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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE
COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**on the interim evaluation of the 2021-2030 European Education Area strategic
framework**

{SWD(2025) 169 final}

1. Introduction

Developing the European Education Area (EEA)¹ as a genuine, common space for quality education and lifelong learning for all is the overarching political objective of the 2021-2030 strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training². The EEA is a comprehensive EU policy and investment strategy for quality, inclusive education and training in all contexts and sectors, from early childhood to adult life. Between 2021 and 2025, the building blocks of the EEA were put in place. This work was driven by shared strategic priorities³, EU-level targets, European cooperation, joint policy delivery, and national reforms. In response to the Council's invitation, the Commission carried out an evaluation on the basis of extensive consultations and an external support study⁴. The evaluation will inform Council deliberations on the review of the strategic framework ahead of its second, 2026-2030 cycle. This includes possible adjustments of EU-level targets, governance and priority areas⁵. The Commission Staff Working Document (SWD) summarises the findings of the evaluation, including the study. In addition to the key findings from this evaluation, the Union of Skills Communication⁶ provides the most recent EU-level strategic orientation for education and skills. This also needs to be reflected in the review of the framework.

2. Conclusions from the evaluation

2.1. Strengths

The evaluation⁷ points to the **EU added value** of the strategic framework, bringing Member States together to discuss and agree on quantified targets and building agreement and cooperation around shared priorities within the wider education and training community, including through the working groups. The EEA, despite having no regulatory power, managed to deliver results and relevant improvements, combining different support mechanisms, quantified targets, EU policy frameworks with concrete guidance and cooperation, mobilising EU funds, monitoring progress, and supporting the evaluation of reforms⁸. Progress has been made on EEA strategic priorities, with trends toward several EU-level targets showing a positive upward convergence (e.g. early school leavers), but limited or decreasing on others (e.g. basic skills)⁹. The delivery and combination of EEA implementation instruments were assessed as **effective and coherent** with each other and the priorities overall, while acknowledging the need for more efficiency and speed.

Many EU-level policy initiatives¹⁰ have been developed and set in motion, in areas ranging from inclusive and digital education, to learning for sustainability, promoting mobility, and reinforcing

¹ [Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025](#), COM/2020/625

² [Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond](#) (2021-2030) (EEA Strategic Framework Resolution)

³ Improving quality, equity, inclusion, and success for all in education and training;

Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality for all;

Enhancing competences and motivation in the education profession;

Reinforcing European higher education;

Supporting the green and digital transitions in and through education and training.

⁴ Forthcoming, July 2025

⁵ EEA Strategic Framework Resolution

⁶ [COM/2025/90](#)

⁷ Evidence in SWD

⁸ Table 1 in SWD on EEA implementation instruments

⁹ SWD 4.1, 5.1. For trends towards targets see also annex.

¹⁰ 19 strategic EEA initiatives and 17 EU-level projects and calls were analysed in the evaluation. Annex III of SWD, footnotes 4 and 5 show the full list.

European higher education¹¹. Evidence shows that the EEA succeeded in delivering important new EU-level actions (e.g. Erasmus+ Teacher Academies), in inspiring and supporting national reforms (see Box 1), and establishing structural, systemic and sustainable pathways for deeper European cooperation between education institutions (e.g. the European Universities Initiative). Actions supported cooperation between Member States and education and training institutions at the EU level, contributed to policy progress and reforms at the national and regional levels, and improved the use of knowledge and best practices at the organisational level.

Box 1 - National EEA reforms

In **Lithuania**, a reform embedded in the Education Development Programme aims to improve access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) for all children, especially those with disabilities and from vulnerable backgrounds. It was stimulated by the 2019 Council Recommendation on high-quality ECEC systems. Its adjustment was inspired by knowledge shared through the Working Group (WG) ECEC, and supported by the European Social Fund+ (ESF+) and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).

To address the country-specific recommendations on education, **Romania** adopted two education laws in 2023 (addressing equity gaps, attendance, learning outcomes, progression to higher education and employment) in the framework of key strategic plans (Educated Romania project, Government programme 2021-2024). The EEA and its key initiative, Pathways to School Success, referenced in the national documents, inspired these national reforms that were supported with funding from the RRF, the Technical Support Instrument (TSI), and the ESF+.

In **Spain**, 2021 educational reforms made citizenship education a compulsory subject. The reform outlines competences for citizenship education in primary and compulsory secondary education. Through the EEA strategic framework, the Spanish Council Presidency facilitated cooperation and the sharing of good practices, hosting a peer learning activity for members of WG Equality and Values in 2023. Work under the WG informed the 2023 Council conclusions on the contribution of education and training to strengthening common European values and democratic citizenship. This helped to connect the technical and political levels of the EEA strategic framework. Jean Monnet actions also contributed.

In **Czechia**, comprehensive digital education reform focused on: (1) Digital literacy reform to modernise the curriculum; (2) Teacher support; (3) Preventing digital exclusion; (4) Adult learning targeting digitally excluded vulnerable groups. The reform, informed by discussions in WG DELTA¹², aligns with the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens and country-specific recommendations under the European Semester. It includes significant investments in digital infrastructure and skills development through the RRF and the TSI.

The strategic framework's strength lies in its strong foundation of voluntary cooperation and co-creation. Throughout consultations for the evaluation, Member States confirmed their strong will to continue cooperation via the strategic framework.

EEA governance structures (the High-Level Group on Education and Training, reinforced by a new Coordination Board) ensured stronger political steering and more strategic agenda setting, compared to previous cooperation frameworks. Working groups and their peer learning activities served as critical spaces to discuss policy issues, to provide inspiration for national reforms, and encourage innovation. The EEA **promoted a genuine European dimension to education and training** (e.g. through the European Universities alliances and Learning EU initiatives), going beyond the legacy of earlier cooperation frameworks.

The evaluation shows that in some cases, EU-level cooperation exceeded expectations and its original ambitions. It provided efficient lines of communication and coordinated response acting as a hub for crisis management (e.g. helping Member States to maintain the continuity of education during COVID-19, and to integrate displaced Ukrainian learners into their education and training systems), boosting the EU's resilience in face of crises.

¹¹ e.g. Council Recommendations on [Pathways to school success](#), [Europe on the move](#), [Learning for the green transition and sustainable development](#), [Improving the provision of digital skills in education and training](#), or Commission Communications on a [European strategy for universities](#) or a [Blueprint for a European Degree](#).

¹² Working Group of the EEA strategic framework on digital education: learning, training and assessment.

A strong consensus has emerged from the evaluation that the major challenges, structured through the strategic priorities identified by the Council in 2021 and in line with the 2023 Council Resolution¹³, remain **relevant**. At the same time, findings suggest that the Council might consider **updating the priorities to adapt to the new reality**.

2.2. Room for improvement

2.2.1. While progress has been made, **significant challenges remain**. These include deteriorating basic skills, teacher shortages, insufficient number of STEM graduates, disparities in access and outcomes, unmet demand for learning mobility, low participation in adult learning, and weakening democratic engagement among young people. The persistent incapacity to reach some of the targets calls for an urgent increase of focus, efficiency and speed in delivering reform.

2.2.2. The results of the evaluation show that there are opportunities to improve the **effectiveness and external coherence** of the EEA strategic framework¹⁴:

- a. **Cross-sectoral coordination and coherence** are unclear and suboptimal between the different sectoral policy areas concerning education and skills. This is especially the case between education, employment, and economic policy and actors¹⁵. The fragmented approach makes it difficult to set coherent policy and investment priorities supporting better competences, skills and innovation with sustainable investment in education and training, from basic skills to adult learning. The evaluation underlines the importance of the Semester as a key channel for the EEA strategic framework to drive evidence-informed reforms and investments in education and skills. This calls for reflection on how to reinforce the role of education and training actors and the coordination and synergies among policy areas¹⁶.
- b. The voluntary and informal nature of the **governance model**, in addition to unclear responsibilities, gaps in information flow between governance bodies, and in the dissemination of EEA outputs at the national level, prevent the framework from reaching its full potential to drive and support national reforms along common priorities¹⁷. An example is the Digital Education Action Plan: here, the absence of strategic steering by the High-Level Group reduced the effectiveness of the implementation of the relevant Council Recommendations.

2.2.3. Two major **gaps hamper evidence-informed policymaking**. First, EU-level targets proved successful in focusing and tracking reforms and in informing EU-level cooperation and mutual learning. Still, such targets are missing for some key longstanding or emerging priorities (e.g. STEM, equity, citizenship skills). Second, evidence of national reforms following up on EU initiatives remains scattered. EU-level monitoring in any open method of coordination requires systematic evidence of the outcome and impact of national policies in response to flagship EU initiatives. Such evidence would be needed for the EEA to live up to its full potential to support

¹³ [2023/C 185/08](#)

¹⁴ SWD, Section 4.1. Some areas for improvement were already identified in the [2023 Council Resolution on The European Education Area: Looking to 2025 and beyond](#). Guiding principles were set out in the [Council Resolution on the governance structure of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond \(2021-2030\)](#): ownership and inclusion; responsibility and collaboration; cooperation.

¹⁵ SWD section 4.1.6

¹⁶ SWD section 4.1.2

¹⁷ SWD sections 4.1.1-4.1.2

evidence-informed policy¹⁸ through mutual learning, and to inform a smart combination of available EEA implementation instruments.

3. A new context

While the priorities agreed in 2021 for the strategic framework remain relevant, in its second cycle the framework will operate in a new reality. New political priorities, tackling challenges as highlighted in several 2024 reports¹⁹, should therefore also be reflected.

The European Council committed to pursuing a prosperous and competitive Europe, stepping up investment in people's competences and skills, economic and social well-being, training and education throughout their lives, and enhancing economic, social and territorial cohesion, as well as a free and democratic Europe, by upholding European values within the Union and at the global level²⁰. This is relevant in the context of the Commission's objective to continue work on the EEA to drive a common approach to skills development, learning mobility, quality and inclusiveness, while strengthening the Erasmus+ programme²¹. Skills shortages and gaps, insufficient transformation speed and fragmented and inefficient governance are hampering the EU's competitiveness. The 2025 **Union of Skills** Communication highlights education and skills as key enablers for the EU's economic competitiveness, preparedness and stability. In line with this heightened ambition, **the profile of education and training deserves to be raised to the highest political level.**

Providing learners, regardless of age, gender, socio-economic, ethnic or migration background, or special needs, with the necessary competences and skills for the future, whatever it will entail, is the key purpose of all education and training systems, from early childhood to adult learning. In this context, the evaluation points to the need to further support Member States in adapting their education systems for students and teachers to thrive.

4. Issues for discussion

The results of the evaluation set out in the SWD, the areas for improvement mentioned above (section 2.2) and the new political context (section 3) can provide the Council with inspiration for the review of the strategic framework to update priorities, to reinforce cross-sectoral coordination, strengthen governance, and boost evidence driving stronger impact. Tackling persistent challenges (2.2.1) requires more focus and faster implementation of effective reforms in light of the new reality. To be competitive and prepared for the future, skills gaps need to be closed and governance needs to be cohesive and efficient.

4.1. Updating priorities to the new reality for Europe's competitiveness and preparedness

As part of the review of the strategic framework, the Council could increase focus and step up efforts to tackle the most persistent and emerging issues (graduates in STEM, basic skills, the

¹⁸ [Council conclusions on promoting evidence-informed policy and practice in education and training to achieve the European Education Area, C/2024/3642](#)

¹⁹ [Letta, E. Much more than a market](#)

[Draghi, M. The future of European competitiveness](#)

[Heitor, M. Align, act, accelerate: Research, technology and innovation to boost European competitiveness](#)

[Niinistö, S. Safer Together – Strengthening Europe's Civilian and Military Preparedness and Readiness](#)

²⁰ [Strategic Agenda 2024-2029](#)

²¹ [Mission letter, Roxana Mînzatu](#)

teaching profession) under the current strategic priorities²². The Council could consider **promoting lifelong learning and skills development as a horizontal priority across all levels of education**, starting with basic skills and addressing **citizenship education as a strategic priority** supported by a new EU-level target (see 4.3. and annex). This would be in line with the results of the evaluation²³, the extension of the concept of basic skills to cover citizenship skills, as set out in the Action Plan on Basic Skills²⁴, and the request of the Council, the European Parliament, and the Conference on the Future of Europe²⁵.

4.2. Governance reform and cross-sectoral coordination to raise the level of ambition and steer structural reforms

Better cross-sectoral coordination to overcome policy fragmentation (2.2.2a) is in line with the heightened ambition of the Union of Skills. Breaking down silos between the education and training sector, the employment sector, and the economic and financial sector is key to driving a common approach to skills development. The strategic framework, including its governance at the political and technical levels, could be more **closely aligned with the European Semester**.

The Commission is committed to playing a leading role in reinforcing the links between the EEA and the European Semester, including through the new European Skills High-Level Board. This key vehicle will inform the EU-27 Recommendation on human capital, announced in the Union of Skills Communication. The EU-27 Recommendation could provide a firm anchor to reinforce the role of education within the European Semester, in support of the effective acquisition, recognition, and retention of skills across the EU²⁶.

The review of the strategic framework can reflect on **how the political profile of education can be raised** to reinforce support for Member States in the implementation of evidence-informed reforms. Discussion is also necessary on how the strategic framework can be more closely aligned with the Union of Skills in relation to skills for life and work.

Stronger, streamlined, simplified and better connected governance arrangements (2.2.2.b) would help to reinforce and ensure more targeted support for evidence-informed reform to Member States, strengthening the link between EU-level coordination and implementation at the national level. The Council review could aim to enhance information flows and cooperation by providing clearer responsibilities for strategic governance bodies in charge of political and policy steering, guiding implementation, and the monitoring of progress.

Efforts should concentrate more sharply on implementing much-needed structural reforms with greater efficiency. As demonstrated by the evaluation, a smart combination of governance with flagship initiatives (in particular the Action Plan on Basic Skills, the STEM Education Strategic Plan, and the European degree) could drive and frame national reform priorities and encourage stronger, faster impact²⁷. The Commission is working on a comprehensive technical **EU-level toolbox** designed to enhance support for implementation, through thematic cooperation and mutual learning, benefitting from a more effective mobilisation of funding. Supplementing the Technical Support Instrument, this toolbox, including tools for mutual and peer learning

²² Set out in the EEA strategic framework Resolution covering the period 2021-2030, foreseeing the option for a review before the 2026-2030 cycle.

²³ SWD, 4.3.

²⁴ [COM \(2025\)88 final](#)

²⁵ [Council Conclusions on the contribution of education and training to strengthening common European values and democratic citizenship](#) (2023). See also: [EP Resolution on the implementation of citizenship education actions](#) (2022), [EP Resolution on proposals of the European Parliament for the amendment of the Treaties](#) (2023), [Conference on the Future of Europe](#) (2022).

²⁶ [European Council Conclusions, March 2025](#)

²⁷ SWD 5.2, 5.7

activities, peer counselling, Learning Lab training, and funding for transnational reform projects, would offer tailored cross-country support to Member States. This would boost their capacity to accelerate the design and implementation of relevant structural reforms.

4.3. Filling knowledge gaps

The work to close knowledge gaps (2.2.3) to promote evidence-informed policymaking is not starting from scratch. Assessing the effectiveness of education and training systems using EU-level targets and supporting indicators helped to focus national reforms, and guided evidence informed policymaking²⁸. The Education and Training Monitor, as demonstrated by the evaluation, has become a successful knowledge broker between evidence and policy. Designed to be accessible to non-specialists, the Monitor makes a wealth of knowledge digestible for policy debate. The online Monitor Toolbox responded to the Council's request for indicators in the areas of equity, the teaching profession, and learning for sustainability.

To focus and steer the policy debate for the 2026-2030 cycle, discussion is needed on bringing together the sectoral targets of the EEA 2021-2025 cycle and the thematic targets of the Union of Skills. The Council review could consider completing the set of targets with two new EU-level targets on equity and citizenship education. This would help to recognise their crucial role in promoting basic skills and quality, inclusive education. A possible **combination of thematic and sectoral targets** to support enhanced progress monitoring is detailed in annex.

In addition, in the 2026-2030 cycle, monitoring at the EU level can be reinforced by consistent reporting by Member States, feeding mutual learning and evidence-informed policymaking. In line with the findings of the evaluation, a discussion in the Council could focus on such reporting, weighing countries' reporting burden against the effectiveness of the EEA.

The **knowledge gained from such EU-level monitoring** can feed into the new European Skills Intelligence Observatory. A stronger evidence base in turn informs the European Skills High-Level Board and the EU-27 Recommendation on human capital under the European Semester. This would help to guide investments in education and skills and link EU funds to structural reforms.

5. Conclusion

The evaluation underlined the added value and achievements of the EEA strategic framework, its strong voluntary cooperation and co-creation, with practice at its core. It also shed light on limitations preventing the full realisation and monitoring of impact and reforms in education and skills. The European Commission is committed to support the continuous improvement of the EEA. This is needed to ensure the education and training community is mobilised in driving the necessary change promoting Europe's competitiveness, social cohesion, preparedness and democracy.

²⁸ SWD 4.1.2, 5.3