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## **Main policy lines in education and training June – October 2012**

### **I. European Union**

#### **1. Institutional context**

##### **1.1 Economic governance**

###### **1.1.1 Action for stability, growth and jobs**

Communication from the Commission, 30 May 2012

The Commission has adopted a package of proposals concluding the second European Semester of economic policy coordination and giving guidance for national policies in 2012-2013. The package consists of a Communication outlining the main findings and concrete measures to boost economic growth and job creation, as well as of 28 Council Recommendations, one for each Member State, with country-specific guidance.

In the communication, the Commission proposes a number of elements that can form part of a growth initiative built on two mutually reinforcing pillars:

- An EU level pillar (drawing on the strength and synergies of working together at EU level)
- A Member State level pillar (based on releasing the growth potential of structural reform identified as part of the European semester)

The basis for these proposals is an assessment of the implementation of last year's policy recommendations, combined with detailed analysis of the national reform programmes and stability or convergence programmes that Member States submitted in the second half of April. The analysis underpinning the

recommendations is presented in 28 staff working documents (again, one for each Member State and one for the euro area). In addition, the Commission carried out twelve in-depth reviews for those Member States that were identified as warranting closer inspection in the Alert Mechanism Report earlier this year.

The communication:

[http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/nd/eccomm2012\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/nd/eccomm2012_en.pdf)

An overview of country-specific recommendations (including the national reform and stability programmes, the Commission staff working papers with the assessment of these national programmes, the in-depth interviews):

[http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/index_en.htm)

Six countries (Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Malta and Spain) received recommendations to address early school leaving, while seven countries (Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Latvia and Slovakia) had recommendations on higher education.

### 1.1.2 Compact for growth and jobs

Council of the EU, 28-29 June 2012

The heads of State or Government endorsed the country-specific recommendations to guide Member States' policies and budgets and decided on a **"Compact for Growth and Jobs"** - action to be taken by the European Union and Member States to relaunch growth, investment and employment, and make Europe more competitive. The 'compact for growth and jobs' provides a coherent framework for action at national and EU levels. All Member States remain fully committed to taking the immediate action required at national level to achieve the Europe 2020 objectives. In the implementation of the country-specific recommendation, Member States will put particular emphasis on the following aspects:

- Pursuing differentiated growth-friendly fiscal consolidation
- Restoring normal lending to the economy
- Promoting growth and competitiveness
- Tackling unemployment and addressing the social consequences of the crisis effectively
- Modernising public administration

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## 1.2 The Cyprus presidency of the EU

During its Presidency, Cyprus works towards a better Europe, more relevant to its citizens and to the world; meaning a more effective Europe, contributing to growth and job creation. A European Union working on the basis of the underlying principle of solidarity, committing itself to a better future, promoting social cohesion and providing hope to its citizens; a European Union, with an enhanced role in the international scene. All efforts will be directed to bequeath a better Europe to the younger generations.

The priorities of the Cyprus Presidency are:

- Europe, more efficient and sustainable
- Europe, with a better performing and growth economy
- Europe, more relevant to its citizens, with solidarity and social cohesion
- Europe in the world, closer to its neighbours

The four priorities are further elaborated in the six month Programme of the Presidency.

The policy areas of education, youth, culture, audiovisual and sport are important factors for economic growth and social cohesion in the EU, as well as for the well-being of citizens. The objective of the Presidency will be to emphasize the social dimension of these policy areas through, inter alia, the modernization of education and training systems, the provision of more qualitative and equitable education, the tackling of illiteracy, the active involvement of youth in democratic life in Europe, the role of sports within the European agenda and the enhancement of cultural governance.

A main priority for the Presidency will be to advance, as far as possible, the work on the content of the proposal for the new **Erasmus for all** Programme 2014 – 2020.

**Literacy** will be one of the issues that will be addressed during the Cyprus Presidency. Many young people and adults in Europe lack basic reading and writing skills, which consequently, constitutes an obstacle for their employment and may result in social exclusion. The Presidency, within the context of the strategic co-operation framework "Education and Training 2020" and in response to relevant Commission's communications, will propose Council conclusions on this issue, calling for the effective tackling of illiteracy through more qualitative education and training.

The Presidency will address the issue of **strengthening vocational education and training** (VET) among young people and adults with an emphasis on equity and excellence in VET. Furthermore, the updated agenda of the Copenhagen Process will be carried forward by exploring the issue of expanding opportunities

and raising skills, by opening pathways between Vocational Education and Training, on the one hand, and Higher Education, on the other.

In the field of Higher Education, focus will be given on the **modernisation of universities**.

In this respect, emphasis will be given to quality assurance and internationalisation of higher education, in line with the objectives of the EU modernisation agenda for higher education and the Bologna Process. The Presidency will also focus on teaching and learning excellence in higher education. Achieving excellence in teaching requires the reformation and modernization of Europe's higher education in order to enrich teaching, improve learning experiences, support personalised learning, facilitate access through distance learning and virtual mobility, streamline administration and create new opportunities for research.

The Presidency, in close cooperation with the Council and the Commission, will follow-up the results of the **European Semester** in the fields of education and training. The Cyprus Presidency will also promote a **Council Recommendation on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning**.

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## 2. Education and training 2020

### 2.1 The Council

The Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council (EYCS) will be held in Brussels on 22 and 23 November 2012

Expected items:

- Erasmus for All
- Council conclusions on literacy as a focal point in providing quality education for all
- Council conclusions on the follow-up of EU 2020 in the field of education and training
- Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning

### 2.2 Progress in reducing early school leaving and increasing graduates in Europe, but more efforts needed

7 June 2012

The Europe 2020 targets related directly to education and training are

- Reduce early school leaving rates to less than 10%
- Increase the share of young people with degree-level qualifications to at least 40 %

The figures for 2011 released by Eurostat show that Member States will have to increase efforts if they want to meet these targets. Progress is being made, but disparities remain.

The Commission is concerned that the progress is not a result of reforms with a long-term impact, but rather a by-product of the high youth unemployment (which means that more young people stay in education). Another concern is that national targets set by Member States are not sufficient for the EU to meet its joint overall target.

[Read more](#)

All the European targets can be accessed at the website of Eurostat

[Read more](#)

### **2.3 Literacy for all**

September 2012

EU Education Ministers have set a common goal to reduce the percentage of 15 year olds with low reading skills from the current level of 20% to 15% by 2020. To achieve the above goal, the European Commission established an independent High Level Group which included 11 special experts, chaired by Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands, in order to analyse the available data and evaluate the most effective policies, in order to identify ways to achieve the common goal of improving literacy levels.

The report of the High Level Group on Literacy includes a series of recommendations, such as advice for parents on creating a culture of reading for pleasure to their children, the construction of libraries in atypical settings and specific advice for boys, who read less than girls on the whole. The report makes age-specific recommendations and provides examples of good practices already in place in Member States.

Based on the recommendations of the Group and the conclusions of the conference, the Cyprus Presidency will hold a discussion during the Informal Meeting of Ministers of Education in October 2012 and subsequently will promote the adoption of Council Conclusions in November on this issue, seeking to tackle illiteracy through the provision of qualitative education and training.

Download [the report](#).

### **2.4 Validation of non-formal and informal learning**

Proposal for a council recommendation, 5 September 2012

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has been part of the European policy agenda since 2001 when the Commission defined lifelong learning as all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective.

The majority of EU Member States do not have a comprehensive validation system. The uneven availability of national validation policies and practices, as well as existing disparities between Member States, reduces the comparability and transparency of validation systems. They create obstacles for the transnational mobility of learners and workers just when such mobility is needed to create more economic growth.

This recommendation says that Member States should ensure that, by 2015, a national system of validation of non-formal and informal learning is established including a certain number of elements (such as assistance to citizens in documenting their learning outcomes; certification of the results of the assessment of learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning in the form of a qualification, as credits leading to a qualification or as otherwise appropriate) and respecting a number of principles (such as affordable access, transparent quality measures, development of the professional competence of staff involved in the validation process). Member States should also ensure the involvement of relevant stakeholders in the process.

The proposal is accompanied by two annexes: annex 1 contains a number of definitions, annex 2 is a summary of the guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning.

The Commission's proposal will be discussed by the Council and is due to be adopted by education and youth ministers on 23/24 November.

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## **2.5 Specific policy lines in education and training**

### **2.5.1 Higher education**

#### ***2.5.1.1 The Bucharest Communiqué***

Bucharest, 27 April 2012

The Ministers responsible for higher education in the 47 countries of the European Higher Education Area have met in Bucharest to take stock of the achievements of the Bologna process and agree on the future policies.

The communiqué recognizes that the crisis is affecting the availability of adequate funding and making graduates' job prospects more uncertain. At the

same time, it states that higher education is an important part of the solution to the current difficulties.

The Bologna Process will pursue the following goals:

- Provide quality higher education for all (widen access, develop the social dimension, promote student-centred learning)
- Enhance employability to serve Europe's needs (with meaningful implementation of learning outcomes and further development of qualifications frameworks)
- Strengthen mobility for better learning

The Communiqué also sets out priorities for 2012-2015, at national and at European level.

[Read more](#)

## **2.5.2 Vocational Education and Training**

### ***2.5.2.1 First European Business Forum on Vocational Training***

Brussels, 7-8 June 2012

The first European Business Forum focused on 'challenges and trends in skills and career development of the European workforce'. Both Jan Trzuszczynski (European Commission, DG EAC) and Christine Antorini (Danish Minister for Education) stressed the role of companies in development of skills and competences as well as the necessity for a greater cooperation between VET providers and employers.

Programme and background documents at <http://eutrainingforum.teamwork.fr/en/programme>

### ***2.5.2.2 Sectoral perspectives on the benefits of vocational education and training***

CEDEFOP research paper n° 22, 2012

This report confirms the importance of training for EU industrial policy. It demonstrates that sectors where training is firmly integrated in human resource practices have higher productivity gains. Such economic benefits are not only realised through developing workers' skills, but also thanks to higher job satisfaction and increased individual commitment.

The report contains case studies that show that public investment in training can be very effective in including firms and stakeholders to work together. The evidence collected in this report argues for integrating VET in regional and sectoral growth strategies.

[Read more](#)

### ***2.5.2.3 Loans for vocational education and training in Europe***

CEDEFOP research paper n° 20, 2012

This report reviews the use of loans for learning in 33 European countries and analyses the systems in eight selected Member States. The analysis shows that loan schemes vary considerably across Europe in terms of types and levels of learning covered, conditions of access, repayment and governance.

Cost has been identified as one of the main factors preventing adults from taking up education and training. Loans can be a viable way of covering cost; they allow individuals to borrow from their future income in order to finance their own education and training.

The evaluation results provide a basis for identifying 'good practice principles for designing and implementing loans. Policy recommendations are formulated based on these findings.

[Read more](#)

### ***2.5.2.3 Necessary conditions for ECVET implementation***

CEDEFOP, 2012

This book is aimed at education policy makers and bodies responsible for developing ECVET in education and training systems. It lists 15 conditions necessary for the implementation of ECVET. Two conditions are particularly important:

- Identification and communication of the added value of ECVET for VET systems (bearing in mind that Member States are at different stages of ECVET development).
- The need to make progress with applying the learning outcomes approach to various steps of the ECVET process.

It can be a guide to a structured approach to ECVET implementation, and to communication with national and European (V)ET stakeholders about the progress of ECVET.

## **3. Developments in other policy domains**

### **3.1 EU Youth Report**

10 September 2012

The 2012 Report includes a summary of how the EU Youth Strategy has been implemented at national and EU level since 2010 and a comprehensive analysis of the situation faced by young people. It draws on input from Member States, government agencies and ministries as well as consultations with young people.

The EU Youth Strategy (2010-2018) was adopted by the Council on 27 November 2009. Its objectives are to create more and better opportunities for young people and to promote active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity. The nine-year strategy is divided into three cycles. Towards the end of each cycle, an EU Youth

Report is drawn up assessing results and proposing new priorities for the next three-year cycle.

The EU Youth Report adopted on 10 September 2012 calls for youth employment, social inclusion, health and the well-being of young people to be top priorities in Europe's youth policy.

Youth unemployment in the EU among 15-24-year-olds has increased by 50% since the onset of the crisis, from an average of 15% in February 2008 to 22.5% in July this year. Across the EU, more than 30% of young unemployed have been jobless for more than a year.

There are, however, signs of hope on the horizon: the report finds that the EU Youth Strategy has reinforced existing priorities at national level in nearly all Member States, which are to create more and better opportunities for young people and to promote active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity. Since the previous report in 2009, Member States have strengthened education, employment and entrepreneurship initiatives aimed at young people. Levels of youth participation in associations and social movements have remained high.

The EU Youth Report will be submitted to the Council and is scheduled to be adopted as a Joint Council–Commission Report in November.

[Read more](#)

## **4. Studies and conferences**

### **4.1 Citizenship education in Europe**

Eurydice, May 2012

Citizenship education in Europe shows that all European countries now have introduced central regulations to promote student participation in school governance. Encouraging citizens, particularly young people, to actively engage in social and political life has recently become a growing political priority both at national and European level. Because education is viewed as a principal means to promote active citizenship, the report aims to capture how policies and measures relating to citizenship education have evolved over recent years in European countries. To this end, the report provides an overview of the state of play on five main topics:

- Curriculum aims and organisation
- student and parent participation in schools
- school culture and student participation in society
- assessment and evaluation
- support for teachers and school heads.

[Read more](#)

## **4.2 Key data on teaching languages at school**

Eurydice, September 2012

Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe 2012 contains 61 indicators and qualitative information describing the context and organisation of foreign language teaching, student participation levels as well as the initial and continuing education of foreign language teachers. In addition to giving a snapshot of the situation today, the report also presents several time series which are helpful in identifying trends in language teaching over recent years and past decades.

The report is based on four main data sources: Eurydice, Eurostat, the European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC), and the OECD's PISA 2009 international survey.

[Read more](#)

## **4.3 National student fee and support systems 2011/2012**

Eurydice, September 2012

This report provides a detailed overview of the national public fee and support systems in place across European countries. The report contains key points which enable readers to have a good overall understanding of the topic while the national diagrams aim to show the main characteristics of each system.

[Read more](#)