Communicaton for achieving the European Education Area by 2025[1]
Type of Document: European Commission Communication
Date of document/adoption: 30 September 2020
Policy document summary
On 30 September 2020, the Commission adopted Communication on achieving the European Education Area and proposed the concrete steps to develop the European Education Area by 2025 along six dimensions: quality, inclusion and gender equality, green and digital transitions, teachers and trainers, higher education and geopolitical dimension.

Disclaimer
This brief overview is intended to summarize the essential points from the EU institutions' policy document that are relevant for research performing and innovation institutions, without providing the full extent of information available in the original document. The focus of the overview is put on initiatives regarding circulation of highly qualified staff, especially researchers, relevant to the European Research Area. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission.

(1) Based on the Commission Communication, the EU vision of the **quality of education** embodied in the European Education Area consists of the following elements:

 ➢ mastering of basic skills, including digital competences
 ➢ mastering transversal skills (such as critical thinking, entrepreneurship, creativity and civic engagement) through transdisciplinary, learner-centred and challenge-based approaches
 ➢ promoting transnational learning mobility for learners and teachers and for institutions to freely associate with one another in Europe and beyond
 ➢ fostering language learning and multilingualism in European learning space
 ➢ supporting teachers in managing linguistic and cultural diversity in school
 ➢ bringing a European perspective in education as a complementary to the national and regional perspectives
 ➢ maintaining education and training institutions as safe environments, free of violence, bullying, harmful speech, disinformation and all forms of discrimination

In its Communication, the Commission set out the actions aimed at providing coordination and tailor-made support to the EU Member States directed towards lifting quality in education. These actions include:

 ➢ supporting Member States in the identification of effective policy reforms that support better achievement in basic skills
 ➢ supporting cooperation between European stakeholder organisations, teachers associations and teacher education providers to work together and provide input to policy recommendations on innovative and multi-disciplinary teaching and learning approaches for basic skills
 ➢ elaboration of Erasmus programme by the update of the learning mobility framework that will focus on a threefold challenge: (i) ensuring opportunities for a much wider

---

[1] You can access the original document here: European Commission. (2020). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 COM (2020) 625 final*

variety of participants, (ii) green and digital mobility, including by blending online and physical exchanges, (iii) encouraging balanced mobility;

➢ encouraging stakeholders at national, regional and school level to foster multilingualism through implementation of the 2019 Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages

➢ fostering transversal skills through the Erasmus programme as well as through the European Structural and Investment Funds

➢ stimulating peer learning and the development of a European perspective in education including the work on widening and strengthening the Jean Monnet Actions through bringing them closer to schools with a view to promoting the European way of life, sustainability and EU values

➢ supporting Member States and stakeholders in implementing the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching in order to build democratic education environments free from bullying, harmful speech and disinformation

(2) Based on the Commission Communication, the EU-level action of making **education and training more inclusive and gender sensitive** embodied in the European Education Area consists of the following elements:

➢ decoupling of educational attainment and achievement from social, economic and cultural status, to ensure that education and training systems boost the abilities of every individual and enable upward social mobility

➢ making educations systems at all levels comply with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

➢ making VET systems that more agile, resilient and future-proof, in line with the Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on VET in order to support young people to manage their entry to a changing labour market and ensure that adults participate in programmes tailored to the twin green and digital transitions

➢ strenghtening lifelong learning strategies

➢ strenghtening cross-border cooperation, in youth work, as well as in the domains of sport and culture, to promote non-formal learning including their link to formal education

➢ developing a better gender sensitivity in education processes and institutions

➢ Challenging and dissolving gender stereotypes, especially those that constrain the choices of boys and girls for their field of study as well as those that can be conveyed in education and training practices and learning materials

In its Communication, the Commission set out the actions aimed at making education and training more inclusive and gender sensitive. These actions include:

➢ convening Member States experts and stakeholders through dedicated platforms for mutual learning and cooperation to support sex disaggregated data collection and innovation for inclusive and gender equal education

➢ putting focus on inclusion, equality and diversity in the Erasmus and European Solidarity Corps Programmes;

In addition, in its Communication, the Commission specified the following initiatives designed to make education and training more inclusive and gender sensitive:

➢ the **Pathways to School Success** initiative shall help all pupils reach a baseline level of proficiency in basic skills; in addition, the Commission will work with the Member States to co-develop a **policy guidance on reducing low-achievement** and **increasing secondary education attainment**. The policy guidance shall be build on the four pillars of i) monitoring (allowing tracking and targeted action), ii) prevention (in particular for groups at risk), iii) early intervention (for pupils already showing difficulties), and iv) compensation (for those who have already had bad results and need a second chance)

➢ the Commission will convene an **expert group** to develop proposals on strategies for creating **supportive learning environments** for **groups at risk of underachievement** and for **supporting well-being** at school

➢ the Commission will support Member States in the implementation of the European quality framework for high quality early childhood education and care systems

➢ the Commission plans to support the establishment of 50 Centres of Vocational Excellence with Erasmus programme funding that shall become reference points for both initial training of young people as well as continuing up- and reskilling of adults

➢ Commission will work towards the development of a European Approach to micro-credentials, to help widen learning opportunities and strengthen the role of higher education and vocational education and training institutions in lifelong learning by providing more flexible and modular learning opportunities

➢ the Commission will provide updated policy guidance in 2021 to address the legal, financial and administrative barriers that still hinder youth cross-border volunteering and solidarity

➢ the Commission plans to help strengthening research, including with support from Horizon Europe, exploring the role of gender in education and training policy, as well as the links between gender, education and social and economic success

➢ dedicated modules under the Teacher Academies would help find solutions to effectively foster gender sensitive teaching in schools

➢ a new agenda for higher education transformation will promote gender balance in academic careers and study choice, as well as integration of a gender equality dimension in curricula by universities

➢ the Commission will propose dedicated working streams in the European Education Area enabling framework to develop policy guidance on gender equality in education and training

(3)) Based on the Commission Communication, the EU-level action of **supporting the green and digital transitions in and through education and training** embodied in the European Education Area consists of the following elements:

➢ investments in education and training to help people acquire knowledge, abilities, values and attitudes i.e. to increase the number of professionals who work towards a climate-neutral and resource-efficient economy

➢ funding programmes supporting the green and digital transitions, such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the Just Transition Fund that can be used to support education and training in implementing their main objectives

In its Communication, the Commission set out the actions and initiatives aimed at supporting the green and digital transitions in and through education and training that include:

➢ the Commission will launch by the end of 2020 an **Education for Climate Coalition** to mobilise expertise, provide resources for networking and support creative approaches with teachers, pupils and students
➢ the Commission will propose a **Council Recommendation on education for environmental sustainability in 2021** to help integrate the green transition and sustainability into school, higher education and professional training
➢ the Commission will also propose a **European Competence Framework** to help develop and assess knowledge, skills and attitudes on climate change and sustainable development
➢ the Commission will promote the **greening of education infrastructure**
➢ the **"Researchers at Schools"** initiative aimed at bringing science to schools, by allowing young researchers supported by the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions to engage with teachers and pupils on climate change, sustainable development, digitalisation, health and other issues covered under the European Green Deal
➢ under the **new Digital Education Action Plan**, the Commission proposed a new comprehensive approach to digital learning and education at the European level that contains actions addressing two strategic priorities: promoting the development of a European digital education ecosystem and enhancing digital competences and skills for the digital transformation
➢ scaling up the workshops on digital and entrepreneurial skills and organising short placement schemes for female students in digital and EU STEM-related areas in the different economic sectors (in cooperation with the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and its Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs), as well as with other parts of Horizon Europe)
➢ making the future Erasmus and European Solidarity Corps programmes greener and more digital by establishing virtual and blended mobility as a complement to physical mobility

(4) Based on the Commission Communication, the EU-level action of **supporting teachers, trainers and educational staff** embodied in the European Education Area consists of the following elements:

➢ overcoming teacher shortages
➢ revalorization of teaching profession in social and, in some Member States, also in financial terms
➢ continuous opportunities for professional development for teachers and trainers
➢ establishing international mobility of students, teachers and teacher trainers as a part of teacher education to broaden the access to the diversity of quality teaching approaches to meet the needs of pupils

In its Communication, the Commission set out the actions and initiatives aimed at supporting teachers, trainers and educational stuff that include:

- ➢ the Commission plans to launch **Erasmus Teacher Academies** within the new Erasmus Programme in 2021 to create networks of teacher education institutions and teacher associations
- ➢ the Commission will develop a **European guidance for the development of national career frameworks** during 2021-2022 to supporting the career progression of school education professionals
- ➢ the Commission will work together with Member States and stakeholders a **policy framework for increasing the number and quality of learning mobility of teachers** in Europe based on their actual mobility needs
- ➢ by 2021 the Commission will establish a **European Innovative Teaching Award** to recognise the work of teachers (and their schools) who make an exceptional contribution to the profession; the initiative will build on good practice such as the European language label, the Jan Amos Comenius prize, as well as the eTwinning national and European prizes

(5) Based on the Commission Communication, the EU-level action for **reinforcing European higher education institutions** embodied in the European Education Area consists of the following elements:

- ➢ Closer and deeper cooperation between higher education institutions, which could lead to more joint curriculum development and common courses and would enable learners to move more easily between education systems in different countries thereby developing a pan-European talent pool, including in cutting-edge scientific disciplines and technologies such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and high performance computing
- ➢ A policy framework across borders that allows for seamless transnational cooperation, which will enable alliances of higher education institutions to leverage their strengths, pooling together their online and physical resources, courses, expertise, data and infrastructure across disciplines
- ➢ Higher education institutions as central actors of the "knowledge square": education, research, innovation and service to society
- ➢ Automatic recognition of qualifications and study periods abroad for the purpose of further learning, quality assurance of joint transnational activities and the recognition and portability of short courses leading to micro-credentials
- ➢ A stronger focus on specialised education programmes in advanced digital skills such as in cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and high performance computing as there is an acute lack of experts in these fields

In its Communication, the Commission set out the actions and initiatives aimed at supporting higher education institutions that include:

- ➢ the co-creation of a **transformation agenda for higher education** by the end of 2021
- ➢ engage in the full rollout of the **European Universities initiative** under the Erasmus programme in synergy with Horizon Europe, the Digital Europe Programme and other EU instruments

- the Commission will help promote the development of **new higher education curricula for engineering and ICT based on the STEAM approach** (with support of the EU STEM Coalition)
- the Commission will also examine together with the Member States and stakeholders the development of a **European Degree** that could provide a framework to ease the delivery of joint degrees of Universities alliances
- the Commission will review the Council and Parliament Recommendation on Quality Assurance in cooperation with the Member States and the higher education sector
- the Commission will explore the **necessity and feasibility of a legal statute for alliances of universities** such as the European Universities
- creation of the **European Student Card Initiative** as important step in achieving the objectives of the European Education Area and making it as easy as possible for students across Europe to be mobile
- the Commission will continue providing support to the Member States for putting in place the conditions that will make possible automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad
- the Commission will support Member States and higher education institutions using the standard European tools available in Europass to issue authentic digital credentials, including digital diploma and micro-credentials
- apart from Horizon Europe and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, data-intensive analytics and machine learning should play their role in support of decision-making and learning in the European Education Area

(6) Based on the Commission Communication, the EU-level action for **reinforcing geopolitical dimension** embodied in the European Education Area consists of establishing collaboration between education institutions both within and outside the Union helps to attract the best talent worldwide, and to promote peer learning and joint international research and innovation projects.

In its Communication, the Commission set out the actions and initiatives aimed at supporting higher education institutions that include:
- creating a Team Europe approach and strengthening the positioning the EU as a partner in education at global level
- the EU should support the digital path of internationalisation of education providers, in particular higher education and vocational training institutes, by increasing digital opportunities of staff, teachers and students including through online courses and blended learning models
- the EU should also strengthen cooperation with strategic global partners (e.g., China, Japan, US), while better safeguarding the Union's interest, know-how and values, and promoting reciprocity and level playing field
- an expanded international dimension of the Erasmus programme could be a major tool to foster the global dimension of the European Education Area
- the Commission will open up to the world actions such as Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees to strengthen international partnerships and ensure that European higher education becomes ever more attractive

In its Communication, the Commission specifies that an enabling framework to achieve the European Education Area by 2025 will be put in place. The enabling framework will be based on the following four elements:

1. It will enable Member States, the EU and the wider education and training community to deliver on initiatives put forward in this Communication to achieve the European Education Area. Based on strengthened guidance from the Council, it will boost flexible cooperation methods and strengthen synergies with other initiatives in education and training, including the European Research Area and the Copenhagen and Bologna Processes. In addition to the European Education Summits and engagement actions under the European Education Area and the Digital Education Action Plan, such as the Education for Climate Coalition or the Digital Education Hackathon, the Commission will promote regular outreach activities and campaigns to foster stakeholders' engagement at local and regional level.

2. The framework will identify targets and indicators to guide and monitor progress towards the European Education Area. Besides tracking progress on existing targets, it is necessary to develop with all stakeholders a new approach to indicators and targets for the European Education Area along its six dimensions. The Commission will continue to work with Member States and wider education and training community to collect comparable evidence and develop indicators with a view to fostering evidence-based policymaking in achieving the European Education Area.

3. The enabling framework will foster integration of education and training in the European Semester to reinforce Member States' capacities to recover from the Covid-19 crisis. The European Semester will set the broader context in which progress toward achieving the European Education Area will be reviewed alongside other social and economic policies. It will also bring on board evidence and analysis on how education and training interact with other policies, to help inform the country specific recommendations.

4. The enabling framework will lay the groundwork for setting up a fullyfledged governance framework for the European Education Area by 2025, while fully respecting the Member States responsibility for the content of teaching and the organisation of their education systems. This new governance framework shall strengthen the EU's strategic objectives and help connect to global initiatives, including those in the UN or OECD contexts. It should bring increased efficiency and effectiveness for ministries and experts when it comes to their engagement at EU level. It should help foster effective solutions and policy reforms on the ground.