
EUROPEAN COOPERATION ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING: ET 2020 STRATEGY

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Abstract: The Education and Training 2020 work programme (ET2020) was adopted in May 2009. In line with the Europe 2020 growth strategy and building on the previous work programme ET2010, ET2020 defines the long-term strategic objectives of EU education and training policies: making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship; enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training. In the Europe 2020 strategy, which was adopted in 2010 in order to put Member States back on track, following the crisis shock in 2008, education was identified as one of the five areas which need specific measures to support economic recovery which could not be based exclusively on financial and budgetary reforms. The Council of the European Union emphasizes that education and training have an essential role to play in meeting the many socio – economic, environmental, demographic and technological challenges facing Europe and its citizens nowadays and in the future. Additionally, the Council claims that effective investment in human capital through education and training systems is an essential component of the Europe's strategy to deliver the high levels of sustainable, knowledge-based growth and jobs that lie in the heart of the Lisbon strategy, at the same time as promoting personal growth, social cohesion and active citizenship. The value of the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET2020) as an integrated framework. A holistic approach is crucial for building a bridge between education, training, youth work and the labour market, and for increasing dialogue among stakeholders. This approach implies collaboration involving formal, non-formal and informal education and training, the education and youth sectors, different levels of education. Researchers have emphasized the value of existing EU tools, cross-policy synergies and multi-professional cooperation, but also emphasized the need to improve the cooperation framework, by promoting networking, cross-sector collaboration and cooperative learning opportunities.

Keywords: ET 2020, higher education, European social policy, education policy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Europe today is facing serious challenges. In addition to persistent issues such as unemployment, slow economic growth, pressure on public finances and uneven educational opportunities and outcomes, new challenges such as the refugee crisis demand urgent action. Education can be vital in tackling these issues, both by enabling young people to become active citizens and by laying the foundations for sustained growth and innovation. Education and training help to equip people with the right skills and to find employment, which, in turn, offers the best protection against poverty. But education can only play this part if it delivers good results. International surveys show that there is still room for improvement. This is one of the reasons why education and training remain a high priority for Europe. Europe is only slowly recovering from the financial and economic crisis. Unemployment rates in the EU remain high, with young people being hit particularly hard. Yet, there are signs of recovery: in 2015, the EU saw employment rates among young graduates rise. Moreover, average public expenditure on education started to increase again in 2014, after three consecutive years of decline.

The inclusion of young people on the labour market has become a matter of growing importance on the agenda of the European Union, notably through the Education and Training Programme in order to fulfil the objective of a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. This link is confirmed by many documents, as seen for example in calls from the European Commission "Europe's future depends largely on its young people" (European Commission, 2011b, p.2).

Furthermore, in 2016, the European Commission launched the New Skills Agenda for Europe. The aim is to help policy makers raise the quality and relevance of skills formation, make skills and qualifications more visible and comparable and better anticipate skills needs. A particular focus has been put on low-skilled people to improve their chances on the labour market. The Agenda also outlines our plans to review of the Key Competence Framework of 2006 and proposals to modernise vocational education and training and higher education. All these initiatives will focus on basic skills (literacy, numeracy and science), but also drive a broader reflection on how to develop and

maintain transversal skills such as critical thinking, sense of initiative, problem solving, entrepreneurial mind-set and cultural awareness. Improving education and training is a complex task. Sound evidence and analysis can help to inform policy decisions and drive reforms to improve educational outcomes. The EU can support Member States by collecting and putting into context facts and figures, which can be the starting point for mutual learning. With such a rich agenda for education, the fifth edition of the Education and Training Monitor represents a large and focused platform for data-driven, policyoriented comparative analyses of the state of education in Europe and in the 28 Member States.

2. PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT ET2020 CYCLE

The next ET 2020 work cycle should focus on the following priorities and expected outcomes:

- Developing a holistic approach linking education, training, youth work and employment, and increasing cross-sector cooperation between stakeholders,
- Strengthening the social dimension of education and training and delivering on the strategic objective ‘Promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship’ of ET2020. This also means promoting learning interventions for those not in employment and enhancing the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, especially for low-qualified youth/adults and marginalised groups,
- Providing additional support, especially from national authorities, to ensure the professionalization of teachers (e.g. pedagogical and digital skills),
- Encouraging the transnational mobility of learners and educators,
- Supporting entrepreneurship education at all levels (starting at primary school level),
- Improving learning outcomes relative to resources used (efficiency).

3. HIGHER EDUCATION AND ET 2020

Since the turn of the millennium, European countries have been engaged in the Bologna Process, which has made European higher education systems more comparable by restructuring programmes into four levels:

- short-cycle tertiary education;
- bachelor level (or equivalent);
- master’s level (or equivalent); and
- doctoral level (or equivalent)¹⁸

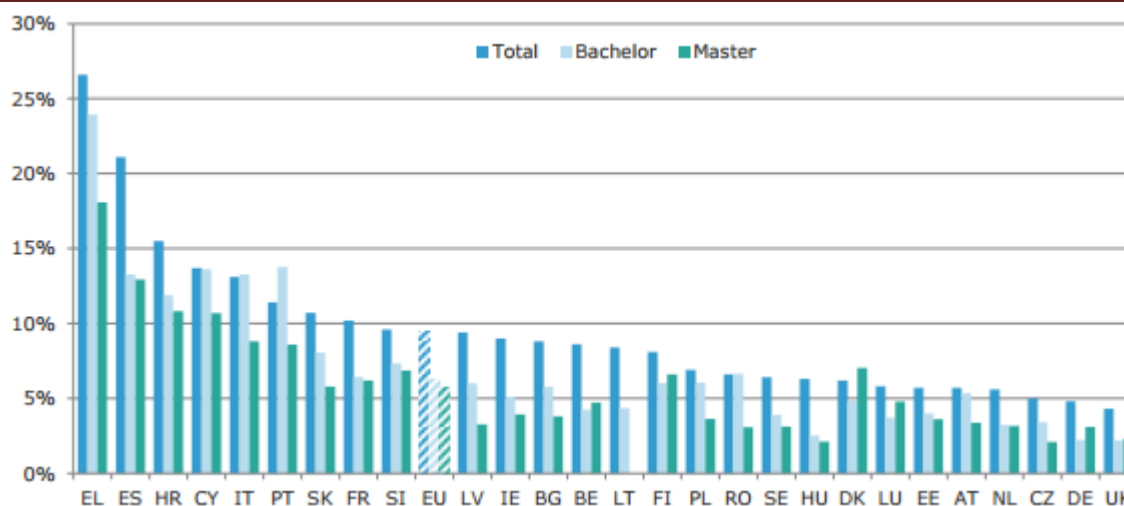
The changing structures have helped higher education expand, by creating new types of study programme in many countries. We can now examine with more precision how graduates from different types of programme fare as they enter and progress in the labour market.

On average, people with a higher level of qualification enjoy an ‘employment premium’ compared to their peers with lower qualification levels. In this section, the analysis focuses on the employment and unemployment rates of tertiary education graduates aged 25-44, i.e. an age group that has generally graduated after the introduction of new Bologna structures in many EU countries.

Importantly, unemployment rates for graduates with a tertiary degree are lower — in most cases significantly so — than those for the population as a whole (Figure 1). The only exceptions are Portugal and Italy for the bachelor level. Unemployment is contingent on the overall macroeconomic profile of a country; for example, high general unemployment levels in southern European countries also translate into relatively high unemployment rates even for people with bachelor’s and master’s degrees.

Figure 1: Unemployment rates of 25-44 year –olds in 2015

¹⁸ For further information please see: <http://www.ehea.info/>.



Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS special extraction, 2015).

In some countries earning a Master's degree is associated to a lower risk of unemployment. This is particularly true in Portugal, Italy, Poland and Romania. However, in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Finland and United Kingdom, this advantage is not apparent; master's graduates fare worse than bachelor's graduates on unemployment. While these data confirm to some extent that investing in a longer and higher level of education pays off, it also shows short-term market distortions that might undermine this principle.

Correspondingly, employment rates generally rise with educational level, including within tertiary education. For example, those holding a doctoral degree have employment rates above 90 % in most European countries. Furthermore, employment rates for graduates with a shortcycle professional qualification are higher than those for people holding bachelor's degrees in systems where high-level vocational training has a strong tradition. This is the case, for example, in Czech Republic, Austria, Germany and Slovenia.

4. INNOVATION AND RELEVANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The European Commission expects that by 2025 almost half of all job openings in Europe will require tertiary qualifications¹⁹. Europe's competitiveness across all sectors will depend more than ever on people's ability to solve problems in creative ways, adapt to unfamiliar situations and work effectively across borders in multicultural environments.

This calls for a higher education sector that trains researchers to solve modern-day problems and equips graduates with an entrepreneurial mindset and drive. To succeed, higher education institutions need to be more innovative and relevant in an increasingly globalised, digitalised and knowledge-dependent labour market. The need to enhance the match between higher education and the skills requirements of the modern economy is underlined in some of the 2016 European Semester country-specific recommendations to Member States. Those addressed to Czech republic, Denmark, Estonia, Spain and Portugal advocate in particular facilitating stronger links between academia and the business sector, including in research and innovation.

With plenty of choices and often-difficult transitions between education types and levels or between education and work, individualised career guidance can support students throughout the whole tertiary education cycle. Career guidance services are available to all students in almost every Member State. However, this career guidance is rarely informed by regular labour market forecasting or graduate tracking surveys. By providing evidence-based assessments of the changes expected in the structure of the labour market and skills requirements, labour market forecasts help to build a picture of the world for which higher education students are being prepared. Around half of the countries conduct regular labour market forecasts and use the results systematically in higher education planning at the central level.

¹⁹ CEDEFOP's Skills Forecast available at <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and/projects/projects/forecasting-skill-demand-and-supply/data-visualisations>

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Graduate tracking — i.e. collecting information on the employment situation and career development of graduates from specific programmes — is increasingly common in higher education institutions²⁰. The actual use of information stemming from graduate tracking, whether for career guidance or the adjustment of study programmes, remains limited. Some of the Member States make systematic efforts to use the information from regular graduate tracking surveys.

Another means to increase the relevance of programmes is to embed work-based learning, a common component of vocational education and training, across higher education. Evidence shows that students who have participated in practical training before graduation are more likely to find jobs than their counterparts without relevant work experience. Eight EU education systems have requirements or provide incentives to their higher education institutions to include work placements in all higher education programmes.

Member States acknowledge the need to strengthen the interaction between their higher education institutions and labour market actors (employers and other social partners). Close communication is needed to improve mutual knowledge and understanding of, respectively, the types of knowledge, skills and abilities required in the real economy and the capacity and mission of higher education. In most Member States there are formal requirements on the involvement of employers in external quality assurance. This is another mechanism through which education authorities can encourage higher education institutions to improve the employability of their graduates.

Another significant aspect of student mobility is the funding opportunities, including the portability of national grants and loans. Several Member States currently make at least some of their major domestic grants (Belgium, Estonia, France, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden) and/or loans (Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden) fully portable, meaning that students can take them abroad without any restrictions. Other Member States have more restrictive policies on the portability of national grants. These include, for example, restrictions on the countries where students can take their grants (e.g. portability within the European Economic Area only) or limits on the time spent abroad. Such restrictions may discourage students from applying to study abroad and thus hinder mobility.

5. CONCLUSION

The EU Member States have adopted an overall framework for political cooperation in education, known as Education and Training 2020. The framework has four main priorities:

- Making lifelong learning a priority
- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training
- Promoting equality, social cohesion and active citizenship
- Enhancing innovation and creativity, including entrepreneurship at all levels of education and training

Higher education holds great potential for promoting upward social mobility and improving employment prospects. Policy measures to increase innovation and the relevance of higher education include personalised career guidance, graduate tracking and work-based learning. The growing internationalisation of higher education is widely seen as an important positive factor in boosting its quality and relevance. Available evidence shows that learning mobility is a predictor of better employability prospects and career development.

As developments in global labour markets drive a greater demand for higher education graduates, governments increasingly focus on improving the quality and relevance of higher education systems as a whole. Public authorities have often sought to improve information about graduate labour market outcomes, although data are not consistently collected and not always used systematically by career guidance services and for adjusting higher education provision. While the importance of promoting transversal skills through innovative curriculum design and use of technology is increasingly recognised, this is an area where institutions and authorities see room for further progress.

²⁰ Rather than the regular tracking assessed here, much of this graduate tracking is of a more ad-hoc nature, as recently shown by a feasibility study for setting up a Europe-wide graduate survey (<http://www.eurograduate.eu/results/digests>).