Education, training and Europe 2020

2012/2045(INI) - 20/12/2011 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: to present the **draft 2012 Joint Report** of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in **education and training** (ET2020).

BACKGROUND: in 2009, the Council drew up the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020").

Since then, the economic and political context has changed, creating new uncertainties and constraints. The European Union had to take further action to stem the worst financial and economic crisis in its history and, in response, has agreed on a strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth: Europe 2020. Education and training play a crucial role in this strategy.

The 2012 Annual Growth Survey (AGS) stresses that: the focus of Europe 2020 needs to be simultaneously on: reform measures having a short-term growth effect; and on setting the right growth model for the medium-term. **Education and training systems have to be modernised** to reinforce their efficiency and quality and to equip people with the skills and competences they need to succeed on the labour market.

A key instrument to modernise education and training, ET 2020 can make a major contribution to achieving Europe 2020's objectives. But to do this, ET 2020 must be adjusted by updating its working priorities, tools and governance structure. Based on an assessment of progress made in key policy areas in the last three years, this draft Joint Report proposes **new working priorities for the period 2012 – 2014** geared to mobilise education and training to support Europe 2020.

The draft Joint Report also sets out a number of options to adjust the governance of ET 2020 to ensure that it contributes to Europe 2020.

CONTENT: research suggests that improving educational achievements can yield immense long-term returns and generate growth and jobs in the European Union. Reaching the European benchmark of less than 15% low achievers in basic skills by 2020, for example, could generate enormous long-term aggregate economic gains for the European Union.

This contrasts with the fact that — even before the crisis — spending in some Member States was rather low, close to or below 4% of GDP, while the European Union average stood at almost 5% of GDP — below the level of 5.3% in the United States.

Ne investments and reforms are needed:

- **Early School Leaving (ESL)**: youth unemployment has risen from 15.5 % in 2008 to 20.9 % in 2010, while the share of 15 to 24 year olds neither in education, employment or training rose by two percentage points. 53 % of early school leavers were unemployed. Against this backdrop, the Europe 2020 target to reduce the share of 18 – 24 year olds having left education and training prematurely to **less than 10% by 2020** becomes particularly critical. If current trends continue, this target will not be reached. As Europe is not on track to achieve the headline target, there is an urgent need to strengthen the policy approach. In the next years, work on ESL needs to be one of the top priorities under ET 2020;

- **tertiary education attainment**: to emerge stronger from the crisis, Europe needs to generate economic growth based on knowledge and innovation. Higher education can be a powerful driver in this respect. It provides the highly-qualified scientific workforce that Europe needs to advance research and development and equips people with the skills and qualifications they need in the knowledge-intensive economy. Europe 2020 set the Headline Target to increase the share of 30-34 year olds with a tertiary or equivalent degree to 40 % by 2020. In 2010, the average level of tertiary education attainment of this age group was 33.6 %. To reach the target, Member States should continue their reform efforts. Reforms should address the challenge of increasing the number of successful graduates, while maintaining and enhancing the quality of education and research. Modernising higher education will contribute significantly to achieving the objectives of Europe 2020;
- **lifelong learning strategies**: for the majority of Europeans, lifelong learning (LLL) is not a reality. Recent data on the number of adults aged 25 – 64 participation in LLL show a slight downwards trend. The current level of 9.1 % (2010) is far below the ET 2020 benchmark of 15% to be reached by 2020. This weak performance is especially serious given the crisis. Unemployed young people and low-skilled adults need to be able to rely on education and training to give them a better chance in the labour market. Member States must improve their systems as regards the detection of obstacles to life long learning, putting in place global strategies, etc;
- **learning mobility**: mobility strengthens Europe's foundation for future knowledge-based growth and ability to innovate and compete at international level10. It strengthens peoples' employability and personal development and is valued by employers. Education institutions, education and training systems and businesses equally benefit from the learning experience, personal contacts and networks that result from mobility. Promoting transnational learning mobility is an excellent example of European added value. However, current levels of mobility do not reflect its value. Roughly 10% — 15% of higher education graduates spend a proportion of their studies abroad, where the added value of mobility is most widely acknowledged; but only about 3% of graduates from initial VET do so. European funding programmes have a key role to play. As part of the new Multiannual Financial Framework for 2014 – 2020, the Commission has proposed to nearly double the number of beneficiaries in the future 'Erasmus for all' programme, from 400 000 to almost 700 000 per year. However, financial programmes need to go hand in hand with policy reforms;
- **new skills and jobs**: the crisis has spurred changes in the demand for skills. Demand for jobs requiring low qualifications is decreasing, and tomorrow's knowledge-based industries require increasing levels of qualification. A recent forecast expects the share of highly qualified jobs to increase by almost 16 million, from 29 % (2010) to 35 % of all jobs in 2020. Conversely, the share of jobs demanding a low level of skills is expected to fall by around 12 million, from 20 % to less than 15%. ET 2020 must support the implementation of the Flagship Initiative 'Agenda for new skills and jobs'. The Commission will present in 2012 a Communication on rethinking skills, proposing action to improve key competences and to promote closer links between education and the labour market.
- **ET 2020'S contribution to Europe 2020**: the communication underscores the urgent need to invest in reformed education and training so that it supports sustainable growth and jobs. On the basis of the Commission's assessment and the consultation of Member States and European stakeholder organisations, the Commission confirms that the four ET 2020 strategic objectives set in 2009 remain valid. It proposes replacing the list of mid-term priority areas agreed in 2009 by a **new one that is geared to mobilise education and training** to support growth and jobs. In addition, the Commission suggests reviewing the working arrangements under ET 2020 that were devised before Europe 2020 and the European Semester were agreed. To increase the contribution of ET 2020 to Europe 2020, the **governance** of ET 2020 and its working tools could be adjusted to coincide with the framework established by the European Semester. Moreover, to strengthen the link between Europe 2020 and ET 2020, the Commission could organise every year an exchange of views between stakeholders in the field of education and training. This new Education and Training Forum could in early October discuss progress in modernising education and training systems drawing on the discussion of education issues in the European Semester. Lastly, all instruments

need to be mobilised to achieve the objectives set under Europe 2020 and ET 2020, including the Lifelong Learning Programme, the future Erasmus for all Programme, structural funds and Horizon 2020.

Annex: it should be noted that the Annex of the Communication proposes **new priority areas** for European cooperation in education and training in 2012-14:

(**1) Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality**: the main measures include: (i)improving European reference tools; (ii) to promote learning mobility at all levels; (iii) the development of comprehensive national lifelong learning strategies.

(2) Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training : (i) to improve basic skills (literacy, Mathematics, Science and Technology), languages; (ii) to modernise higher education and increasing tertiary attainment levels ; (iii) to attract and promote the relevance of VET; (iii) to provide efficient funding and evaluation.

(3) Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship: (i) to prevent early school leaving; (ii) to promote early childhood education and care (ECEC) ; (iii) to reinforce mutual learning on effective ways to raise educational achievement in an increasingly diverse society.

(4) Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training: (i) to promote partnerships with business, research, civil society; (ii) to support networks for schools, universities and other education and training providers to promote new methods of organising learning (including Open Educational Resources); (iii) to work together to promote the acquisition of the key competences identified in the 2006 Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, including digital competences and how ICT and entrepreneurship can enhance innovation in education and training.