



## TURNING TARGETS INTO ACTION

### *Addressing inequalities in education and training*

3 June 2014 – Brussels

Conference organised in the context of the ET2020 Review

#### /// BACKGROUND INFORMATION ///

Education has always been regarded as a national rather than an EU competence. To date, the EU has only a supporting competence over education and training, meaning that its role is limited to **support, coordinate and supplement member state actions, without superseding their competence**. However, the Maastricht Treaty already recognised a European dimension to education and allowed the EU to contribute to the development of quality education and the promotion and improvement of vocational training, now included under articles 165 and 166 of the Lisbon Treaty. This influence has been growing with the adoption of the Lisbon (2000-2010) and Europe 2020 Strategies (2010-2020).

A turning point in the EU's involvement in education was the formulation of the **Lisbon Agenda** and the application of the **Open Method of Coordination** to the area of education. This agenda aimed at "making the European Union the most competitive economy in the world by 2010" and referred significantly to education and training, predominantly as a way for the EU to become the most competitive and knowledge-based economy. In June 2010 the European Council adopted the **Europe 2020 Strategy** in which education, training and lifelong learning play an even a greater role than in the Lisbon Strategy (2000-2010). This Strategy has implications for learning.

The **Education and Training 2020 Strategic Framework (ET2020)** drives EU cooperation in Education and Training; it contains four key objectives and seven benchmarks. Two headline targets from the Framework have been top-ranked on the Europe 2020 agenda, namely on reducing early school leaving and increasing levels of tertiary attainment across the EU. Indeed, the Framework is meant to be tightly linked to the **European Semester**, as part of the Europe 2020 economic governance. It results in Country-Specific Recommendations that are sometimes related to education and training. The ET2020 framework and the Europe 2020 Strategy are currently undergoing a mid-term review that EUCIS-LLL is closely following, notably through this conference.

In line with legal frameworks, the European Commission regularly publishes communications giving political directions for the years to come such as the 2012 "[Rethinking Education](#)" and the 2013 "[Opening up Education](#)" Communications – what is referred to as soft law. These documents mention the need to put emphasis on access and equity as well as Europe 2020 flagship initiatives "**Youth on the Move**" and the "**Agenda for New Skills and New Jobs**". Some [sectoral policy initiatives](#) also contribute to tackle the crucial challenge of inclusive education. However there is not a Communication or Flagship initiative providing a clear and comprehensive overview of the EU strategy on these issues.

Finally, the EU plans to fund many good practices including those addressing inequalities through the new **Erasmus+ programme** 2014-2020. Equity and inclusion are indeed one of the main features of Erasmus+ and have also been earmarked (20% of the budget) in the **European Social Fund** 2014-2020, another key lever of action for education and training that are one of its thematic objectives for the seven years to come.

## I. THE EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY

The Europe 2020 (EU2020) strategy was launched in [March 2010](#) as the EU's strategy for promoting smart, sustainable and inclusive growth for the period 2010-2020. It identifies three key drivers for growth, to be implemented through concrete actions at EU and national levels:

- Smart growth, fostering knowledge, innovation, education and digital society;
- Sustainable growth, ensuring that the European economy makes a transition towards a low-carbon economic model, and
- **Inclusive growth, raising participation in the labour market and reducing poverty.**

It aims to achieve a knowledge-based, competitive European economy while preserving the EU's social market economy model and improving resource efficiency. It was thus conceived as a partnership between the EU and its Member States driven by the promotion of growth and jobs.

The EU2020 Strategy is currently subject to a mid-term review that is taking stock of its achievements and remaining challenges in a context of economic and social crisis. On 5 March 2014, the Commission adopted a Communication "Taking stock of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" ([Communication](#) and [Annexes](#)). It has launched a public consultation until October 2014 to collect stakeholders' views on how to improve the strategy.

### /// Headline targets

To render this more tangible, five [headline targets](#) in the areas of employment, innovation, education, poverty reduction and climate/energy have been set for the EU to achieve by the end of the decade. The targets are:

- to have at least 75% of people aged 20-64 in employment;
- to invest 3% of GDP in research and development;
- to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20%,
- increase the share of renewables to 20% and improve energy efficiency by 20%;
- **to reduce school drop-out rates to below 10% and increase the share of young people with a third-level degree or diploma to at least 40%;**
- to ensure at least 20 million fewer people are at risk of poverty or social exclusion

**In 2013, the level of early-leavers reached 11.9% while tertiary attainment topped 36.8%.** The headline targets in the field of education and training could soon be reached, though those figures hide sometimes strong national and regional disparities (e.g. 8 Member States had a difference of more than 15 percentage points between their top and bottom regions in terms of rates of tertiary education graduates in a region<sup>1</sup>). In the framework of the EU2020 mid-term review, a reflection on the relevance of indicators in education and poverty reduction has been initiated.

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<sup>1</sup> ["Mind the Gap, Education inequality across EU regions"](#), NESSE network for the European Commission, 2012

### /// THE FLAGSHIP INITIATIVES

The strategy also includes seven “[flagship initiatives](#)” providing a framework through which the EU and national authorities mutually reinforce their efforts in areas supporting the Europe 2020 priorities namely innovation, the digital economy, employment and youth, industrial policy, poverty, and resource efficiency.

#### THE SEVEN FLAGSHIPS:

##### Under Smart Growth:

- Digital Agenda for Europe
- Innovation Union
- **Youth on the Move**

##### Under Sustainable growth:

- Resource efficient Europe
- An industrial policy for the globalisation era

##### Under Inclusive Growth:

- **An Agenda for new skills and new jobs**
- European platform against poverty

Two of these flagship initiatives are particularly linked to education and training, Youth on the Move and the Agenda for new skills and new jobs.

**Youth on the Move** is a comprehensive package of policy initiatives aiming at improving young people’s education and employability, in order to reduce high youth unemployment and to increase the youth employment rate – in line with the wider EU target of achieving a 75% employment rate for the working-age population (20-64 years) – by:

- making education and training more relevant to young people's needs;
- encouraging more of them to take advantage of EU grants to study or train in another country;
- encouraging EU countries to take measures simplifying the transition from education to work.

In the implementation of the Youth On the Move initiative, the EU has set the frame and provided some funding for the youth guarantee to facilitate young people’s transition from education to the labour market in member states. Nevertheless at national level there are still challenges to overcome before the full implementation of the youth guarantees. Robust monitoring of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee is needed to ensure the respect of the main principles defined in the recommendation adopted by the Council in February 2013.

**An agenda for new skills and jobs** has the objective of creating the right conditions to modernise labour markets and to allow people to acquire new skills in order to raise employment levels and to ensure the sustainability of our social models. The concrete actions to be taken include the implementation of the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training "ET 2020", the acquisition and recognition of learning throughout general, vocational, higher and adult learning, and the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework.

In its Communication “Taking stock of the Europe 2020 strategy”, the Commission’s assessment of the youth flagship initiative was particularly negative: its impact at macroeconomic level was limited, the awareness of the flagship has been hampered, and also its link with European Semester, including the Country Specific Recommendations, has been limited.

### /// THE EUROPEAN SEMESTER

In their latest [joint report](#) on the implementation of the ET2020 Strategic Framework<sup>2</sup>, the Council and the Commission recommended better adapting ET2020 to the Europe 2020 and the European Semester objectives in order to make it “*the mechanism to mobilise ET2020 stakeholders, increase their ownership and harness their expertise*”. The **European Education, Training and Youth Forum** organised by the Commission every year in October is also meant to feed in the process.

The Europe 2020 strategy calls on each Member State to translate the common European targets into national targets and roadmaps by taking account of its relative starting position and national circumstances. Set up in 2011 the [European Semester](#) works as an **annual cycle of economic and fiscal policy coordination**. Through this process, the Commission evaluates whether and to what extent the commitments undertaken by Member States allow the EU to meet its headline targets for 2020 and it provides them with recommendations for the next 12-18 months. It involves discussion among EU institutions on broad priorities, annual commitments by the Member States and **Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs)** prepared by the Commission and endorsed at the highest level by leaders in the European Council. These recommendations should then be taken on board in the Member States' policies and budgets. As such, together with the EU budget, the country-specific recommendations are key instruments for the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy.

The Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) have shown some **improvement** over the years. In 2013 the number of CSRs on poverty, employment, education and care and health services increased. However **consistency between the different CSRs is lacking**. The main focus is still on reducing public deficits and debt, primarily through reducing public expenditure, rather than on coherent and balanced proposals which deliver on the objectives of Europe 2020<sup>3</sup>. Unless such a balance is restored, this absence of coherency will continue to generate increased poverty and social exclusion and undermine the coherence of the social CSRs and their potential for delivery.

There is also an **implementation gap** between the recommendations set in the Growth Survey and CSRs and the decisions made by Member States. In the [2013 Growth Survey](#) the Commission considers that “*Longer term investment in education, research, innovation, energy and climate action should be protected and the needs of the most vulnerable in our society should be catered for*” as a priority and that it is “*essential to invest in the modernisation of education and training systems, including life-long learning*”. Promoting investment in education and skills is further mentioned in the country specific recommendations of 22 Member States. However, in the last years most Member States have cut their spending in education. The [Education and Training Monitor 2013](#) states that 16 Member States decreased their education expenditure at some stage between 2008 and 2011, with six of them showing further significant budget decreases in 2012 (EL, IT, CY, LV, PT, UK-WLS). There is a clear lack of coherence that hinders the whole process and the trust of citizens and civil society organisations alike.

Many voices especially in civil society express the **lack of transparency** of the European Semester and the lack of involvement of stakeholders at national and EU level. EUCIS-LLL in the framework of the Liaison Group with Organised Civil Society of the EESC has been pushing for a change of governance. Policymaking and implementation has to be rendered democratic and legitimate through the meaningful and structured involvement of civil society at all levels and steps.

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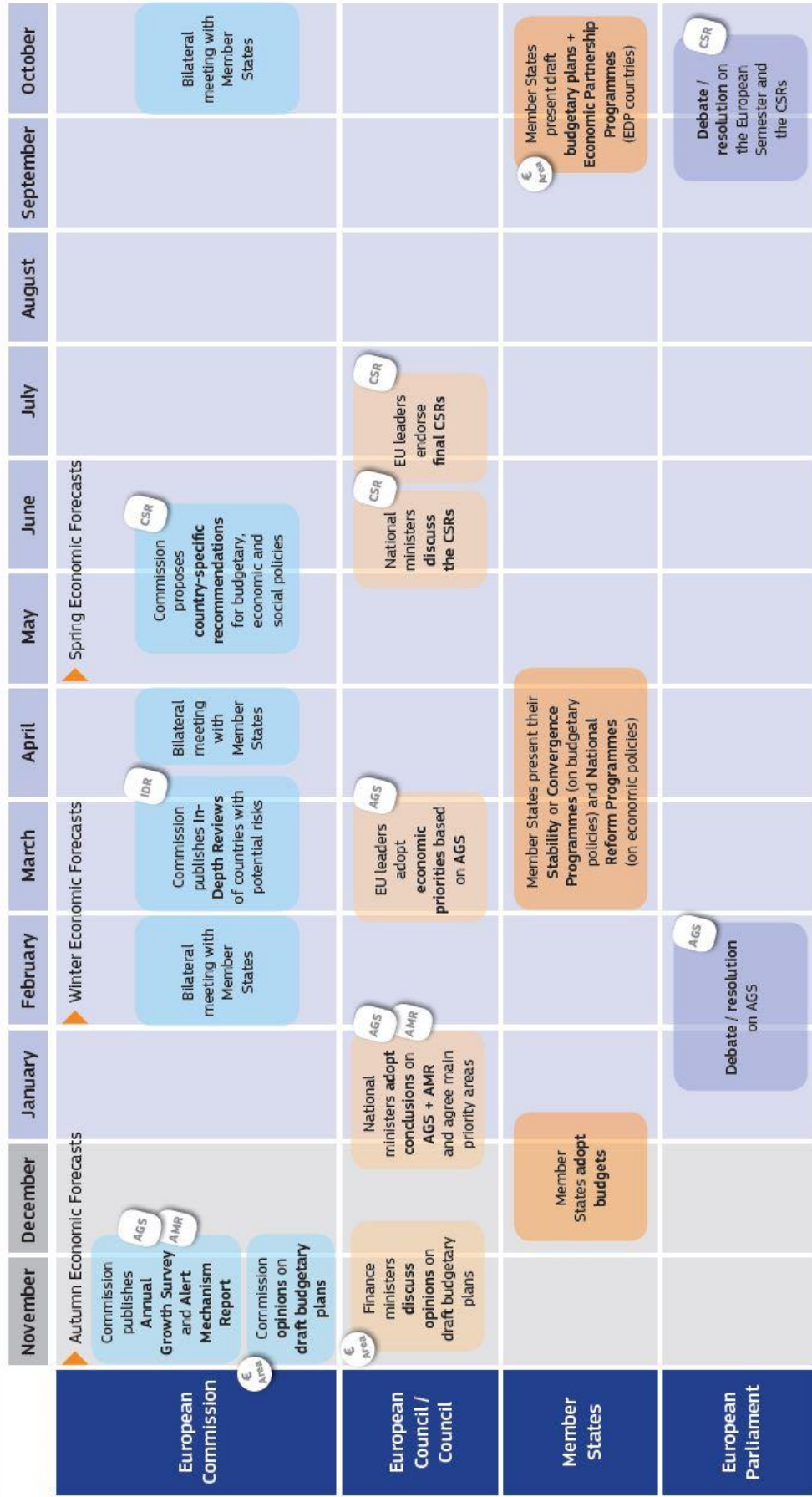
<sup>2</sup> 2012 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) ‘*Education and Training in a smart, sustainable and inclusive Europe*’, Official Journal of the European Union, 8 March 2012 (2012/C 70/05)

<sup>3</sup> It is notable that Europe 2020 nor the goals of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, or the five targets are referenced explicitly in the preamble of the Recommendations.





# EUROPEAN SEMESTER: A PARTNERSHIP EU-MEMBER STATES



Glossary: AGS: Annual Growth Survey - AMR: Alert Mechanism Report - CSR: Country-Specific Recommendations - EDP: Excessive Deficit Procedure - IDR: In-Depth Review

European Commission

## II. THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2020 STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK (ET2020)

ET2020 is the successor of the “**Education and Training 2010**” (ET 2010) work programme, which was launched as a response to the Lisbon Agenda in 2000. The main aim of the framework is to support Member States in further developing their educational and training systems from a lifelong learning perspective, covering all levels and contexts (including non-formal and informal learning). It provides common **strategic objectives** for Member States, including a set of principles for achieving these objectives, as well as common working methods with priority areas for each periodic work cycle:

- Make lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
- Improve the quality and efficiency of education and training;
- Promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship;
- Enhance creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

For each of these strategic objectives, the programme identified key issues and indicators for measuring progress and proposed ways with the follow-up work for achieving the concrete objectives in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) working method.

A new element that has been introduced by the ET2020 is that the period up to 2020 is divided into a series of **cycles**, with the current one covering the three years from 2012 to 2014. For each work cycle, a number of **priority areas** are adopted on the basis of the above-mentioned four strategic objectives. This more “flexible” approach is meant to allow more regular evaluation of progress and, when necessary, adjustment of priority areas for the following cycle. A **joint Council-Commission progress report** should be drawn up at the end of each cycle, which assess Member States progress towards the common ET2020 objectives and also contributes to the establishment of the priority areas for the next cycle.

### 2012 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of ET2020

The first joint report was adopted in February 2012 and, apart from adjusting some of these priority areas, it also reviewed some of the working arrangements under ET2020 to be better aligned with Europe 2020 and the European Semester. In particular, it strengthened the Council’s involvement and role on the education and training dimension of Europe 2020 in both the European and national semester process (i.e. peer-reviews on the outcomes of the semester) and it suggested the creation of two new tools: the **Education and Training Forum**, to consult stakeholders on modernising education and training systems drawing on the discussion of education issues in the European Semester, and the **Education & Training Monitor**, an annual analytical report to monitor progress on the ET 2020 benchmarks and core indicators.

#### PRIORITY AREAS 2012-2014

##### Make lifelong learning and mobility a reality:

- Lifelong Learning Strategies
- European reference tools
- Learning mobility

##### Improve the quality and efficiency of education and training:

- Basic skills, languages
- Professional development of teachers, trainers and school leaders

- Modernising higher education and increasing tertiary attainment levels
- Attractiveness and relevance of VET
- Efficient funding and evaluation

Promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship:

- Early school leaving
- Early childhood education and care
- Equity and diversity

Enhance creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training:

- Partnerships with business, research, civil society
- Transversal key competences, entrepreneurship education, e-literacy, media literacy, innovative learning environments

### /// THE OPEN METHOD OF COORDINATION (OMC) IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) is an instrument from the Lisbon Strategy. It consists in a **voluntary process for political cooperation** based on agreeing common objectives and common indicators, which show how progress towards these goals can be measured. It is applied in policy areas where the European Union has limited competences according to the EU Treaties, such as education and training, but where Member States feel there is an added value in working together at the European level. This is therefore an **intergovernmental method** where Member States assess each other according to a method based on “naming and shaming” and under the supervision of the Commission. The Commission plays indeed a very active role in setting goals, indicators and benchmarks and monitoring their evolution, which allows it to gain quite an influence in the process. The OMC is the working method applied to implement the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (**ET2020**).

From a practical level point of view, this work within the OMC can be undertaken through different working methods and tools, like establishing groups/networks with the aim of implementing legal instruments (i.e. EQF advisory Group), setting up thematic working groups and expert groups to address specific policy areas, organising peer-learning activities and conducting research, data collection and analysis. In the field of education, **ET2020 Thematic Working Groups (TWGs)** have just undergone a revision after the Council’s request in February 2013. Their new mandate focuses on implementing the ET2020 agenda and build tighter links with the European Semester, and their number has been reduced to match key policy challenges. Their results should be regularly presented to the Education Committee of the Council and national representatives should turn over within the TWGs representation in order to gain more ownership on what happens there.

#### THEMATIC WORKING GROUPS

- Schools, including Early school leaving and the Teaching Profession.
- Modernisation of Higher Education.
- Vocational education and training, with an initial focus on apprenticeships and work-based learning, as key elements of overall VET systems.

- Adult Learning, with focus on strategies to reduce the number of low-skilled adults.
- Transversal Skills, including ICT and Entrepreneurial Skills (and Languages once the new benchmark is agreed).
- Digital and online learning.

In education and training, the Commission has also been putting in place “**soft law**” **measures** (non-legally binding measures for Member States but with quite an impact in practice, a “soft influence”), such as Commission Staff working documents and Communications, to give substance to the OMC process.

### /// EU LEGAL & POLICY INSTRUMENTS

As EU has only a supporting competence over education and training, it mostly issues **soft-law policy measures**, which are nonbinding, but nonetheless carry political weight:

- **Communications** usually set out a Commission action plan. They may also include concrete proposals for legislation.
- **Green Papers** are usually used to launch a consultation process. They present Commission policy orientations to interested parties that may wish to comment. The Commission will generally prepare a subsequent proposal.
- **White Papers**, which are often the follow-up of a Green Paper, set out concrete proposals for action by the Commission in a specific area.
- **Council Conclusions** are policy guidelines adopted at Council meetings. Although not legally binding, the conclusions have political power as a frame of reference.
- **Council Resolutions** are documents that are produced at the end of thematic debates at the European Council. While they are not legally binding, they have often been transposed into EU law through the work of the European Commission, Council of Ministers, or the European Parliament.
- **Recommendations and Opinions** are non-binding instruments issued by the Commission to define its view and suggest a line of action a specific issue. Though they have technically no legal force, they do carry political and moral weight.

### /// MEASURING PROGRESS: INDICATORS AND BENCHMARKS

To measure progress towards the ET2020 strategic objectives in education and training, Member States agreed to set up measurement tools, the **benchmarks** and **progress indicators**. The role of these indicators and benchmarks is to help structure educational performance data on different education systems among Member States and, thus, become frames of reference and comparison for setting future policy development and discussion.

In May 2009 the Council adopted the set of benchmarks to be achieved by 2020. Two of these five benchmarks – to reduce the number of early school leavers; and to increase the share of young adults holding tertiary education qualifications – have been given further importance having been selected headline targets for the Europe 2020 for socio-economic development to 2020.



#### FIVE BENCHMARKS FOR 2020

- **Pre-school participation:** at least 95% of children between the age of four and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education;
- **Low achievers:** the share of 15-years olds with insufficient abilities in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%;
- **Early school leavers:** the share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10%;
- **Tertiary attainment:** the share of 30-34 year olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40%;
- **Adult lifelong learning participation:** an average of at least 15 % of adults (age group 25-64) should participate in lifelong Learning.

The new framework for cooperation ET 2020 explicitly mentions that the benchmarks are not to be considered as binding targets for Member States. EU countries are rather encouraged to contribute to the collective achievement of the benchmarks at EU level according to their specific needs and national priorities.

In addition, since 2009 two new benchmarks on learning mobility and the employability of young graduates have been adopted and the European Commission has just proposed another benchmark on language teaching.

#### THREE MORE BENCHMARKS FOR 2020

- **Learning mobility** (adopted in 2011): at least 20 % of higher education graduates in the EU should have had a period of higher education-related study or training (including work placements) lasting a minimum of three months or representing a minimum of 15 ECTS credits; more than 6 % of 18-34 year olds with an initial vocational education and training qualification should have had an initial study or training period abroad of at least two weeks by 2020.
- **Employability of young graduates** (adopted in 2012): by 2020, the share of employed graduates (20-34 year olds) having left education and training no more than three years before the reference year should be at least 82% (as compared to 76.5 % in 2010).
- **Language teaching** (launched in 2012, see [Staff Working Document](#)): by 2020, at least 50% of 15 year-olds should attain the level of independent user of a first foreign language; by 2020, at least 75% of pupils in lower secondary education should study at least two foreign languages (compared to the present 61 %).

#### Monitoring progress: Joint Reports and Annual Commission Reports

Monitoring of both performance and progress is an essential part of the European Union's education and training policies, assessing strengths and weaknesses and guiding future strategy. Although it seems unlikely that all these targets will be reached across the EU, comparing Member States performance and showing their strengths and weaknesses lead them to "compete" towards the achievement of these benchmarks.

The Commission publishes regular **annual reports** and Commission staff working documents that present a detailed analysis and national statistics on performance and progress under ET2020 using all of these benchmarks and indicators.

The European Council and the Commission publish a **joint report** on the overall situation every two years, based on both the progress reports and national reports. These joint reports evaluate the overall progress made towards the set education objectives and assess developments across national education systems. They present the state of play, identify areas where progress has remained insufficient, and propose measures to be taken. The next Joint report is due to be published in 2015.

Since 2012 a new [Education & Training Monitor](#) has been put in place, to provide an annual analytical report to monitor progress on the ET 2020 benchmarks and core indicators and that is accompanied with 28 country reports. The next Education and Training Monitor is due to be published early 2015. In 2013, the Monitor acknowledged in particular decreasing investments in education in 16 Member States, increasing early-school leaving rates in 3 countries and growing inequalities in European education and training systems. The yearly progress in benchmarks and indicators can also be found on [Eurostat](#).

## Targets in education and training

			Current	Target
Headline target	1 Early leavers from education and training	The share of the population aged 18-24 fulfilling the following two conditions: (1) the highest level of education or training attained equals International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level 0, 1, 2 or 3c short; (2) respondents declared not having received any education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey. Data comes from the EU Labour Force Survey.	12.7% (2012)	Below 10% (2020)
	2 Tertiary education attainment	The share of the population aged 30-34 years who have successfully completed university or university-like (tertiary-level) education that equals International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level 5 or 6. Data comes from the EU Labour Force Survey.	35.7% (2012)	At least 40% (2020)
Other targets	1 Early childhood education and care	The share of the population aged 4 to the age when the compulsory education starts who are participating in early education. Data comes from the UOE data collection.	93.2% (2011)	95% (2020)
	2 Achievement in reading, maths and science	The share of 15-year-olds failing to reach Level 2 in reading, mathematics and science as measured by the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).	Reading: 19.6% (2009) Maths: 22.2% (2009) Science: 17.7% (2009)	15% (2020)
	3 Employment rate of recent graduates	The share of employed people aged 20-34 having successfully completed upper secondary or tertiary education 1 to 3 years before the reference year of the survey and who are no longer in education or training. Data comes from the EU Labour Force Survey.	75.7% (2012)	82% (2020)
	4 Adult participation in lifelong learning	The share of the population aged 25-64 who stated that they received formal or non-formal education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey. Data comes from the EU Labour Force Survey.	9.0% (2012)	15% (2020)

## Annex – 2013 Education and Training Monitor (page 12)

Table 1.1. Performance summary benchmarks and indicators

			EU average		HIGHEST performer	LOWEST performer
			2009	2012	2012	2012
Europe 2020 headline targets						
Early leavers from education and training <i>Europe 2020 headline target: less than 10%</i>			14.2%	12.7%	4.2%	24.9%
Tertiary education attainment <i>Europe 2020 headline target: at least 40%</i>			32.1%	35.7%	51.1%	21.7%
ET 2020 benchmarks						
Early childhood education and care <i>ET 2020 target: 95%</i>			91.7%	93.2% <sup>11</sup>	100% <sup>11</sup>	70.6% <sup>11</sup>
Low achievers in basic skills <i>ET 2020 target: 15%</i>		Reading	19.6%	:	8.1% <sup>09</sup>	41.0% <sup>09</sup>
		Maths	22.2%	:	7.8% <sup>09</sup>	47.1% <sup>09</sup>
		Science	17.7%	:	6.0% <sup>09</sup>	41.4% <sup>09</sup>
Learning mobility	IVET	Leonardo da Vinci outbound	0.6%	0.7% <sup>11</sup>	7.1% <sup>11</sup>	0.1% <sup>11</sup>
	Higher education	Erasmus inbound	:	1.1% <sup>11</sup>	8.4% <sup>11</sup>	0.0% <sup>11</sup>
		Inbound degree mobile students	:	7.0% <sup>11</sup>	40.6% <sup>11</sup>	0.5% <sup>11</sup>
Employment rate of recent graduates <i>ET 2020 target: 82%</i>			78.3%	75.7%	91.9%	42.9%
Adult participation in lifelong learning <i>ET 2020 target: 15%</i>			9.2%	9.0%	31.6%	1.4%
Proposed ET 2020 benchmark <sup>14</sup>						
Foreign language skills	ISCED 2 students at proficiency level B1 or higher in first foreign language <sup>1</sup>		:	43.5% <sup>11</sup>	82.7% <sup>11</sup>	9.3% <sup>11</sup>
	ISCED 2 students learning a second foreign language		58.6%	60.8% <sup>10</sup>	100% <sup>11</sup>	0.0% <sup>11</sup>
Other ET 2020 indicators						
Investment in education and training	General government expenditure on education (% of GDP)		5.5%	5.3% <sup>11</sup>	7.8% <sup>11</sup>	3.6% <sup>11</sup>
	Expenditure on educational institutions per student in € PPS	ISCED 1-2	5,732 € <sup>08</sup>	6,021 € <sup>10</sup>	15,262 € <sup>10</sup>	1,674 € <sup>10</sup>
		ISCED 3-4	6,964 € <sup>08</sup>	7,123 € <sup>10</sup>	13,203 € <sup>10</sup>	1,680 € <sup>10</sup>
		ISCED 5-6	9,309 € <sup>08</sup>	9,168 € <sup>10</sup>	15,068 € <sup>10</sup>	2,956 € <sup>10</sup>
Digital competences	Pupils in grade 4 (ISCED 1) using computers at school		60.7% <sup>07</sup>	:	85.8% <sup>07</sup>	21.9% <sup>07</sup>
	Individuals aged 16-74 with high computer skills <sup>2</sup>		25.0%	26.0%	42.0%	8.0%
Entrepreneurial competences Individuals aged 18-64 who believe to have the required skills and knowledge to start a business			42.3% <sup>a</sup>	42.0% <sup>a</sup>	54.0%	30.0%
Vocational education and training Share of vocational students at ISCED 3			49.6%	50.3% <sup>11</sup>	76.1% <sup>11</sup>	12.7% <sup>11</sup>
Skills for future labour markets Projected change in employment 2010-2020						
			High qualification	:	19.1%	38.0%
			Medium qualification	:	4.6%	39.3%
			Low qualification	:	-20.2%	26.4%
Adult skills			Literacy	:	19.9%	10.6%
Low achievers in basic skills			Numeracy	:	23.6%	12.8%
			Problem solving in technology-rich environments	:	26.9%	19.1%
						38.0%

Source: CEDEFOP, EAC, European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC), Eurostat (LFS-ISS-UOE), IEA TIMSS, Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, OECD (PISA). Notes: <sup>07</sup>=2007; <sup>08</sup>=2008; <sup>09</sup>=2009; <sup>10</sup>=2010; <sup>11</sup>=2011; e=estimate; a=unweighted average; b=break; p=provisional; <sup>1</sup>=average of skills tested in reading, listening, writing; <sup>2</sup>= having carried out 5-6 specific computer related activities. See the corresponding sections in the Monitor for the number of countries incorporated in each EU average presented in this table.

<sup>14</sup> SWD(2012) 372 final.

## II. EU FUNDING PROGRAMMES

### /// ERASMUS+

Community programmes such as Erasmus+ are also key policy implementation instruments. EU funds, managed mostly by the European Commission and National agencies, can be granted to public or non-governmental institutions. The funds are intended to support the implementation of EU policies or to further pursue EU interests in specific policy areas. The funds are especially important in areas where the EU lacks formal competence, such as education and training.

Entered into force at the beginning of 2014 and acting up to 2020, the new Erasmus+ programme brings together seven former programmes including the Lifelong Learning programme and Youth in Action programme 2007-2013. Sport is also included for the first time as a community programme. With a budget of **€14.7 billion** that is meant to represent a **40% increase** compared to former programmes spending levels, Erasmus+ aims to provide **opportunities for over 4 million Europeans** to study, train, gain work experience and volunteer abroad.

The programme has been conceived with a simplified architecture based on three key actions:

- **Learning mobility** of individuals supporting mobility of learners and staff, joint master degrees and the master student loan guarantee;
- **Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices** supporting strategic partnerships, sector skills alliances and knowledge alliances as well as capacity-building projects and IT sectorial platforms;
- **Support for policy reforms** encouraging stakeholders' participation, evidence-based policy-making, the Open Method of Coordination and prospective initiatives from public authorities.

Within those three strands, former brand names and sectors have been kept (Erasmus, Comenius, Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig), making it easier for beneficiaries to find the actions that are relevant to them. In a general manner, administrative and financial rules have been simplified (i.e. generalisation of the use of lump-sums).

The programme general objectives are meant to be **more tightly linked to EU2020 and ET2020 priorities** as well as the renewed Framework for EU cooperation in the youth field. Important features should be emphasised in the current programming period such as the recognition and validation of skills and qualifications, the international dimension, multilingualism and **equity and inclusion**. Indeed, Erasmus+ aims at facilitating the access to learning mobility to disadvantaged learners (disability, poor socio-economic background, migrants, remote areas inhabitants, etc.).

### /// THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND

The European Social Fund is as old as the European Union and belongs to the EU Structural Funds that are **financial tools set up to implement the European regional policy**. It was created to reduce differences in prosperity and living standards across the EU, especially through the promotion of employment and with a focus on vocational training for the education and training aspects. From the 2000s on its priorities were aligned with the Lisbon Strategy and a **main focus was improving education and training as part of a lifelong learning policy**. With the elaboration of the new ESF 2014-2020 a new category of regions has been created (transition regions) in order to ease the transition of these regions, which have become more competitive in recent years, but still need targeted support.

The funding is allocated for projects operated by public and/or private sector beneficiaries within member states and their regions according to co-financing and shared management principles. Indeed, working in partnership with stakeholders is a founding principle of the ESF. The 2014

European Code of Conduct on Partnerships says the European Social Fund should be designed and implemented in **partnership** between the European Commission, national and regional authorities as well as other stakeholders such as civil society.

From 2014 on, Operational Programmes will be elaborated jointly by Member States and the Commission for the programming period describing thematic objectives and investment priorities chosen by countries.

#### THEMATIC OBJECTIVE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

##### *Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning*

###### ESF Investment priorities:

- Reducing and preventing early school-leaving and promoting equal access to good quality early-childhood, primary and secondary education, including formal, non-formal and informal learning pathways for reintegrating into education and training.
- Improving the quality and efficiency of, and access to, tertiary and equivalent education with a view to increasing participation and attainment levels, especially for disadvantaged groups.
- Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning for all age groups in formal, non-formal and informal settings, upgrading the knowledge, skills and competences of the workforce, and promoting flexible learning pathways including through career guidance and validation of acquired competences.
- Improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems, facilitating the transition from education to work, and strengthening vocational education and training (VET) systems and their quality, including through mechanisms for skills anticipation, adaptation of curricula and the establishment and development of work-based learning systems, including dual learning systems and apprenticeship schemes.

[Source: Common Provisions Regulation, 2013](#)

#### STAKEHOLDERS' INVOLVEMENT IN EU POLICY-MAKING IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

In the field of education and training, there is no structured dialogue with stakeholders as there is in different fields of EU action such as the youth, citizenship, development and culture sectors. Participative democracy can however be practiced by citizens in different ways depending on the level of openness and transparency of each EU institution. In 2012, the Commission issued a [Staff Working Document](#) on “**Partnership and flexible pathways for lifelong skills development**”. The document underlines that working in **cooperation and partnership with stakeholders increase flexibility and relevance of learning and improve efficient use of resources**. However it **requires strong and sustainable coordination structures and a shared vision among stakeholders with** adapted funding. The document also recommends breaking down barriers between sectors in a transversal and more comprehensive approach for more flexible pathways and integrated learning services.

#### /// THE CASE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

In the field of education and training there is **no structured dialogue with stakeholders**. Other directorates have structured dialogue groups, such as the Structured Dialogue Group of DG Communication and the EU Stakeholders Group of the European Platform Against Poverty and Social



Exclusion of DG Employment. DG EAC has launched a recent tender to implement a structured dialogue in culture but not for education and training. [EUCIS-LLL](#) has been calling for such a dialogue for several years now to improve the implementation of the ET2020 work programme, as the proposed Regulation “Erasmus for all” points out: *“Support for policy reform action shall include the activities initiated at Union level related to (...) the **policy dialogue with relevant European stakeholders in the area of education, training and youth**”*. The open, transparent and regular dialogue evoked by the article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty is the only way to successfully achieve the EU strategic objectives in lifelong learning; and this will not be possible without clear mechanisms of communication, consultation and cooperation. However there are several ways in which the stakeholders are consulted today.

### **Public and semi-public consultations**

When the Commission starts working on a new policy initiative or revises existing legislation, it usually opens a [public consultation](#). Individuals, businesses and other organisations with an interest in or expert knowledge on a given topic can help shape the Commission's draft proposal before it goes to the Council and European Parliament for discussion and adoption.

This was the case for instance in 2014 with the consultation on a European Area of Skills and Qualifications, to be potentially proposed by the European Commission and already announced in the 2012 “Rethinking Education” Communication. The new Area would be intended as a way of improving the overall coherence of tools and policies and further implementing the learning outcomes approach as well as ensuring clarity of rules and procedures for the recognition of skills and qualifications for further learning.

Other consultations from the European Commission or its subcontractors can take place and could be qualified as “semi-public” as they are often targeted at stakeholders known as “experts” in the topic. In 2014 ICF GHK is, for instance, running a survey for the Commission on the impact of the ET2020 Strategic Framework in view of its revision.

### **European Education, Training and Youth Forum**

The European Education, Training and Youth Forum aims is to be a space of consultation and dialogue with Education, Training and Youth stakeholders (policy makers, employers, trade unions, organisations representing educational institutions and staff, civil society and youth organisations) about the priorities of the [Europe 2020 strategy](#) as it was pinpointed in the [2012 Joint Report on European Cooperation in Education and Training \(ET 2020\)](#).

The Forum is therefore an opportunity to involve a broad range of stakeholders in the implementation of Europe 2020. For the first time, it offers a wide range of stakeholders and policy-makers a platform to exchange views about how to respond to the Country-specific Recommendations. The findings of the Forum are transmitted to the Council (Education, Youth, Culture and Sport configuration) through official conclusions presented by the Commissioner.

In 2012 the Forum focused on investing in skills for growth and jobs, while the 2013 edition was primarily aimed at discussing the new Erasmus+ programme.

### **Participation in Thematic Working Groups and expert groups**

Under the Open Method of Coordination, peer-learning activities are organised by either groups (“clusters”) of Member States interested in specific topics, or by expert groups set up by the European Commission. Independent experts and stakeholders may be invited by the Commission to join. Other expert groups can also be set up on specific issues, such as the European Qualifications Framework advisory group in charge of overseeing the implementation of the EQF, and now of the

2012 Council Recommendation on Validation of non-formal and informal learning. The units in charge of coordinating these groups have the possibility of inviting external experts including civil society organisations.

### Other tools

There are other tools to give civil society a voice in EU cooperation on education and training such as the **European Citizens Initiative**. This is an **invitation** to the **European Commission to propose legislation** on matters where the EU has competence to legislate. It has to be backed by at least one million EU citizens, from at least 7 out of the 28 member states. A minimum number of signatures is required from each of those 7 member states. A citizens' initiative is possible in **any field in which the Commission has the power to propose legislation**.

In the field of education for instance, in 2014 the ECI [“Invest in education!”](#) is collecting signatures in support of an initiative to combat inequality by providing equal opportunities for education and training to all young people in Europe; ensure adequate and appropriate infrastructures and tools for high quality education in Europe in times of crisis; enhance and safeguard growth, development and democratic institutions and ensure the employability of younger generations through investment in education.

If an initiative reaches one million signatures, the Commission examines the proposal, meets **the organisers** and adopts a formal response specifying what **action it will propose in response** to the citizens' initiative though the Commission is not obliged to propose legislation as a result of an initiative. If the Commission decides to put forward a legislative proposal, the normal legislative procedure kicks off: the Commission proposal is submitted to the legislator and, if adopted, it becomes law.

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