C/2026/3720

10.7.2026

Council Resolution on the second cycle of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area (2026-2030)

(C/2026/3720)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING

— the Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), the 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) and the Council Resolution on the European Education Area: Looking to 2025 and beyond, which announced that the Council would review the strategic framework – including EU-level targets, governance structure, working methods and priority areas – in 2025 and make any necessary adjustments for the second cycle, as appropriate, to adapt to the reality and needs of the European Education Area or any major developments in the European Union;

— the political background set out in Annex I.

ACKNOWLEDGING

— the important contribution of European cooperation in education and training to relevant parts of the European Semester.

RESTATING

— the need for coordination and coherence of all EU initiatives in the area of education and training, in particular those concerning skills and competences, while fully respecting the legal basis for the respective policy areas as set out in the Treaties.

WELCOMING

— the Commission report on the interim evaluation of the 2021-2030 European Education Area strategic framework [1].

EMPHASISES that:

— in the light of a changing geopolitical reality, giving impetus to achieving equal and inclusive access for all to high-quality education and training is fundamental for individual growth, sustainable social and economic development, democracy, resilience, social cohesion, competitiveness and preparedness;

— achieving the European Education Area continues to be the overarching ambition of European cooperation in education and training. In this context, for individuals and society to achieve their full potential, education and training must be seen from a holistic perspective.

[1] COM(2025) 340 final.

RECOGNISES that:

— considerable progress has been made since 2021 towards achieving the European Education Area, and many initiatives have been launched in line with the strategic priorities. Further implementation is still needed for a number of initiatives;

— the 2021 Council Resolutions on the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training continue to form the basis for cooperation. The present Council Resolution reviews and updates those Resolutions.

TAKES NOTE that, according to the Commission report on the interim evaluation of the 2021-2030 European Education Area strategic framework:

— the strategic framework has had EU added value in bringing Member States together around quantified targets and shared priorities. It has managed to deliver results and relevant improvements. The delivery and combination of European Education Area implementation instruments are effective and coherent with each other and the priorities overall. The evidence shows that the European Education Area has succeeded in delivering important new EU-level actions, in inspiring and supporting national reforms, and in establishing structural, systemic and sustainable pathways for deeper European cooperation between education institutions. In some cases, EU-level cooperation has exceeded expectations and original ambitions, providing efficient lines of communication and a coordinated response during crisis management, thereby boosting EU resilience;

— the strength of the strategic framework lies in its strong foundation of voluntary cooperation and co-creation. Throughout consultations for the evaluation, Member States confirmed their strong will to continue cooperation via the strategic framework;

— the major challenges, structured through the strategic priorities identified by the Council in 2021 and in line with the 2023 Council Resolution, remain relevant;

— a number of areas with room for improvement may be identified: strategic priorities, cross-sectoral coordination and coherence, the governance model, and two major gaps (lack of EU-level targets for some longstanding or emerging priorities and lack of systematic evidence of national reforms as a follow-up to EU initiatives);

— the European Education Area governance structures, more specifically the High Level Group on Education and Training, reinforced by its Coordination Board, have ensured stronger political steering and more strategic agenda-setting. The European Education Area has promoted a genuine European dimension in education and training;

— as for the EU-level targets, trends towards meeting them show a mixed picture. For several targets there have been positive developments (e.g. fewer early school leavers), but for some others there has been limited progress or even a decrease (e.g. basic skills).

FURTHER TAKES NOTE of

— the Commission communication on the Union of Skills ([2]), which underlines that European competitiveness requires skills ranging from basic skills to skills acquired through lifelong upskilling and reskilling. The Commission announces a new approach, including an EU-27 recommendation on human capital as part of the European Semester, combining education, training and employment policies, united around a common vision on competitiveness;

— the Commission communication on the Action Plan on Basic Skills ([3]), which is a response to declining levels in basic literacy, mathematics and science ([4]), and which also addresses declining levels of basic digital skills and civic knowledge ([5]);

([2]) COM(2025) 90 final.
([3]) COM(2025) 88 final.
([4]) As attested by PISA and PIAAC for adults.
([5]) As attested in ICILS and ICCS+.

— the Commission communication on a STEM ([6]) Education Strategic Plan: skills for competitiveness and innovation ([7]), which points to challenges in STEM across all levels of education and training, such as declining interest, participation and achievement, STEM teacher shortages and gender and diversity gaps, all of which need to be addressed by the Council;

— the Commission's intention to establish a European Skills Intelligence Observatory and a European Skills High-Level Board, as announced in the communication on the Union of Skills.

AGREES that:

1. To thrive in today's world and to cope with future transformations in society, in the economy and in the labour market, all individuals must be equipped with the key competences for lifelong learning ([8]) and in this context multilingualism, interdisciplinary competences and transversal skills have an important role to play. To continue to achieve this, there is a need to identify policy measures which could boost educational success for all learners, including opportunities for education and training at different stages of life.

2. The EU faces a competitiveness challenge. While also being expected to deal with demographic challenges, education and training systems will need to equip individuals with the skills required to boost European competitiveness and strategic autonomy in the years to come and to support the green and digital transitions. Developing capacity for resilience and the ability to withstand and recover from crises will help to build future-proof education and training systems across the EU, building on lessons learned and responding to the impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and its repercussions for European security.

3. The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training will be the main tool to support and implement the European Education Area, with full consideration for its holistic approach and, where relevant, in synergy with the Union of Skills.

4. While much progress has been made towards achieving the European Education Area, there is still work to be done towards its full achievement by 2030.

5. In the light of developments during the first cycle of the strategic framework, there is a need to revisit and adapt the strategic priorities, priority areas and EU-level targets set in 2021, as well as to reinforce education for the green and digital transitions across all strategic priorities.

6. Promoting quality, equity, inclusion and success for all remains at the heart of the European Education Area, permeating all of its strategic priorities. In the second cycle (2026-2030), the strategic framework will address the following six strategic priorities, using the financial means available:

([6]) Science, technology, engineering and mathematics.
([7]) COM(2025) 89 final.
([8]) As defined in the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning (OJ C 189, 4.6.2018, p. 1).

Strategic priority 1: Literacy, mathematics and science for all

High-quality education and training help all learners to develop competences consisting of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are key for an individual's quality of life, their employment opportunities, for social cohesion and competitiveness and for EU resilience and preparedness. To attain this objective, education and training systems should ensure equitable access, participation and outcomes by promoting high-quality learning, inclusion and well-being. While progress has been made in the first cycle of the strategic framework, it remains key to further improve education, training and skills for the personal growth, active citizenship and professional development of learners of all ages.

Providing a sufficient level of literacy (reading, writing and a sound understanding of written and oral information), mathematics and science for all is the foundation for all further learning. This foundation enables learners to develop both wider and more specialised competences, such as in STEM ([9]), and to succeed in initial and continuing education, the labour market and society more broadly. Key to the provision of literacy, mathematics and science is improving the quality of teaching and enhancing equity and inclusion. This will help to ensure success for all in education and training, which is more important now than ever before.

Europe faces a critical challenge: recent international assessments, including PISA, show a worrying decline in reading, mathematics and science, with a growing share of students failing to reach minimum proficiency levels. Increased efforts must be made to address this, including efforts to reduce early leaving from education and training and to improve access to high-quality early childhood education and care, particularly for learners from vulnerable groups. Providing all individuals with skills in literacy, mathematics and science, and promoting key competences for lifelong learning in general, is essential for their personal and professional development and helps to address socio-economic inequalities and skills shortages. Simultaneously, improving quality in education and training should increase the number of top performers, including with a view to strengthening Europe's innovation capacity and competitiveness.

Across Europe, learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are overrepresented among low-achievers. To have truly inclusive education and training systems, the educational attainment and achievement of learners at all levels and in all types of education and training should not be determined by personal, social and economic factors. Inclusive education and training also involve developing sensitivity in learning processes to take into account diversity, inclusion and non-discrimination. Challenging all stereotypes and providing the necessary support for learners with disabilities and special educational needs are equally important in this context.

Strategic priority 2: Developing digital skills and citizenship education

In today's global context, marked by crises, climate change, rapid technological change, digitalisation (including artificial intelligence (AI)), increasing polarisation, the spread of disinformation and growing challenges to democratic norms and values, as well as a low level of democratic participation, there is an urgent need to strengthen democracy and resilience within the European Union. Both digital and citizenship education play a key role in this respect.

Digital skills are crucial for modern life and have become essential in almost all areas of society and the economy. They are key to active citizenship, employability, social inclusion and well-being, while also being instrumental in improving European competitiveness through the development of more advanced STEM skills. Digital education should cover media, digital and data literacy, critical thinking, digital well-being, the fight against mis- and disinformation, cyberbullying, hateful and harmful speech, and knowledge of AI, ethical and responsible use thereof, and other emerging technologies.

Citizenship education is equally important in the present context. The current global situation requires informed and engaged citizens who understand and respect democratic institutions, principles and processes at local, national, European and international level. Citizenship education helps all individuals to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for active and responsible participation in democratic life and meaningful civic engagement.

([9]) The STEAM (science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics) approach, embracing the creative potential of connecting STEM education with the arts, humanities and social sciences, may also be applied.

A European dimension of teaching ([10]) can contribute to promoting shared European values ([11]) in order to foster a sense of European identity and solidarity. It should promote respect for cultural diversity and help learners navigate their local, national, European and global identities. Citizenship education goes hand in hand with understanding the challenges of the digital and green transitions.

A key aspect of citizenship education is teaching and learning through, about and for democracy. Education and training, in all fields and at all levels, should promote democratic values, encourage open dialogue and critical thinking, and address both mis- and disinformation (including online). Schools and all other education and training institutions should function as democratic communities where learners experience participation, dialogue and co-decision-making. Teachers, educators, trainers and leaders at all levels of education and training should be well prepared to play a vital role in creating inclusive and participatory learning environments that reflect democratic values in practice. In this regard, digital and citizenship education are particularly important in helping learners think critically and act safely and responsibly online. Shaping an ethical approach to screen use is necessary to ensure children's well-being and safety.

The focus should be on promoting active citizenship, equipping individuals with the competences and confidence to engage constructively in their communities and in the democratic process at all levels.

Learning for the green transition and sustainable development ([12]) and citizenship education are closely interconnected and also relevant for European competitiveness. Preparing learners at all levels and in all types of education and training in order to respond to societal and environmental challenges is a core aspect of active and responsible citizenship. This includes equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to engage meaningfully in the green and digital transitions and to contribute to a just, socially and environmentally sustainable society.

Strategic priority 3: Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality for all

Societal, technological, environmental and economic challenges are increasingly affecting the way we live and work. In particular, technological developments require the population to upskill and reskill. Lifelong learning is essential in the context of the climate crisis as well as technological changes, as it helps individuals to build resilience and be prepared for ongoing environmental and societal change. It supports the development of green and digital skills and ensures that people can adapt to new and emerging labour market demands, thereby contributing to more sustainable ways of living and working. Ever-changing societies make lifelong learning essential for personal, civic and professional development. Further progress is still required in providing flexible, high-quality lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The average participation rate of adults in learning in the EU remains low. Education and training systems should become more flexible, resilient, future-proof and appealing, reaching out to a more diverse group of learners, including those with low skills levels. They need to ensure the recognition of qualifications and validation of prior learning and offer training opportunities for upskilling and reskilling, including at higher qualification levels and throughout a person's working life, e. g. through micro-credentials. Furthermore, innovations in learning pathways, new educational approaches and lifelong career guidance can help to better accommodate the needs of a wider range of learners, as a growing number of adults will need to reskill and upskill. Particular attention should be paid to supporting learners from marginalised backgrounds and those with disabilities and special educational needs.

([10]) To be fostered in line with the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching (OJ C 195, 7.6.2018, p. 1).
([11]) As expressed in Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.
([12]) As outlined in the Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on learning for the green transition and sustainable development, OJ C 243, 27.6.2022, p. 1.

Mobility for learners, teachers, educators, teacher trainers and staff should continue to be expanded, in particular through the current Erasmus+ programme, as a key element of EU cooperation and a tool to enhance quality and inclusion in education and training and promote multilingualism, intercultural competences, European identity and active citizenship in the EU and beyond. Therefore, further efforts must be made to remove existing barriers to learning and teaching mobility, including in the areas of study periods abroad, quality assurance and automatic mutual recognition of qualifications and outcomes of learning periods abroad ([13]). It is important to strive for balanced mobility in order to ensure balanced circulation and allocation of skills, and to monitor these processes.

Strategic priority 4: Enhancing attractiveness, competences and motivation in the education and training profession

Teachers, educators, trainers, education and training leaders and other educational and pedagogical staff, at all levels and in all settings, are at the heart of education and training.

EU countries face increasing challenges with teacher shortages, especially in certain subjects and geographical areas. The motivation of teachers, educators, trainers and other educational and pedagogical staff plays a vital role in the quality of education and training. Therefore, there is a need to increase the attractiveness and societal appreciation of the teaching profession and to develop better and more flexible recruitment strategies. The quality of the education of teachers, educators and trainers and their professional development, mobility opportunities, working conditions and well-being are key factors in increasing the attractiveness of the profession. To support innovation, inclusion, quality and achievement in education and training, educators must be competent and motivated, which requires high-quality initial education and continuous professional training. They should receive recognition and have opportunities for career progression.

Strategic priority 5: Fostering excellent and attractive European vocational education and training (VET)

Initial and continuing VET plays a crucial role in preparing Europe's workforce for the future. Across the EU, countries are facing growing labour shortages in key sectors. To ensure European competitiveness and drive innovation, it is essential to enhance the attractiveness, excellence and inclusiveness of VET. There is also a need to promote the societal recognition of VET and raise awareness among learners, parents and employers about its quality and the career opportunities it provides. The Copenhagen Process enhances collective European efforts to develop high-quality and innovative VET systems, contributing to national and European competitiveness and resilience.

The ongoing green and digital transitions, particularly as regards the emergence of AI and other innovative technologies, require new skills and adaptability, and VET plays an important role in ensuring appropriate and effective responses. Support for the upskilling of VET teachers and trainers and the modernisation of VET infrastructure are essential for the effective integration of green and digital skills into teaching practice. By aligning training with labour market demands, VET ensures that learners are not only prepared for current jobs but can also adapt to future changes. Ensuring labour market relevance in VET remains of key importance. Equally important is to develop an appropriate level of other transversal skills and competences for lifelong adaptability to changing labour market needs and personal development, through citizenship, entrepreneurship, digital education and education for sustainable development.

There is a pressing need to strengthen VET in STEM fields to ensure innovation and technological progress in Europe. Encouraging young people – especially girls and underrepresented groups – to pursue STEM-related VET programmes will be essential to meet future societal and economic challenges. VET also plays an important role in applied research, innovation and entrepreneurship, for example through the Centres of Vocational Excellence.

([13]) In line with the Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (OJ C 444, 10.12.2018, p. 1).

Improving diversity within VET programmes remains an important challenge. Particular attention should be paid to supporting learners from marginalised backgrounds and those with special educational needs. Making VET an attractive, flexible and inclusive pathway for all learners through early career guidance is essential, not only for equality but also to address the full spectrum of skills shortages across Europe. Furthermore, VET should be recognised and promoted as offering opportunities for personal, academic and professional development which are as valuable as those offered by general education pathways.

To further enhance the appeal of VET, it is important to boost opportunities for learning mobility. Encouraging cross-border exchanges and improving the recognition of qualifications and of training periods abroad can make VET a more dynamic and attractive pathway for all learners. Such efforts also promote competitiveness, a sense of European identity and collaboration.

Work-based learning remains a cornerstone of effective VET systems. Strengthening partnerships between training institutions and employers and expanding opportunities for apprenticeships and work-based learning can increase the attractiveness and relevance of VET programmes.

VET should ensure options for further learning, enabling learners to progress further in their studies by promoting the permeability between VET and general or higher education and training pathways. It should be possible to transition seamlessly from vocational pathways to further education, including to higher education, thus ensuring that learners can continue developing their skills throughout life and adjust to changing career paths.

Strategic priority 6: Promoting competitive European higher education

Higher education, research and innovation continue to have an essential role to play in ensuring the European Union's future competitiveness, innovation capacity, attractiveness and societal resilience.

Significant progress has already been made in strengthening cooperation among European higher education institutions ([14]), particularly through the implementation of key commitments of the Bologna Process and initiatives such as European Universities alliances and the Council Resolution on a joint European degree label and the next steps towards a possible joint European degree: boosting Europe's competitiveness and the attractiveness of European higher education ([15]), approved in May 2025. These efforts have laid the groundwork for deeper integration and mobility, and further development will continue in the coming years. Continued collaboration across borders not only enhances the quality of education and research but also strengthens democracy and cultivates shared European identity and values.

Work should continue to remove barriers to transnational cooperation by furthering the implementation of initiatives such as the European Universities alliances and continuing the three-phase process agreed in May 2025 'with a view to implementing a joint European degree label and paving the way for a joint European degree' ([16]). Further efforts are needed to enhance automatic mutual recognition of qualifications for the purpose of further studies ([17]), which will also contribute to improved mobility of students and learners.

The Bologna Process continues to be an important cornerstone of the European higher education landscape. Ensuring synergy between the strategic framework and the Bologna Process is crucial to avoid duplication and inefficiencies, and to support a more cohesive European Education Area. Strengthening links with the European Research Area also remains important.

([14]) For the purposes of this Resolution, the term 'higher education institutions' is used as a reference to the whole sector, representing the entire area of tertiary education, thus covering all types of higher education institutions, including, in accordance with national law or practice, research universities, university colleges, universities of applied sciences, higher vocational education and training institutions, and higher arts institutions.

([15]) OJ C, C/2025/2939, 22.5.2025, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2025/2939/oj.

([16]) While discussions on the joint European degree are ongoing, a decision on its possible introduction has not yet been taken by the Council of the European Union, and any reference to a joint European degree in this Council Resolution should be understood in this sense.

([17]) In line with the Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (OJ C 444, 10.12.2018, p. 1).

To address growing skills gaps and shortages of higher education graduates in the labour market effectively, accessibility of higher education should be broadened by creating opportunities for learners of all ages and backgrounds and by designing flexible learning pathways that promote lifelong learning, recognition of prior learning and support the well-being of students and staff. Students need to have access to high-quality and inclusive higher education and benefit from sufficient guidance and support in order to achieve their full potential.

It will be equally crucial to safeguard fundamental academic values (including academic freedom) and acknowledge the role of higher education institutions in supporting the future development of democratic societies.

Academic staff are essential for thriving European higher education institutions and deeper transnational cooperation. To address the challenges they face, it is necessary to support initiatives that recognise and acknowledge the value of their diverse roles and the importance of attractive and sustainable careers in higher education.

Research and innovation are central to the role of higher education in addressing complex societal and economic challenges. Stronger cooperation between higher education institutions and economic sectors is vital for the alignment of educational offerings with evolving labour market demands.

Higher education in STEM is crucial to meet the demand for skilled professionals in key sectors, including through the use of micro-credentials. Attracting more girls and women to STEM studies already from an early age is crucial in increasing tertiary enrolment and the number of STEM professionals. Moreover, the development of green and digital skills is key to supporting Europe's twin transitions and strategic autonomy. Further focus is also needed on the development of higher education in relation to AI and ethical and responsible use thereof. AI will have a deep impact on the sector, from teaching, learning and student assessment to research, innovation and the internal processes of higher education institutions.

STRESSES that:

— strengthening the governance of the European Education Area can be achieved within the current structures ([18]). The principles and the working methods at European level have proven their efficiency and flexibility;

— the High Level Group on Education and Training (HLG), supported by its Coordination Board, has an important role in identifying, discussing and steering strategic and transversal issues for European cooperation in education and training in a forward-looking manner, including key strategic topics related to digital education and training and to digital skills and competences ([19]). Delivering efficiently in that role is key;

— the prerogatives of the Council and the rotating Presidency remain central in steering governance, including the organisation of HLG meetings and meetings of Directors-General;

— the working groups of the strategic framework, operating on the basis of the open method of coordination, are essential for EU policy preparation and for connecting experts across Member States. Their mandates should reflect the updated strategic priorities as identified in the current Resolution. Back-to-back meetings between working groups could be further developed in order to strengthen a cross-sectoral approach and ensure more coherent cooperation;

— it is important to reinforce the use of peer learning activities, including peer counselling;

— the need for dissemination of information and results remains crucial at all levels (HLG, Directors-General meetings and working groups of the strategic framework); efforts to this end should be reinforced.

([18]) As set out in the 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) (OJ C 497, 10.12.2021, p. 1).

([19]) As indicated in the Council Recommendation of 23 November 2023 on improving the provision of digital skills and competences in education and training (OJ C, C/2024/1030, 23.1.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/1030/oj) and the Council Recommendation of 23 November 2023 on the key enabling factors for successful digital education and training (OJ C, C/2024/1115, 24.1.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/1115/oj).

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES to:

1. Work together, with the support of the Commission and using the open method of coordination, to enhance European cooperation in education and training in the period up to 2030 on the basis of the revised strategic priorities, the principles and working methods, and the concrete issues and actions agreed for each of the strategic priorities in the 2026-2030 cycle (as outlined in Annex III).
2. Consider, on the basis of national priorities and with due respect for national competence in the area of education and training, measures at national and regional level which aim to achieve progress within the strategic priorities outlined in the strategic framework and to collectively contribute to the full achievement of the European Education Area and to the EU-level targets identified in Annex II.
3. Support the governance structure and the working methods chosen, taking ownership of the process.
4. Make effective use of EU policies and current funding instruments to support the implementation of national and regional measures and actions to achieve progress on the strategic priorities and towards related targets at EU and national level.

INVITES THE COMMISSION, WITH FULL RESPECT FOR SUBSIDIARITY, to:

1. Support and work with Member States in cooperation under this framework in a co-creative manner, on the basis of the strategic priorities, the principles and working methods described above, the EU-level targets and the indicator outlined in Annex II, and the concrete issues and actions agreed for each of the strategic priorities in the 2026-2030 cycle as outlined in Annex III.
2. Work with Member States and provide specific support to facilitate mutual learning, analysis, peer counselling and the sharing of good practice on early childhood education and care, schools, VET, higher education, adult learning and transversal issues. To ensure all sectors of education and training are covered, opportunities for back-to-back and joint meetings of the working groups of the strategic framework should be actively explored.
3. Analyse, in particular through progress reporting based on the information provided by the Member States, the degree to which the strategic priorities of the framework have been addressed as regards the achievement of the European Education Area, as well as in the area of European cooperation in education and training at national level through the Education and Training Monitor. Preserving reporting within the existing structures, with due regard to administrative burdens, is key for the Member States.
4. Collaborate with the Member States through the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks to improve data analysis and collection, and report back to the Council on this work on a regular basis.
5. Pursue work on methodology on the basis of the indicator in the area of civic knowledge, in order to enable the further development of a target related to citizenship.
6. Publish a final report on the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) in 2030 and make a proposal for a framework for cooperation for the following decade.

ANNEX I

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Council of the European Union

1. Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), OJ C 66, 26.2.2021, p. 1.

2. Council conclusions on equity and inclusion in education and training in order to promote educational success for all, OJ C 221, 10.6.2021, p. 3.

3. Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative – Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education, OJ C 221, 10.6.2021, p. 14.

4. 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), OJ C 497, 10.12.2021, p. 1.

5. Council Resolution on a new European agenda for adult learning 2021-2030, OJ C 504, 14.12.2021, p. 9.

6. Council Recommendation of 29 November 2021 on blended learning approaches for high-quality and inclusive primary and secondary education, OJ C 504, 14.12.2021, p. 21.

7. Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation, OJ C 160, 13.4.2022, p. 1.

8. Council conclusions on enhancing teachers' and trainers' mobility, in particular European mobility, during their initial and in-service education and training, OJ C 167, 21.4.2022, p. 2.

9. Council conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe, OJ C 167, 21.4.2022, p. 9.

10. Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on learning for the green transition and sustainable development, OJ C 243, 27.6.2022, p. 1.

11. Council Recommendation of 28 November 2022 on Pathways to School Success and replacing the Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving, OJ C 469, 9.12.2022, p. 1.

12. Council conclusions on supporting well-being in digital education, OJ C 469, 9.12.2022, p. 19.

13. Council resolution on The European Education Area: Looking to 2025 and beyond, OJ C 185, 26.5.2023, p. 35.

14. Council conclusions on further steps to make automatic mutual recognition in education and training a reality, OJ C 185, 26.5.2023, p. 44.

15. Council conclusions on the contribution of education and training to strengthening common European values and democratic citizenship, OJ C, C/2023/1419, 1.12.2023, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2023/1419/oj.

16. Council Recommendation of 23 November 2023 on improving the provision of digital skills and competences in education and training, OJ C, C/2024/1030, 23.1.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/1030/oj.

17. Council Recommendation of 23 November 2023 on the key enabling factors for successful digital education and training, OJ C, C/2024/1115, 24.1.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/1115/oj.

18. Council Recommendation of 13 May 2024 'Europe on the Move' – learning mobility opportunities for everyone, OJ C, C/2024/3364, 14.6.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/3364/oj.

19. Council conclusions on promoting evidence-informed policy and practice in education and training to achieve the European Education Area, OJ C, C/2024/3642, 14.6.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/3642/oj.

20. Council Recommendation of 25 November 2024 on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education, OJ C, C/2024/7282, 5.12.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/7282/oj.

21. Council conclusions on strategic partnerships in education and training, OJ C, C/2024/7400, 9.12.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/7400/oj.

22. Council conclusions on inclusive, learner-centred practices in early childhood education and care and school education, OJ C, C/2025/2796, 21.5.2025, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2025/2796/oj.

23. Council Resolution on a joint European degree label and the next steps towards a possible joint European degree: boosting Europe's competitiveness and the attractiveness of European higher education, OJ C, C/2025/2939, 22.5.2025, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2025/2939/oj.

24. Council Recommendation of 12 May 2025 on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education, OJ C, C/2025/3006, 28.5.2025, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2025/3006/oj.

European Commission

1. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European strategy for universities, COM(2022) 16 final.

2. 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, COM(2022) 700 final.

3. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a blueprint for a European degree, COM(2024) 144 final.

4. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Action Plan on Basic Skills, COM(2025) 88 final.

5. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on A STEM Education Strategic Plan: skills for competitiveness and innovation, COM(2025) 89 final.

6. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on The Union of Skills, COM(2025) 90 final.

7. Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the interim evaluation of the 2021-2030 European Education Area strategic framework, COM(2025) 340 final.

Other documents

1. Tirana Communiqué (Tirana EHEA Ministerial Conference, 29 and 30 May 2024).
2. Herning Declaration on attractive and inclusive Vocational Education and Training for increased competitiveness and quality jobs 2026-2030 (12 September 2025).

ANNEX II

EU-LEVEL TARGETS - Reference levels of European average performance in education and training

As a means of monitoring progress and identifying challenges, as well as contributing to evidence-informed policy making through the systematic collection and analysis of internationally comparable data, a series of reference levels of European average performance in education and training ('EU-level targets') should support the strategic priorities outlined in the Resolution for the period 2026-2030. They should be based solely on comparable and reliable data and take account of specificities of education and training systems and differing situations in individual Member States. They should be achieved collectively by the Member States and should not be considered concrete targets for individual countries to reach by 2030. Member States are invited to consider the establishment of relevant national targets.

On this basis, Member States agree to the following EU-level targets to be reached by 2030 in the following nine target areas:

1. **Achievement of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science**

a) The share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15 % ([1]).

b) The share of top performance in reading, mathematics and science should be at least 12 % ([2]).

c) The share of learners from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds with a good achievement in at least one domain (reading, mathematics or science) should be at least 25 % ([3]).

2. **Low-achieving eighth-graders in digital skills**

The share of low-achieving eighth-graders in computer and information literacy should be less than 15 % ([4]).

3. **Participation in early childhood education and care**

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 ([5]).

4. **Early leavers from education and training**

The share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 8 % ([6]).

([1]) The data source is the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), as collected and administered by the OECD. The target measures the share of 15-year-olds (attending educational institutions in grade 7 of compulsory education or higher) who do not reach level 2 (on a scale of 1-6) on the proficiency scale in the respective domain (reading, mathematics or science).

([2]) The data source is PISA. The target measures the share of 15-year-olds (attending educational institutions in grade 7 of compulsory education or higher) who reach level 5 (on a scale of 1-6) or higher on the proficiency scale in the respective domain (reading, mathematics or science).

([3]) The data source is PISA. The target measures the share of 15-year-olds (attending educational institutions in grade 7 of compulsory education or higher) in the bottom quarter of the index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) who reach level 4 or higher on the proficiency scale (1-6) in at least one domain (reading, mathematics or science).

([4]) The target is based on the Computer and Information Literacy (CIL) survey from the International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS) conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The target measures the share of students in their eighth year of schooling (13-14-year-olds) performing below the level 2 threshold on the computer and information literacy proficiency scale.

([5]) The data source is Eurostat (UNESCO-OECD-Eurostat joint data collection). The target measures the share of children between the age of 3 and each country's starting age for compulsory primary education who participate in early childhood education and care.

([6]) The data source is Eurostat (EU Labour Force Survey). The target measures the share of the population aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary educational attainment and no longer in formal or non-formal education or training.

5. **Tertiary-level attainment**

The share of 25-34-year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 47 % ([7]).

6. **Participation of adults in learning**

At least 60 % of adults aged 25-64 should have participated in learning during the last 12 months ([8]).

7. **STEM enrolment**

a) The share of students enrolled in STEM fields in initial medium-level VET should be at least 45 %, with at least 1 out of every 5 students female ([9]).

b) The share of students enrolled in STEM fields at tertiary level should be at least 32 %, with at least 2 out of every 5 students female ([10]).

c) The share of students enrolled in ICT PhD programmes should be at least 5 %, with at least 1 out of every 3 students female ([11]).

8. **Learning mobility**

a) In higher education, the share of graduates with a learning mobility experience abroad should be at least 23 % ([12]).

b) In VET, the share of vocational learners benefiting from a learning mobility experience abroad should be at least 12 % ([13]).

([7]) The data source is Eurostat (EU Labour Force Survey). The target measures the share of the population aged 25-34 having completed a short-cycle tertiary, bachelor, master, doctoral or equivalent level of education.

([8]) The target was welcomed by EU Heads of State or Government in the Porto Declaration and by the European Council in its conclusions of 24 and 25 June 2021. The data source is Eurostat, with a possible transfer from the Adult Education Survey to the EU Labour Force Survey currently under assessment. The ongoing data collection in the EU Labour Force Survey started in 2022. The target measures the share of 25-64-year-olds who have participated in formal or non-formal education and training during the last 12 months (excluding guided on-the-job training). Once the source is finally confirmed, the Council may decide, if relevant, on a revision of the target.

([9]) The data source is Eurostat (UNESCO-OECD-Eurostat joint data collection). The target measures the share of students enrolled in natural sciences, mathematics, statistics, information and communication technologies, engineering, manufacturing and construction out of the total volume of students enrolled in vocational upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education. With respect to female student enrolment, the target measures the share of women enrolled in STEM out of the total volume of students enrolled in STEM.

([10]) The data source is Eurostat (UNESCO-OECD-Eurostat joint data collection). The target measures the share of students enrolled in natural sciences, mathematics, statistics, information and communication technologies, engineering, manufacturing and construction out of the total volume of students enrolled in tertiary education. With respect to female student enrolment, the target measures the share of women enrolled in STEM out of the total volume of students enrolled in STEM.

([11]) The data source is Eurostat (UNESCO-OECD-Eurostat joint data collection). The target measures the share of students enrolled in information and communication technologies (ICT) programmes out of the total volume of students enrolled at doctoral level. With respect to female student enrolment, the target measures the share of women enrolled in ICT out of the total volume of students enrolled in ICT.

([12]) The data source is Eurostat (UNESCO-OECD-Eurostat joint data collection). The target measures the share of outgoing degree- and credit-mobile graduates (credit mobility of a minimum duration of three months or representing at least 15 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits (including both traineeships and study mobility) or credit mobility consisting of less than three months and at least three ECTS credits throughout the cycle of study). The credit mobility actions can be either fully physical or blended, i.e. consisting of both a virtual and physical component. In the Council Recommendation of 13 May 2024 'Europe on the Move' – learning mobility opportunities for everyone (OJ C, C/2024/3364, 14.6.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/3364/oj), the Commission was asked by the Council to put forward a proposal for an updated methodology for data collection in 2026. Work on the future methodology is still ongoing, led by Eurostat.

([13]) The target builds on the indicator defined in the Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (OJ C 417, 2.12.2020, p. 1). It measures the share of mobile learners in a calendar year, as a proportion of a cohort of VET graduates in the same year. It includes participants in flexible mobility opportunities, such as under Erasmus+ (for example short-term mobility, group mobility, blended mobility, mobility linked to participation in skills competitions), or other mobility programmes. The indicator will be based on data sourced from Eurostat (UNESCO-OECD-Eurostat joint data collection) for VET graduates and Erasmus+ for mobility. Where available and only if the data provided is comparable with Erasmus+ data, data from national authorities' mobility programmes, including on the duration of mobility, could also be used to complement the data from Erasmus+. Where data from national authorities is included, this should be indicated in a transparent manner.

9. **International attractiveness**

The annual number of learners from outside the EU coming to study and obtain a degree at tertiary level in the EU should be at least 350 000 ([14]).

In addition to the abovementioned EU-level targets, the Council:

— acknowledges the Commission's work on an indicator in the area of civic knowledge. On the basis of a future proposal for a target, the Council may agree on an EU-level target concerning this key element related to strategic priority 2;

— takes note of the Commission's intention to publish a European Strategy for VET in 2026 and to put forward new proposals for EU-level targets for VET. The Council will examine the future proposals as appropriate and will decide on the new EU-level targets.

([14]) The data source is Eurostat (UNESCO-OECD-Eurostat joint data collection). The target measures the number of degree-mobile graduates in tertiary education (short-cycle tertiary, bachelor, master, doctoral or equivalent level) who come from a non-EU country.

ANNEX III

CONCRETE ISSUES AND ACTIONS FOR THE STRATEGIC PRIORITIES OF THE EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING DURING THE SECOND CYCLE: 2026-2030

Strategic priority 1 – Literacy, mathematics and science for all

i) Promoting the development of literacy, mathematics and science, with a focus on supporting both low-achievers and high-achievers.

ii) Considering initiatives set out in the Commission's Action Plan on Basic Skills and the Commission's STEM Education Strategic Plan.

iii) Further promoting and supporting language teaching and learning and multilingualism for all.

iv) Continuing efforts to reduce early leaving from education and training and low achievement by supporting a whole-school approach with a learner-centred vision for education aligned with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

v) Enhancing work on addressing the increased diversity of learners' needs and improving access to high-quality and inclusive education and training for all learners, including learners with disabilities or special educational needs and learners from disadvantaged or vulnerable groups.

vi) Continuing to implement the EU quality framework for early childhood education and care.

vii) Continuing the focus on gender gaps in education and training and on unequal opportunities for girls and boys, women and men, by promoting educational choices which are more gender-balanced and by challenging harmful gender stereotypes in education and educational careers, especially in STEM fields of study.

viii) Continuing to foster sustainable investment in high-quality and inclusive education and training.

Strategic priority 2 – Developing digital skills and citizenship education

i) Pursuing the protection and promotion of European values in education and training policy across all fields by promoting civic, intercultural, multilingual and social competences, diversity, mutual understanding and respect, and ownership of democratic values and fundamental rights at all levels and in all types of education and training.

ii) Strengthening the promotion of critical thinking and digital citizenship supported by digital and media literacy, including understanding of artificial intelligence (AI), in response to the growing challenge of mis- and disinformation.

iii) Exploring the impact of AI and other technological advancements on education and training across all sectors and fostering ethical and responsible use thereof.

iv) Promoting well-being, including digital well-being, and mental health at school, and supportive and safe school environments to prevent and address any form of violence, bullying, hate speech, mis- and disinformation and all forms of discrimination.

v) Continuing efforts to advance learning for the green transition and sustainable development by continuing to embed those topics across all levels of education and training systems, within an interdisciplinary approach; where relevant, those efforts could mobilise expertise and resources for networking, and supporting creative approaches, for example through the Education for Climate Coalition and use of GreenComp: The European sustainability competence framework.

vi) Continuing to exchange best practices and implement actions included in the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027, the 2023 Council Recommendations on the key enabling factors for successful digital education and training and on improving the provision of digital skills and competences in education and training, while also considering initiatives in the forthcoming 2030 roadmap on the future of digital education and skills.

vii) Continuing work on the European dimension of teaching.

viii) Developing and exploring the concept of citizenship education at a European level. Possible tools such as a competence framework and guidelines can be considered, taking into account the work done by the Council of Europe.

ix) Continuing the development and promotion of the Jean Monnet Actions, which are part of the Erasmus+ programme.

Strategic priority 3 – Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality for all

i) Fostering flexible education and training systems that address the transition phases between vocational education and training, higher education and adult learning, including non-formal and informal learning, and from education and training to work.

ii) Promoting the creation of a lifelong learning mindset as the primary approach to education and training.

iii) Ensuring that education and training systems, including adult learning systems, support all learners in accessing a changing labour market and in their personal development and continue to enhance upskilling and reskilling opportunities for all adults, especially the low-skilled.

iv) Continuing to pursue the new European agenda for adult learning 2021-2030.

v) Promoting the freedom for learners and teachers, educators, trainers and other education and training staff to be mobile, and for institutions to cooperate with one another in Europe and beyond, through learning mobility and cooperation across borders.

vi) Continuing efforts to remove existing obstacles and barriers to all types of learning and teaching mobility, including those related to access, guidance, student services and recognition.

vii) Exploring the possible development of European school alliances.

viii) Following up on initiatives set out in the Council Recommendation of 13 May 2024 'Europe on the Move' – learning mobility opportunities for everyone.

ix) Increasing efforts to attract a greater number of students from outside the EU to study and graduate in the EU and to retain talent in accordance with EU migration policy.

x) Exploring work on mutual recognition of education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad at school and VET levels, for the purposes of mobility and further learning.

xi) Where necessary, continuing work on recognising and validating the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning, including volunteering, and on enhancing the inclusiveness, quality and recognition of cross-border solidarity activities.

Strategic priority 4 – Enhancing attractiveness, competences and motivation in the education and training profession

i) Continuing to promote excellence in teaching at all levels of education and training and improve the attractiveness and status of the teaching, pedagogical and leadership profession.

ii) Strengthening European cooperation to share the best practices to attract and retain competent, highly qualified and motivated teachers and trainers, including in relation to their working conditions.

iii) Contributing to the development of an EU Teachers and Trainers Agenda.

iv) Continuing to support the development of basic and advanced digital skills and competences and innovative pedagogies, including ensuring that teacher education addresses teachers' competences to teach in digital environments and respond to the challenges and opportunities of AI.

v) Continuing the development of networks of teacher education institutions, through the Erasmus+ Teacher Academies.

vi) Supporting teachers, educators, trainers and leaders in education and training in managing inclusion, equity and diversity in terms of language, culture and age.

vii) Continuing to increase the number and quality of learning mobility opportunities for teachers, trainers, leaders in education and training and other pedagogical and educational staff in Europe.

viii) Working towards reducing gender imbalances at all levels and in all types of education and training related professions.

ix) Contributing to the possible development of a European competence framework for academic staff and the implementation of measures to ensure the attractiveness and sustainability of higher education careers.

Strategic priority 5 – Fostering excellent and attractive European vocational education and training (VET)

i) Pursuing an attractive and innovative VET system through the development of a European Strategy for VET focused on attractiveness, excellence and inclusivity.

ii) Continuing to strengthen transnational cooperation, for example under the Centres of Vocational Excellence, and supporting their further development and networking.

iii) Facilitating the mobility of VET learners by exploring the development of a potential European VET diploma/label, while also considering possible alternative approaches, with a view to a Council decision at a later stage.

iv) Continuing the promotion and use of micro-credentials within the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in the field of VET, if applicable.

v) Implementing the Herning Declaration on attractive and inclusive Vocational Education and Training for increased competitiveness and quality jobs 2026-2030.

vi) Further expanding the European Alliance for Apprenticeships.

vii) Considering VET initiatives related to the STEM Education Strategic Plan.

viii) Contributing to the green transition and continuing to promote environmental sustainability perspectives across education and training curricula.

ix) Continuing to address the development of basic and advanced digital skills and competences in VET in order to face and respond to the technological and digital transformation of the economy and society.

Strategic priority 6 – Promoting competitive European higher education

i) Continuing to encourage closer and deeper cooperation between higher education institutions by promoting and fostering seamless transnational cooperation.

ii) Continuing the development of the European Universities initiative under the Erasmus+ programme, in synergy with EU, regional and national funding instruments, based on evaluation of the progress already made.

iii) Continuing to enhance automatic mutual recognition of qualifications for the purpose of further studies [1].

iv) Continuing the three-phase process agreed in May 2025 'with a view to implementing a joint European degree label and paving the way for a joint European degree', on the basis of the work of the Policy Lab of the Working Group on Higher Education of the European Education Area strategic framework, while considering possible alternative approaches.

v) Continuing to explore the development of a framework for quality assurance for alliances of higher education institutions, based on the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the standards of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

vi) Pursuing increased accessibility of higher education for a wider range of learners and ages, and providing them with targeted guidance and support to help them succeed.

vii) Considering higher education initiatives related to the STEM Education Strategic Plan.

viii) Encouraging balanced mobility and balanced circulation and allocation of skills.

ix) Continuing to enhance synergies and facilitate further work between higher education, innovation, research and economic sectors, with a focus on strengthening labour market relevance and entrepreneurship.

x) Continuing to enhance the evidence base on the innovative, inclusive and competitive nature of the European higher education sector, including on the relevance of skills acquired and on the comparability of graduate outcomes.

xi) Supporting evidence-informed policy making, in particular through continuous improvement of the European Higher Education Sector Observatory, and promoting the European student survey Eurostudent, and the European graduate tracking survey Eurograduate.

[1] In line with the Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (OJ C 444, 10.12.2018, p. 1).

xii) Continuing the promotion and use of micro-credentials in the field of higher education.

xiii) Encouraging further use of the European Student Card initiative, with the aim of benefiting all mobile students in Europe.

xiv) Continuing to address the development of digital skills and competences, including the use of AI, in higher education in order to face and respond to the technological and digital transformation of the economy and society.

xv) Contributing to supporting the safeguarding of fundamental academic values, in synergy with the actions of the Bologna Process and the European Research Area.