innovative and creative solutions on learning for sustainability? Do they promote green investment, new sustainable education and training infrastructure, and/or renovate existing buildings (‘greening of education infrastructure’)<sup>98</sup>? Is learning for environmental sustainability a cross-sectoral and cross-curricular issue in terms of the pedagogical approach?

### II.2.3. Supporting indicators for the existing EU-level target domains

A comprehensive monitoring of EU averages and Member State progress towards existing EU-level targets requires supporting indicators to shed light on related phenomena, disaggregation, embedded context and policy levers<sup>99</sup>. Such supporting indicators allow for a sharpened regular monitoring at EU-level. Moreover, openness about the indicators used in Commission assessments means increased transparency for Member States and other stakeholders.

The Commission has developed a [Monitor Toolbox](#) with supporting indicators in all seven EU-level target domains, as set out below<sup>100</sup>. This toolbox links each main indicator to the broader policy objectives of the EEA [Communication](#) and the EEA [Strategic framework Resolution](#), as well as the latest EU policy context in each respective domain. The Monitor Toolbox is intended to underpin regular rounds of monitoring at EU level, such

<sup>94</sup> Ongoing work on learning for environmental sustainability stresses the importance of the learning and teaching necessary for personal, social and environmental well-being, both now and in the future. It should help people of all ages to become more aware of, sensitive to and knowledgeable about environmental issues, including the climate crisis. Learners of all ages need to be able to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and mindset to live more sustainably.

<sup>95</sup> The European sustainability competence framework is the result of a participatory research methodology based on consensus building. The framework comprises 12 competences organised into four areas relating to sustainability values, complexity, futures and agency. All sustainability competences are interrelated and equally important. They are composed of interlinked knowledge, skills and attitudes. The framework aims to be a reference tool for individuals and institutions that want to embed the sustainability competence into education and training settings by adapting it to fit local circumstances and learner needs.

<sup>96</sup> Two reports were published in September 2022. The first one, “*Young people’s environmental sustainability competence: emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and attitudinal dimensions in EU and OECD countries*”, links the results of PISA to the Commission’s GreenComp framework and maps young people’s environmental sustainability competence. It analyses differences in environmental sustainability competence between boys and girls and between students with a different socio-economic background. The second one, “*The environment sustainability competence toolbox: from leaving a better planet for our children to leaving better children for our planet*”, considers the extent to which education systems have equipped students with competences such as collaborative problem-solving, familiarity with digital tools and financial literacy.

<sup>97</sup> The survey includes questionnaire items related to environmental sustainability, for example on activities such as energy and water saving or recycling), on campaigns to raise people’s awareness of environmental issues or on the extent to which a school implements practices, such as differential waste collection, waste reduction, purchasing of environmentally friendly items, energy-saving practices or encouraging environmentally-friendly behaviour by students.

<sup>98</sup> Sources for the stock of sustainable infrastructure are severely limited. For example, Eurostat publishes comparable data on the share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption by sector (transport, electricity or heating and cooling), but there is no information available about electricity in education and training institutions. A main source of information that can be monitored is the investment directed to these institutions, starting with EU funds, in particular the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).

<sup>99</sup> Policy levers will be captured with “structural indicators” by the Eurydice network, on an annual basis as of 2023.

<sup>100</sup> An eighth item in the Monitor Toolbox concerns equity, following the work set out in section II.2.2.1.

as the Education and Training Monitor. The toolbox is meant to evolve alongside policy priorities, and as new cross-EU data become available.

### *II.2.3.1. A toolbox for early childhood education and care*

The main indicator “Participation in early childhood education and care” (ECEC) is captured by the joint UNESCO-UIS/OECD/Eurostat (UOE) data collection. It details the share of children between 3 years old and the national starting age for compulsory primary education who are participating in ECEC programmes that fall under the ISCED 0 category. The EU-level target is for this share to be at least 96% by 2030.

This main indicator, based on the administrative UOE data collection, can be broken down by age, sex and NUTS 2 regions. Other possible breakdowns are by type of institution or intensity of participation. The main indicator based on the administrative UOE data collection can also be computed for different age brackets, such as pupils from age 0 to each country’s starting age for compulsory primary education and pupils under the age of 3.

The EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) provide the data for a parallel participation indicator: children in formal childcare. Disaggregating the data according to parental income, or children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, allows for a specific equity angle to be added to the overall picture. Apart from equity, the quality of ECEC provision is the focus of future additions to the toolbox for ECEC. Access, curriculum, staff, governance and funding and evaluation and monitoring, the five principles making up the quality framework for ECEC<sup>101</sup>, an important EEA action under the quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality focus area<sup>102</sup>, inform the selection of policy levers as of 2023.

Participation in ECEC is widely monitored both inside and outside the Commission, partly because of its dual policy implication of (a) giving children a strong start and (b) facilitating parental labour market participation. As an example of the former, the global education community, as part of the [UN 2030 agenda for sustainable development](#), acknowledges early childhood education and care under SDG-4<sup>103</sup>. As an example of the latter, the 4 March 2021 [European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#), endorsed during the 7-8 May 2021 Porto Social Summit, refers to an increase in the provision of formal childcare as one of the means to achieve the 78% employment rate by 2030<sup>104</sup>. The Action Plan also envisages a revision of the Barcelona targets<sup>105</sup>, following the [2022 Commission proposal](#) for a Council Recommendation.

A [benchmarking framework](#) on childcare and support to children has been established by the Social Protection Committee of the Council in October 2021. It aims to monitor two key aspects of principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights – children’s right to affordable ECEC of good quality (principle 11a) and children’s right to protection from poverty (principle 11b). More specifically, it aims to monitor children’s (i) adequate access to resources, and (ii) access to quality services.

### *II.2.3.2. A toolbox for early school leaving*

The main indicator “Early leavers from education and training” (ELET) is captured by [EU Labour Force Survey \(LFS\)](#) data. It details the share of the population aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary educational attainment and no longer in formal or non-formal education or training. The EU-level target is for this share to be below 9% by 2030. In the European Pillar of Social Rights’ [social scoreboard](#), the share of early leavers from education and training is included as a headline indicator.

The toolbox for ELET covers similar indicators such as upper secondary educational attainment, and links to the [reinforced Youth Guarantee](#) with, for instance, a focus on the young people not in employment, education or

<sup>101</sup> As per the [2019 Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems](#).

<sup>102</sup> See section I.1.2.1. above.

<sup>103</sup> More specifically, SDG-4’s “Target 4.2” for 2030 is to “ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education”. One underlying indicator is the participation rate in organised learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by gender.

<sup>104</sup> The European Pillar of Social Rights’ “[social scoreboard](#)” already included, as a headline indicator, the share of children aged less than 3 years in formal childcare. The Barcelona target (see below) is also focused on formal childcare. The data source for this indicator is the [EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions \(SILC\)](#).

<sup>105</sup> The 2002 Barcelona European Council set two targets on childcare facilities for pre-school children, aiming for the share of children attending formal childcare to be 90% from age 3 until mandatory school age and 33% of children under 3.

training (NEET) who have the lowest level of education. As of 2023, the toolbox for ELET will also cover prevention and early intervention efforts, with a special focus on dimensions emphasised in the Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on *Pathways to School Success* (a strategic EEA action under the quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality focus area<sup>106</sup>). These include multidisciplinary support teams and strategies for promoting a positive school climate.

### *II.2.3.3. A toolbox for work-based learning in VET*

The main indicator “Exposure of VET graduates to work-based learning” (WBL) is captured by the EU Labour Force Survey (LFS) as of 2021, meaning that the underlying data were published for the first time in 2022. It details the share of individuals aged 20-34 who graduated from medium-level VET programmes 0-3 years prior and had gained at least one month of work experience<sup>107</sup> as part of the curriculum<sup>108</sup>. The EU target is for at least 60% of recent graduates from VET<sup>109</sup> to benefit from exposure to WBL during their vocational education and training by 2025.

Because the underlying data are brand new this year, the toolbox of supporting indicators is still a work in progress. It is an opportunity for the Commission to link the target domain to the other targets and priorities set out in the [2020 Council Recommendation on VET for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience](#), as well as the [2020 Osnabrück Declaration on VET as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies](#).

For now, the toolbox for WBL in VET mentions a breakdown of the main indicator by gender and type of remuneration, and the exposure to work-based learning for a longer period (seven months or more). Context indicators include enrolment by programme orientation at secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary and tertiary levels, enrolment in VET programmes by field of education, participation of VET students in mobility programmes under Erasmus+ and the employment rate of recent VET graduates.

In the future, the toolbox for WBL in VET may include additional indicators on initial VET students with direct access to tertiary education, young VET graduates in further education and training, and the provision of continuing vocational training in companies (CVTS). The Commission also envisages exploring new data on apprenticeships as a reason for having a temporary job/work contract of limited duration (LFS)<sup>110</sup>.

### *II.2.3.4. A toolbox for tertiary educational attainment*

The main indicator “Tertiary level attainment” is captured by EU LFS data. It details the share of the population aged 25-34 with such higher educational attainment. The EU-level target is for this share to be at least 45% by 2030. In the [social scoreboard](#), the share of tertiary educational attainment is included as a secondary indicator.

A toolbox with supporting indicators is an opportunity to link to the 2022 [European strategy for universities](#) and the [2022 Council Recommendation](#) on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation (a strategic EEA action under the higher education focus area)– both of which single out a number of priorities for the sector<sup>111</sup>. A key element of the toolbox is a richer focus on entry flows, enrolment and graduates – allowing for a more in-depth annual monitoring of higher education statistics, which also covers the topic of gender stereotypes. As of 2023, this will be complemented by structural indicators for policy levers such as admission criteria, flexible learning pathways and rules for credit allocation/transfer.

<sup>106</sup> See section I.1.2.1. above.

<sup>107</sup> At a workplace in a market or non-market unit (i.e. in a company, government institution or non-profit organisation).

<sup>108</sup> This refers to the formal VET programme at ISCED level 3 (upper secondary) and 4 (post-secondary non-tertiary) that led to the highest level of education successfully completed. If a respondent had several periods of work experience, the cumulative duration of all these periods is considered. Periods of work experience are expressed in full-time equivalents.

<sup>109</sup> The 60% target applies only to graduates from upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary VET [whereas the LFS data will also include work-based learning in general education and in higher education].

<sup>110</sup> Future policy levers could touch on enabling factors related to the target domain (WBL in VET, apprenticeships) and additional dimensions (measures to increase the labour market relevance of VET, permeability between VET and higher education, measures to increase participation in CVET and others).

<sup>111</sup> See section I.1.2.4. above.

### II.2.3.5. A toolbox for adult learning

The main indicator “Participation of adults in learning” is captured every 2 years by the EU Labour Force Survey as of 2022, with the first data available as of 2023. It details the share of adults aged 25-64 that have participated in formal or non-formal learning during the previous 12 months. The [2021 Council Resolution on a new European Agenda for Adult Learning 2021-2030](#) confirms a two-stage approach to the corresponding EU-level target. Adult learning should increase to at least 47% by 2025<sup>112</sup> and reach at least 60% by 2030<sup>113</sup>. This two-stage approach is linked to fact that the data supporting this main indicator will only be available as of 2023<sup>114</sup>.

For that same reason, a toolbox for adult learning is still a work in progress. Future supporting indicators may be informed by objectives expressed in the [European Skills Agenda](#) and the [social scoreboard](#). The future toolbox may include similar indicators from a different data source (the Adult Education Survey) and context indicators, such as the highest level of education attained among 25-64 year-olds and the digital skills of the adult population in general. Policy levers may draw inspiration from the [2022 Council Recommendation](#) on individual learning accounts.

For now, the toolbox for adult learning mentions the participation rate in education and training during the last 4 weeks by type of learning (which can be further broken down by age and education attainment level), the participation rate in education and training during the last 4 weeks by the students' own education attainment level and that of their parents.; and the participation rate in education and training during the last 4 weeks, by degree of urbanisation.

### II.2.3.6. A toolbox for key competences and basic skills

The main indicator “Low achieving 15-year-olds in basic skills” is captured by the OECD’s PISA. It details the share of 15-year-olds who do not reach level 2 on the PISA scale for reading, mathematics or science<sup>115</sup>. The EU-level target is for all three shares to be below 15% by 2030.

When it comes to supporting indicators for this target domain, the Commission intends to broaden the focus to include other key competences, in line with the [2018 Council Recommendation](#) on key competences for lifelong learning and the more recent EEA objective on mastering transversal skills<sup>116</sup>. Apart from the above-mentioned basic skills, this means capturing multilingual competence, personal, social and learning to learn competence, citizenship competence, entrepreneurship competence and cultural awareness and expression competence. Digital skills are covered in a standalone target domain (*see section II.2.3.7*) and green skills will be covered in a future standalone domain too (*see section II.2.2.3*).

Such a broader focus enriches the Commission’s annual monitoring of educational *achievement* across the EU, while ensuring that the evidence base supporting all key competences gains traction. Having said that, the available cross-EU indicators remain limited for a number of key competences. Forthcoming sources comprise the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2022 and the foreign language assessment in PISA 2025.

<sup>112</sup> The 2025 target originates in the EEA Strategic Framework Resolution.

<sup>113</sup> The 2030 target originates in the [European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#) and the ensuing [Porto Declaration](#). EU employment and social affairs ministers also presented their national targets on 16 June 2022.

<sup>114</sup> The Commission, in cooperation with the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks (SGIB), will assess the new 2-yearly LFSLabour Force Survey data when first available in 2023 and compare results with those yielded by the Adult Education Survey. This assessment is to feed into possible changes to the LFSLabour Force Survey methodology and/or advise the Council on a re-evaluation of the target level for 2025.

<sup>115</sup> As a concrete example, for the 2018 reading proficiency scale, this meant a score between 407 and 479. Readers at Level 2 can identify the main idea in a piece of text of moderate length. They can understand relationships or construe meaning within a limited part of the text when the information is not prominent, by producing basic inferences, and/or when the text(s) include some distracting information. Across the total OECD sample, 77.4% are at or above this level.

<sup>116</sup> *See the table with EEA objectives in section I.1.1.* Mastering general skills is the EEA objective that the highest number of EEA actions address (25 out of the 40 actions).

The toolbox currently mentions the percentage of students by number of foreign languages studied in primary and secondary education, young people's attitudes and behaviours with respect to e.g. politics or engagement in political and civic activities (Youth Survey 2021), and the extent to which training in creating or managing small or medium-sized businesses is incorporated within the education and training system (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor). The toolbox also covers context indicators for basic skills such as recommended annual instruction time, the degree of flexibility in time allocation, and the share of classes devoted to each basic skills domain.

Future structural indicators could potentially focus on "horizontal enablers" that can be expected to benefit the development of most – if not all – key competences in an education and training system. Such enablers include cross-discipline learning, whole-school approaches, learner continuity, cross-sectoral cooperation, active participation and decision-making by learners, guidance and support for innovative learning methodologies<sup>117</sup>, and competence-oriented approaches in initial teacher education, continuing professional development and staff exchanges. Other "horizontal enablers" may include individual learning accounts<sup>118</sup> and micro-credentials<sup>119</sup>.

### *II.2.3.7. A toolbox for digital skills*

The main indicator "Low achieving eighth-graders in digital skills" is captured by the [International Computer and Information Literacy Study](#) (ICILS), as collected and administered by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). It details the share of pupils in their eighth year of schooling (aged about 13 to 14) performing below the level 2 threshold on the ICILS computer and information literacy achievement scale<sup>120</sup>. The EU-level target is for this share to be below 15% by 2030. The EU-level target is a direct follow-up to Action 11 in the Commission's [Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027](#) (DEAP).

ICILS is conducted every five years, with the next data collection scheduled for 2023, and data release in 2024. This will be the third cycle of the study, with the previous two conducted in 2013 and 2018. ICILS 2023 will be the first cycle with comprehensive coverage of EU Member States, more than doubling the coverage, from nine countries in 2013 and seven in 2018, to 22 in 2023.

A toolbox with supporting indicators is an opportunity to link to the targets and priorities under the EEA digital focus area<sup>121</sup>, [Europe's Digital Decade](#), DEAP, and the [European Skills Agenda](#). The toolbox will ensure consistent and transparent annual monitoring of digital skills until complete data for the main indicator become available in 2024. A key element of the toolbox is that it looks beyond school education and considers digital skills at different levels of education and in different contexts. This is complemented by policy levers such as curriculum approaches to teaching digital competences, learning outcomes related to digital competences, and teachers' preparedness for teaching digital skills.

---

<sup>117</sup> Including access to centres of expertise, tools and materials.

<sup>118</sup> See the [2022 Council Recommendation](#) on individual learning accounts.

<sup>119</sup> See the [2022 Council Recommendation](#) on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability. Micro-credentials were also a topic in the [2020 Commission Communication](#) on completing the European Education Area by 2025.

<sup>120</sup> Level 2 is one of four defined proficiency levels in the ICILS computer and information literacy test, and performance below this level can be defined as underachievement. The proficiency levels describe the nature and the complexity of the tasks pupils are able to solve. At level 1, pupils demonstrate a functional working knowledge of computers as tools and a basic understanding of the consequences of computers being accessed by multiple users. At level 2, pupils use computers to complete basic and explicit information gathering and management tasks. At level 3, pupils demonstrate the capacity to work independently when using computers as information gathering and management tools. At level 4, pupils select the most relevant information to use for communication purposes.

<sup>121</sup> See section I.1.2.2. above on the EEA focus area 'green and digital transitions'.



# Summary of main findings





This report took stock of progress towards the completion of the European Education Area, looking at actions, investment and policy and governance reforms at EU and national levels. The findings confirm that the EEA has been a **step change in ambition, a common endeavour** co-created and jointly owned by the EU, Member States and all stakeholders in the education and training community.

The **strengthened governance has contributed** to improving the impact of European cooperation, the effective delivery of actions and the implementation of reforms needed for recovery and for building more resilient and inclusive education and training systems. This chapter summarises the most important findings concerning the various work strands under the EEA.

## EU-level EEA actions

The development of strategic EEA initiatives announced in the [EEA Communication](#) to support cooperation between Member States and reforms of their education and training systems in accordance with EEA objectives have progressed more than proportionately in 2021 and 2022. Among strategic initiatives requiring a decision by both the Commission and the Council, six have been adopted by the Commission, and five of these have already been adopted by the Council. These include the following proposals:

- Council Recommendation on blended learning approaches for high quality and inclusive primary and secondary education (Commission adoption: 5 August 2021, Council adoption: 29 Nov. 2021)
- Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers across the EU (Commission adoption: 13 January, Council adoption: 5 April 2022)
- Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation (Commission adoption: 18 January 2022, Council adoption: 5 April 2022)
- Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability (Commission adoption: 10 December 2021, Council adoption: 16 June 2022)
- Council Recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development (Commission adoption: 14 January 2022, Council adoption: 16 June 2022)
- Proposal for a Council Recommendation on pathways to school success (Commission adoption: 30 June 2022)

Two other strategic EEA initiatives – requiring only a Commission decision – have also been adopted:

- Framework of inclusion measures of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes 2021-2027 (Commission Implementing Decision adopted on the 22 October 2021)
- European strategy for universities (Commission Communication adopted on: 18 January 2022, subsequent Council Conclusions adoption: 5 April 2022)

**While the adoption of these initiatives is certainly a major milestone in terms of building consensus and providing guidance for European cooperation and national reforms in education and training, it is their subsequent implementation that will generate the necessary impact and progress towards completing the European Education Area.** Nevertheless, in this first report on progress the emphasis is inevitably on these early achievements in terms of policy guidance and development. The full report on the EEA planned for 2025 will be able to take stock of the impact of implementing these recommendations at national level. Implementation has started (and made significant progress) on other high-visibility flagship actions under the EEA and funded by Erasmus+ – namely Jean Monnet Actions for Schools and VET, the Education for Climate Coalition, Erasmus+ Teacher Academies, as well as the association of the Western Balkans. See annex 1 and section I.1.2. for details.

**Further strategic EEA initiatives remain to be presented until 2025.** First, Commission proposals for Council Recommendations on the enabling factors for digital education and on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training will be presented in spring 2023, based on the outcomes of the Structured Dialogue on digital education and skills that took place in 2022. This will significantly advance the implementation of the Digital Education Action Plan and enable progress towards the EEA's digital objectives. The Commission's proposal on an updated European learning mobility framework is also expected in 2023. Finally, several strategic EEA initiatives promoting the transformation of the higher education sector will complete the EEA by 2025, including a European Quality Assurance and Recognition System, as well as steps towards a possible European Degree label based on European criteria and a possible legal status for alliances

of higher education institutions in cooperation with Member States, higher education institutions and stakeholders.

In terms of design and implementation across the six focus areas, the most significant progress has been registered in the focus areas on (i) quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality and (ii) higher education. The areas where further important strategic EEA initiatives are planned for adoption following substantial preparation and co-creation are (i) the digital transition in and through education and (ii) lifelong learning and mobility, and (iii) higher education.

In the focus area on **quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality**, the adoption of the [Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers across the EU](#) (on 5 April 2022) and the [proposal for Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success](#) (on 30 June 2022) are important milestones towards tackling the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mobility and on equity and inclusion in education. The [framework of inclusion measures of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps 2021-27](#) (adopted by the Commission on 22 October 2021) together with the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy (29 April 2021) provide guidance for national inclusion plans and subsequent implementation, helping the programmes to promote equal opportunities and access, inclusion, diversity and fairness across all their actions. Three types of calls (teacher training, school networks and learning EU) have been launched under the new strand of Jean Monnet actions, to reach out to new groups and institutions and involve further education levels in learning about the EU. All other actions and activities in this focus area are well under way. The EEA strategic framework working group on Equality and Values has supported mutual learning for inclusive reform and ensured the involvement of experts from Member States, international organisations and EU-level stakeholders (civil society and social partners) in designing and following up EEA actions in this area. An important recent development – to support the implementation of the Pathways initiative – was the launch in autumn 2022 of the call for expression of interest for a new Commission expert group to develop strategies for creating supportive learning environments for groups at risk of underachievement and for supporting well-being at school. The expert group will start its work in early 2023.

In the work on reinforcing European **higher education**, the adoption of the [Communication on a European strategy for universities](#) (on 18 January) and the subsequent Council Conclusions on 5 April) and of the [Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation](#) (on 5 April) mark a major breakthrough. Co-created with Member States and stakeholders, they set out a long-term vision and guide the design, reform, upscaling and implementation of several new and ongoing higher education actions (such as roll out of the European Universities initiative, the generalised use of the European Student Card and the development of (i) a European Quality Assurance and Recognition System, (ii) a possible joint degree based on European criteria, and (iii) institutionalised cooperation instruments, such as a possible legal status for alliances of higher education institutions).

The most important achievements in the area of supporting the **green and digital transitions** in and through education and training have been the adoption of the [Council Recommendation on blended learning approaches for high quality and inclusive primary and secondary education](#) (on 29 November 2021), and on [learning for the green transition and sustainable development](#) (on 16 June 2022). Other notable progress includes the engagement of the education community through the [Education for Climate coalition](#) and the development of the [European Sustainability Competence Framework \(GreenComp\)](#), to establish a shared understanding of sustainability competences for learners at all phases and stages of education. Two major actions (under both the EEA and the Digital Education Action Plan) planned for 2023 as a result of the ongoing Structured Dialogue with Member States on digital education and skills will be the Council Recommendations on enabling factors for digital education and on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training.

In the focus area for **lifelong learning and mobility for all**, the adoption of the Council Recommendation on a [European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability](#) (on 16 June) will pave the way for the wider use, portability and recognition of micro-credentials by 2025. This should widen learning opportunities for a more diverse group of learners in a lifelong learning approach, through better quality, transparency and take-up of short-term learning experiences. Another significant EU-level contribution will be the updated European learning mobility framework. The proposal for a Council Recommendation (to replace and repeal the [2011 Youth on the Move Recommendation](#)) is planned for adoption by the Commission in 2023.

The implementation of both of these initiatives will play an important role in supporting recovery and improving physical and social mobility.

**Preliminary evidence suggests that the most important value added by the EEA so far is the development of a coherent European Education Area vision, which provides a consistent and integrated framework for reforms and supports the role of education and training systems** in (i) driving recovery, (ii) the digital and green transitions and (iii) building resilience against crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It is particularly the EEA vision and objectives under the focus areas of quality, equity, inclusion, as well as those under the digital and higher education focus areas, that provided a framework for Member States' reform efforts. While the pandemic has first made pre-existing educational inequalities more visible and contributed to their widening, education systems have shown remarkable adaptability. Targeted remedial actions helped to reverse the declining trends resulting from the disruption caused by the pandemic. However, evidence suggests that such policies are not prevalent enough across the EU.<sup>122</sup>

## More and better investment for implementing EEA actions and reforms in the Member States

The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) offers unprecedented funding opportunities for Member States' education and training reforms in line with EEA objectives. The RRF comes on top of 2021-2027 EU cohesion policy Funds and REACT-EU, which are also relevant for education and training. If used effectively, these unprecedented EU resources can make a significant contribution to modernising education in each of the EEA focus areas. As announced in the EEA Communication and requested by the Council, the Commission has intensified work on investment in line with EEA objectives. The Commission Expert Group on Quality Investment in Education and Training, launched in May 2021, delivered its final report in October 2022, identifying a series of actions that could be conducted at European level in the next few years to boost a true evaluation culture in the field of education and training.

It is too early in implementation to have measurable evidence of the impact of flagship EEA actions at national or regional level or to measure national progress towards EEA objectives. At the same time, setting up a common European discourse and shared ambition on cooperation and reforms in line with clear priorities is a major success driving national action. Information from the Member States<sup>123</sup> shows that the EEA vision is valuable as a consistent and integrated framework that inspires and supports national reforms. The EEA vision helps support recovery, drive system modernisation through the green and digital transitions and build inclusive and resilient education and training systems.

Due to the shared targets, objectives and European cooperation on common priorities, initiatives in the Member States and at European level are developing largely in the same direction and are mutually reinforcing. While the EU's annual socio-economic policy coordination round, the European Semester, helps to identify key challenges for Member States in education, the European Education Area sets out common priorities. Both influence Member States' use of the substantial EU funding available (under the RRF and 2021-2027 cohesion policy Funds) and thus contribute, in turn, to reinforcing the joint commitment to and progress towards the completion of the European Education Area.

**Quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality:** The integrated coherent EEA vision resonates most strongly in the Member States in the context of reforms improving quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality in education. Member States are undertaking investment and reforms to improve quality and equity of the provision of early childhood education and care, and work to align school curricula, reform assessment, quality assurance, and update teacher training and career development with a view to building skills and competences needed by a modern inclusive and diverse society and a labour market transformed by technological change. Recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic has a very strong equity dimension, bringing to the fore the priorities such as addressing learning loss and specific learner needs by targeted support and promoting the mental health and well-being of students and teachers.

<sup>122</sup> [Employment and Social Developments in Europe. Annual review 2022; Impacts of COVID-19 on school education](#)

<sup>123</sup> Implementing the EEA in the Member States, report by the network of independent experts on education

**Green and digital transitions in and through education:** While promoting **green skills and competences** is a significant priority in all Member States, there is no systematic approach to reaching this objective. Green competences and attitudes are predominantly linked with natural sciences in curricula; the potential of links with citizenship education has not been fully explored. Integrating green education topics as general issues across all levels is less common and concepts need to be further advanced. The Recovery and Resilience Facility will support the greening of education infrastructure, increasing the number of professionals working towards a climate-neutral and resource-efficient economy, including teacher education for green education. Such investment and reforms could be further prioritised.

The COVID-19 crisis kept **digitalisation of education** consistently high on the agenda, expanding the use of digital tools in classrooms and making digital literacy a highly valuable competence for both teachers and learners. Member States are exploring the implementation of blended learning – characterised by blending school site and distance learning environments; and blending digital and non-digital tools as part of learning tasks. In both their investment and reforms, Member States are prioritising the reinforcement of digital equipment and ICT infrastructure (albeit from very different starting positions), and promoting digital skills among educators and learners. Improving digital skills and competences among learners is often connected to policy measures for promoting STEM subjects in schools. Encouraging girls and women to engage in digital and entrepreneurial skills and STEAM subjects is among the most common measures promoting gender equality in education, while more could be done to address gender gaps on aspects where boys have lower levels of success (e.g. underachievement in basic skills). The RRF is expected to give a major boost to digital education, with an estimated investment of more than EUR 25 bn for digital skills and education.

**Teachers and trainers:** Most Member States are taking actions to overcome teacher shortages and increasing the attractiveness of the teaching profession, including by reforming and developing the initial and ongoing professional development of teachers (especially in digital skills), helping teachers manage diversity in the classroom, and improving working conditions. The EEA and the Recovery and Resilience Facility provide an major framework for reforms and funding in this domain, working towards EEA objectives. Issues and challenges shared by several Member States include teacher shortages, linked with low attractiveness of the teaching profession, skill gaps including transversal and socio-emotional competences and digital skills.

**Higher education:** Most Member States are taking action and implementing reforms to improve the quality and relevance of their national academic offer and higher education system, in line with EEA objectives, covering in particular three main areas:

- 1) improving relevance, quality and competitiveness (development of quality standards and assessment systems, digitalisation and blended learning, internationalisation of the teaching and student body, promoting quality research and cooperation with businesses, helping students successfully access the labour market after graduation)
- 2) improving inclusion in and access to higher education and research (attracting local and international students to make the higher education system more inclusive and diverse, tackling gender disparities, especially in STEM studies and research, and setting up scholarships schemes and working groups to increase the diversity of the student and staff body,)
- 3) restructuring governance and funding (increasing the autonomy of higher education institutions, reforming governance and course structures, allocating increased funding, etc.).

The EEA, including the European strategy for universities, provides a major policy framework, while the RRF provides significant funding for these reforms and actions. Early impacts of EEA strategic actions include the participation of HEIs and individual researchers in European initiatives, such as the European Universities initiative, Erasmus+ mobilities and partnerships and Jean Monnet Actions. National developments also support the implementation of the European Graduate Tracking initiative.

**Lifelong learning and mobility:** The COVID-19 pandemic curtailed learning mobility and shed a light on the shortcomings of adult learning systems in the Member States. Several Member States are struggling with low participation, especially among the low-skilled, the elderly, rural people and the long-term unemployed. National recovery strategies – in line with EEA objectives – focus on skills for green and digital transitions, better match between supply and demand (taking into account the deep changes in the labour market) and the extension of lifelong learning opportunities. Several Member States are developing national strategies and measures to stimulate lifelong learning, ensuring flexible and inclusive pathways. Action includes legislative changes to

facilitate coordination between key stakeholders, facilitating access to resources and toolkits for sharing good practice on adult learning and available training options, and increasing the labour market relevance of vocational education and training. National developments are also directly relevant for EU-level EEA actions, such as the European approach to micro-credentials. Other national actions are supporting the implementation of the Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition, and helping promote transnational learning mobility.

**Geopolitical dimension:** Member States have made progress in strengthening their international cooperation with countries and regions around the world, with Erasmus+ playing a significant role, especially in the higher education sector, but with increasingly active involvement by schools and VET institutions. Cooperation on education is supported and prioritised by diplomatic missions, ensuring wider visibility for national education institutions. While a clear commitment is present in most Member States, evidence suggests that there is no systematic approach to promoting European interests and values in the world.

## EEA governance and co-creation processes

The new governance structures – from the reformed High Level Group, through its new Coordination Board to the new generation of EEA strategic framework working groups – have proved their usefulness not only in **driving cooperation on reforms and action towards completing the EEA by 2025**, but also in allowing the swift **mobilisation of knowledge and resources and building solidarity and resilience amidst new crises**, as proven by the speed, scope and effectiveness of the EU response to the high numbers of Ukrainian refugees welcomed in the EU (including the response of the EU Solidarity Group for Ukraine, which mobilised all possible tools and working formations under the EEA strategic framework governance).

The most notable progress includes **intensified work by the new EEA strategic framework working groups as key pillars of co-creation** between the Commission, the Member States and stakeholders on EEA focus areas, and increased synergies between various working groups, including in their activities to help Member States ensure continuity of education for refugees from Ukraine.

During its few months of existence, the newly created **HLG Coordination Board** helped make the High Level Group more strategic, prepared policy debates at the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council, and improved the continuity of work between Council Presidencies. Furthermore, the Board contributed to quick and effective action at EU level to ensure continuity of education for Ukrainian refugees. Through its discussions and preparation of the HLG meetings, the Board has also brought some improvement by better linking the technical and political levels of governance. In the upcoming period, the Board can further strengthen the role of the High Level Group in linking the technical and political levels and steering strategic issues for European cooperation towards the EEA. The Board can do this by regularly informing the HLG on progress towards completing the EEA under the strategic framework and supporting the HLG with broad guidance for possible future policies. For the High Level Group to have a central role in the EEA strategic framework governance, Member States' ownership both in the HLG and its Coordination Board are crucial.

Progress has been made towards **improving synergies between education and training and other relevant policy areas**, most notably between the EEA and the European Research Area (ERA). A joint meeting of Directors-General for Higher Education and the European Research Area and Innovation Committee took place (forming an ad hoc taskforce to increase synergies between the higher education dimension of the EEA, the ERA and the European Higher Education Area). The next step is to follow up on the proposed way forward by this taskforce. Moreover, the HLG Coordination Board can help through identifying relevant issues to support the High Level Group in enhancing synergies between education and training and other relevant policy areas. This can also comprise suggestions for joint discussions between education and training bodies and other relevant bodies, including joint discussions between the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council and other Council configurations.

The creation of the **EEA Portal made it easier to access information, increased transparency and improved the dissemination** of the results of European cooperation under the EEA strategic framework governance. The portal also played a key role in disseminating information about the common European response to the COVID-19 pandemic. More recently, all relevant actions taken by the European Commission in the field of education and training as a reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine were published on the portal. The Commission will further develop this online resource to continue to increase the availability of transparent

and accessible information on education and training opportunities and outputs, and to boost the impact of these activities. These efforts need to go hand in hand with dissemination efforts at national and local levels.

## Performance monitoring

As for improved performance monitoring and analysis of progress towards EU-level targets, two strands of progress deserve emphasis.

- 1) Firstly, the Commission has developed a **EU-level indicator domain on inclusion and equity**. This sheds light on the substantial effects of socio-economic status on educational achievement, and acknowledges both the broader context in which educational inequity may be embedded and the most prominent policy levers that can help face challenges at national/central level head-on. The proposal also covers the inclusion of various disadvantaged groups and links to the relevant disaggregated data underpinning other EU-level indicator domains.
- 2) Secondly, the Commission has developed a **“Monitor Toolbox” for several existing EU-level indicator domains**. This will help strengthen the annual monitoring exercise by making the Commission’s assessment more comprehensive. This toolbox comprises, alongside each main indicator, the most meaningful breakdowns, context indicators and policy levers.

In terms of next steps, the Commission will complete the toolbox by addressing some of the EU-level indicator domains that are still hampered by certain levels of data limitations, and will continuously update it as new data become available. This will ensure that the annual monitoring exercise is always evolving and benefiting from new cross-EU insights.

The Commission will also proceed with the development of proposals for new EU-level indicator domains to capture the **teaching profession**, as well as **learning for environmental sustainability**. The Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks (SGIB) is the first forum of discussion on all these fronts. Finally, additional domains for indicator development are likely to remain on the agenda, including learning mobility and investment in education.