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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

on progress towards the achievement of the European Education Area

{SWD(2022) 750 final} - {SWD(2022) 751 final}

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1. Introduction

In recent years at EU-level increasing policy attention has been devoted to promoting quality and inclusiveness in education. In 2017 the Rome Declaration pledged to work towards a '*Union where young people receive the best education and training and can study and find jobs across the continent.*' The same year the Commission set out the **vision of the European Education Area (EEA)**[1] as a genuine common space for quality education and lifelong learning across borders for all. The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission solemnly proclaimed at the Gothenburg Social Summit the European Pillar of Social Rights, which sets out as its first principle that '*Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning….*' In 2019, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen committed to making the EEA a reality by 2025: '*We need to bring down barriers to learning and improve access to quality education. We need to enable learners to move more easily between education systems in different countries. And we need to change the culture of education towards lifelong learning that enriches us all.*'[2]

As set out in the 2020 Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025 (EEA Communication) and two 2021 Council Resolutions[3], the **overall approach to achieving the EEA** is based on a set of:

- policy objectives for reform and European cooperation[4];
- EU-level targets to measure progress[5];
- EU-level actions to support Member States in implementation[6]; and
- a reformed governance framework for cooperation and co-creation[7].

Putting in place such an ambitious agenda requires the active involvement of Member States, EU institutions and stakeholders, in particular teachers, trainers, learners, and education and training institutions.

The EEA plays a pivotal role for the **EU policy agenda** notably for 'promoting our European way of life' and 'an economy that works for people'[8]. It is among the drivers of 'a Europe fit for the digital age'[9] and the European Green Deal. It contributes to 'a Union of Equality', 'a stronger Europe in the world', and 'a new push for European democracy'.

Unexpected challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, put education and training systems to the test, with teachers, trainers and learners being significantly affected (although to varying degree) across the EU. New instruments and processes, such as NextGenerationEU and the Conference on the Future of Europe, have also helped advance the EEA.

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[1] The European Commission's contribution to the Leaders' meeting in Gothenburg
[2] Political guidelines 2019-2024
[3] Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) (EEA strategic framework Resolution), Council Resolution on the governance structure of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) (Governance Resolution).
[4] See SWD(2022) 750 Section I.1.1.
[5] By 2030, at least 96% of children between 3 years old and the starting age for mandatory primary schooling should be in early childhood education and care, while the proportion underperforming in reading, maths, science, or digital skills should be less than 15%. The share of young people leaving the system with no more than a lower secondary education qualification should be below 9%, while the share of young people with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 45%. By 2025, at least 60% of recent VET graduates should have been exposed to work-based learning and at least 47% of adults should have participated in learning over the previous 12 months. See the 2022 Education and Training Monitor accompanying this Commission Communication (SWD (2022) 751).
[6] See SWD(2022) 750 and Annex 1.
[7] See SWD(2022) 750 and Annex 2.
[8] The European Skills Agenda, the renewed VET policy and the European Care Strategy also contribute to achieving the objectives of EEA, in particular with regards to early childhood education and care (ECEC), lifelong and adult learning and vocational education and training (VET). Specific initiatives from these areas (e.g. Council Recommendation on individual learning accounts), are not described in this report, which focuses on the 40 actions announced in the EEA Communication.
[9] The digital education action plan (DEAP) was adopted together with the EEA Communication. It forms part of the EEA vision, as supporting the green and digital transition in education and training is one of the focus areas under the EEA. The progress report covers a limited number of digital actions referenced in the EEA Communication. Monitoring all actions announced under the DEAP, which covers a different period (2021-2027) and a higher number of digital actions, is beyond its scope.

EU funding supports the building of the EEA. The Erasmus+ programme, with its budget increasing two-fold compared to 2014-2020 (to over EUR 26 bn) and its more inclusive, digital and green approach, helps drive European cooperation and national reforms towards achieving the EEA.[10] The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), the key instrument of the NextGenerationEU programme, can be a game changer in delivering EEA objectives across the board. It is complemented by cohesion policy funds. As a result, is estimated that total EU expenditure on education and skills between 2021 and 2027 will triple compared to the 2014-20 period.

This Communication, supported by evidence in the accompanying staff working document (SWD(2022) 750), takes stock of **progress towards the EEA**, examining in particular key actions, governance, investment and mobilisation of EU funds, and work on developing EU-level indicators. The Communication also highlights issues that require further attention and actions until 2025.

The **2022 Education and Training Monitor** (SWD (2022) 751) is part of the EEA progress report package[11]. The EEA progress report and the Monitor complement each other, with the report tracking progress in implementation, and the Monitor tracking progress towards achieving the EU-level targets. The Monitor also illustrates key findings on the Commission's new and complementary EU-level indicator domain on **equity in education**.

The Commission is publishing this progress report to provide input to a **midterm review** reflection process **in 2023**, including through an event with the European Parliament, to take stock, discuss and give fresh impetus to achieving the EEA, together with other EU institutions, Member States, regional and local authorities, social partners, civil society, and other stakeholders. Up until 2025, Member States, with the Commission's support, will need to focus on **implementation**, especially through ensuring **effective use of EU and national resources for reform and investment,** and **monitoring** of progress. The Commission will provide a full report on the EEA in 2025.

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[10] Other relevant programmes and EU funding instruments that also fund education and training include the Technical Support Instrument or the Digital Europe Programme.

[11] Volume 1 presents a cross-EU comparison of education and training systems, whereas Volume 2 consists of 27 in-depth country reports, covering policy reforms which reflect Member States' efforts towards achieving EEA objectives.

2. Progress so far towards the European Education Area (EEA)

2.1. EU initiatives shaping the EEA are on track

The implementation of EU-level action is on track. The EEA has set out a total of **40 EU-level actions**[12]. Of these, 14 are strategic EEA initiatives to be decided by the College of Commissioners, with most being delivered jointly by the Commission and the Council. These initiatives provide a framework for action and policy guidance to achieve progress in the main focus areas for reform and European cooperation. The Commission already proposed eight of these initiatives, and the Council adopted most of them. (See Section 4.1 for strategic EEA initiatives that remain to be tabled).

Strategic EEA initiatives already adopted				
Action	**Commission** (proposal/ decision)	**Council** (adoption)	**Implementation** (at EU and national level)	**Focus area**
Framework of inclusion measures of the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps 2021-27: This Commission Implementing Decision highlights measures to promote inclusion, equity and diversity in both programmes.	✓	-	✓	Quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality
Blended learning approaches for high-quality and inclusive primary and secondary education: This Council Recommendation addresses blending learning environments and tools to build more resilient primary and secondary education and training systems in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.	✓	✓	✓	Digital transition
Mobility of young volunteers across the EU: This Council Recommendation aims to enable young people to volunteer in other EU countries, boosting inclusiveness, quality, recognition and sustainability.	✓	✓	✓	Quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality
European strategy for universities: This Communication aims to support the higher education sector in adapting to changing conditions and strengthen cooperation across borders.	✓	Council conclu-sions	✓	Higher education
Building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation: This Council Recommendation aims to enable deeper cooperation by supporting alliances of higher education institutions in developing joint programmes and initiatives.	✓	✓	✓	Higher education
European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability: This Council Recommendation aims to support providers of micro-credentials, and thus learners, by applying an EU approach to their design and use, thereby stimulating inclusion and equal opportunities.	✓	✓	✓	Lifelong learning and mobility
Learning for the green transition and sustainable development: This Council Recommendation provides a roadmap for Member States on supporting learning and teaching for the green transition and sustainable development in all phases of education and training.	✓	✓	✓	Green transition
Pathways to school success: This proposal for a Council Recommendation aims to promote better educational outcomes for all learners by reducing the share of low-achievers in basic skills and of early leavers from education and training while promoting well-being at school.	✓	Forth-coming	Forthcoming	Quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality

Alongside these strategic initiatives to be adopted by the Commission and the Council, other important actions to support policy reform and cooperation between education and training institutions have been launched in 2021-2022 at the level of Commission services, often involving EU financial support.

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[12] While Annex 1 of SWD (2022) 750 provides an overview of the state of play on all EU-level EEA actions, this section highlights priority initiatives proposed by the Commission (and adopted by the Council), and a selection of EU-funded transnational projects.

Selected EU funded EEA actions		
Action	**Implementation**	**Focus area**
Jean Monnet actions for schools and VET	Annual calls from 2021 to promote active citizenship and learning about the EU in Erasmus+ programme countries. EUR15 m under Erasmus+ 2021-2022: ✓ teacher training; ✓school networks; ✓learning EU for innovative ways to teach about the EU, its policies and values	Quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality
Centres of vocational excellence	Over EUR 90 m for 25 projects under Erasmus+ for 2021 and 2022, driving reforms and ensuring high-quality skills and competences that lead to quality employment and career-long opportunities meeting the needs of an innovative, inclusive and sustainable economy	Quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality
Girls and women in STEM and ICT	Digital and entrepreneurial skills for girls and women; ✓Girls Go Circular by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, and knowledge and innovation communities: 11 205 students completed the programme, of which 7 682 girls in 2021, 10 000 girls in 10 countries to be reached by the end of 2022; ✓Girls and women ESTEAM online communities were set up[13], and 5 ESTEAM Fests were organised in 2022 to build entrepreneurial and STEAM (science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics) competences	Digital transition
Education for climate coalition	Co-created bottom-up initiative to engage the education community at EU, national and local levels, sharing initiatives to support green skills development and changes in behaviour. Education for Climate platform, annual Education for Climate Day, 10 active community challenges, mobilising more than 4 400 registered community members	Green transition
Erasmus+ teacher academies	Annual calls to support networks of teacher education providers to develop and test effective, innovative and transferable programmes increasing the European dimension and internationalisation of teacher education along EEA priorities. Academies develop and test innovative models of teacher mobility. 11 Teacher academies launched in 2022. EUR 37.5 m under Erasmus+ 2021-2022	Teachers & trainers
European Innovative Teaching Award	Annual award to showcase innovative teaching practices in line with EEA priorities (2021: distance and blended learning; 2022: promoting creativity and sustainability). 104 projects in 31 Erasmus+ countries awarded in 2021; 98 projects in 29 Erasmus+ countries awarded in 2022	Teachers & trainers
European Universities initiative	Further rollout of the European Universities initiative with support to transnational alliances of higher education institutions developing long-term structural, strategic and sustainable cooperation creating inter-university campuses. 44 European Universities. EUR 1.1 bn of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 funding	Higher education
Increased cooperation with the Western Balkans	Western Balkans agenda on innovation, research, education, culture, youth and sport and enhanced partnership approach. North Macedonia and Serbia associated with Erasmus+, North Macedonia associated with the European Solidarity Corps. Implementation of the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans with a focus on human capital development	Geopolitical dimension

2.2. Stronger governance framework steering the achievement of the EEA

Progress was also made in strengthening the EEA strategic framework governance. The recent reforms have shown encouraging signs of more agile responsiveness in addressing shared challenges, while harnessing the benefits of mutual learning opportunities. The new strategic framework, set out in two 2021 Council Resolutions[14], laid the ground for a stronger governance mechanism relying on **trust, voluntary cooperation, co-creation, flexibility, and increased ownership** by Member States[15]. The Governance Resolution brought clarity about and strengthened the role of the **High Level Group on Education and Training (HLG)[16]**. Against the background of the education impact of war in Ukraine, the HLG provided a forum for pragmatic *ad hoc* cooperation. Its work benefitted from the establishment of a new body, the **HLG Coordination Board**. These improvements in the new strategic framework governance proved to be of great value, strengthening its responsiveness in face of unexpected challenges (see Section 3.2 below).

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13   Women ESTEAM community, Girls ESTEAM community
14   EEA strategic framework Resolution, Governance Resolution
15   See SWD (2022) 750 Section II.1 and Annex 2
16   The High Level Group on Education and Training links the technical level to the political level and has a central role in identifying, discussing and steering strategic and cross-cutting issues relevant for the European Education Area in a forward-looking manner. See SWD (2022) 750 section II.1.2.

The 2021-2025 **EEA strategic framework working groups** form the frame for intensive structured cooperation and mutual learning with Member States, European Economic Area / European Free Trade Association and candidate countries, stakeholders, experts and international organisations on EEA priorities. The new generation of working groups, set up in line with the EEA's objectives, have been the backbone for exchange and peer learning on topics such as inequality and early school leaving, education for environmental sustainability, skills for the green transition, enabling factors for digital education, or promoting gender equality in education.[17] Working groups are also an important channel for engaging with stakeholders, enabling them to contribute to achieving the EEA.

The Commission has been engaging with the **wider stakeholder community** through the annual European education summits (launching major EEA initiatives such as the Education for climate coalition or showcasing the European innovative teaching award), the education and innovation summit and several targeted and open public consultations.

Various **EU online tools and communities of practice enable interaction with stakeholders**[18]. In line with the proposal of the Conference on the Future of Europe calling for further improved information platforms to pool and exchange education-related information, the new **EEA Portal** helps learners as well as teachers, trainers and stakeholders access EU funding, upskilling programmes, quality education, training and lifelong learning. It gives access to the outputs of the working groups and serves as the go-to space for education policy developments and effective and innovative practices. The **European School Education Platform** provides a public platform, which pools information and promotes EU-wide exchange of knowledge between all stakeholders in school education, including initial vocational education and training. The **EPALE Community of VET practitioners** offers also opportunities of knowledge sharing, networking and dissemination for VET. The new **Digital Education Hub** serves as a space for information sharing, exchange and cooperation, enabling innovation and bringing together stakeholders in digital education. The Digital Europe Programme supports a closer collaboration in the digital education sector in Europe amongst European education technology (EdTech) start-ups/SMEs and other relevant stakeholders. Erasmus+ Key Action 2 'Partnerships for cooperation' offers opportunities to different stakeholders, including EdTEch to join forces with education and training stakeholders and develop digital transformation plans.

Networks supported by the Commission[19] and **international organisations**[20] also contribute to the development of the EEA.

2.3. Progress towards EU-level targets and the state of education in the EU

Seven EU-level targets have been set in the context of the EEA. The 2022 Education and Training Monitor, accompanying this Communication, tracks the latest progress made toward these targets, analyses key challenges and recent developments in Member States from a cross-EU perspective (SWD (2022) 751 – Comparative report) and a country-specific perspective (SWD (2022) 751 – Country reports). This covers a wealth of evidence on the state of education in the EU, and helps identify common challenges not yet sufficiently captured by EU-level targets.

Trends towards EU-level targets show a mixed picture. On the one hand, we see a clear and **positive trend towards upward convergence** on several longstanding indicators: **Early school leaving** continues to decline; the share of young people with **tertiary** level diplomas is on the rise, albeit in combination with an increasing gender gap; and participation in **early childhood education** has steadily increased in the past

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[17] For progress and deliverables so far, see SWD (2022) 750, Section II.1.3
[18] The School Education Gateway (including the European Toolkit for Schools), and eTwinning, have been integrated into the new European School Education Platform. EU Learning Corner; Education for Climate Coalition; Digital Education Hub
[19] EURYDICE, NESET, EENEE
[20] Such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) the Council of Europe, or different bodies of the United Nations, see SWD (2022) 750 Annex 2.

decade, keeping the EU on track towards these 2030 targets.[21] On the other hand, structural issues persist: 3.1 million young early school-leavers are disengaged from the education system and we see a worrying **stagnation** of **underachievement in basic skills**. Furthermore, the positive trends linked to EU level targets hide significant gaps within and among Member States; and it cannot be taken for granted that the positive trends are robust and will continue.[22]

Addressing inequalities in education has been a key priority in Member States.[23] A broad range of measures has been implemented across the EU, such as additional financial support to disadvantaged schools, teacher training programmes or increasing the availability of support staff. Prior to the pandemic about half of the Member States had measures in place to support teachers in disadvantaged schools[24]. Several countries have launched targeted programmes to compensate for the learning loss due to pandemic, which affected disadvantaged children the most.

However, **socio-economic background is still the most important predictor of education outcomes.** Essentially, children and youth from disadvantaged background lag behind on all EU-level targets. Children (aged 3 years and above) at risk of poverty or social exclusion are 7.5 percentage points less likely to participate in formal childcare. Young people whose parents have a low level of education are nine times more likely to leave education and training prematurely and 48.6 percentage points less likely to attain a tertiary qualification when compared to young people whose parents have a high level of education. Looking at key competences for lifelong learning, lack of progress in basic skills may be due to the root problem of inequity not being tackled sufficiently. The impacts of the pandemic may have exacerbated inequalities in educational outcomes[25]. In this context, EU-level targets are unlikely to be reached without stepping up the focus on equity in education.

Seven EU-level targets				
	EU-level target	Latest EU average		
		Total	Female	Male
1.	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	93.0% [2020]	93.1 [2020]	93.0 [2020]
2.	By 2030, the share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 9%	9.7% [2021]	7.9% [2021]	11.4% [2021]
3.	By 2025, the share of recent VET graduates who benefit from exposure to work-based learning during their vocational education and training should be at least 60%	60.7% [2021]	60.3% [2021]	61.0% [2021]
4.	By 2030, the share of 25-34 year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 45%	41.2% [2021]	46.8% [2021]	35.7% [2021]
5.	By 2025, at least 47% of adults aged 25-64 should have participated in learning over the previous 12 months	[*]	[*]	[*]

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[21] There is a gender gap (favouring girls over boys) when it comes to early school leaving and underachievement in reading, and a significant and growing gender gap (favouring young women over young men) regarding tertiary educational attainment. (See the table on the seven EU-level targets as well as SWD (2022) 751 –Comparative report.)

[22] The 2022 Education and Training Monitor's (SWD (2022) 751) comparative report is built around the seven EU-level targets, with each chapter showing numerous Member States lagging behind, as well as a substantial disparities between population sub-groups in virtually all countries.

[23] See SWD (2022) 751 – Country reports.

[24] Approaches to remove institutional barriers to equity and inclusion remain limited, even though evidence shows that early tracking, grade repetition and segregation increase inequalities.

[25] Research suggests that learning loss from the pandemic tends to disproportionally affect children experiencing various socioeconomic disadvantages. Certain groups of children were particularly impacted, such as children living at risk of poverty or social exclusion, children in single-parent households, children whose parents have lower educational attainment, or children with migrant backgrounds. While remedial actions targeting disadvantaged students proved effective in reversing declining trends, they remain underexploited. Employment and Social Developments in Europe, Annual review 2022, Impacts of COVID-19 on school education,

	EU-level target	Latest EU average		
		Total	**Female**	**Male**
6.	By 2030, the share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%	Reading: 22.5% [2018] Maths: 22.9% [2018] Science: 22.3% [2018]	Reading: 17.5% [2018] Maths: 22.9% [2018] Science: 21.2% [2018]	Reading: 27.4% [2018] Maths: 22.8% [2018] Science: 23.2% [2018]
7.	By 2030, the share of low-achieving eight-graders in computer and information literacy should be less than 15%	[**]	[*]	[*]

Source: for target 1, Eurostat (UNESCO OECD Eurostat [UOE] joint data collection; for targets 2, 3, 4, 5, EU Labour Force Survey [LFS]); for target 6, OECD (Programme for the International Assessment of Students [PISA]); and for target 7, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement [IEA] (International Computer and Information Literacy Study [ICILS]). Note: [*] The underlying LFS data will be available biennially as of 2023[26]; [**] ICILS 2023 data will be available in 2024[27].

Furthermore, **teacher shortages,** largely due to the ageing teacher workforce[28] and the professions' low attractiveness, **are aggravating across the EU**, representing a serious risk to the quality and equity of education even in some of the best performing countries. While comparable data for Member States are lacking, estimations reported by Member States and mentioned in the respective country reports (SWD (2022) 751 – Country reports) indicate the size of the problem. The challenges are generally more severe in subjects such as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and ICT and in remote or disadvantaged areas. To increase competence-based teaching and learning, comprehensive curricular reforms are being rolled out in several countries, requiring well-trained and experienced teachers. To improve the profession's attractiveness, salaries have been significantly raised in recent years in several countries. Member States aim to attract more candidates to initial teacher education, support novice teachers, improve working conditions, and offer alternative pathways to the profession.

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[26] The 2021 Council Resolution on a new European Agenda for Adult Learning confirms a two-stage approach to the corresponding EU-level target. Adult learning should increase to at least 47% by 2025 and reach at least 60% by 2030. The 2030 target originates in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan and the ensuing Porto Declaration. The Commission, in cooperation with the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks, will assess the new biennial data when first available in 2023 and compare results with those yielded by Adult Education Survey. This assessment is to inform possible changes to the methodology and/or advise the Council on a re-evaluation of the target level for 2025.

[27] ICILS 2023 will be the first cycle with comprehensive coverage of EU Member States, more than doubling the coverage, from 9 in 2013 and 7 in 2018, to 22 in 2023.

[28] At EU level, almost 40% of the teaching workforce is above 50 years.

3. Building back stronger

Both the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine have deeply impacted and mobilised the EEA. EU funds, in particular the almost doubled budget of the Erasmus+ programme, and increased cooperation under the EEA strategic framework governance have supported national education systems in times of crisis and aimed to reinforce their capacity to drive the recovery through investments and reforms in line with EEA objectives. The lingering impacts of COVID-19 and the continuing Russian invasion of Ukraine can still slow down progress or divert attention from addressing long-term structural challenges (that have been aggravated by the pandemic and the war).

This chapter looks at how the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and other 2021-2027 EU funds contribute to driving the recovery in line with EEA objectives, and how EU funds and cooperation under the EEA have been mobilised to tackle the education impact of **Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine** (in line with EEA objectives on promoting quality, equity and inclusion). While programming of EU funds to meet EEA objectives is a significant achievement of the past 2 years, effective implementation of reforms and investments and their robust monitoring in the next stage will be key to ensure the achievement of the EEA.

3.1. Mobilising the Recovery and Resilience Facility and other EU funds for national EEA actions and reforms driving a sustainable and inclusive recovery

Education and training policies have gained increased attention following the outbreak of the pandemic and its dramatic impact on learners and teachers. All levels of the strengthened EEA strategic framework governance have been mobilised to step up cooperation and mutual learning and thus help limit the negative impact of the pandemic on learning outcomes and well-being.[29]

The EEA connects closely with the European Semester and the programming of EU funds for reforms and investments in education and training. The Semester sets the broad orientations for the EU and national level, including an in-depth analysis of the role of education and training in the socio-economic context of the Member States. It underpins the identification of national policy and investment priorities,[30] with the EEA offering support to addressing the identified challenges. The link between EU funding and reform priorities have been further strengthened under the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework and the RRF.

The RRF has become the principal source of EU financing for education and training, including digital education and skills through reforms and investments, with an allocation of around EUR 71 bn, representing about 14% of the total RRF budget[31]. Programming of education and training investment under cohesion policy funds is still ongoing with a preliminary allocation of EUR 21.13 bn from ESF+ and the EUR 2.3bn from the ERDF, which have been programmed to date to support education, training

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[29] See SWD (2022) 750, Section II.1.

[30] In 2022, eight Member States received a country-specific recommendation focussed on challenges related to education and skills, which are not adequately addressed in the RRPs, see Country Specific Recommendations (CSR). In 2019 all Member States, in 2020, 24 Member States received an education or skill-related CSR.

[31] The figure is based on the pillar tagging methodology for the Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard. It corresponds to the sum of estimated cost of measures allocated to either "General, Vocational, And Higher Education: Accessibility, Affordability, Quality And Inclusiveness, Including Digitisation And Infrastructure", "Adult Learning, Including Continuous Vocational Education And Training; Recognition And Validation Of Skills", "Early Childhood Education And Care: Accessibility, Affordability, Quality And Inclusiveness, Including Digitisation And Infrastructure" or "Human capital in digitalisation" as primary or secondary policy area. The calculation is based on the 25 recovery and resilience plans endorsed by the Commission and Council by September 2022. These are estimated costs; actual funding will be based on the fulfilled milestones and targets. The Commission assessed the cost estimates when the initial plans were submitted and approved. Member States are not required to submit spending receipts and the Commission will not verify the actual costs of measures supported by the RRF.

and skills policies[32]. Moreover, through the Technical Support Instrument, the Commission provides further support in the area of education and training, upon request from Member States, on a bilateral or multi-country basis.

EU funds have been mobilised to address inequalities and to make education systems more resilient following the pandemic. Member States have launched a number of immediate crisis response measures, which are generally embedded in more long-term strategies covering the decade to 2030.[33] These strategies are often supported by EU funds and guided by EEA objectives. In particular the RRF together with cohesion policy funds provide substantial financial support to compensatory learning programmes, as well as more comprehensive measures aimed at promoting access to quality education for all, including curricular reforms, tackling skills mismatches through re- and upskilling. Moreover, EU funds, including the ERDF, are helping to modernise infrastructure to strengthen equal access to quality and inclusive education services, provide innovative learning environments and the conditions for inclusive digital education through equipment and platforms.

RRF reforms and investments boost the digital and green transformation of education and training, in line with EEA objectives. Out of the EUR 71 bn, around EUR 28 bn contribute to supporting digital education and skills across the EU[34]. Countries plan to improve digital infrastructure and connectivity, often with a focus on disadvantaged schools. They invest in measures to develop students' and teachers' digital competences, and digital resources and content, as well as adapt school curricula. RRF funds are also programmed to build up the digital skills of the labour force, in particular those of low-skilled workers, and adapt vocational education and training (VET) courses to digital requirements. The RRF also contributes to the greening of education and training in particular through investing in energy-efficient education and training infrastructure, but also improving education and training policies for environmental sustainability.

EU funds greatly contribute to empowering universities to become drivers of change in line with EEA objectives. The pandemic triggered more innovation, especially in digital formats. EU funds are expected to further accelerate and consolidate digitalisation and the transformation of the higher education sector in line with the European strategy for universities and the new European innovation agenda, exploiting synergies between the EEA and the European Research Area (ERA). Beyond digital infrastructure, Member States also plan to invest in developing digital content, advanced digital skills, adapting study courses, training academic staff, developing online/blended courses, and digitalising governance. Investments and reforms aim to improve the labour market relevance of higher education by modernising study programmes, launching new study courses, including micro-credentials, stimulating STEM/STEAM specialisation, improving governance and funding, enhancing access to higher education for disadvantaged students and supporting inclusiveness, e.g. through targeted scholarships, recognition of qualifications or access to affordable student accommodation.

3.2. Mobilising EEA tools and EU funds for education solidarity with Ukraine

As a result of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine millions of displaced people, most of them women and children have arrived to the EU. The inclusion of children and youth (many traumatised by the war and not proficient in EU languages) in the education and training system of the Member States has been a major challenge amidst a high degree of uncertainty. The immediate priority is ensuring the inclusion of children in

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[32] By 30 September 2022, 23 Member States have already programmed European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) resources amounting to EUR 21.13 billion to support education and skills. The preliminary allocation from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to education and training infrastructure, based on adopted programmes in 7 Member States, amount to 2.3 billion.

[33] See SWD (2022) 750, Section I.2.2.

[34] The figure is based on the pillar tagging methodology for the Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard. It corresponds to the estimated cost of measures allocated to 'Human capital in digitalisation' as primary or secondary policy area. The calculation is based on the 25 recovery and resilience plans endorsed by the Commission and Council by September 2022. These are estimated costs; actual funding will be based on the fulfilled milestones and targets. The Commission assessed the cost estimates when the initial plans were submitted and approved. Member States are not required to submit spending receipts and the Commission will not verify the actual costs of measures supported by the RRF.

quality inclusive mainstream education for in the 2022-2023 school year, while maintaining their link with Ukraine[35].

The response by the **EU Education Solidarity Group for Ukraine[36]**, mobilising all levels of the EEA strategic framework, helped integrate learners and teachers displaced from Ukraine into EU education systems. The **High Level Group** has been instrumental in identifying Member States' needs in supporting Ukrainian refugee children and ensuring a prompt, coordinated EU response, where together with the HLG Coordination Board, it acted as suitable fora for identifying common European concerns and coordinating Member States' efforts. EEA strategic framework **working groups** pooled expertise from across the EU through exchanges and peer learning activities. Member States benefited from these exchanges when implementing the Temporary Protection Directive with respect to key issues such as: i) recruiting Ukrainian staff, ii) outreach to refugee children not yet enrolled in the host countries' education systems, iii) access to early childhood education and care, iv) recognising qualifications, v) welcoming students in higher education, vi) addressing disinformation in wartime, vii) psychosocial support, and viii) the organisation of entry exams to Ukrainian higher education, or language learning.

This sharing of intelligence contributed to **updated guidance and information on good practice** and practical insights to support Member States in the inclusion of displaced children in education[37]. In June 2022, the European Commission has also published policy guidance for Member States when implementing the provisions of the Temporary Protection Directive related to access to the labour market, VET and upskilling/reskilling[38]. The European Training Foundation (ETF) has prepared and delivered an emergency package to support continuity in learning of young Ukrainians via online courses and the employability of Ukrainian refugees outside their country.

The **EEA portal** has played a key role in disseminating information about the prompt, coordinated EU education response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The **School Education Gateway** has acted as a public platform supporting teachers and the wider education community, pooling resources and offering free online professional development courses related to refugee education[39].

The Commission has mobilised **EU funds to support the inclusion into education of people fleeing Ukraine.** The Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE) initiative, adopted in April 2022, provides maximum flexibility to redirect unused 2014-2020 Structural Funds (approximately EUR 7 bn). Legislative amendments allow for 100% EU co-financing and Member States may use ERDF and ESF interchangeably. FAST-CARE was adopted on 29 June and introduced a new set of measures including additional flexibilities to the 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 Common Provisions Regulations. It extended the flexibilities provided by the CARE regulation and introduced additional measures, in particular to help Member States better address emerging needs and the long-term consequences of the crisis. REACT-EU has provided EUR 50 bn worth of fresh top-up resources to ongoing cohesion policy programmes (ESF, ERDF and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)) for years 2021 and 2022 to be spent by the end of 2023. The total allocation to education under REACT-EU amounts to around EUR 4.9 billion[40].

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[35] At the start of the 2022-23 school year around 500 000 Ukrainian children were registered in the national education system of 26 Member States and Lichtenstein. This is much less than the number of displaced children, which is in the millions. (Registrations for temporary protection are above 4 million.)

[36] The Commission set up an EU Education Solidarity Group for Ukraine that helps identify the needs in relation to ensuring Ukrainian children continue to be educated and support the countries who are hosting them by pooling the expertise available across Europe. This Group is rooted in the existing tools and mechanisms under the EEA strategic framework, including the working groups.

[37] Supporting the inclusion of displaced children from Ukraine in education: considerations, key principles and practices for the school year 2022-23, June 2022. See also SWD (2022) 750, Table 7.

[38] Guidance for access to labour market, vocational education and training and adult learning of people fleeing Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, June 2002.

[39] E.g. e-learning material in Ukrainian, information on the Ukrainian school system, on recognising academic qualifications, or on resources and courses on psychosocial support, including through the European Toolkit for Schools.

[40] Some 14 Member States plan to fund education under the ESF with over EUR 3.5 bn. Under ERDF, 5 Member States have allocated EUR 1.4 bn. of REACT-EU resources on measures related to e-Learning & e-Education and 6 Member states have allocated close to EUR€ 1bn. on support for infrastructure for primary and general secondary education.

Under the Erasmus+ programme new opportunities are now open for incoming participants from Ukraine. Organisations with ongoing Erasmus+ projects can host Ukrainian teachers and students to carry out teaching assignments, studies or traineeships. Staff with relevant expertise can be sent to regions where refugees are housed. Organisations active in Erasmus+ can invite teachers, trainers and other experts to temporarily support their work in areas such as language learning or integration. Higher education institutions in Member States and non-EU countries associated with the programme can receive and fund students and staff from Ukrainian higher education institutions without the sending institution being formally involved. Students can take courses at the receiving institutions and benefit from additional support such as help with accommodation, integration within the local academic community or language preparation. Students and recent graduates (who have graduated from a Ukrainian higher education institution within a maximum of 12 months before fleeing Ukraine) are also eligible for traineeships. Staff are eligible for teaching mobility and training. Youth mobility activities are open to Ukrainian young people and youth workers. Prospective applicants across the Erasmus+ programme are encouraged to include activities linked to integrating persons displaced from Ukraine in project proposals under current and upcoming calls. These topics are well embedded in the Erasmus+ programme, with inclusion and diversity, as well as participation and civic engagement included as key cross-cutting priorities.

4.   Further actions required to achieve the EEA by 2025

4.1. Six EU-level strategic EEA initiatives under preparation

The Commission is preparing the six remaining strategic EEA initiatives to be adopted by 2025, and supporting Member States in the implementation of all strategic EEA initiatives. Both co-creation of new strategic EEA initiatives and experience with national follow up of all EEA initiatives can be discussed during the 2023 midterm review (see Section 5.2).

Strategic EEA initiatives to be adopted by 2025	
Action	**Focus area**
Enabling factors for digital education: The objective will be to support Member States in the digital transformation of their education and training systems by outlining the key enabling factors for effective and inclusive digital education.	Digital transition
Improving the provision of digital skills in education and training: The objective will be to support Member States in facing common challenges related to the level of digital skills of different segments of the population and step up the ability of their education and training systems to ensure its provision.	Digital transition
European learning mobility framework: The objective will be to promote transnational learning mobility at all levels, identify remaining barriers and provide guidance on how to overcome them.	Lifelong learning and mobility
European Quality Assurance and Recognition System: The objective will be to review current quality assurance and recognition arrangements and ensure that they are fit for purpose in the context of an evolving higher education landscape.	Higher education
Joint European degree label: The objective is to pilot the degree label, to be delivered on a voluntary basis, in order to attest learning outcomes achieved and skills developed from joint European programmes involving in-depth transnational cooperation.	Higher education
Possible legal status for alliances of higher education institutions: The objective is to pilot a programme involving more in-depth cooperation among higher education institutions through institutionalised instruments allowing human, technical, data, education, and research and innovation capacities to be shared, where appropriate.	Higher education

The adoption by the Council of the Council Recommendation on **Pathways to School Success** (on the Commission's proposal see Section 2.1 above) will be an important step towards setting up a policy framework to promote better educational outcomes for all young Europeans, irrespective of their socioeconomic background and personal characteristics. It proposes a comprehensive approach by i) focusing on both school achievement and well-being at school, ii) emphasising prevention and early intervention besides compensation, iii) combining universal, targeted and individualised measures to effectively reach all. To support its implementation the Commission will launch in early 2023 an expert group on well-being and supportive learning environments for groups at risk of underachievement. The group will prepare EU guidelines for promoting well-being in schools – widely documented to correlate with the educational performance of disadvantaged learners.

As part of the implementation of the digital education action plan, in early 2023, the Commission will present two flagship proposals based on the outcomes of the Structured Dialogue on digital education and skills[41]. The forthcoming proposal for a Council Recommendation on **enabling factors for digital education** will address formal education and training and focus on investment, capacity building and successful use of digital technologies to enhance teaching and learning, with the goal to improve learning outcomes of all learners. The proposal for a Council Recommendation on **improving the provision of digital skills** in education and training will put forward a more strategic outlook to digital skills development and promote a quality, inclusive, coherent and coordinated approach to the provision of digital skills at all levels of education

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[41]   Announced in the 2021 State of the Union address and supported by European Council conclusions, this dialogue with Member States and stakeholders runs until the end of 2022.

and training. Both proposals will **support the learning needs of teachers**. The Council Recommendation on the enabling factors for digital education will focus on teachers' digital pedagogy and their ability to use digital technologies in the teaching and learning process. The Council Recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training will focus on teachers' digital competences and their ability to teach informatics and/or other digital subjects to develop the digital skills of learners.

By the end of 2023, the Commission will propose a **European learning mobility framework** to make learning periods abroad for everyone a norm, rather than an exception. The new framework will encourage the Member States to make mobility experiences a valued part of all education and training pathways and embed the opportunity for mobility in education and training programmes. It will have a strengthened focus on inclusive mobility and will broaden the scope of the [2011 Youth on the Move Recommendation](#) to cover all learners and staff (including teachers and youth workers) in all education and training sectors, youth and sport, whether formal, non-formal or informal. The framework will address the persistent impediments to mobility such as administrative burden, language barriers, lack of financial means, and lack of automatic recognition schemes. It will equally address new developments in learning patterns aiming at making learning mobility more environmentally friendly and linking it more to digital learning opportunities.

In the field of higher education, forthcoming strategic EEA initiatives include actions under the European strategy for universities. Following the report to the Council on implementing automatic recognition which is planned for late 2022, the Commission will carry out consultations in 2023 on the way forward for a **European Quality Assurance and Recognition System**. In 2022-2023, Erasmus+ funded projects will pilot a **joint European degree label**, based on European criteria, as well as institutionalised cooperation instruments to enable deeper cooperation between higher education institutions testing the notion of a **possible legal status for alliances of higher education institutions**. Based on the outcomes of these pilots, the next steps will be set out together with Member States and stakeholders.

4.2. A new equity indicator and other efforts to enrich the evidence-base

From the outset, equity has played a key role in EU cooperation on education and training, and this is reflected in the long-standing EU-level target to bring down the share of underachievement in basic skills, as measured through the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Young people showing very low performance in reading, math or science run an increased risk of problems later in life with respect to, for instance, their labour market prospects or social inclusion.[42]

To complement this early-warning indicator, the Commission has taken the next step and presents in the 2022 Education and Training Monitor, for the first time ever, **an indicator that provides evidence about the root causes of educational underperformance** (See SWD (2022) 750, Section II.2.2.1, and SWD (2022) 751)**.** The new indicator looks at the share of underachievement in all three PISA domains at the same time[43], comparing each country's top and bottom quarters of socio-economic status.
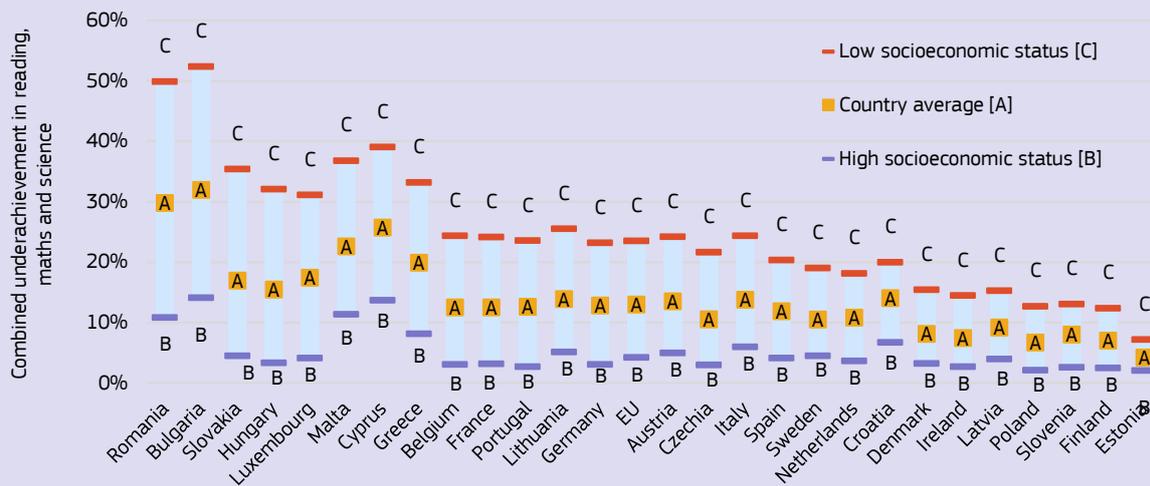
The data confirm that one of the key drivers behind educational underperformance is a person's socio-economic background. At EU average, the risk of underperformance for young people with a disadvantaged socio-economic background is almost six times higher than it is for a person with an advantaged socioeconomic background, which points to a serious problem in terms of equity. As mentioned above, education systems in most Member States fail to decouple educational performance from socio-economic background. Indeed, the evidence suggests a perpetual transmission from one generation to the next, sowing the seeds for unemployment and exclusion in a vicious circle.

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[42] See SWD (2022) 751 – Comparative report, Chapter 1.

[43] This combined measure of severe educational underperformance is a deviation from the approach until now, which looked at each PISA domain separately. The advantage of a focus on underachievement in three basic skill domains simultaneously is that it supports a broad proxy of equity in education, while putting the focus on the most at-risk youth.

The new EU-level indicator for equity in education[44]

The new EU-level indicator for equity in education is based on the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). It depicts the share of underachievement in reading, maths and science (combined) among 15 year-olds in the lowest quarter of socio-economic status [C]. The two comparators are [A] the country average share of underachievement and [B] the share of underachievement among the highest quarter of the index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS).

Source: Education and Training Monitor 2022 (European Commission calculations based on OECD's PISA 2018 data).

The release of new PISA data in December 2023 will enable a fresh look at the situation, and capture first impacts of the pandemic. It will also help inform any target setting for 2030, should Member States wish to do so as part of the 2026-2030 cycle of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training.

This new indicator brings a wealth of evidence and new insights. Firstly, while the finding for the EU average is already alarming, in some Member States the situation is even considerably worse, with a gap amounting to almost 40 percentage points. Secondly, country variation is so substantial that underperformance among high socio-economic backgrounds in one Member State may be higher than the underperformance among low socio-economic backgrounds in another Member State. Thirdly, the data also hold good news: a few countries manage to limit socio-economic underperformance gaps and, importantly, these are the same countries that show a strong performance in PISA *overall*. This suggests that it is possible to combine quality education with equitable education. This illustrates that education policies can achieve quality and inclusion simultaneously, so there is no inherent trade-off between excellence and social fairness.

These findings are highly policy relevant. How to do this best can be discussed during in the midterm reflection process. One key question is how to ensure that the new indicator does not only fill knowledge gaps but is harnessed to improve policy design. One option is to develop, on the basis of the new indicator, a new EU-level target for the 2026-2030 cycle to help focus policy-attention and address the challenges in a systematic way, as a permanent feature of the work under the EEA (see Section 5.2).

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44   All technical details of the new EU-level indicator, alongside numerous context indicators, are elaborated on in the SWD (2022) 750 and SWD (2022) 751.

Equity is not the only domain where improvements are being made to the evidence base available for the EEA strategic framework. Two **additional EU-level indicator domains under development** concern the **teaching profession** and education for **environmental sustainability** respectively. A third example worth emphasising is the European Higher Education Sector Observatory.

Firstly, in order to strengthen the evidence base, improve the regular EU-level monitoring of specific aspects of the teaching profession, enable mutual learning and gain a better understanding of obstacles and policy levers, the Commission, with technical support from the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks (SGIB), is preparing a dashboard that will bring together multiple equivalent indicators across different sub-dimensions. The overarching focus will be on the attractiveness of the teaching profession, in response to widespread teacher shortages across the Member States.

Secondly, the Commission is working on indicators to acknowledge the role of education and training for a successful green transition[45]. Using the 2022 Council Recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development as guidance, and taking inspiration from the new European sustainability competence framework, available and forthcoming data sources are currently being investigated. The work is at a preliminary stage and proceeds with the technical support of the SGIB.

Finally, the Commission will work towards setting up a **European Higher Education Sector Observatory**, including a scoreboard, so as to provide evidence on the progress made in implementing the European strategy for universities. It will combine the best of the current EU data tools and capacities to provide evidence and indicators on key priorities such as inclusion, values, quality and relevance, mobility, green and digital skills, employability, transnational cooperation, technology transfer and knowledge valorisation.

4.3. Ensuring quality of investments in education and training through a new learning lab

The mounting pressure on public budgets amidst growing need for reforms and investments in education (from infrastructure and building construction to the training of teaching staff, provision of digital devices and funding for open educational resources) increasingly turns the **spotlight on quality issues in investment.** Member States have recognised that the performance of education systems is affected by their ability to maintain an appropriate level of investment and ensure its effectiveness, equity, quality and efficiency. To this end they are prepared to develop and share evaluation methodologies that help identify measures with high individual and social impact, specific to their own national requirements[46].

In May 2021, the European Commission launched an **Expert Group on Quality Investment in Education and Training** to identify policies with the highest potential to boost education outcomes and inclusiveness, while improving the efficiency of spending, as well as monitoring and evaluation[47]. It is in that spirit that this group proposed to i) run more education policy evaluations in a systemic fashion, ii) share knowledge on the best evaluation methods, and iii) organise mutual learning and capacity building on evaluation methodologies, allowing Member States to make well-founded choices about educational investment.

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[45]   As highlighted in the European Green Deal and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.
[46]   Inter-governmental declaration to build a shared vision of effective, efficient, and equitable investment in education
[47]   See SWD (2022) 750, Section I.2.1.

Final report of the Expert Group on Quality Investment[48] – Main policy conclusions

The final report identifies many promising education policy measures that nevertheless deserve further experimentation at Member State level. Experimentation and evaluation are key steps in the design and successful development of policy interventions that are adapted to each specific local, regional or national context.

From a methodological standpoint, the review revealed that **a large body of robust evidence comes from the US and UK, and much less so from EU Member States**. Moreover, the number of evaluations that provide detailed cost-benefit analysis is even more limited. **The development of the expertise for evaluation and dissemination of findings at EU level is therefore needed.**

There are gains to be expected from gathering expertise and evidence on policy evaluation at EU level. Experts concluded that the development of a culture of evaluation in the EU should be supported by the following actions:

✓ promoting the development of expertise on evaluation methods in each Member State;
✓ disseminating knowledge about rigorously evaluated policies to develop and share best practice; and
✓ making available EU funding for policy experiments for the evaluation of the development of innovative education policies.

To follow up the main conclusions of the expert group, in November 2022, the Commission is launching a learning lab on quality investment in education and training to support Member States in making effective, efficient and evidence-based choices on education funding. The lab will promote education policy evaluations tailored to specific local, regional, and national needs, and encourage their regular use in policymaking. It will offer Member States the knowledge, tools, methods, and resources for evaluating their public spending on education and training. It will also nurture networking and collaboration among evaluation providers and expertise centres around the EU, including international organisations such as the OECD.

4.4. Strengthening the governance of the EEA

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on education and training systems resulted in some structural issues becoming more pressing. Effectively addressing such systemic challenges require long-term efforts that benefit from **close cooperation**[49]. Priorities for such cooperation include tackling the **challenges** identified in this progress report (such as boosting equity in education and training, and tackling teacher shortages).

The **Conference on the Future of Europe** spelled out ideas to improve the EU, including proposals for **future oriented measures** that are fully in line with EEA objectives that can be best promoted through closer cooperation (e.g. promoting **European citizenship education** as a contribution to civic identity, further improving information platforms to pool and exchange information related to education).

Stakeholders' engagement, including that of civil society, is instrumental in rolling out EEA actions. To better include **civil society in EU-level efforts to achieve the EEA,** as of 2023, the Commission will explore possibilities within the Erasmus+ programme to increase financial support to boost civil society cooperation in relation to education and youth policies. The Commission will support mobilising the EEA strategic framework governance structures and consolidating its voluntary approach for closer cooperation and coordination between Member States and other education stakeholders.

To ensure a stronger stock-taking of progress towards the EEA – including through the High Level Group and its recently established Coordination Board – the Commission proposes a midterm reflection process, as outlined in Section 5.2 below. This reflection can examine **how reformed governance and cooperation at EU level can help tackle emerging and recurring challenges through systemic reform**, thus helping

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[48] Final report of the expert group on quality investment in education and training, October 2022
[49] The 2022 Strategic Foresight Report examines, among other things, education in the context of the interaction between the green and digital transitions against the backdrop of the current volatile geopolitical realities.

to achieve the EEA, and identify potential areas for adjustments. The **effectiveness of mutual learning** and how it can better support EU Member States in addressing shared challenges and developing future oriented measures through improved policy design, supported by an enhanced comparative EU evidence base as well as better dissemination of the results at EU, national and local levels, will also be discussed.

4.5. Strengthening the geopolitical dimension of the EEA

The geopolitical dimension of the EEA has been growing in importance. The EEA has proven to be a driver of reforms in other countries and serves as a global standard of quality with multiple EEA actions (e.g. the Jean Monnet actions, centres for vocational excellence, and Erasmus+ teacher academies) reaching out to countries and participants beyond the EU, promoting attractiveness of European education and training systems, motivating countries on the course towards EU membership, and supporting them in transforming their education, research and innovation systems.[50] This has been further bolstered through the Global Gateway and the EU's global investment in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all[51], promoting learning mobility and the digital transition both in and via education, as well as quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality in education. Furthermore, it was strengthened through an increase of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument's (NDICI) budget to education from 7% to 10% and a strengthened international dimension of the Erasmus+ programme (Erasmus Mundus) which is now fully in place, with a total budget of EUR 2.2 bn.

Providing combined EU and Member State education support to Ukraine is proving that Team Europe can be agile and efficient in responding to crises, demonstrating the value added of such informal and voluntary cooperation[52]. Unprecedented flexibility was introduced in the Erasmus+ programme, which supported the integration of pupils, students and staff into the EU education systems including through its international dimension. The Commission will also support the Ukrainian education recovery, including the reconstruction of damaged Ukrainian schools[53]. Building on the education dimension of the Global Gateway initiative, the Commission will continue to support a Team Europe approach in order to promote quality education in partner countries, and in particular, in view of the future reconstruction of Ukraine's education system after the war. After Ukraine was granted the status of EU candidate country on 23 June 2022, the Commission invited relevant education authorities to join EEA strategic framework working groups that will contribute to improved mutual learning and continued support to tackling the negative impact that the invasion of Ukraine has had on education.

The Commission, together with the Western Balkans, developed the **Western Balkan Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport**[54]. This agenda focuses on bringing the Western Balkans closer to the EU, including in the area of education. As a concrete action, a stronger partnership with the Western Balkans will be promoted under Erasmus+ to give education organisations and institutions the possibility to take part in important strategic actions under the programme, starting with European Universities Alliances. Work will continue more globally too, to boost the key **role that EU universities can play in maximising Europe's global influence, and promoting democratic values** and cooperation for peace. The European Universities Alliances supported by Erasmus+[55] are leading the way

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[50] See SWD (2022) 750, Section I.1.2 and Annex 1.
[51] Sustainable Development Goal 4
[52] The European Training Foundation (ETF) has responded fast to the Russian invasion to Ukraine and, in full coordination with the EU, the Ukrainian government and other international organizations. The European Commission, With the ETF, Ukrainian authorities and EU Member States, has compared the European Qualifications Framework and the Ukrainian national qualifications framework from primary to post-doctoral. The ETF established a resource hub to help both Ukrainians seeking assistance in having their qualifications recognised, and others who need help in interpreting them. In the context of EU external relations policies, the ETF focuses on improving human capital development in countries outside the EU (partner countries). Currently the ETF is active in the EU Neighbourhood, in Enlargement countries, in Central Asia and it cooperates with the EU on skills development in Africa. (See also Section 3.2 above.)
[53] As announced in the 2022 State of the Union address.
[54] EU and Western Balkans Innovation Agenda
[55] 39 of which receive complementary support from Horizon 2020 for their research and innovation dimension

by promoting European values and identity, and revolutionising the quality and competitiveness of the European higher education sector. The **Study in Europe portal** also serves as a one-stop shop for promotion, information and advice on studies in Europe. It drives traffic towards national sites on higher education, notably through the individual country profiles, and showcases the benefits of studying in Europe. It is a concrete expression of the Team Europe approach and the networking activities organised under its banner foster peer learning and exchange of best practices. These help promote Europe as a study and research destination in partner countries throughout the world. Study in Europe, in particular its networking aspects, will be further developed in the future. Education also continues to be a priority in the EU cooperation in the European Neighbourhood and enlargement region, and benefits from bilateral and regional funding under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance and the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument.

In the medium and long term, the Commission will support reflections with EU Member States on further **promoting a coordinated approach on investments in education** in partner countries, with a view to positioning Team Europe as a champion and an effective driving force in the education sector both at country and regional level and on the global stage.

5. Conclusions and next steps

5.1. Main findings

This stocktaking has shown that the EEA is on track: Progress has been made over the past 2 years in setting out EEA initiatives, stepping up cooperation and co-creation and mobilising funding for national reforms and investments. The EEA has provided an agenda for reforms, investment and cooperation for a fairer, better and future-proof education for everyone in Europe. On the one hand, it is still too early in the implementation process to have measurable evidence of the impact of EEA actions, governance reforms and EU funding at national, regional and local levels. On the other hand, early indications show that thanks to the common EEA commitment and European cooperation, initiatives in Member States and at EU level have been mutually reinforcing.

The stronger governance showcased the EEA at work, demonstrating joint national and EU leadership in stepping up cooperation on reforms and action towards reaching EU-level targets, and responsiveness to new challenges. The strengthened strategic framework enabled pooling of knowledge and resources, an organised sharing of good practices and implementation of concrete solutions. The common EEA ambition has increased cooperation and ownership of shared priorities. This resulted in education and training becoming a common concern based on shared interests.

While trends toward several EU-level targets show a positive upward convergence (early school leaving is declining, while tertiary educational attainment and participation in early childhood education and care are on the rise), **we also see significant warning signs requiring systemic longer-term efforts** to improve quality and equity in education and training. The Commission will continue to improve EU-level performance monitoring to support evidence-based policymaking and facilitate mutual learning on the deep challenges identified (including promoting equity in education and tackling aggravating teacher shortages across the EU).

Focusing on implementation, quality investment, absorption and robust monitoring will be key for the years ahead. After the 2021-2022 phase of policy design and the launch of a set of EU-level EEA actions, focus should now be placed on ensuring i) follow-up of strategic EEA initiatives at national level, ii) quality investment through the effective absorption of EU and national resources and iii) a robust monitoring of progress. This could help solidify systemic reforms that Member States are pursuing and bring about a positive impact for learners and teachers. EEA strategic framework working groups and other co-creation forums supporting work towards the EEA[56] can play a key role in this, with active participation of all members and ensuring links with national decision making being crucial for success. The Erasmus+ programme will continue to support the implementation of EEA objectives through its mobility, cooperation, and policy actions and priorities.

5.2. Midterm review

This progress report is the Commission's input for the **2023 midterm review** aiming to take stock and keep momentum, commitment to, and participation by all in achieving the EEA.

The Commission invites Member States, other EU institutions and stakeholders, including social partners and civil society, to take part. This process of listening, dialogue, and joint reflection will mobilise all EEA strategic framework governance levels, and include a **midterm review event** with the European Parliament. The 1 December 2022 Education Summit will be the first occasion to reflect jointly with all stakeholders.

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[56] See SWD (2022) 750 – Annex 2.

The findings of this progress report provide the direction for the **main questions to be discussed during the midterm reflection process**, with each actor bringing its own experiences with their respective actions and efforts towards the achievement of the EEA:

✓ exchange on flagship actions and policy reforms towards shared EEA objectives;

✓ co-create the remaining strategic EEA initiatives until 2025;

✓ implement the reinforced governance to support a comprehensive stock-taking of progress towards the EEA, including through the High Level Group and its recently established Coordination Board, and identify potential areas for adjustments;

✓ reflect together on deep challenges and future oriented measures (emerging from the findings of this progress report and the Conference on the Future of Europe) such as: i) boosting equity and inclusion at all levels of education and training, ii) improving quality by tackling teacher shortages and increasing attractiveness of the teaching profession, or iii) enhancing European citizenship education;

✓ explore the feasibility and value-added of further EU-level targets under the EEA, in particular on equity, the teaching profession and sustainability;

✓ support policy reform, ensure quality investment and foster European cooperation on improving policy design to tackle the identified deep and future oriented challenges through regular education policy evaluations;

✓ strengthen and tailor to the needs of Member States mutual learning activities;[57]

✓ strengthen monitoring of the follow-up given at Member State level to strategic EEA initiatives.

While the 2023 midterm review is focused on drawing lessons from the first years and building momentum and commitment for the period up until 2025, in 2023, the Commission will also publish a call for evidence and launch a policy evaluation of the EEA. This will enrich the evidence base for the **2025 full report on the EEA**.

As set out in the EEA strategic framework Resolution, it is *'on the basis of this evaluation [that] the **Council shall review the strategic framework** — including EU-level targets, governance structure, and working methods – and make any necessary adjustments for the second [2026-2030] cycle, as appropriate, to adapt to the reality and needs of the European Education Area or any other major developments in the European Union.'*

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[57] Including under the new learning lab on quality investment in education and training, the EEA strategic framework working groups and other demand-driven peer counselling activities.