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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 having only a supporting role. However, a number of 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 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 lifelong education and training, the mobility of learners and teachers in Europe and the development of a sense of belonging to the Union. To that end, in a communication published in September 2020 ([COM\(2020\)0625](#)), the Commission outlined a ‘European Education Area’ based on six dimensions:

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



quality of education and training, inclusion, green and digital transitions, teachers and trainers, higher education and the geopolitical dimension. Following the Commission's communication, in February 2021 the Council adopted a [resolution](#) on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030). This resolution sets out a list of objectives to be achieved in the coming years:

- The rate of 15-year-olds with underachievement in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15% by 2030 (2020 rate: 22.5% for reading, 22.9% for mathematics and 22.3% for science);
- The share of low-achieving eighth-graders in computer and information literacy should be less than 15% by 2030;
- At least 96% of children between 3 years old and the starting age for compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education and care by 2030 (2020 rate: 94.8%);
- The share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 9% by 2030 (2020 rate: 10.2%);
- The rate of 25 to 34-year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 45% (2020 rate: 40.3%);
- The proportion of recent graduates from vocational education and training benefiting from exposure to work-based learning during their studies should be at least 60% by 2025;
- At least 47% of adults aged 25-64 should have participated in learning during the last 12 months by 2025.

Compared to the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020), the most significant new feature is the digital skills indicator. The indicators adopted should be monitored through a governance body set up to implement the European Education Area.

ACHIEVEMENTS

A. Erasmus+

[Erasmus+](#) is the EU programme for the fields of education, training, youth and sport for the period 2021-2027. 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 (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.

B. Education and employment

In July 2020, the Commission published a communication entitled 'European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience' ([COM\(2020\)0274](#)), in which it proposed twelve actions to help individuals and businesses develop more and better skills:

- Action 1: Pact for Skills;
- Action 2: Strengthening skills intelligence;
- Action 3: EU support for strategic national upskilling action;
- Action 4: Proposal for a Council recommendation on vocational education and training;
- Action 5: Rolling out the European Universities initiative and upskilling scientists;
- Action 6: Developing skills to support the twin digital and green transitions;
- Action 7: Increasing the number of STEM graduates; promoting entrepreneurial and transversal skills;
- Action 8: Skills for Life;
- Action 9: Initiative on individual learning accounts;
- Action 10: A European approach to micro-credentials;
- Action 11: A new Europass platform;
- Action 12: Improving the enabling framework to unlock Member States' and private investments in skills.

C. Other achievements

Over the past five years, the Council has approved a series of recommendations aimed at implementing the European Education Area. 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', in May 2019 the Council approved a recommendation on [High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems](#). Expressing a growing concern for secondary education, recommendations also focused on [promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching](#) (May 2018), on [automatic mutual recognition of qualifications and learning periods abroad](#) (November 2018) and on [improving the teaching and learning of languages](#) (May 2019). The Council also approved a resolution on a [strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond](#) (February 2021).

On 18 January 2022, the Commission launched a new higher education package, which included a [European Strategy for Universities](#) and a [proposal for a Council recommendation on transnational higher education cooperation](#). The Council responded to these two initiatives in April of the same year, adopting [conclusions on](#)



[a European strategy empowering higher education institutions](#) and a [recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation](#). These acts aim to:

- Help European higher education institutions contribute to shaping sustainable and resilient economies and to making the European Union greener, more inclusive and more digital;
- Intensify transnational cooperation and expand its scope, and develop a genuinely European dimension in the higher education sector, built on shared values.

Students are not the only focus of EU initiatives regarding education. In 2020, the Commission launched the European Innovative Teaching Award, which aims to:

- Celebrate the achievements of teachers and schools and give credit to their work;
- Identify and promote outstanding teaching and learning practices;
- Provide the means for mutual learning;
- Highlight the value of the [Erasmus+ programme](#) for collaboration between teachers at the European level (e.g. Erasmus+ Teacher Academies) and the establishment of the European Education Area.

Finally, the Council has published a [recommendation on pathways to school success](#), which was adopted by Member States on 28 November 2022. The recommendation aims to ensure better educational outcomes for all learners by boosting performance in basic skills and reducing early leaving from education and training. It takes a holistic view of school success, looking both at educational achievement and attainment and at well-being at school. The recommendation repeals and replaces the 2011 Council recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving.

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 need to foster 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 May 2021, Parliament and the Council adopted [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/817](#) establishing Erasmus+ programme for the period 2021-2027. With a budget of EUR 26.6 billion (compared to EUR 14.7 billion in the previous period), the new edition of the programme aims to increase the participation of people with fewer opportunities owing, for example, to disability, geographical remoteness or poverty. Erasmus+ will support lifelong learning for adult learners. Administrative formalities will be simplified and access to structural funds will be possible via a 'Seal of Excellence' for projects not selected under the programme. Lastly, the programme will contribute to the EU's climate objectives through measures to reduce its climate footprint.

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'. Parliament adopted a resolution on the subject on [14 September 2017](#). It advocated a holistic approach to education and skills development, inviting Member States to not only focus on employability skills, but also on skills that are useful to society.

CULT and EMPL also 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.

Furthermore, in its [position](#) on the proposal on a [European Year of Youth 2022](#), Parliament insisted that the Year of Youth should boost efforts to empower young people to acquire relevant knowledge and skills and a better understanding of their working environments.

Finally, on 19 May 2022, Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) in which it welcomes the Commission's proposals to develop a European approach to micro-credentials, individual learning accounts and learning for environmental sustainability as part of the European Education Area by 2025 and notes that this would help make learning paths more flexible, broaden learning opportunities, deepen mutual recognition, create ties with the digital and green transitions and strengthen the role played by both higher education and vocational education and training (VET) institutions in lifelong learning.

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](#), of 11 December 2018 on [education in the digital era: challenges, opportunities and lessons for EU policy design](#), and of 11 February 2021 on the [European Skills Agenda](#). Finally, in its resolution of 25 March 2021 on [shaping digital education policy](#), Parliament also set out its position on the Commission communication



entitled 'Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) – Resetting education and training for the digital age' ([COM\(2020\)0624](#)).

For more information on this topic, please see the [website](#) of the Committee on Culture and Education.

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