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REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL

Progress report on a Learning Mobility Benchmark

1. INTRODUCTION

The recent Commission Communication on Investing in Europe's Youth¹ highlights the positive impact of learning mobility on employability and active citizenship. Learning, studying and training in another country is a unique experience and can open up new horizons. Skills gained during a mobility experience, such as problem-solving, adaptability, tolerance and confidence are valued by employers and essential for today's society.

The Commission encourages learning mobility of young people through its policies and programmes, including a dedicated benchmark and support from the Erasmus+ programme.

The 2011 Council conclusions on a benchmark for learning mobility (2011/C372/08)² invite the Commission to: 'report back to the Council by the end of 2015, with a view to reviewing and, if necessary, revising the European benchmark on learning mobility.'

The Council conclusions also request the Commission and the Member States to carry out a number of other actions, in particular in regard to indicators on student, youth and teacher mobility. However, there is no obligation to report back to the Council linked to these actions. They are described in more detail in separate available Commission documentation.

The background to the 2011 Council conclusions is the Strategic Framework on European Cooperation in Education and Training 2020 which invites the Commission 'to submit a proposal for a benchmark in this area by the end 2010, focusing initially on physical mobility between countries in the field of higher education...'³. The Council conclusions were preceded by the Commission staff working document of 24 May 2011 on the development of benchmarks on education for employability and on learning mobility (doc. 10697/11)⁴.

This report fulfils the obligation of reporting back to the Council on the progress made regarding the mobility benchmark with a view to continuing the work towards 2020.

The learning mobility benchmark consists of two indicators and is defined in the annex of the 2011 conclusions as:

- 'By 2020, an EU average of at least 20 % of higher education graduates should have had a period of higher education-related study or training (including work placements) abroad, representing a minimum of 15 ECTS credits or lasting a minimum of 3 months.'

- 'By 2020, an EU average of at least 6 % of 18-34 year-olds with an initial vocational education and training qualification should have had an initial VET-related study or training period (including work placements) abroad lasting a minimum of 2 weeks⁽³⁾, or less if documented by Europass. ⁽³⁾ = 10 working days.'

The focus of the benchmark is on outward mobility: in other words, the extent to which individuals go abroad to gain learning experiences and qualifications. Within the EU, this objective is linked to the EU basic principles of the free movement of people and work within the internal market.

The EU benchmark measures the number of graduates who have both been mobile during their studies and have successfully completed their qualifications. It does not directly specify a geographical area, but the 2011 Conclusions underline that: 'learning mobility is defined as physical mobility and takes worldwide mobility into account'. The measurement of the IVET

¹ COM(2016) 940 final of 7.12.2016

² http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2011.372.01.0031.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2011:372:TOC .

³ OJ C 119, 28.5.2009. The continuation of the paragraph reads: '...focusing initially on physical mobility between countries in the field of higher education, taking both quantitative and qualitative aspects into account and reflecting the efforts made and the objectives agreed within the Bologna process, as highlighted most recently at the Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve conference. At the same time, the Commission is invited to study the possibility of extending such a benchmark to include vocational education and training and teacher mobility.'

⁴ https://www.eumonitor.nl/9353000/1/j4nvg5skjg27kof_j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vipo5nwh1fzn/f=/10697_11.pdf.

mobility benchmark indicator is in practice limited by the instrument implied in the Conclusions (a household survey of a specified broad age group), whereas the source for the higher education benchmark indicator is not specified.

The pertinent Commission advisory body (The Standing Group of Indicators and Benchmarks (SGIB)) was consulted on a draft of this report in January and February 2016, after an initial SGIB discussion in December 2015. The results of these consultations are referred to where relevant in this report. They inform the Commission's assessment of the technical feasibility of further work.

The report treats the work done since 2011, the evidence available and it draws conclusions for the higher education and the IVET mobility benchmark indicators respectively (sections 2 and 3). Moreover, it sets out the further work proposed by the Commission (section 4).

2. THE HIGHER EDUCATION MOBILITY BENCHMARK INDICATOR

2.1. Work done since 2011

A Eurostat Task Force working in 2011-2012 produced a proposal for a methodology and means of data collection to fulfil the requirements of this benchmark indicator. The data was not available in the correct format prior to the agreement on the Council conclusions. The Task Force identified that the most important issue was the feasibility of collecting data that would fulfil the benchmark definition.

The benchmark indicator definition and subsequent work was carried out in close cooperation with actors involved in the Bologna process⁵, as also requested in the Council conclusions. It includes a broader focus on improving data on learning mobility (also according to the European Higher Education Area / Bologna process 'Strategy: Mobility for better learning'⁶).

The learning mobility data are collected through UNESCO, the OECD and Eurostat (UOE) education data collection using mainly administrative information. Eurostat has developed, in cooperation with Member States (through the Task Force), the OECD, UNESCO, DG EAC and other relevant Commission bodies, a methodological manual on learning mobility and data collection tables⁷. The data for the benchmark from EU Member States is collected on the basis of a Commission Regulation adopted in 2013⁸, which is being implemented gradually over the period 2015 to 2018.

In 2022, 5 years of data will be available for the reference period 2016-2020, given that the target is set for 2020. 2019 will be the year in which it will be necessary to assess the situation more specifically with a view to post-2020. In 2019, the evidence base for doing this will consist of 2 years of data (for 2016 and 2017).

⁵ <http://www.ehea.info/>. The 2009 Leuven/Louvain la Neuve Communiqué specifies and defines the learning mobility benchmark in paragraph 18, and further develops it in paragraphs 19 to 21 and 26 (http://media.ehea.info/file/2009_Leuven_Louvain-la-Neuve/06/1/Leuven_Louvain-la-Neuve_Communique_April_2009_595061.pdf).

⁶ As adopted at the Ministerial Conference in Bucharest (2012) as part of the official Bucharest communiqué: <http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/%281%29/2012%20EHEA%20Mobility%20Strategy.pdf>.

⁷ The methodological manual, as well as the data collection tables, are available here: Methodological manual https://circabc.europa.eu/sd/a/3bc0cfff-6ba0-462b-a799-5b75490868b7/Methodological%20manual%20on%20LM_rev_28072015.pdf and data collection tables https://circabc.europa.eu/sd/a/849a866e-d820-4006-a6af-21cb1c48626b/UOE2016manual_12072016.pdf.

⁸ See COMMISSION REGULATION (EU) No 912/2013 of 23 September 2013 implementing Regulation (EC) No 452/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the production and development of statistics on education and lifelong learning, as regards statistics on education and training systems.

2.2. Evidence available

The data for the higher education benchmark indicator include two types; ‘credit’ and ‘degree’ mobility. These two types are treated separately below because the methodology and data requirements differ significantly.

- Credit mobility

Credit mobility is defined as a temporary education or/and study-related traineeship abroad within the framework of enrolment in a tertiary education programme at a ‘home institution’ (usually) for the purpose of gaining academic credit (i.e. credit that will be recognised by the home institution). **Graduates who have had a credit mobility stay** are defined as graduates from a given tertiary programme (defined using ISCED⁹) who have had a temporary tertiary education study period and/or work placement abroad and return to their ‘home institution’ to complete their degree. Data for credit mobility are supplied to the national statistical authorities by the home institutions (and are subsequently transferred to Eurostat following an agreed format).

Data on graduate credit mobility are not yet available from Eurostat. Member States will start transferring data to Eurostat in 2017 for the reference period 2016 (school year 2015-2016) to be published in the first part of 2018. At this time, the credit mobility data will be almost complete¹⁰ as it relies on data collected from the countries to which the students return after their credit mobility stay (i.e. the EU 28 Member States) and the data transfer to Eurostat is obligatory following the regulation adopted in September 2013¹¹.

Until then, the best information for EU level credit mobility is the programme data for Erasmus+. However, this does not include mobility that takes place outside the programme and the only data currently available are enrolment data, which cannot be used as a proxy for the relevant part of the benchmark indicator which requires graduate data.

- Degree mobility

Degree mobility is defined as the physical crossing of a national border to enrol in a degree programme at tertiary level in the country of destination. **Degree mobile graduates** are graduates whose country of origin¹² is different from the country in which they graduate from at tertiary-level.

Data on degree mobile graduates is collected at the level of the destination country. As a consequence, calculating the total number of EU outward mobile graduates, by origin, takes into account figures provided by all the destination countries inside and outside the EU. This implies that the reliability of the outward indicator depends on the quality and detail of the information provided by other countries, as well as the number of destination countries for which data are available.

The first results of the new UOE data collection as regards degree mobility became available in autumn 2015. The Center for Research in Education and Lifelong Learning (CRELL) at

⁹ ISCED 2011: the International Standard Classification for Education — <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-standard-classification-of-education.aspx> .

¹⁰ With the exception of IT and PL which were granted derogations: for Italy until 31 December 2019 for ISCED level 8 graduates by type of mobility scheme and by country of destination and for Poland until 31 December 2018 for ISCED levels 6 to 8.

¹¹ For credit mobility, the benchmark indicator requires data for graduates who during their study time have been abroad for study purposes. Practically, the data can therefore be collected at the time when a student graduates by registering the credit mobility stay abroad.

¹² While country of origin would ideally be defined as country of prior education, i.e. ‘country where upper secondary diploma was awarded’, the data collection for the academic years 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 allowed countries to use the national definition of country of origin, which can be either country of prior education, country of usual residence, or country of citizenship.

JRC analysed and published the very first estimates of the outward mobility of European students at tertiary level (ISCED levels 5-8), as well as for each ISCED level separately¹³.

The EU benchmark with the available data shows 2.9 % for the reference period 2013 (academic year 2012-2013). This is far below the target of 20 %, but this is because only ***partial data is available at present***. As mentioned above, no data is yet available for credit mobility. Data on degree mobility is currently available only for some of the destination countries, due to derogations in data provision granted to some EU countries and to lack of information from many destination countries beyond the EU. ***It is therefore likely that the real benchmark level is significantly higher.***

As regards individual countries, the data shows that CY and LU far exceed the benchmark target (respectively with levels of 63% and 68%); most students from these countries attend and graduate from education institutions in either neighbouring countries or the UK and CH (both of which traditionally attract many mobile students). It should be noted that, despite the partial coverage of data, significant proportions of graduates from BG, DE, EE, IE, EL, LT, LV, MT, SK and FI graduate abroad (between 5 and 13%). For most of them, large numbers of these students went to neighbouring countries, given historical and often language connections. The data also shows that a higher educational level is generally associated with higher shares of learning mobility, with the highest shares found at the doctoral level.

The first data provided on degree mobility shows, in general, that Member States comply well with the Commission Regulation. A few countries have derogations for later provision (EL and FR for the main part of the data; ES and PL for specific parts).

As noted earlier, the benchmark is not limited to Member States. Many students originating in the EU graduate in countries outside the Union and it is therefore necessary to collect data from these countries¹⁴. Consequently, starting from 2014, data collection mechanisms have also been put in place by the OECD and UNESCO (in cooperation with Eurostat). However, unlike for EU Member States, provision of the data is optional and the compliance of non-EU countries in the first year of collection was quite uneven.

For the countries outside Europe, the first results show that only Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Israel and New Zealand provided data in the required format. The intended (but not achieved) coverage of the benchmark includes countries as the US which is known to receive the bulk of mobile students from EU countries so that the estimated total coverage would be 95 % of total world mobility¹⁵.

2.3. Conclusions based on work carried out and current evidence available

Section 2.2 shows that a sustained effort is needed to provide better quality data on higher education learning mobility in terms of making comparative credit mobility data available and ensuring that data on graduates from Member States graduating in countries outside the EU are available for all main destination countries.

The Commission supports the current definition of the higher education benchmark indicator. Likewise, the SGIB consultation indicated that this benchmark should stay as it is, as it is considered to be meaningfully defined responding to an interest in worldwide mobility.

¹³<https://crell.jrc.ec.europa.eu/?q=publications/learning-mobility-technical-report>, see particularly table 1 page 20. The benchmark indicator is defined as an EU average. The UOE data collection collects census data (e.g. for all the units defined in the population) and results are therefore reliable by country and for the breakdowns stipulated.

¹⁴ EU Member States do not necessarily know, nor can they, which of their students who graduated in upper secondary education later take a degree abroad. This data is most reliably collected from the countries in which the students graduate.

¹⁵ Beyond the US, the main missing destination countries are South East Asian countries as Korea and Japan as well as Mexico, China and India.

Further efforts are needed to obtain relevant data for countries outside the EU to expand the present partial coverage by 2018¹⁶.

A first ambition would be to obtain complete coverage of Bologna countries given that they share a similar benchmark ambition. Recent data collections for non-EU Bologna countries show however limited data availability for the main countries¹⁷.

Secondly, it should be a priority to strengthen cooperation with OECD and UNESCO on the world evidence of learning mobility by further improving the collection of international data already agreed upon. In particular, as many students originating from the EU study in the US it would be important to obtain such data. The Commission works closely with the OECD and UNESCO through shared policy goals regarding learning mobility and has therefore developed close cooperation on data collection.

The OECD has indicated that significant changes in the 2014 UOE collection may have prevented some countries from providing the data. The UOE data collection as implemented in 2014 was thoroughly revised due to the revision of the main education classification ISCED 2011. UNESCO-UIS has indicated that the relevant countries lack the capacity to adapt their survey instruments (new data would, in all likelihood, need to be collected).

Another development, alongside the improved data collection and methodology, is the dissemination of the existing benchmark indicator data. Eurostat plans to disseminate outward mobility data for the geographical area covered by the European Statistical System and its Code of Practice¹⁸. However, it would also be important for the Commission to provide data that reflect EU graduate mobility across the world, as requested in the benchmark indicator formulation, given the prominent role that learning mobility plays in higher education policies at EU and international level.

These areas of further work were widely supported by the SGIB. Respondents to the consultation agreed that the benchmark has been well defined and its technical achievement by adding the credit mobility data and completing the degree mobility data should be pursued.

Given the partial completion of the work at this stage, a reassessment of the progress of work by end of 2019, with a view to its continuation and development, will be envisaged.

The timeframe for getting complete data is in principle until 2018 given that this is when the credit mobility data will become available for EU countries. For countries outside the EU this means that the data collection should be in place for the reference period 2016 (to be reported in 2017). The Commission therefore intends to encourage these countries to provide data as soon as possible.

In conclusion, it is clear that a legal basis has led to a regular quality reporting of learning mobility data in higher education. At the same time, it takes time to create such a data collection system. These two observations, combined with the overarching growing policy relevance of learning mobility in higher education, have an impact on the continued work in this area (see section 4).

¹⁶ The Council conclusions on a Global dimension of European Higher Education, 25-26 November 2013 support this approach.

¹⁷ 2015 Bologna implementation report, chapter 7, Eurydice 2015, data are available for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, and Switzerland plus Norway.

¹⁸ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/quality/european-statistics-code-of-practice>.

3. THE IVET MOBILITY BENCHMARK INDICATOR

3.1. Work done since 2011

When the IVET mobility benchmark was adopted, there was no European harmonised data source that could provide data for the indicator. Therefore a 2011-2012 Eurostat Task Force worked on technical issues related to the possible use of household surveys for this purpose, and on setting up a general indicator on youth learning mobility. The benchmark indicator stipulates that IVET mobility should be measured for the 18-34 years old age group. The Task Force concluded that the only way to provide a reliable estimate of participation in IVET mobility for this age group would be through a representative survey instrument.

The conclusions of the Task Force were discussed by the Directors of Social Statistics and the work resulted in a European Statistical System (ESS) agreement in November 2012 to carry out a pilot data collection on learning mobility via household surveys. Countries could opt in or out of participating in the pilot collection (there was no legal obligation) and the Commission provided funding for those countries that chose to participate¹⁹. The ESS agreement included the list of variables, the sample and quality requirements as well as the format and the time delays for transmission.

3.2. Evidence available

As requested in the Council conclusions on a benchmark for learning mobility (2011/C372/08), the pilot data collection was done in 2014 through household surveys; either the EU Labour Force Survey or a specific stand-alone survey (BG, ES and SE). 16 Member States participated in the pilot (BE, BG, EE, ES, IT, LV, LT, HU, NL, AT, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK, SE), of which 10 countries took up the offer for financial support by the Commission (BG, ES, IT, LT, HU, NL, AT, RO, SI, SE). Data from the 16 countries conducting the pilot are judged to be comparable as shown by the Eurostat reporting²⁰.

In addition, a few Member States also provided some information from national administrative sources (including CZ, DE and the UK). Member States could opt for a short or long version of the questionnaire. The long version also aimed at measuring youth mobility.

The Eurostat reporting shows that reliable results with a coefficient of variation below 15 % were obtained for only six countries: BE, IT, HU, NL, AT and SE. Data for five other countries can still be considered reliable according to sample size requirements but have a coefficient of variation of 15 % or more: BG, ES, PL, PT and SI. The results for IVET learning mobility cannot be published for three countries due to reliability concerns: EE, LV and LT. In addition, the results are of low reliability for two other countries: RO and SK. This illustrates that the main problem of the chosen method was to get reliable data for small populations through a sample survey.

Combining the results of the 16 available countries leads to an average IVET learning mobility of 3.1 % (weighted average of the 16 countries).

The conclusion is that a household survey is not the best vehicle for capturing IVET mobility, as it would require very big samples with high costs, but with no guarantee for reliable quality data for the EU target.

¹⁹ This in contrast to the process defined for the higher education benchmark indicator. Grants were offered to countries for both the IVET mobility pilot data collection and the higher education part (with a minimal uptake for the HE part).

²⁰ Doc 2015-ETS-05 and its annex: <https://circabc.europa.eu/w/browse/92373d62-bba3-42d2-be57-578a165bd0bb>. Initially 20 countries participated in the ESS agreement but no pilot data collections were in the end carried out in CZ, EL, FR and LU. FR would carry out a pilot data collection in 2016.

3.3 Conclusions based on work carried out and current evidence available

Given the outcome of the IVET mobility pilot data collection, the Commission will discuss possible options with the main stakeholders at Member State level to find a viable and sustainable solution for improving the evidence base on the IVET mobility benchmark indicator.

In this respect, it is essential that efforts match outcomes and consequently that the tools chosen for monitoring provide reliable and regular data without putting undue burden and costs on the statistical system.

Based on the pilot data collection and discussions with Member State authorities, the Commission draws the conclusion that it would be worth exploring the use of administrative data and review the feasibility of using such data to underpin the benchmark on IVET mobility. Administrative data on this already exists in some EU countries as well as in other participating countries of the Erasmus + programme.

From a policy point of view, there are clear advantages in switching to administrative data because of the possibility of combining Erasmus+ participants' data with other IVET mobility data²¹ as well as the prospect of having more frequent and recent data. This was the approach already chosen for the higher education benchmark indicator and it would allow the Commission to use monitoring to further EU policy/programme goals for IVET mobility.

The SGIB consultation showed that 12 out of 15 replying countries would agree in principle with changing the data source. Two would not agree (because of a lack of availability of data or a preference for survey data)²². The Commission therefore proposes to test the feasibility of data collection through administrative sources.

It should be underlined that a change in the data source would mean that the benchmark definition needs to be slightly revised as the current benchmark formulation implies data collection through a household survey (because of the age group coverage).

Therefore, similar to the approach for the higher education benchmark indicator, the proposed feasibility study would test if IVET institutions could provide information on their students'/graduates' learning mobility characteristics. This option was also highlighted in the SGIB comments in relation to the policy relevance of the indicator both at national and institutional level.

A revision of the IVET benchmark definition can only be envisaged in the light of the results of the feasibility study in terms of the evidence available at administrative/institutional level (data from administrative sources). A further discussion on whether to focus on inward or outward learning mobility will also be needed. In the current benchmark formulation, IVET mobility graduates who originate inside the EU but live in a non-EU country (and are between 18 and 34 years old) are not covered.

This work will be carried out together with Eurostat in close cooperation with main partners at EU, national and institutional level in the field of vocational education and training. However, a feasibility study requires time and it is therefore unlikely that the IVET mobility target could be assessed before 2020.

²¹ As can also be done for the higher education benchmark (once the correct format of the credit mobility data are available).

²² Another country noted that there is limited policy interest in this area and proposed not to pursue the action further.

4. OUTLOOK

The 2015 Joint Report Education and Training 2020 reports on progress and sets new priorities for 2020; it underlines that learning mobility is a priority where a main challenge is that 'Better data are needed for evidence monitoring on mobility'²³.

The 40 % increase of the budget of the EU's Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020) over its predecessor, the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013), is clear evidence of the continued and increased commitment of the Commission and Member States to increasing further learning mobility. A further increase was proposed by the Commission in the Multiannual financial framework (MFF) review²⁴ and the positive impact of mobility was confirmed and further encouraged in the recent 'Investing in Europe's Youth' initiative, where the Commission underlined that 'mobility of young people is essential to increase European consciousness and identity'.

The New European Skills Agenda²⁵ also stresses the importance of learning mobility by underlining that more support should be available for learners' mobility. It calls for greater engagement by Member States, including financial support.

These latest initiatives follow a number of Commission communications and Council conclusions since 2011 which, in turn, build on the considerable evidence of the importance attached to learning mobility in European, national and institutional policies.²⁶ The research evidence on the outcomes of learning mobility for society and the individual points to positive effects including on employability²⁷ and on institutions.

Nevertheless, the Mobility Scoreboard²⁸ for Higher Education revealed that the environment for learning mobility varies greatly between Member States, with significant barriers remaining in terms of information, student support and recognition. Similar results are seen from an equivalent exercise for IVET. In this regard, the Joint Report underlines that actions on transparency, quality assurance, validation and recognition of skills and qualifications have to be pursued and tracked²⁹.

The continued development of the evidence base regarding quantitative data on learning mobility should be seen in this broader context. The benchmark indicators actively support the evidence base for policies to increase learning mobility, not only at EU level, but also at national, regional and institutional levels. An improved evidence base is essential for informed policy decisions regarding future EU and national learning mobility programmes.

In this context, this report underlines that the Commission intends to:

- 1) Continue to implement the higher education learning mobility benchmark indicator following the path defined with the Member States and cooperation organisations.
- 2) Identify and discuss options for implementing the IVET mobility benchmark indicator based on the results of a feasibility study on collecting IVET mobility data from

²³ [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52015XG1215\(02\)&from=EN](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52015XG1215(02)&from=EN); section 2.3, 4th paragraph.

²⁴ COM(2016) 603 of 14.09.2016 p. 3: http://ec.europa.eu/budget/mff/lib/COM-2016-603/COM-2016-603_en.pdf.

²⁵ 'A New Skills Agenda for Europe', (COM(2016) 381/2), see p. 13 section on 'More support for learners' mobility'.

²⁶ The 2011 Council conclusions provide a long list of reference policy documents up to 2011. For the period 2012 to 2015 the following acts are of relevance: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32013R1288>, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32013R1288>; [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52011XG1220\(07\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52011XG1220(07)).

²⁷ See for example: http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact_en.pdf,

<http://www.voiced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A40712>, http://www.pedz.uni-mannheim.de/daten/edz-b/gdbk/10/vetpro_en.pdf.

²⁸ https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Publications:Towards_a_Mobility_Scoreboard:_Conditions_for_Learning_A_broad_in_Europe.

²⁹ The Higher Education (2nd edition) and the IVET mobility scoreboards are accessible via a common platform published 8.12.2016: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/news/online-platform-mobility-scoreboard_en.

administrative sources. Follow up on the results of these consultations, if appropriate, with a proposal to revise the definition of the IVET mobility benchmark indicator.

The Commission asks the Council to support these developments.