



## POSITION PAPER

# Education and Training 2020 halfway: taking up the challenge of social inclusion and participation

July 2014

*2014 is a turning point for European cooperation in Education and Training: mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy, of the Education and Training 2020 Strategic Framework (ET2020), elections of a new Commissioner and Members of Parliament, launch of the EU funded programme Erasmus+ 2014-2020... It is important that decision-makers, in partnership with civil society, take stock of what has been achieved in the last fifteen years and adopt a fresh look on upcoming education challenges, half way to 2020. The 2014 European elections show that more and more citizens are turning their backs to Europe together with a raise of far-right and xenophobic parties. It is important to draw lessons and to deliver policies that will contribute to social welfare, well-being, active citizenship and to economic growth. The mid-term review of ET2020 is of particular importance, as EU institutions will set new political priorities. Today it seems that the more the EU gains influence in the sector, the more balance is lost among expected benefits of the modernisation of education and training systems. EUCIS-LLL believes that lifelong learning strategies should not only be looked through the prism of growth and jobs. Only comprehensive strategies can bring results in terms of employment, social inclusion and civic participation including important dimensions such as tolerance and intercultural dialogue. We ring the alarm bell in this position paper to build a more social and cohesive Europe and to reflect this in the revision of ET2020 and more broadly of the Europe 2020 strategy. This position reflects the discussions that took place within our organisations and results from an internal consultation and from the messages that emerged during our [Annual Conference 2014 on the ET2020 review](#).*

## Inclusive growth: the forgotten Europe 2020 pillar

In a smart, sustainable and inclusive society, **access to knowledge** is seen as a prerequisite for a move towards **learning societies**. This means providing everyone with the means to learn in all contexts, be that formal, non-formal or informal, and at all levels: from early childhood education and compulsory schooling through to higher education, vocational education, training and adult learning. It is only by doing so that we can contribute towards smarter, more sustainable and more inclusive societies in Europe. Putting education and training as one of our top Europe 2020 priorities is an excellent political sign, but they should not be taken hostages of labour market needs and economic targets. Signs of **social distress and political disengagement** cannot be ignored anymore as alarming symptoms of increasing inequalities. Evidence is striking: the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the EU increased from 114 million in 2009 to 124 million in 2012. **Youth unemployment** reached 59,2% in Greece in 2013<sup>1</sup>, while those neither in employment nor in education and training (**NEETs**) have significantly increased in OECD countries since the start of the crisis<sup>2</sup>. Inequalities persist in European education and training systems where **vulnerable groups** such as migrants are particularly disadvantaged<sup>3</sup>. Beyond formal education, **participation of adults in lifelong learning** has been stagnating for many years<sup>4</sup> and 20% of the EU working age population has **low literacy and numeracy skills**<sup>5</sup>, reducing by half their chances to be employed but also to access

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<sup>1</sup> Commission's Communication "[Taking stock of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth](#)", 2014

<sup>2</sup> OECD's "[Society at a glance. OECD social indicators: the crisis and its aftermath](#)", 2014

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> [Eurostat data, 2013](#)

<sup>5</sup> [PIAAC, the survey on adult skills](#), OECD 2013

basic welfare services, participate in democratic and associative life or develop a sense of social cohesion. The OECD also shows correlations between educational attainments and life expectancy<sup>6</sup>.

What European cooperation needs in education and training is to **reconcile its role in both smart, sustainable and inclusive growth**, the latter deserving far more political focus than it had in the last years. Pr. Ides Nicaise puts it this way: *“There is a reasonable degree of certainty about the positive impact of investments in knowledge on economic growth. [...] But to what extent does this growth translate into employment, and above all, how is that employment distributed? The dominant pattern appears to be one of ‘skill-biased technological growth’, which means that technological innovations boost the demand for better-skilled jobs in particular, while low-skilled jobs are displaced and either disappear or sink lower on the status and pay ladder. This raises inequality on the labour market rather than reducing it. In other words, the knowledge-based society entails a risk of plunging more people (mainly the low-skilled) into poverty<sup>7</sup>.”* To avoid this negative effect, Pr. Nicaise recommends putting on equal footing economic growth and social cohesion through a **smarter policy mix** favouring a **fairer distribution of knowledge** across the population. Real progress has been made in this sense since ET2020 was elaborated: success in reaching the headline target on early-school leaving (even though strong regional disparities remain), right focus on early childhood education and care in the Social Investment Package, recent emphasis on Roma pupils within the EU framework for National Roma Integration Strategies, etc. However those targeted measures are clearly not sufficient and a **mainstreamed and comprehensive approach** is requested.

- A smart policy mix could mean focusing on a genuine implementation and mainstreaming of the **third objective of ET2020 that has been clearly weak so far<sup>8</sup> and**
- Giving a political emphasis **on fighting inequalities in learning through a new Europe 2020 flagship initiative**. Let us re-engage to deliver **the vision of a social Europe** in respect of Article 9 of the Treaty<sup>9</sup>: providing quality education to as many citizens as possible, from all age groups and countries!

## Quality Education and Training: an investment for the future of Europe

The EU aims to contribute to high quality education, this is not possible if our education and training systems are weakened. Austerity measures affect public services and put at risk the possibility for education and training systems to contribute to economic recovery - while lifelong learning is a lever to fight poverty and one of the means to promote social inclusion by tackling inequalities<sup>10</sup> and marginalization of the most vulnerable groups. To ensure that recession does not have a negative impact on education and training, **a minimum of expenditure on education should be off the fiscal balance sheet**. Indeed, as Nobel Prize in economics Christopher Antoniou Pissarides and Ambassador of the [“Invest in Education”](#) European Citizens’ Initiative states *“Cutting down on education investments because of a temporary economic crisis is short-sighted. It could destroy the lives of a*

<sup>6</sup> OECD’s [“Society at a glance. OECD social indicators: the crisis and its aftermath”](#), 2014

<sup>7</sup> « [A smart social inclusion policy for the EU: the role of education and training](#)”, Pr. Ides Nicaise, University of Leuven and NESSE network, Belgian EU Presidency Conference, 28-29.09.2010

<sup>8</sup> The social aspect of recent policy initiatives should be far more emphasised. For instance, it is mentioned in the “Opening Up Education” Communication that digital tools and environments can entail a better access to education, but the topic of inclusion and digital learning has almost never been seriously tackled. The same goes with the Modernisation of Higher Education Agenda that mentions the social dimension without concrete steps for improvement being implemented.

<sup>9</sup> « *In defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health”*, Article 9, TFEU

<sup>10</sup> See EENEE report on “Equity in and through Education and Training: Indicators and Priorities” and its typology of inequalities: Gender Inequality, Inequality due to Immigration, Racial or Ethnic Differences, Inequality between Individuals with different Sexual Orientation and Inequality due to Family Background.

*whole generation of young people. Education spending is an investment in our future and should not be part of the government's fiscal balance.*" The Commission has committed to engage a broad array of stakeholders in a debate on efficient and sustainable use of resources in the "Rethinking Education" Communication and this discussion has not yet taken place. Furthermore, there is a clear **implementation gap** today between the recommendations set in the framework of the European Semester and the decisions made by Member States. In the [2014 Annual Growth Survey](#) the Commission considers that *"in terms of expenditure, Member States need to find ways to protect or promote longer term investment in education, research, innovation, energy and climate action"* and that *"it is essential to invest in the modernisation of education and training systems, including lifelong learning."* However, **public spending** in education **decreased** from 2000 to 2011 in most Member States<sup>11</sup>. There is a **clear lack of coherence that hinders the whole process and the trust of citizens and civil society organisations alike**.

Another crucial question in this debate is: how to measure progress towards quality education and where to invest the money? There is sometimes a **lack of coherence between what evidence shows (e.g. the reasons for differentiated attainment levels) and the political choices that are made**. EUCIS-LLL believes for instance that further reflection should be led on ET2020 indicators that have stagnated so far, such as the one on **participation of adults in lifelong learning** – especially after what the PIAAC survey has revealed.

If indicators and benchmarks often provide a reality check to put light on a particular problem, they only provide a partial image<sup>12</sup> through the prism of Member States<sup>13</sup>. Current EU indicators seldom measure the **social human capital of learning or the wider benefits of learning**. It is necessary to invest in instruments to measure **qualitative progress** and to balance the use of indicators with quality data, in partnership with stakeholders. Besides, behind the visible success of headline indicators in education and training, **regional disparities** are alarming: eight Member States had a difference of more than 15 percentage points between their top and bottom regions in terms of rates of tertiary education graduates in a region<sup>14</sup> - hence the importance of comparing data at the regional level to have a clearer picture in future research.

- We call on Member States to consider education and training as an investment: governments should agree that **a % of Education expenditure is off the fiscal balance sheet (Stability Pack)**.
- More **evidence-based policies** are needed combining qualitative and quantitative data. Support to European projects providing **qualitative analysis** should be supported via the Erasmus+ programme including by civil society organisations. Synergies with Horizon 2020 could be made.

## **Making ET2020 more operational: more dialogue and participation**

The top ranking of education and training in the EU political agenda has tremendously advanced European cooperation in the field through ever-tighter links with the recent set up of the Annual Growth Survey (AGS) and European Semester. Addressing Country-Specific Recommendations to almost all Member States this year<sup>15</sup> is a major political step forward by making national authorities coordinate their efforts in education and training<sup>16</sup>. This could be clearly analysed as **a redefinition of**

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<sup>11</sup> [Education and training Monitor 2013](#), European Commission, 2013

<sup>12</sup> See the general report of EUCIS-LLL Policy Debate "[Measuring progress in lifelong Learning](#)", European Parliament, 5 December 2013.

<sup>13</sup> See EU benchmarks and indicators' limitations in EENEE report on "[Equity in and through Education and Training: Indicators and Priorities](#)" for the European Commission, 2012

<sup>14</sup> "[Mind the Gap, Education inequality across EU regions](#)", NESSE network for the European Commission, 2012

<sup>15</sup> Education and training are mentioned in all [2014 country specific recommendations](#) made to Member States (except the Netherlands).

<sup>16</sup> [Eurostat data on Europe 2020 headline targets](#)

**the subsidiarity principle boundaries** in education and training. Yet, if the EU gains more and more influence in the sector, **it should be more accountable to its citizens.**

The open, transparent and regular dialogue evoked by the article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty is the only way to achieve successfully the EU strategic objectives; and this will not be possible without clear mechanisms of communication, consultation and cooperation. DG EAC management plan 2014 states that *“Policy dialogue and exchange about how to modernise education and training systems will continue to be supported by DG EAC, through the open method of coordination, peer learning, peer reviews and the exchange of good practice involving relevant **civil society stakeholders**, as well as studies and the collection and use of data from relevant sources, e.g. the European Monitor 2014 (...) and the **Education, Training and Youth Forum.**”* We believe that the **European Education, Training and Youth Forum** that has been supposed for the past two years to be a key milestone in the cooperation between the Commission and stakeholders, is important but **not enough**. The lack of dialogue between stakeholders before the event prevents them to gain ownership of key challenges that will be discussed<sup>17</sup>. Besides, **no clear follow up** is made except the promise that the Commissioner will present the Forum outcomes to the EYCS Council. The Forum costs hundreds of thousands EUR and should not only be seen as a “big show” but rather be embedded in a true structured dialogue with stakeholders.

EUCIS-LLL has already paved the way for a structured dialogue and has made very [concrete proposals](#). This dialogue should be based on **clear aims and on a participative and sustainable approach**. EUCIS-LLL has a clear role to play in making this dialogue happen<sup>18</sup>. Today the involvement of civil society organisations highly depends of the decisions of the different units and directorates within the institutions. This system clearly **lacks coherence and transparency**. The 2013 Regulation on “Erasmus+” clearly points out that *“Support for policy reform action shall include the activities initiated at Union level related to (...) the policy dialogue with relevant European stakeholders in the area of education, training and youth”*. In the spirit of the Europe 2020’s partnership approach reflected notably in its 2012 Communication [“Rethinking Education”](#), **a structured dialogue has to be established in the field of education and training** to improve the implementation of the ET2020. Efforts in that direction are already made in the Youth, Culture, Citizenship and Sports sectors but there is a clear lack for education.

Furthermore more efforts should be put to **reach out to national and local stakeholders** on European cooperation in education and training notably thanks to Erasmus+. EUCIS-LLL is currently leading the [“Lifelong Learning Hub”](#) project initiated under the Lifelong Learning Programme to move forward this policy dialogue at national level. There is a clear gap in reaching out to national stakeholders and citizens. For example only 9% of EU citizens know to which level of the EQF their national qualification correspond while most respondents say that they have not heard of any of the European information points<sup>19</sup>. **European non-governmental organisations should be seen as important intermediaries in creating such bridges and should be better acknowledged and supported in order to play this role**. Today civil society organisations suffer from financial cuts all around Europe as well as at EU level, which weaken their capacity to create such a dialogue. This clearly goes against the political intentions stated in the Europe 2020 and related EU communications.

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<sup>17</sup> Several solutions could be imagined such as the interactive tchat rooms of the Digital Agenda Assembly workshops where people can contribute to discussions before the event or the use of more interactive methodologies during the event.

<sup>18</sup> As the European Commission stated, it is *“in a unique position to support European networks in education and training to work collectively at European, national and local levels and to contribute to a structured policy dialogue within the open method of coordination in education and training”* [2013 Commission annual work programme](#) on grants and contracts for the Lifelong Learning Programme.

<sup>19</sup> European area of skills and qualifications, [Special Eurobarometer 417](#), June 2014

- Set up a **coordination body** composed of representatives of the different DG EAC units, Member States and stakeholders - such as the former ETCG (Education and Training Coordination Group) - to ensure greater coordination, mutual learning and dialogue between Member States, DGs, social partners and civil society organisations. It could meet once or twice per year to review political priorities and initiatives and the progress that is made under the ET2020 and Europe 2020 strategies. Money could be reallocated from the Forum to this body as we believe it would have more impact in the long-term.
- Support **civil society organisations** that play a clear role as intermediary bodies between the citizens and the European Union in order to implement a genuine partnership approach (top down) that is not about “selling Europe” but “communicating Europe” under Erasmus+ (KA3) and the European Social Fund.
- Implement **genuine consultation and participation mechanisms** with civil society at the European and national level on the ET2020 and Europe 2020 strategy by adopting consultation guidelines for the whole Directorate General EAC.

## Learning from the past: a comprehensive approach to learning is still needed

2014 is the opportunity to look at more than a decade of community action. The [Education and Training Strategic Framework 2020](#) is now a pillar of the [Europe 2020 Growth Strategy](#) and investing in human capital is a top priority in the EU agenda. But have education and training really been put in the spotlight for the good reasons? We see a **danger in adopting a more and more utilitarian approach to education**. Employability<sup>20</sup> depends a lot on other factors than levels of education, for instance due to reasons on the skills demand side (job creation, employers’ preferences) or the skills supply side (social and financial capital for education, appropriate childcare...). Already twenty years ago, Jacques Delors warned against our societies “*making many pressing and sometimes contradictory demands on education and training systems [i.e.] the competitiveness of businesses, the employment crisis and the tragedy of social exclusion*”<sup>21</sup>. In 2000, the Commission’s Memorandum on Lifelong Learning expressed that “*employability is obviously a key outcome of successful learning, but **social inclusion rests on more than having a paid job***”. In 2003, the ET2010 Joint Report also repeated that the lack of coherence in lifelong learning strategies frequently came from “*a vision overly concerned with the requirements of employability [that] does not on its own constitute a lifelong learning strategy which is genuinely integrated, coherent and accessible to everyone*”<sup>22</sup>. Two decades have passed and it seems that not looking back on history has conducted to repeat the same mistakes. Despite the warnings sent by those successive progress assessment exercises, **the balance** in the key objectives of EU cooperation was lost one more time, which is an **undeniable threat to the essence of what quality education is**. The UNESCO has launched a global reflection called “[Re-thinking education](#)” in 2013, echoing the eponymous EU document. The preliminary conclusions are as follows: “*There appears to be general agreement that the **integrated and humanistic vision of learning outlined in the Faure and Delors reports is of continued relevance in today’s world**; and that it constitutes a viable foundation for the rethinking of education. The vision is seen as a **meaningful alternative to the utilitarian and productionist approach** that has dominated international education development discourse and practice since the 1970s. In rethinking*

<sup>20</sup> As far as the sector can fulfil labour market needs, employability should be seen as a **set of competences** combining transversal and technical skills in today’s world where adaptability is key to successful career management. “*The nature and importance of different factors will change with circumstances and in many cases these factors interact - for instance, a **qualification such as a degree usually needs to be supplemented by transferable skills or social skills** in order to gain employment (Holmes, 2001). Similarly, interpersonal, ‘emotional’ and ‘aesthetic’ skills are increasingly demanded by many employers, particularly where there is a direct interface with customers (Witzet al., 2003; Glomb and Tews, 2004).*”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>21</sup> “[Growth, competitiveness, employment. The challenges and ways forward into the 21st century](#)”, White Paper, Commission of the European Communities, 1993.

<sup>22</sup> “[ET 2010. The success of the Lisbon Strategy hinges on urgent reforms](#)”, Draft joint interim report on the implementation of the detailed work programme, Commission Communication, 2003, COM (2003) 685 final

*education today a fresh reappraisal of this vision is needed that takes into account contemporary conditions.”* This should clearly be an **overall objective** of the ET2020 strategy.

The recent efforts from the Commission to set up a European area of skills and qualifications are the momentum to adopt this holistic approach and foster a genuine learning outcomes paradigm (especially including validation of non-formal and informal learning). In order to create more coherence we need to better communicate and coordinate the various policies, programmes and tools with the active involvement of all stakeholders. In that respect it is crucial to **create bridges between sectors but also between the different units and directorates within DG EAC and between DG EAC and other DGs** to implement a genuine lifelong learning strategy and tackle all employability factors in a comprehensive way. Synergies are required between the programmes and more particularly Erasmus+ and the European Social Fund.

Furthermore while ET2020 recommends promoting **intercultural, social and civic competences** especially among young people, those have completely been forgotten in EU cooperation. It is necessary to value transversal key competences (learning to learn, sense of initiative, awareness and expression) necessary to foster tolerance, solidarity and intercultural understanding. Civic competences and (European) **citizenship education** is particularly important: in more and more complex societies it is very important to make citizens aware of Europe’s values, prerogatives, political history and structure by developing citizenship through formal and non-formal education: a genuine democratic society cannot be built if citizens are not aware of the impact that the EU institutions have on their daily life. Focusing on the **European dimension of education and training** represents a genuine added value. The Commission repeatedly assures that active citizenship, social inclusion and personal fulfilment are fully compatible with and equal to employability. We call on new EU decision-makers to turn this policy discourse into action by better linking policy priorities to what indicators and benchmarks show in terms of growing learning inequalities.

The **use of a common terminology** – already adopted by Member States within EU frameworks (e.g. European Key Competences Framework) – is essential. EUCIS-LLL believes that **narrowing education to economic needs and using employment terminologies will further create tensions between actors** instead of creating the necessary bridges between the world of education and the business world.

- An **integrated and humanistic vision of learning** is of continued relevance in today’s world and a viable foundation for the rethinking of education: it should be the **overall approach** of ET2020.
- **Coordination bodies between the DGs should be set up to ensure better synergies between the relevant policies and programmes both at national and European level.** The Education, Training and Youth Forum could be used to give visibility to the outcomes of this work by highlighting possible synergies in order to improve the impact of the various EU strategies (ET2020, Europe 2020, Social Investment Package, Youth strategy, etc.).
- The **use and assessment of transversal competences** should be a priority for all sectors. Transversal competences such as civic and social competences should be particularly highlighted alongside language, digital and entrepreneurial skills understood in a broad sense.
- More work should be done on the **European dimension of learning**: how do we teach and learn about Europe in formal and non-formal education as there is a great added value of tackling those issues at EU level. This should be a priority under Priority 3.

## Our proposal concerning the 4 priorities

### **Overall approach**

An **integrated and humanistic vision of learning** is of continued relevance in today's world and a viable foundation for the rethinking of education: it should be the **overall approach** of ET2020. We believe that equity should be a regulating principle and that the approach should be learner-centred. The partnership principle should be operationalised under the ET2020 with clear guidelines and consultation mechanisms, involving social partners and representative civil society organisations, with proper channels and feedback loops.

### **Priority 1: Make lifelong learning and mobility a reality for all**

Stronger emphasis on lifelong learning strategies: giving a political impulse on national implementation (recommendations could be made in the framework of the European Semester). Continue the work on EQF/NQF and on Validation by implementing the roadmap and peer learning activities between the most and less advanced countries. More cooperation is needed on career guidance and counselling services. Concerning mobility: focus should be put on access, language and recognition.

### **Priority 2: Improve the quality and ~~efficiency~~ effectiveness of education and training**

Quality should always go hand in hand with equity. A clear roadmap is needed for the priorities set under this chapter. Effectiveness of education and training seem more appropriate.

### **Priority 3: Promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship**

A strong focus should be given to this third pillar. Civic education and the European dimension of learning as well as the management of diversity including gender and intercultural dialogue should be priority areas of cooperation with clear roadmaps or the adoption of a new flagship initiative.

### **Priority 4: ~~Enhance creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels~~ / Develop the creative, innovative and entrepreneurial spirit of learners and educators at all levels**

Partnerships with research, business and civil society should continue to be a priority and an implementation principle. Key competences and in particular the transversal ones should be seen as proprietary areas of cooperation. The use of ICT to improve learning methodologies should continue to be a priority and be followed by national roadmaps of the Opening up Education strategy.

## **To conclude...**

Expanding access to lifelong learning can open up new possibilities for active inclusion and enhanced social participation, especially for the low skilled, the unemployed, people with special needs, the elderly and migrants. In order to reach these people and to improve their conditions effectively, it is important to combine both quality of education and universal accessibility to knowledge. Today on average, the share of 20-24 year-old who are not in education and have not attained upper secondary education among people born abroad is eleven percentage points higher than among those born in the country<sup>23</sup>. EUCIS-LLL is engaged in the promotion of values such as equity and social inclusion and advocates the adoption of concrete measures at national and European level. Its members recognise lifelong learning as one of the key instruments for the promotion of prosperity and wellbeing. In 2010 a working group was established within the platform in order to work on concrete [policy recommendations](#) based on the identification of more than 30 good practices. Indeed, learning opportunities are now offered by a variety of actors and settings whether formal, non-formal or informal. It is thus crucial to implement a coordinated plan of action to fight social

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<sup>23</sup> EENEE Analytical Report No. 12 "Equity in and through Education and Training: indicators and priorities", Prepared for the European Commission, February 2012

exclusion and poverty. EUCIS-LLL members think it is essential to build bridges between education and training providers as well as with other stakeholders to find concrete, adapted and sustainable solutions.

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## WHO IS EUCIS-LLL?

*The European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL) is an umbrella association that gathers 36 European organisations active in the field of education and training, coming from all EU Member States and beyond. Currently these networks represent more than 45 000 educational institutions (schools, universities, adult education and youth centres, etc.) or associations (involving students, teachers and trainers, parents, HRD professionals, etc.) covering all sectors of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Their members reach out to several millions of beneficiaries. Download our brochure in [23 languages!](#)*

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