POSITION PAPER

On Europe 2020 strategy - from political will to implementation

The Europe 2020 strategy launched in March 2010 is giving the overall direction and political priorities for promoting smart, sustainable and inclusive growth up to 2020. It is conceived as a partnership between the EU and its Member States driven by the promotion of growth and jobs. Constructed around five headline targets in the areas of employment, research and development, climate and energy[1], education and the fight against poverty and social exclusion, the strategy also set out a series of action programmes, called "flagship initiatives", in seven fields considered to be key drivers for growth, namely innovation, the digital economy, employment and youth, industrial policy, poverty and resource efficiency. EUCIS-LLL believes that the fact that education is part of the global European strategy is essential to reach the targets for 2020. Clearly, educational attainment levels are linked to more and better employment, health, democratic and social participation and can certainly be called growth-friendly investments. Simultaneously with the crisis, inequalities have increased in European education and training systems where vulnerable groups are particularly disadvantaged. The level of low-skilled adults, increased numbers of people at the risk of social exclusion and rising unemployment levels in most Member States show that a lot more is to be done in order to reach the 2020 targets. This will require a renewed political commitment to foster lifelong learning at European level with a stronger focus on the social dimension of education, training and youth policies and funds.

INVESTING IN WHAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

European citizens should be rightly placed at the centre of the strategy and of all political decisions made at EU level. A common vision for the European Union cannot be reduced to purely economic considerations. EUCIS-LLL presents 10 key points on the EU2020 Strategy.

1. A flagship initiative on Inclusive Education, fighting inequalities and discrimination

EUCIS-LLL deplores that **inclusive growth has been forgotten** over the past years. 20 million fewer people were supposed to be lifted out of poverty and social exclusion. Evidence is alarming: the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the EU increased from 114 million in 2009 to 122,6 million in 2013. Youth unemployment reached 59,2% in Greece in 2013, while those neither in employment nor in education and training (NEETs) have significantly increased in OECD countries since the start of the crisis. **Inequalities persist** in European education and training systems where vulnerable groups such as migrants are particularly disadvantaged. Europe cannot afford the social distress we are currently experiencing as alarming symptoms of increasing inequalities.

[1] In January 2014 the Commission launched a framework for energy and climate policies up to 2030. A reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 40% below the 1990 level, an EU-wide binding target for renewable energy of at least 27% and renewed ambitions for energy efficiency policies are among the main objectives of the new framework.

According to the Education and Training Monitor 2014, ten countries received Country Specific Recommendations to focus on disadvantaged learners in particular – given the challenging school dropout rates amongst those groups and the need to improve inclusiveness and quality at all levels, from early childhood care to adult education. EUCIS-LLL calls for a new **Flagship initiative on inclusive education** that will aim at fighting inequalities and discrimination in education and training to deliver the vision of a social Europe in respect of Article 9 of the Treaty[2]: providing quality education to as many citizens as possible, from all age groups and countries and to reach the Europe 2020 headline targets! A **new unit in DG EAC should be in charge of monitoring this agenda.**

2. Re-assess current headline targets

As the EU2020 is approaching a mid-term review, the Commission has been promoting the initial success in achieving some of the targets such as for desired rates for early-school leavers (less than 10%) and participants in tertiary education (at least 40%). EUCIS-LLL welcomes such results. However, **the current early-school leaving (ESL) headline target is insufficient in connecting it to the target having less than 20 million of the population at risk of poverty** or social exclusion. Linear reduction of early-school leaving from 15% to 10% may reduce the financial poverty risk in the active population from 19 to 17.5% as the overall share of ESL in overall population is small. Eradication of ESL by 2040 may moreover reduce the financial poverty risk in the active population to 11-12%, but only by 2080.[3] **More ambition is needed** right now. Education levels link with poverty: according to Eurostat, the lifetime poverty risk between people having high- and medium education is twice as high. The issue of **equity** is not tackled in the other education headline target of having at least 40% of 30-34-year olds being attained to higher education. On paper, the EU is committed to access and lifelong learning as means of fostering social inclusion but several examples notably in higher education - including the lack of focus on access for disadvantaged groups in higher education in the EU supported university U-Multirank tool - portray a different picture[4].

3. Use smartly indicators for evidence based policies

It is important to keep in mind that Europe 2020 benchmarks are only giving a partial image: they should support and not narrow policy action. Concerning education, they only represent 2 out of 5 benchmarks that aim to reflect the situation in the various sectors of education. The **participation of adults in lifelong learning** for example, which is not part of the Europe 2020 benchmarks, is the one where Member States perform the least. This benchmark clearly deserves more attention and could be an additional Europe 2020 benchmark (see disastrous PIAAC results). It is crucial to introduce more **qualitative approaches to measurement**, as numerical objectives cannot cover the complexity of phenomena such as social exclusion. A reality check is also often missing. Is the data based on Member States data provision exclusively

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[2] "In defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health", Article 9, TFEU

[3] NICAISE I., DE WITTE K., LAVRIJSEN J., LAMOTE C., VAN LANDEGHEM G. (2013), *Towards a basic qualification for all: a social, educational and economic agenda*, KU Leuven: Euroforum, 28p.

[4] Paul Downes (2014) : Access to Education in Europe. A Framework for Agenda and for System Change. P 19-20,25. Lifelong Learning book series. Springer.

or do they take into account the point of view of the various stakeholders involved in the field? It is necessary to invest in instruments to measure qualitative progress and to balance the use of outcome indicators with structural indicators.

4. Investment Plan: supporting greater cohesion and solidarity

EUCIS-LLL welcomes the new **Investment Plan** that should aim to support a greater cohesion and solidarity in Europe. The **cost of non-investing in education** especially for the most vulnerable groups is very high! Lower-skilled adults in literacy are for instance twice less likely to be employed but also to access basic welfare services, participate in democratic and associative life or even develop a sense of social cohesion One of the key findings of the Education and Training Monitor 2014 is that socio-economic and socio-cultural inequalities continue to impact negatively upon educational outcomes. Parental educational attainment still determines to a large extent one's own educational attainment. Promoting solidarity and fighting inequalities in education and training should thus be priority of the new **Investment Plan** to support a greater cohesion and inclusive growth in Europe. It shall also be a priority of other programmes such as Erasmus+, Horizon2020 and the European Social Funds.

5. Stop austerity and take out education from the fiscal balance sheet

Austerity measures undermine the recommendations that are made at EU level and will certainly prevent us from reaching EU2020 targets. They also give a very negative image of the EU as many promises made by our governments are not respected. Promoting investment in education and skills was mentioned in the Country Specific Recommendations for most Member States. However over the last number of years Member States have cut their spending in education[1]. The Annual Growth Survey 2015 notes that European "Education and innovation systems are less well equipped and less funded than those of our key competitors." EUCIS-LLL thus calls Member States to stick to their European commitments. Europe should make a **sustainable investment in public goods such as education** both for economic development, social and civic participation and well-being. This commitment **shall be reflected by concrete measures: education should be taken out from the fiscal balance sheet (Stability Pact)**.

6. Tackle issues that have a have huge added value at EU level

Major gaps exist in terms of implementation of policy priorities. Citizenship, equity and languages are not prioritised whereas there is a huge added value of tackling them at European level. All Member States should address the **deficit of foreign languages**, which is continuing to raise barriers to mobility, cross-border and global trade and social cohesion throughout the European Union in all sectors of society. Stronger emphasis and investments on intercultural learning programmes, including through improved mobility schemes for Europeans and non-Europeans, can also help reverse this phenomenon. EUCIS-LLL regrets that in the re-shaping of the new European Commission from November 2014, Multilingualism will no longer be the prominent responsibility of one of the Commissioners' portfolio. The staffing of the Multilingualism Unit has been reduced and lost its identity by being merged into another Unit. The inherent importance of Multilingualism in the European Union must be restored to its former prominent position.

Electoral political disengagement has never been so high, as shown by the lowest turnout to EU elections in 2014 since 1979, and tackling this should be a priority for the new Commission and be reflected in EU programmes such as Erasmus+. In this light, the budget reduction for the

Europe for Citizens programme for the period 2014-2020 is hardly encouraging. **Rising xenophobia and intolerance** all over Europe is a challenge that cannot be ignored anymore. In this regard the EU has also a responsibility to defend the fundamental values of our European democracies notably by taking the fundamental rights dimension more into account in EU programmes and policies. **Citizenship and intercultural dialogue** should be a priority within the Erasmus+ programme and well as in other programmes.

7. A more transparent and open European Semester process

The Europe 2020 is a catalyst to involve stakeholders but concretely, local, regional and national actors have difficulties to get on board. Europe 2020 is still seen as **a top-down process**. Much more effort should be made in putting into operation EU initiatives at national and regional level with clear and comprehensive strategies[5]. The European Semester process and its Country-Specific Recommendations are tools to coordinate EU action, but there are still too much of an economic mechanism for national decision-makers to really get ownership of its potentiality as a lever for the Europe 2020 strategy. The European Semester should promote coherent solutions to tackle Europe's urgent social and economic challenges with national/regional action plans and the active involvement of stakeholders in a transparent and open way. Again, we would like to put the emphasis on the importance of having a regular and meaningful dialogue with grassroots stakeholders, both sector-wise and transversally. None of the EU2020 objectives or the Country-Specific Recommendations can become tangible if decision-makers at all levels and relevant stakeholders do not gain ownership of the process. It is crucially important that those affected in their daily lives by the strategy participate in its design so that they can embrace its legitimacy, show good will in implementing it and feel concerned by its monitoring. Those are the basics of the European Code of Conduct on partnerships for the cohesion policy that should be mainstreamed in many policy areas.

8. Improve communication and coordination of the various policies, programmes and tools

EUCIS-LLL believes a comprehensive and transversal strategy is needed up to 2020. This is the approach promoted by Mr Juncker in his political guidelines and in the new Commission institutional framework. A coordinated strategy implies **new working methods** between different policy fields on a daily basis but also between various actors within the same sector (i.e. Member States, social partners, civil society organisations). It should not be forgotten that the **targets have to be considered in close correlation with one another.** Reducing early school leaving and poverty/social exclusion for example clearly have to be tackled by comprehensive social policies. Measures such as the Social Investment Package are very positive and heading in this direction. Synergies are also required between the programmes, such as Erasmus+ and the

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[5] For example, the use of **Open Educational Resources** should be promoted and mainstreamed in all levels and sectors of education and training: the recent cutting down of public investments in education which has been seen in some countries must be reversed if investment in ICT infrastructure is to have any positive effect; the "bring your own device" must be avoided in order to make sure that ICT investment does not lead to a situation which further excludes learners from socio-economically disadvantaged background; the learners must be given a space to learn how to use ICT tools critically rather than simply to consume them; and the learners themselves need to be involved in the shaping and implementation of these investments. EUCIS-LLL has published a position paper "Opening up education for new learning environments" on the topic.

European Social Fund as stated in several legislative initiatives.

A good example is the recent decision to move the adult education and VET unit from DG EAC to DG EMPL. As much as we welcome increasing synergies and the establishment of a common working language, we are very much afraid that this path may lead **to policies overly concerned by skills demands**, a loss of what adult education is in its essence (far more than a factor of employability) and dismantled lifelong learning strategies. Such transfers must be accompanied by a **solid political will to maintain coherence among portfolios** and consider other aspects than the race for growth and jobs. EUCIS-LLL strongly calls for the **implementation of very concrete mechanisms to ensure this cooperation** does take place.

9. Set up national targets and roadmaps to reach the EU headline targets

Setting up national road maps with clear targets and funds taking into account geographic disparities should complement the use of EU benchmarks and improve policy monitoring and implementation. Several expert reports support the idea that setting one target for all Member States up to 2020 can be counterproductive as not all of them move forward at the same pace, even though benchmarking is always an efficient way to put pressure and create a debate for change by "naming and shaming". It is important to remind that indicators often hide **strong regional disparities**. The study Mind the Gap shows for instance that eight Member States had a difference of more than 15 percentage points between their top and bottom regions in terms of rates of tertiary education graduates in a region. In this sense, **the best way to set national targets** would probably be to take into account the situation of the country including its regional disparities and to agree on objectives in consultation with all stakeholders concerned, as well as to involve them in progress monitoring in a partnership approach, in a similar way as promoted in the guidelines adopted on a European Code of Conduct for the cohesion policy.

10. Recognise and support civil society organisations as key intermediaries between the EU and citizens in the framework of a coherent, open and transparent civil dialogue

Civil society organisations can be a strong intermediary to bridge the gap between the EU and its citizens. However many organisations in Europe suffer from severe cuts and from the lack of cooperation mechanisms to make their voices heard. **European non-governmental organisations** should be better supported in order to play this role. Besides civil society organisations suffer from financial cuts all around Europe, which weakens their capacity to create such a dialogue. This clearly goes against the political intentions stated in the Europe 2020 and related EU communications fostering the need for partnerships. In this sense, more efforts should be put into **reaching out to European, national and local stakeholders** on European cooperation in education and training notably thanks to Erasmus+.

The European Commission should implement clear **mechanisms of communication**, **consultation and cooperation** with civil society by adopting consultation guidelines for the whole Commission in the same line as the transparency initiative. This shall reflect article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty. EUCIS-LLL recently contributed to the Commission consultation on stakeholders' guidelines, pointing out the limits of public consultation processes and stressing the need for a more structured input from civil society. Sparse initiatives to directly hear from citizens have been launched i.e. the European Citizens Initiative. However the latter is very hard to use and to keep it a popular tool for political participation, the procedure needs to be clear and transparent about the outcomes of successful initiatives. Examples of more structured forms of civil dialogue can be seen in the field of youth, culture and employment. In most cases

the issue is always to see the **impact of these consultations**[6] and to **make sure such mechanisms are in place for all sectors**. In the 2015 Work Programme, the Commission writes that it will draw lessons from the first four years of the strategy, "following up on the recent public consultation." Today the involvement of civil society organisations highly depends of the decisions of the different units and directorates within the institutions. This system clearly **lacks coherence and transparency**.

EUCIS-LLL would also like to stress and support the coordinated response on the Europe 2020 strategy that was done by the civil society organisations member of the EESC Liaison Group including EUCIS-LLL.

Who is EUCIS-LLL?

The European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL) is an umbrella association that gathers 36 European organisations active in the field of education and training, coming from all EU Member States and beyond. Currently these networks represent more than 45 000 educational institutions (schools, universities, adult education and youth centres, etc.) or associations (involving students, teachers and trainers, parents, HRD professionals, etc.) covering all sectors of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Their members reach out to several millions of beneficiaries. Download our brochure in 23 languages*!*

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[6] Concerning the European platform against poverty, for example, EUCIS-LLL is satisfied with the stakeholders' dialogue that has been implemented to support the initiative; its meeting have proven to be an opportunity for stakeholders to give their opinion on the flagship initiative as well as on EU2020 in general. However more concrete efforts should be made to improve its contribution on the decision-making process (e.g. by providing concrete space for follow-up of the recommendations defined yearly by stakeholders in the EPAP Annual convention) as well as to guarantee an improved and genuine involvement of civil society.