



Civil Society Recommendations for the 2023 Mid-Term Review of the European Education Area

Follow up of the European Lifelong Learning Stakeholders Forum 2023

An event co-organised
by the Lifelong Learning Platform and the European Commission-DG EAC
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On 27 November, education and training stakeholders at EU level were reunited by the Lifelong Learning Platform for the annual **European Lifelong Learning Stakeholders Forum**. After five years in which the European Education Summit replaced the traditional format of the Forum, this year's edition saw the support of the European Commission as well as the inclusion of the outcomes of the Forum in the Summit discussions. For a full day, **over 100** EU civil society organisations were engaged in World Cafe discussions to:

- Discuss the successes and remaining challenges of the **implementation of the European Education Area for each of the main sectors** of education and training (early childhood education and care, school education, vocational education and training, higher education, adult education, non-formal education and youth)
- Discuss the successes and remaining challenges with regard to the **six dimensions of the European Education Area**
- **Elaborate recommendations on five aspects** of the European Education Area
 - Investment and funding for the achievement of the EEA
 - Governance of the EEA
 - Policy coherence within the EEA and with other EU policies
 - Monitoring of the implementation of the EEA
 - Achieving equity within the EEA: the time for new strategic priorities

The discussion on the EEA was prompted by the fact that 2023 was the year that marked the mid-term review of this initiative which will have implications on its further implementation until 2025 and for its future cycle of implementation until 2030. LLLP recalls that the EEA is the principal education and training strategy at the EU level and has started its implementation as of 2020.

The recommendations based on the five aspects can be explored below.

1. Investment and funding for the achievement of the EEA

- **Funding according to priorities.** While the importance of education and training was elevated in the policy discourse, it is time to recognise its importance for society, for people and for all sectors through commensurate funding. **Dedicate at least 20% of public expenditure to education and training**, to ensure all learners benefit from equitable access to quality, public education and training.
- **Fund the educators.** Ensure sustainable public funding to improve the educator profession, ensuring that all types of educators, teachers and trainers have access to **quality initial education** and to **quality and accessible continuous professional development**. Funding must strengthen working conditions, ensuring that the wellbeing of educators is championed, that they are supported in their learning activity to tailor it to learners' needs and that they have room for career growth. Without this, existing shortages in the profession will only deepen.
- **Allow EU Member States to invest in their learning systems.** There is a need to reform the existing macroeconomic governance framework of the EU, to **exclude education and training from EU debt calculation rules** and incentivise Member States to increase public funding in the sector considering its impact on reducing social costs in all other fields.
- **European funds for a European Area.** Any funding at national level must be **complemented by the EU level**. The **Erasmus+ budget must be increased in the next funding period** of the EU to reflect the growing demand for the programme, the inequity that still characterises who benefits from the programme and the programme's growing scope in terms of new initiatives.
- **Missed opportunities from unaccessed resources.** Member States must be **better incentivised to use all available EU funding lines for education and training**, ensuring policy coherence between the funding mechanisms that each European Commission DG makes available and not overburdening the Erasmus+ programme. At the moment, Member States and beneficiaries are not fully aware how to make use of the ESF+ funding, the Technical Support Instrument, Interreg, Creative Europe and other funding lines to complement and compensate Erasmus+ options. **Guidance, simplification and coordination is required to ensure that the menu of funding options is easily accessible.**
- **Achieve a true lifelong learning entitlement.** Investing in all existing learning opportunities across a learner's journey. The **Child Guarantee** needs stronger Member State commitment to ensure free, quality and inclusive early childhood education and

care. The **Pathways to School Success initiative** requires adequate funding to ensure each learner is supported to develop in compulsory education and nurture their wellbeing. Expand the available funding for the implementation of **European Universities Alliances and Micro-credentials**, ensuring that all learners can equitably access them. Provide adequate support to **Individual Learning Accounts** while ensuring that all adult learners can access them. **Ensure stable, consistent, long-term and sustainable funding to not-for-profit education and training providers**, including those operating in the non-formal and informal sector.

2. Governance of the EEA

- **Overseeing the implementation of the EEA.** Education and training as well as competence development are part of the targets of the EU across all its current strategies and targets. There needs to be a better way to monitor how this work on competence development is performed at the EU level, and to simplify the modalities of coordination that would better support Member States to prepare all Europeans for the upcoming challenges. Therefore, **unite the governance over policies on education and training at the EU level by creating the role of a European Commission Vice President for Lifelong Learning and a unique Directorate General for education and training** that connects formal education, with adult education as well as with the specific learning actions foreseen in the various EU strategies linked to the twin transition.
- **Stakeholders' experiences make possible the implementation, promotion, engagement of policymaking.** Ensure the participation of education and training stakeholders in the **High Level Group responsible for the governance of the EEA**, especially within specific meetings which focus on topics of relevance for education and training stakeholders. This is in accordance with the Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation and training. This should then trickle down so that all sectors, all levels and all formats of learning are included in all steps for the implementation and monitoring of the EEA.
- **A wide civic space for an inclusive EEA.** The EEA promotes democratic values and civic competences. Nevertheless, learners require a space where to practice this competences, which can be developed only by means of exercising them. There is a need to **safeguard an open civic space within Member States** to ensure learners are free to be active citizens but also to avoid excluding education and training stakeholders from policymaking. Without space and resources to engage, civil society cannot meaningfully contribute to the policies on education and training and the realisation of the EEA is stunted.
- **Nothing about us without us.** Ensure constant involvement of education and training stakeholders in the development of budgets and funding for education and training, based on their needs and expertise, while ensuring a follow-up in the implementation of the agreed upon funding, such as a **better monitoring of the Recovery and Resilience Facility reforms and a better inclusion of stakeholders in the monitoring and implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility.**

3. Policy coherence within the EEA and with EU policies

- **The true meaning of lifelong learning.** Develop a common understanding of lifelong learning for the public at large, national and EU decision makers. **The understanding of the concept must connect all learning sectors, formats and environments**, covering all the stages in a learner's life and viewing them in a connection as they set up an individualised learning journey for each. This must be mainstreamed across each EU policy that refers to education, training or competence development at large. The same approach to lifelong learning must guide the work of each strand of the European Commission to ensure the spreading of a common understanding of this topic.
- **Key competences facilitate policy coherence.** Mainstream **key competences across all learning policies** to promote policy coherence while providing adequate training to educators to work with key competences. Advance the implementation of the **Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning as an anchor that connects all policies in education and training**. The prioritisation of the development of key competences across different stages of lives, supports the connection of policies that target varied levels, formats and sectors of learning in a way that will ensure policy coherence and a mainstreaming of lifelong learning.
- **Whole-of-government approaches for a holistic EEA.** Promote inter institutional cooperation based on the holistic understanding of lifelong learning, aligning the policies and instruments available at different levels and sides of governments and policymakers (EU and national level) for education and training
- **Institutionalised co-creation for lifelong learning.** Create more spaces for dialogue between policymakers and practitioners, ensuring mechanisms such as Structured Dialogues, Strategic Dialogues, Civil Dialogue with education and training stakeholders when it comes to policies in lifelong learning. The involvement of all stakeholders ensures a greater attention to policy coherence and connecting the needs of the different beneficiaries.
- **Structured policy coherence mechanism.** Develop a **Thematic Working Group on Key Competences at the level of the European Education Area** to ensure that this cross-sectoral perspective over education and training is considered and Member States are aided to develop the same approach towards lifelong learning.
- **A Lifelong Learning Index.** Develop indicators across all EU policies to assess the achievement of lifelong learning across the European population. This is crucial for ensuring policy coherence across the different initiatives that ought to monitor lifelong learning's implementation, while also facilitating the mainstreaming of the understanding of lifelong learning that connects all the different levels, sectors and formats of learning.

4. Monitoring the implementation of the EEA

- **A wealth of stakeholder data.** Ensure the involvement of education and training stakeholders at all steps in the monitoring of the EEA process, **making use of the already existent data from their work on the ground** and using their expertise to validate any data collection across the EU. Member States frequently raise the challenge

of missing data, but civil society in education and training can close such gaps if allowed to be actively involved in the monitoring of the EEA.

- **Assessing which data measures the success of the EEA.** Quantitative and qualitative data must be better merged, especially with granular data related to the different categories and types of learners, to ensure a comprehensive picture of the state of education and training systems. This requires **new monitoring targets for the EEA** which go beyond the participation of learners in education and training and account for the **quality of the learning experience, for wellbeing in education and training and for learning outcomes which promote transversal competences**. An indicator similar to basic skills must be developed for **transversal competence acquisition**.
- **Structured process of monitoring.** Ensure that the **monitoring of the EEA and its initiatives is performed constantly**, with **yearly updates on the implementation of Council Recommendations and Council Conclusions** at Member State-level as opposed to large-scale tick-the-box exercises performed once for each EEA initiative. These updates should be mainstreamed through the Education and Training Monitor. Embolden a process of positive feedback loops, where monitoring and data collection is performed as a **learning exercise**, with Member States/regions/education and training institutions helped to reform based on monitoring.
- **Monitoring cannot be done without funding and resources.** Ensure adequate funding and resources for the monitoring of each EEA initiative, supporting national and EU level monitoring bodies with **staff and time resources**, with resources to ensure that there is **no language barrier on data collection** and with **resources for the education and training institutions to be able to perform institutional level monitoring** without encumbering their day-to-day activities.
- **Connect policy and project monitoring. Mainstream the results of the Erasmus+ projects in the monitoring of the EEA**, leveraging the work done by the beneficiaries of the programme in connection to the EEA, and assessing how the Erasmus+ funding can better support the EEA's implementation, including by means of upscaling and ensuring the sustainability of inspiring and good practices from the Erasmus+ projects.

5. Achieving equity within the EEA: the time for new strategic priorities

- **Equity implies the centrality of the learner.** Mainstream a **learner-centred approach** in all learning environments and for learners of all ages, boosting their active participation in their learning journey and strengthening the **self-regulating and learning to learn competences**. In the absence of such competences and of an enabling environment, learners will lack the capacity to direct their own learning journey and meet their needs. Moreover, the **participation** of learners should be expanded over all **decision making in education and training** and must start from an early age, in the decision-making processes of their education and training institution.
- **Intersectionality as the basis of equity.** Approach equity and inclusion from an intersectional perspective, ensuring that all learners are supported to participate in the EEA and the multiple identities that each learner carries are recognised and considered when developing tailored learning approaches.

- **Equity and not equality.** Meaningfully implement equity in education and training by providing each learner the resources needed to achieve wellbeing and success in learning, understanding that the needs of each learner depend on their background and social situation. **Targeted responses**, in collaboration with education and training stakeholders, can ensure that each European can thrive.
- **Assessment as determinant of equity.** Adapt assessment in education and training to ensure that **wellbeing and inclusion is prioritised** and to use it as a tool for further competence development in an equitable manner. Ensure that **assessment does not promote competitiveness to the detriment of equity and inclusion**, and that it is adapted to the various strengths and needs that each learner has.
- **Protecting those outside of learning.** Promote **outreach and conditions that boost the participation of diverse learners** into education and training at all stages and empower them for a sustainable and meaningful participation. The targets of the EEA must not only safeguard the wellbeing of those learning, but also expand its reach to those that have to continue their lifelong learning journey but have been out of learning for a period. Moreover, this must expand to early leavers from learning, which remain a significant challenge in the EU
- **Funding the missing link.** The validation and recognition of competences has been lagging at EU level as shown by the inadequate implementations of the Council Recommendation on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning and the Council Recommendation on Upskills Pathways. If the variety of competences acquired outside of formal education is not recognised, many learners with fewer opportunities would face increased difficulties for rejoining learning or actively participating in society while those transversal competences for the various societal challenges will not be developed. Therefore, there is a need to **boost funding for the validation and recognition of competences within the EU**.
- **An EEA for all.** Expand the scope of the European Education Area to **better include learners of all ages**, promoting intergenerational learning as an essential resource for developing key competences.