



EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING

In accordance with the subsidiarity principle, primary responsibility for education and training policies lies with the Member States, with the European Union functioning in a solely supporting role. However, certain challenges are common to all Member States — ageing societies, skill deficits in the workforce, global competition and early childhood education — and thus call for joint responses, with countries working together and learning from each other^[1].

LEGAL BASIS

While vocational training was identified as an area of Community action in the Treaty of Rome in 1957, education was formally recognised as an area of EU competence in the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. The treaty states that the Community ‘shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity’.

The Treaty of Lisbon retained the provisions on the role of the EU in education and training (Title XII, Articles 165 and 166), while adding a provision that can be described as a horizontal ‘social clause’: Article 9 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) states: ‘In defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health’.

Moreover, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which has the same legal value as the Treaties (Article 6 of the Treaty on European Union), states: ‘Everyone has the right to education and to have access to continuing and vocational training’ (Article 14), as well as ‘the right to engage in work and to pursue a freely chosen or accepted occupation’ (Article 15).

OBJECTIVES

In its policies and actions, the Union must take account of requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of education and training. Thus, the EU’s long-term strategic objectives on education and training as set out in the Council Conclusions of 12 May 2009 are: (1) making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; (2) improving

[1]For further information, see Fact Sheet [3.6.4](#) on Higher Education.



the quality and efficiency of education and training; (3) promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship; (4) enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

ACHIEVEMENTS

A. 'Europe 2020' and 'Education and Training 2020'

Education and training policy gained particular momentum with the adoption of the [Europe 2020 strategy](#). Under Europe 2020, Member States were given specific guidance on priority reforms each year in the form of country-specific recommendations. In the field of education and training, the [Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training](#) (ET 2020) outlined the instruments and arrangements for joint work at EU level. It also set seven objectives to be reached by 2020:

- At least 95% of children between the age of four and the compulsory primary education starting age should participate in early childhood education (2018 rate: 95.4%);
- The rate of 15-year-olds with insufficient abilities in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15% (2015 rate: 19.7% for reading, 22.2% for mathematics and 20.6% for science);
- The rate of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10% (2018 rate: 10.6%);
- The rate of 30 to 34-year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40% (2018 rate: 40.7%);
- An average of at least 15% of adults (aged between 25 and 64) should participate in lifelong learning (2018 rate: 11.1%);
- At least 20% of higher education graduates and 6% of 18 to 34-year-olds with an initial vocational qualification should have spent some time studying or training abroad;
- At least 82% of graduates (20 to 34-year-olds having successfully completed upper secondary or tertiary education) who left education one to three years ago should be in employment (2018 rate: 81.6%).

While European countries have made significant progress in most areas, the figures relating to basic competences (reading, mathematics and science) are still a cause for concern.

B. New Skills Agenda for Europe

In 2016, the Commission released a communication on a [New Skills Agenda for Europe](#) ([COM\(2016\) 0381](#)) in which it proposed 10 actions to equip people with the skills needed in the job market:

- A Skills Guarantee to help low-skilled adults acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills;
- A review of the [European Qualifications Framework](#);



- A ‘Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition’ to support cooperation among education, employment and industry stakeholders;
- A ‘Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills’ to improve skills intelligence;
- A ‘Skills Profile Tool for Third-Country Nationals’ to support early identification and profiling of the skills and qualifications of migrants;
- Support for vocational education and training, particularly through events and activities within the European Vocational Skills Week;
- A review of the [Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong learning](#);
- A revision of the [Europass](#) Framework;
- A proposal for a Recommendation on Graduate Tracking aiming to improve understanding of graduates’ performance after their education and training experiences;
- The analysis and sharing of best practices to manage the movement of highly skilled and qualified people between countries (‘brain flow’).

C. Early childhood education

Following the adoption of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), which acknowledges that ‘children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality’, the issue of early childhood education has become more prominent. In May 2019, the Council approved a [Recommendation](#) on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems^[2].

D. European Education Area

In May 2018, following the Gothenburg summit, the Commission published a communication entitled ‘Building a stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies’ (COM(2018) 0268). It sets out its vision on building a ‘European Education Area’ including, among other things, a proposal for a Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas and of the outcomes of learning periods abroad. This [recommendation](#) was adopted by the Council on 26 November 2018^[3].

E. Erasmus

[Erasmus+](#) is the EU programme for the fields of education, training, youth and sport for the period 2014-2020. The specific objectives pursued by the Erasmus+ programme are: (1) to improve the level of key competences and skills, with particular regard to their relevance for the labour market and their contribution to a cohesive society; (2) to foster quality improvements, excellence in innovation, and internationalisation of education and training institutions; (3) to promote the emergence and raise awareness of a European lifelong learning area designed to complement policy reforms at national level; (4) to enhance the international dimension of education and training; and

[2]OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 4.

[3]OJ C 444, 10.12.2018, p. 1.



(5) to improve the teaching and learning of languages. For the education sector, the programme is delivering on these goals through a framework of key actions:

- Key Action 1: learning mobility of individuals;
- Key Action 2: cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices;
- Key Action 3: support for policy reform.

The [Commission's proposal](#) for a successor programme (2021-2027) was published in May 2018 ([COM\(2018\) 0367](#)). The overall architecture of the programme remains essentially the same. However, the Commission proposes to double the budget from its levels in the 2014-2020 programming period to EUR 30 billion.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Parliament has always supported close cooperation between Member States in the fields of education and training and encourages the development of a European dimension in Member States' education policies. It actively participates in the policy cycle linked to ET 2020.

A. Erasmus

In its [resolution of 14 September 2017](#), Parliament acknowledged the extremely positive impact of Erasmus+. It stressed that the new programme should be more open and accessible, and drew attention to difficulties with the recognition of European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits. It called for the creation of a European student eCard to give students Europe-wide access to services. Members emphasised the importance of fostering active citizenship, civic education and European identity through the programme. On 13 March 2019, in the context of Brexit, Parliament also adopted a [resolution](#) on the continuation of ongoing learning mobility activities under the Erasmus+ programme in the context of the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU.

In its [resolution of 28 March 2019](#) on the next generation of the Erasmus+ programme, Parliament proposed to triple the budget to EUR 41 billion, allowing for an increase in participants and a focus on people with fewer opportunities^[4]. MEPs proposed to revise the budget allocation to reflect these priorities, for instance by offering pre-school and early education staff the option to participate in mobility schemes. Vocational education exchanges, especially in border regions, are also a priority of the new programme and will be allocated a higher budget. The final text of the new regulation on Erasmus is to be negotiated and agreed with the Council in the beginning of the 9th parliamentary term.

B. Education and employment

The Committee on Culture and Education (CULT) and the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) drew up a joint own-initiative report on the Commission communication on the 'New Skills Agenda for Europe'. The resolution was adopted in Parliament [on 14 September 2017](#)^[5]. Parliament advocated a holistic approach to education and skills development, inviting Member States to not only focus on

[4] Texts adopted, [P8_TA\(2019\)0324](#).

[5] OJ C 337, 20.9.2018, p. 135.



employability skills, but also on skills that are useful to society. Other issues mentioned were developing a more comprehensive approach to the upskilling of migrants, investing in early childhood education and care, boosting lifelong learning opportunities, enhancing the key role of non-formal and informal learning as well as fostering digital, STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and entrepreneurial skills.

CULT and EMPL jointly drew up a legislative report on the Commission's proposal on an update of the Europass framework. The new Europass framework was adopted on 18 April 2018 through [Decision \(EU\) 2018/646](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council.

C. Other specific areas

Parliament also takes a strong interest in Commission communications that target specific areas of education and training. Examples include Parliament's resolutions of 15 April 2014 on [new technologies and open educational resources](#), of 8 September 2015 on [promoting youth entrepreneurship through education and training](#), of 12 September 2017 on [academic further and distance education as part of the European lifelong learning strategy](#), of 12 June 2018 on [modernisation of education in the EU](#) and of 11 December 2018 on [education in the digital era: challenges, opportunities and lessons for EU policy design](#).

Pierre Hériard
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