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EDUCATION AND TRAINING WITHIN EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY

1. EUROPE 2020

Education and training and the Europe 2020 Strategy

To tackle an unprecedented economic crisis, the European Union set up in 2010 a strategy for boosting growth and jobs, Europe 2020. A key feature of Europe 2020 is the aim to promote smart growth. The underlying rationale is that Europe has to compete in the global economy through a highly productive workforce, world-class R&D, cutting-edge technology and developing new products.

The Europe 2020 strategy has identified education as an essential driver for growth and a key instrument for addressing issues such as unemployment (particularly among young people), globalisation and the knowledge economy.

The EU Member States are well aware that such issues can only be resolved if Europe invests in the knowledge, skills and competences of its citizens throughout their life and across all sectors of education and training: early childhood education and care, and later, schools lay the groundwork; vocational education and training plays a key role in facilitating the transition from the phase of learning to work, and higher education trains the staff needed to advance research, development and innovation; re- and up-skilling of adults is necessary for a productive workforce.

Education and training systems therefore need to be urgently modernised to face up to the current and future challenges, also bearing in mind the increasingly important and disruptive impact of technology both on education and training systems and on learning.

Although reforms in education and training are more necessary than ever, the need for tight fiscal consolidation linked to the crisis, the slow growth and productivity prospects of the EU relative to other developed and emerging economies, the high unemployment rates and skills mismatches, make the reform process particularly testing for the Member States. In this context, the EU can however fully play its supporting role with regard to Member States and create genuine added value.
Education and training play a key role under Europe 2020: one of the five Europe 2020 headline targets aims at bringing down early school-leaving and increasing tertiary attainment. Many of the Country-specific Recommendations (CSRs), which are addressed to Member States to guide their reform policies, concern those headline targets and issues linked to the relevance of education outcomes, skills and VET. A few CSRs address the funding of education and training, in line with the Commission's call to Member States to maintain funding for growth-friendly policies, namely education, when consolidating budgets.

The European Semester and, in particular, the CSRs are increasingly relevant for policy-makers in the field of education and training. This trend requires due policy attention, as the responsible Ministers are expected to enact measures in response to the CSRs. In March 2013, the Heads of State and Government meeting in the European Council stated that "Education and training systems need to perform better, ensuring that young people are equipped with the right skill and linking the worlds of work and education more effectively."

Country-specific Recommendations should, in the first place, support Member States in their efforts to improve the performance of their education and training systems and can offer a way for national policy-makers to mobilise political support for their domestic reform agenda.

CSRs can also play a crucial role in helping to secure financial support for policy reforms in key priority areas through European Structural and Investment Funds as illustrated in the document 'Channelling Cohesion Policy Funds towards Education and Training'.

The present document sets out the inter-linkages between Europe 2020 and the work of specific policy-sectors in the field of education and training (general education, higher education, vocational training and adult learning), with a view to ensure that these policy-sectors are fully informed about the developments under Europe 2020 and can benefit from them. The coherence between the Europe 2020 Strategy and the work in the field of education and training will also be assessed in the mid-term review of ET2020 scheduled in 2014, in order to better adjust the scope and the instruments of the Open Method of Coordination in education and training to the latest policy priorities.

Organising the response to the crisis: the European Semester

The economic situation in Europe is a key concern for all Member States and the European Union as a whole. To overcome the crisis, launch a job-rich recovery and restore sound public finance is a recurring issue at practically each meeting of the Heads of State and Government at the European Council.

This crisis impacts on the life of millions of European citizens, including many young people. Currently, almost 26 million Europeans are without employment, among them 5.7 young people. While unemployment is forecast to peak this year at 11.1%, growth is expected to amount to a mere 0.1% of GDP.

This is the longest and deepest crisis in Europe in living memory, and it affects all areas of economic and societal life, with far-reaching implications for virtually all policy fields. Education and training are no exception in this respect.
The Europe 2020 Strategy constitutes a large effort to coordinate various policies, including the areas of public finance, macro-economic developments, employment, research and development, social, environmental, as well as education and training.

This policy coordination has been organised through the following steps, the so-called "European Semester":

- First, the Commission sets outs each year its views on the overriding policy priorities for policy measures and reforms to overcome the crisis. The Commission puts forward its views in a document called the Annual Growth Survey, which is usually presented in November.

- At their March meeting, the European heads of state and government discuss this paper and fix the direction and top priorities for their reform agendas.

- Next, this guidance is translated into plans for action at the national level (National Reform Programmes), which are presented in April.

- On this basis, the Commission assesses the situation, key challenges and intended policy measures in each Member State, and drafts Country-specific Recommendations, which are adopted by the Commission at the end of May and submitted to the Council.

- After in-depth scrutiny by the competent Council formations – i.e. the Council for economic and financial affairs (ECOFIN) and for employment and social affairs (EPSCO) - the June European Council has the final say on these country-specific Recommendations.

- The country-specific Recommendations are formally adopted by the Council in July. This marks the end of each "European Semester".

Each European Semester builds on the outcome of the previous one. Once the Council has adopted the country-specific Recommendations, the focus shifts to the implementation of the necessary reform measures at national level.

The key role of Country-specific Recommendations

The very first set of Country-specific Recommendations was adopted in the first European Semester in 2011, and revised in 2012. The 2012 Recommendations remain valid until they will be up-dated in July 2013 at the end of the current (third) European Semester.

Typically, the Recommendations do not change radically from year to year. The bulk of the 2011 Recommendations were carried over to 2012 (their formulation was revised to make them more operational and clarify them, where necessary). It is to be expected that in 2013 only few issues will be added that are genuinely new but the CSRs would focus even more on operational solutions.

The country-specific Recommendations are up-dated on an annual basis, but this does not necessarily mean that results are (or could) be expected within a 12 months period. In the 2013 Annual Growth Survey, the Commission explicitly acknowledged that some
reforms take time to show effects, and this is certainly true for the area of education and training.

Given the key role of education and training for Europe 2020 it is not surprising that a high number of CSRs is linked to the fight against early school leaving (6 CSRs) and modernising higher education (9 CSRs), which are the subject of the two-pronged education headline target (cf annex).

Importantly, the issue of bringing closer the world of learning and of work has also left its mark on the content of many CSRs: calls to link education and work, to make better use of work-based elements in education, of improving the quality and the attractiveness of VET, to promote apprenticeships or to make educational outcomes more relevant to labour market needs show up in 16 CSRs.

It would be misguided to perceive the Recommendations as a tool to criticise Member States. Their aim is to solve problems that exist objectively, show up in data and have been identified by Ministers as a cause of common concern. In fact, country-specific Recommendations can support the domestic reform agenda of Ministers; in this sense, CSRs are not only meant to be country-specific but also country-supportive

The increasing importance of CSRs – their guiding role for future EU funds

Until now, the County-specific Recommendations expressed a call for action, which is based a political commitment. In the future, CSRs will play an increased role because they will be linked to funding. This new connection is set out in detail in the accompanying document on the European Structural and Investment Funds.

The key point is that the programming of interventions the future European Structural and Investment Funds is set to mirror closely the challenges identified in the CSRs. This means that the future concentration of funds on key investment priorities should be guided and determined in each country by the substance of CSRs.

In consequence, Ministries that are responsible for taking action in response to a CSR will find it easier to secure funding, as they can make a legitimate claim at national level to receive co-funding from the European funds.

The amounts in question can be quite substantial. For example, in the 2007-13 programming period, €32 billion are planned to be spent on education and training, the bulk being processed through the European Social Fund (€25 billion).

As the main work for the programming takes place this year, the 2013 CSRs will be determining for the 2014 – 2020 programming period. Steps to ensure that an adequate share of the funding, available in a country, is foreseen for education and training have to be taken this year.

Key messages of the 2013 Annual Growth Survey on education and training

Education and training have been one of the pillars of the Europe 2020 Strategy since its inception in 2010. In recent years policy attention has been shifting even more to this policy area. One reason for this development is the devastating impact of the crisis on the situation of young people (youth unemployment amounted in January 2013 to 23.6% and is some Member States to above 50%).
In November 2012, the Commission presented a new policy initiative on "Re-thinking Education", which focuses on the need to equip people with the right skills to enable them to succeed on the labour market. The 2013 Annual Growth Survey (AGS) drew on this analysis and its policy messages and called for raising the performance of education and training systems and the overall skill level, linking the worlds of work and education more closely together.

The 2013 AGS did not only call for reforming – it also took position on financing them: Member States should give priority to growth-friendly policies – such as education – when consolidating their public budgets; and the 2013 adopted a more differentiated approach by adding that those Member States that have the fiscal margin of manoeuvre should seek to strengthen their investments in skills, education and training.

**Coherence between the EU-cooperation in education and training and Europe 2020**

One of the key questions is how the European cooperation in the field of Education and Training (the Strategic Framework ET 2020) can support best the implementation of Europe 2020 and help to improve the performance of education and training so that they give the best possible support to learners and equip them with the right skills and competences to succeed on the labour market.

In 2012, the Council and the Commission agreed in their ET 2020 Joint Report on a number of new working methods, which should help to mobilise ET 2020 in support of Europe 2020: (1) the Commission developed a new analytical report to strengthen the evidence basis for policy-making in the field of education and training. This "Education and Training Monitor" was presented for the first time in November 2012; (2) a new form of peer-review has been launched that focussed on the output of the European Semester. A first pilot event was organised in September 2012 and should be followed by an improved set-up in autumn 2013; (3) to reach out to key stakeholders, the new Education, Training and Youth Forum was launched in October 2012; (4) the cooperation between the Employment Committee and the Education Committee is being intensified.

While these new tools have been developed in 2012, the next steps should consist in exploiting the synergies with the work in key policy sectors, such as ESL, Higher Education, VET and adult learning and in looking into the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of ET 2020.

2. **IMPLICATIONS FOR MINISTERS AND MINISTRIES IN CHARGE OF GENERAL EDUCATION, VET, HIGHER EDUCATION AND ADULT LEARNING**

Europe 2020 is about overcoming the crisis and boosting growth and jobs. But these overall objectives do not make it the sole responsibility of Ministers of Finance, Economics and Labour. An important part of the work under Europe 2020 concerns education and training.

This fact has very concrete and practical implications for the work of the responsible ministries and Ministers. It is in their interest to be actively involved in the European Semester.

This applies certainly to National Reform Programmes, as the ministries in charge of education and training have an interest to portray their policies as growth-enhancing by highlighting their contribution to growth and jobs. This also applies for the implementation of CSRs, because ministries – and Ministers – are in charge of
implementing reforms in education and training. Another good reason to be involved in the work on CSRs is, of course, that CSRs can help to secure EU financial support.

Country-specific Recommendations do not refer to "education and training" in general, in some abstract way. These recommendations are also specific in that they pin-point issues linked to a concrete policy sector, be it schools, higher education or VET (as shown in the annex).

Therefore, dealing with Europe 2020 in national ministries, cannot be confined to the directorates of European affairs. In the last consequence, it is a matter for the directorates in charge of the respective policy sector. They should play an active role and use the momentum of the Europe 2020 reform process for advancing the measures they think are suited best to improve policy-making.

The Director-Generals in charge of a specific policy sector at national level should use the European level as a forum to voice their sector-specific views, interests and need, and they should do this on a continuing and regular basis. DG-meetings should address the state of play of Europe 2020 and of implementing Country-specific Recommendations as a standard item on the agenda of their meetings.

The DGs' work should be articulated with the different thematic and peer reviews that are organised in the context of Europe 2020 and ET 2020. They should be associated to the on-going discussion about "optimising the OMC" (launched by the IE PRES).

In autumn of each year, all DG meetings should examine the outcome of the European Semester and help to ensure that the relevant thematic working groups are involved in the follow-up work on CSRs.

**Conclusion**

In the face of the inter-linkages between Europe 2020 and the EU-level cooperation in the field of education and training, it is important that the ministries and the Ministers in charge of education and training are involved in the implementation of the European Semester. To play an active role is in their interest and it is beneficial for achieving the objectives of Europe 2020.

The Country-specific Recommendations are highly relevant for the policy-making and reforms in all policy-sectors in the area of education and training: early childhood education and care, general education, higher education, vocational training and adult learning. The ministries and the Ministers that have the expertise for developing and the competence for implementing reforms in response to the CSRs play a critical role in this process and need to be involved in it.

A coherent use of the European Structural and Investment Funds to address key challenges in the field of education and training will help to advance reforms at national level and achieve the European goals of boosting growth and jobs.
## 2012 Country-specific recommendations by theme and country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Countries</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sufficient and sustainable funding</td>
<td>AT, BG, CZ [only for HE], DE, HU, LV, NL, PL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cost-effectiveness of system</td>
<td>DK</td>
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<tr>
<td>References to lifelong learning</td>
<td>BE, EE, ES, FR, PL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Young people</td>
<td>AT, ES, FI, FR, IT, LT, LU, LV, PL, SE, SK, UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disadvantaged or vulnerable groups</td>
<td>AT, BG, DE, HU, SE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roma</td>
<td>BG, HU, SK</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low-skilled workers; persons with low education levels or very poor basic skills</td>
<td>EE, LT, LU, SI, UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>Older workers</td>
<td>ES, SI</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long-term unemployed</td>
<td>FI, LT, LV</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improving educational outcomes; skills of the workforce; relevance of skills for labour market demand/needs</td>
<td>AT, CY, DE, EE, ES, FI, IT, LU, MT, PL, SI, SK</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reform needs in Higher Education</td>
<td>AT, BG, CZ, EE, IT, LV, SI, SK, PL [formulation in CSR for PL not explicitly linked to HE]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schools (including ESL and teacher training) and compulsory education</td>
<td>BG, CZ, DE, DK, ES, HU, IT, LV, MT, PL [quality of teaching], UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-school care facilities</td>
<td>CZ, DE, PL, SK</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vocational Training; Apprenticeship schemes</td>
<td>BE, DK, ES, FR, LT, LV, PL, SI, SK, UK</td>
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