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Main Policy Lines in Education and Training

(October 2014 – November 2014)

1. **European Union**
2. **Institutional context**

## European Semester

## Presidencies of the EU

### The Italian Presidency of the EU

July – December 2014

The Italian Presidency invited EUNEC (European Network of Education Councils) to attend the European High Level Conference on "Education in the Digital Era", which will take place on December 11, 2014 in Brussels. The conference is organised by the European Commission in close cooperation with the Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and will bring together Ministers, high level experts, and policy makers from across Europe to discuss the challenges and opportunities that the Digital Era brings to European education.

The conference will feature three panels on different aspects of Education in the Digital Era, followed by a ministerial panel. The panels will in particular discuss the topics (1) Increasing the quality and relevance of learning, (2) Increasing the impact of educators and (3) Addressing inequalities through better access and lower cost.

[Programme of the Italian presidency](http://italia2014.eu/media/1349/programma_en1_def.pdf)

Common [programme of the trio-presidency](http://italia2014.eu/en/presidency-and-eu/programme-and-priorities/the-trio-programme/)

# Education and training

## Education and training monitor

13 November 2013

The report is the third edition in an annual series that charts the evolution of education and training systems across Europe. It brings together, in a concise way, the latest quantitative and qualitative data, recent technical reports and studies, plus policy documents and developments. While focused on empirical evidence, each section in the Monitor has clear policy messages for the Member States.

The Education and Training Monitor 2014 supports the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) by strengthening the evidence-base and by linking it more closely to the broader Europe 2020 strategy and the country-specific recommendations, adopted by the Council as part of the 2014 European Semester.

The Education and Training Monitor 2014 is accompanied by twenty-eight country reports, as well as a visualisation tool to evaluate the performance and progress of the Member States in relation to the ET 2020 targets.

The findings in the Education and Training Monitor 2014 demonstrate that we need to strengthen our investments in education while we must look beyond the number of people with qualifications, and that we have to boost the inclusiveness, quality and flexibility of our education and training systems. It highlights the importance of focusing on the quality and attractiveness of the teaching profession; including by enabling teachers and learners to benefit from effective use of innovative pedagogies and tools.

<http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/et-monitor_en.htm>

## Education and training thematic working groups

### Role of the working groups

As part of the [Education and Training 2020 (ET2020)](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/index_en.htm) Open Method of Coordination, the Commission and Member States cooperate in the form of Working Groups.

Working Groups are designed to help Member States address the key challenges of their education and training systems, as well as common priorities agreed at European Level.

The primary focus of the Working Groups is to benefit the Member States in the work of furthering policy development through mutual learning and the identification of good practices.

Following their mandate, Working Groups must deliver outputs directly linked to the objectives of ET2020 and contribute to Europe 2020.

Between 2011 and 2013, work was conducted by eleven thematic working groups. These groups concerned

* Primary and Secondary Education
* Higher Education
* Adult Learning
* Vocational Education and Training
* Transversal Key Competencies.

From 2014, there are six working groups:

* School Policy
* Modernization of Higher Education
* Adult Learning
* VET
* Transversal skills
* Digital and online learning

Each ET2020 Working Group has a specific mandate detailing the challenges the group needs to address, the outputs to achieve, and the overall roadmap.

<http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/expert-groups_en.htm>

### Report of the thematic working group on Early Childhood Education and Care

The report of the thematic working group on ECEC on which EUNEC has been consulted on several occasions has been published on the web. It can be found below under the docs of the ECEC working group.

Link to thematic working group documents:
<http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/index_en.htm>.

Direct link to the Quality Framework document: <http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework_en.pdf>.

Link to ECEC policies in the EU: <http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/early-childhood_en.htm>.

### Study on the effective use of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in preventing early school leaving (ESL)

26 November 2014

The aim of the study is to get a better understanding of the evidence base behind the relationship between good-quality early childhood education and care and early school leaving rates and to support the work of the European Commission and Member States, within the Strategic framework Education and Training 2020. The study is carried out by the Public Policy and Management Institute, Vilnius, Lithuania.

The study demonstrates the impact of non-cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, besides cognitive ones, for setting the foundation for subsequent learning. Using the capabilities approach – mainly used in social policy – the study highlights two essential characteristics of the education systems: whether learners are able to convert their abilities/competences into capabilities and whether – at the same time – education systems provide opportunities for this process (i.e., if learners are able to use their abilities at their own choice and if education systems provide this choice).

Strategies that promote the continuity of the curriculum, of pedagogies and of professional capacity, and of institutional arrangements that in turn ensure smooth transition between ECEC and primary school and beyond are most needed. In contrast, strategies, like grade retention, that are not beneficial for improving learning outcomes should not be supported. There should be an emphasis on proper support and early warning systems that are the foundation of a good education system, not simply an accessory.

The study confirms that underachievement (a more subtle term than low-achievement), i.e. students not reaching their full potential during their school years, is due to the inadequacy of the education system.

Positive outcomes of ECEC include: early literacy, language and numeracy skills as well as pro-social behaviour, self-regulation, motivation, capacity to do independent work, take responsibility for tasks. These are essential for the further development of competences at school. The analysis of the profile of underachievers/early school leavers in the study reveals that they often lack a number of these cognitive and non-cognitive abilities, whose foundations are set by ECEC services. This confirms that there is a direct link between ECEC and ESL.

The study brings these outcomes in direct connection with certain characteristics of ECEC systems. Main quality aspects that bring good outcomes of ECEC systems and good outcomes for the individual children are: access (including affordability), governance (i.e. monitoring and evaluation and good leadership), structure (i.e. adequate staff training, the existence of a curriculum, staff-child ratio) and process quality (i.e. parental engagement and the quality interactions among all actors) of ECEC services. These quality aspects need to be developed interdependently.

The study brings practical examples how countries address the above issues. These include: efficient leadership with more autonomy can cater more effectively for local needs even if there is a shortage of places; additional quality support staff (psychologist, speech therapist, etc.) is key to having competent teams to deal with the diversity of children and with bigger group sizes; a deeper understanding of learning through play (both child and adult initiated) can serve as a major and efficient lever for children's learning; initiatives that work with the parents of disadvantaged children are essential for the good outcomes of ECEC.

Sustainability of positive outcomes of ECEC for children depends on learning experiences in subsequent levels of education. Good quality ECEC is a necessary but not sufficient condition for success in primary and secondary school. After ECEC the following quality criteria need to be met in subsequent schooling: efficiency dimension: no part of the system is allowed to waste or counteract the results of other parts of the system; equity dimension: the conditions for success of one sub-group are not allowed to damage the prospects of another sub-group; cohesion dimension: its stakeholders are aware of and feel responsible for the full breadth of the education system; representativeness dimension: the diversity of its cohorts of pupils is mirrored by the diversity of its staff and policymakers.

The transitions between different levels of education (from ECEC to primary and from primary to secondary education) prove to be delicate phases in the learning process, and negative experiences can undermine acquisitions from previous stages. Educational systems should ensure smooth transition between levels by ensuring structural, pedagogical and professional continuity.

These principles translate into concrete measures, such as ensuring continuity of institutions, of training, of curriculum, building professional capacity of diverse workforce from early years up to the end of compulsory schooling, developing systematic monitoring and exploiting the result for policy development, empowering all parents to support their children's learning process, etc.

The study is now available and downloadable on-line in EU Bookshop: <http://bookshop.europa.eu/en/study-on-the-effective-use-of-early-childhood-education-and-care-ecec-in-preventing-early-school-leaving-esl--pbNC0414322/>

### Peer review on schools policy

Athens, 11-13 March 2014

The schools peer review took place in Athens on 11-13 March 2014 with the participation of 26 Member States (including in all 12 reviewed Member States).

Topics were examined in three parallel groups, each including four reviewed countries:

* Early school leaving (ESL)
* Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)
* Basic Skills and teachers

[The report](http://www.eunec.eu/executive-committee-2-december-2014-brussels)

# Studies, conferences and tools

## European strategic guide for fostering participation and raising awareness on validation of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning

Building learning societies project, October 2014

This publication is intended to be useful reading for both the actors and individuals involved in the topic of validation of non-formal and informal learning, and to contribute to the process of fostering participation and awareness raising. The Council Recommendation on validation of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning made an increased cooperation between EU and Member States, in order to present national validation arrangements in all countries by 2018. Institutions, stakeholders, social partners, civil society organizations and education and training providers, are facing a great set of challenges to overcome the lack of awareness on validation at different levels. Therefore, they should act together to support the implementation and the promotion of the process. This is the final publication of the Building Learning Societies project by SOLIDAR and their partners.

<http://www.solidar.org/IMG/pdf/pvnfil_book_final.pdf>

## National student fee and support systems in European Higher Education 2014/2015

20 October 2014

This annual Eurydice report contains a comparative overview of student fee and support systems (grants and loans). It covers 33 European countries. It offers country-specific information, including fees, shown by year and whether international students pay different fees compared with national/EU students; support in the form of grants (need-based or merit-based); three additional elements: loans, tax benefits for parents and family allowances; a short description of planned reforms.

The report highlights a great variation in the number of students paying fees in publicly funded higher education institutions.

Separate country sheets proved national descriptions and country-specific diagrammes.

[Full report](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/facts_and_figures/fees_support.pdf)

## The organization of school time in Europe and the organization of the academic year in Europe 2014/2015

Eurydice, 20 October 2014

The overview covers 35 countries, reference year 2014/2005.

Reports:

[The Organisation of School Time in Europe: Primary and Secondary General Education 2014/15](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/facts_and_figures/school_calendar_EN.pdf)

[The Organisation of the Academic Year in Europe 2014/15](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/facts_and_figures/academic_calendar_EN.pdf)

## Tackling Early Leaving from Education and Training in Europe

Eurydice, 21 November 2014

This Eurydice/CEDEFOP report supports the Europe 2020 agenda on reducing early leaving from education and training and is a direct follow-up to the 2011 Council recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving.

Some of the main conclusions:

* Early leaving from education and training (ELET) is strongly linked to socio-economic disadvantage. Both migrant/minority background and gender alone cannot be considered as determining factors with respect to students leaving education and training early. Early leavers are much more likely to come from families affected by socio-economic disadvantage. Low levels of parental education are of particular importance. Early leaving has direct socio-economic consequences for the individual (In the EU-28 19.7 % of young people with lower secondary education at most are in employment, compared to 42.7 % of young people with upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary qualification and 54.6 % of tertiary graduates.
* Most countries use a student register to collect national data on early leavers, in an effort to understand the phenomenon and to develop policies and measures to tackle it. However, not everywhere these data are available in an aggregated format at different levels and up-to-date.
* Only around one third of all European countries have adopted a strategy for tackling early leaving. Across Europe six countries/regions have developed a comprehensive strategy for tackling early leaving (Belgium (Flemish Community), Bulgaria, Spain, Malta, the Netherlands and Austria).
* Education guidance and career guidance is one of the key measures against early leaving. It is an important element in prevention, intervention and remediation.

A separate chapter is dedicated to early leaving from VET. Analysis shows a large number of different approaches, and one of the uniting features is the ever-growing recognition of the need to ensure individualized student-centred pathways for VET-students.

[The report](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/175EN.pdf)

[The highlights](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/175EN.pdf)