



**UNITED NATIONS  
TRANSFORMING  
EDUCATION  
SUMMIT 2022**

**Knowledge hub**  
-  
**Collection of best practices**

**Summary of the best practice**

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) \*

European Education Area (EEA)

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented \*

European Union Member States, other countries, associated in the Erasmus+ programme.

3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to \*

- Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools
- Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development
- Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession
- Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation
- Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) \*

Council of the European Union, European Commission

5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. \*

Education, Lifelong learning, Mobility, Competences, Skills, Targets, Teachers, Early childhood education and care, School education, Higher Education, Vocational Education and Training, Adult learning, Low achievers, Digital competence, Sustainability

## 6. What makes it a best practice? \*

The European Education Area initiative helps European Union (EU) Member States to work together to build high quality, innovative, inclusive and resilient education and training systems. It will allow learners to pursue their studies and to look for employment across the European Union. It will allow Member States and stakeholders to cooperate to ensure that this objective becomes a reality in all EU Member States and regions, supporting economic growth and high quality employment opportunities, as well as personal, social and cultural development. Within a European Education Area, learners and educational staff can also easily cooperate and communicate across disciplines, cultures and borders, and qualifications and learning outcomes from periods of learning abroad can be automatically recognised. Until 2030, the achievement and further enhancement of the European Education Area is the overarching political objective of a new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, permeating all strategic priorities and priority areas, set out in the 2021 Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030). While moving towards the achievement of the European Education Area by 2025, the main goal of European cooperation in education and training will be to support the further development of education and training systems in the EU Member States which are aimed at ensuring: a) the personal, social and professional fulfilment of all citizens, whilst promoting democratic values, equality, social cohesion, active citizenship, and intercultural dialogue; b) sustainable economic prosperity, the green and digital transitions, and employability. The European Education Area is rooted in decades of education cooperation at EU level. Since 2000, the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020' and its predecessor 'ET2010') has helped to build trust and mutual understanding based on common objectives. It has launched common initiatives and backed reforms of national education and training systems by developing EU-level tools and promoting mutual learning and exchanges of good practices. Recently, it has facilitated the response of the education and training community to the Covid-19 pandemic. This strategic framework will be the main tool to support, implement and further develop the European Education Area, along a common vision and in a spirit of co-creation. It will enhance cooperation in policy coordination, communication and output dissemination. It will support education and training reforms from an innovative perspective, building on past achievements while fully respecting the principle of subsidiarity and the diversity of EU Member States' national educational systems. The European Education Area will be built in synergy with the European Skills Agenda, the renewed EU Vocational Education and Training (VET) policy and the European Research Area (ERA) to harness knowledge and enhance Europe's recovery and prosperity based on shared principles of inclusion, mobility and innovation. Together with the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, these initiatives will foster a smooth transition from school to academia, VET and work, and make lifelong learning a reality. They will also promote a gender equal workplace culture and help combat racism and all forms of discrimination.

## Description of the best practice

### 7. Introduction (350-400 words)

This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice and address the following issues:

- i) Which population was affected?
- ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
- iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? \*

Population affected includes EU Member States, public and private entities, citizens of all ages involved at all levels of education and training.

Education and training are key to shape the future of Europe. Access to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning is a right for all citizens in the European Union, as enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights.

There is a need to prevent the Covid-19 crisis – which has heavily affected education and training systems - from becoming a structural barrier to learning, to young people's employment and to inclusion for society as a whole.

European cooperation in education and training, guided by the EU Council of Ministers and designed and implemented with the education and training community, should help to address these challenges and to achieve the European Education Area (EEA) by 2025.

The European Education Area approach is centered around five priorities for European cooperation:

- 1: Quality, equity, inclusion and success for all in education and training
- 2: Lifelong learning and mobility
- 3: Teachers and trainers
- 4: Higher education
- 5: Supporting the green and digital transitions in and through education and training

The content and structure of Member States' education and training systems remain the competence of the relevant national or regional authorities. Cooperation is based on the European Union's intergovernmental "Open Method of Coordination" (OMC), that does not result in binding EU legislative measures and does not require countries to introduce or amend their laws ('soft' law). Under the OMC, EU countries can direct national policies towards common objectives and are evaluated by one another (peer pressure), while the Commission's role is limited to surveillance. The OMC is based on:

- jointly identified and defined objectives (adopted by the Council);
- jointly established measuring instruments (statistics, indicators, guidelines);

benchmarking, i.e. comparison of EU countries' performance and best practice exchange (monitored by the Commission).

The strategic framework of the European Education Area is the structure for collaboration for EU Member States and stakeholders. It will back the achievement of the EEA, supporting Member States' reforms and enhancing synergies with the European Skills Agenda, the European Research Area, the EU Digital Education Action Plan, EU social, employment and youth policies, and EU funding instruments.

EEA progress towards its priorities is monitored i.a. through seven 'EU-level targets' concerning: low achievers in basic and digital skills, participation in early childhood education and care, early leavers from education and training, tertiary level attainment, exposure of VET graduates to work based learning, and adults' participation in learning.

## 8. Implementation (350-450 words)

Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:

- i) What are the main activities carried out?
- ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
- iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
- iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation? \*

EEA activities started in 2000 and are ongoing. They are carried out in all EU Member States. EEA activities and instruments under the European Education Area include:

- i) common reference tools and approaches;
- ii) peer learning, peer review, peer counselling and exchange of good practice through senior officials meetings and expert groups, and dissemination;
- iii) monitoring and reporting, including through EU-level targets and the annual European Education and Training Monitor, which also analyses key education challenges and recent policy developments at EU and national levels and highlights policy measures that can make European education systems more responsive to societal and labour market needs. The Monitor comprises an EU-level analysis and 27 country reports;
- iv) joint analysis and knowledge exchange, involving comparable evidence and data from EU sources and international organisations such as the OECD, UNESCO and the IEA;
- v) a Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks;
- vi) activities under Erasmus+ and other EU programmes, funds and instruments.

EEA Working Groups coordinated by the European Commission are fora for exchanging experiences and best practices in education and training to foster national reforms. They include government officials appointed by EU Member States and other countries, stakeholder organisations and social partners. They focus on themes of common interest such as

- early childhood education and care
- schools, covering Pathways to School Success and Education for Environmental Sustainability
- higher education
- vocational education and training and the green transition
- adult learning: opening up opportunities for all
- digital education: learning, training and assessment
- equality and values in education and training

Key implementation actors and collaborators are EU Member States' authorities responsible for education and training at different levels; public and private stakeholder organisations active in education and training. Other countries, associated in the Erasmus+ programme, may be involved. Implementation resources include: Erasmus+ funds, the European Structural Funds, REACT-EU, the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility, and other Union funding programmes and schemes, in accordance with the overall objective of achieving the European Education Area and Member States' goals, within the strategic priorities of the EU education and training cooperation framework.

## 9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:

- i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
- ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
- iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? \*

The last (2015) Joint report of the Council and the Commission on the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') confirmed the value of an integrated framework covering education and training at all levels. The need for flexibility and permeability between learning experiences requires policy coherence from early childhood education and care, through school to higher education, vocational education and training and adult learning, thereby upholding the principle of lifelong learning. The report also confirmed that ET2020 strategic objectives and EU benchmarks remained valid, as they were formulated in a comprehensive and forward-looking manner, providing a solid basis for activities up to 2020.

EU cooperation achieved significant results empowering teachers, improving general education, adapting to the digital transformation, and setting new principles for improving Vocational Education and Training. In addition, it set common EU targets and provided a broad range of mutual learning and policy support tools that encouraged Member States to focus efforts on the most pressing priorities. As a result of decades of cooperation, significant progress has been made, with

- almost 95% of children attending early childhood education from the age of 4,
- more than 40% of young adults acquiring a higher education qualification,
- almost 90% of young people leaving education with either an upper secondary diploma or enrolment in training,
- 80% of recent Erasmus+ graduates gaining employment in less than 3 months after graduating.

In 2019, an independent assessment found that the ET2020 tools and deliverables were focussed on the objectives and useful, and activities were structured and involved the right profile of participants. Almost all Member State respondents considered the EU framework for European cooperation in education and training to be useful for preparing, testing and/or implementing education and training reforms. Almost all interviewed policy makers, both at senior and technical level, reported that the activities carried out and deliverables developed under the framework were useful for their country, for individual participants, for their organisation/institution, and for inspiring new ideas and better understanding other countries' and EU education and training policies.

According to the survey respondents, the European Education and Training Monitor is key for analysing the progress made towards the EU targets; and the targets and indicators provide useful, high-quality quantitative evidence that should be used alongside qualitative, country-specific knowledge on the policy context and specific policy measures in each EU Member State.

ET2020 deliverables were considered directly or indirectly relevant to the key EU priorities. Most of them were moderately aligned with the national education and training policy priorities in terms of the number of countries in which relevant policy measures could be identified. According to most survey respondents, the focus of the tools and deliverables they were involved in was strongly connected with the education and training policy priorities of their institution, their country, other countries, and the European Union. At the same time, some feedback points to a risk of deliverables presenting only general conclusions that may not be fully relevant to all countries.

## 10. Lessons learnt (300 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:

- i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
- ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
- iii) What did not work – why did it not work? \*

EU cooperation in education and training received top political recognition in the 2017 Rome Declaration, whereby EU leaders pledged to work towards a Union where “young people receive the best education and training and can study and find jobs across the continent”. The European Pillar of Social Rights, proclaimed by EU Leaders at the 2017 Gothenburg Social Summit, establishes quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning as its first principle. EU Commission President von der Leyen has committed to making the European Education Area a reality by 2025. The EU Strategic Agenda for 2019 – 2024 states that EU Member States “must step up investment in people’s skills and education”. EU Education and Finance ministers have agreed that investing in education, skills and competences is a necessity for all Member States and should be a strategic priority for the EU. For some countries, the challenge is ensuring an adequate level of investment in education and training. For others, it is spending efficiently and effectively. The COVID-19 pandemic put unprecedented stress on education and training systems and triggered a shift to distance and blended learning, which unveiled the digital divide and connectivity gaps within Member States and inequalities among wealth groups and urban-rural settings. But it also showed the potential of education and training to build resilience, and EU countries’ capacity to adapt teaching to allow learners, irrespective of their socio-economic background or learning needs, to continue to learn. The EEA is also set in the perspective of EU external policies based on European values. It makes the EU an attractive destination and partner in the global race for talent and in cooperation worldwide. It is key for the Union’s geopolitical priorities and the UN’s 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, globally and within EU Member States. EU-Member States coordination strengthens the Union’s international position and cements its global links.

Exchanges of information and good practice, networking and an informal, non-politicised environment are particularly appreciated in EU-level cooperation. Success factors are stable expert groups and strong buy-in to collaborative working. Good working relations foster achievement and a shared political will to use the deliverables for policy change. The European Structural and Investment Funds have made funding available for systemic reforms in line with or inspired by EU-level cooperation outcomes. The Erasmus+ programme has helped to scale up good practices, enhancing cooperation and financing EU-level actions. It has strengthened the Union’s links with the rest of the world and contributed to support education in EU partner countries.

On the downside, hindering factors were unstable participation and lack of interest by Member States to use EU cooperation deliverables in support of reforms. The 2015 Report on the EU cooperation framework stressed the need to refocus towards economic and employment challenges and promoting equity and inclusion, to inspire common European values, intercultural competences and active citizenship. It stressed the need to develop the evidence base, mutual learning and country-specific relevance. This has been translated into new priorities for the 2021-2030 work cycle.

Also, the EU did not achieve its target to reduce the share of 15-year-olds reaching low levels of reading, maths and science to less than 15% by 2020, and this is strongly correlated with socio-economic status. Also, adult participation in learning did not reach the 15% EU target, with wide gaps between Member States. Effective and efficient investment is a prerequisite for quality and inclusive education and training and for sustainable growth. While respecting the principle of subsidiarity, stronger investment in education and training should help to recover from the crisis and support the green and digital transformations.

## 11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a “best practice”. What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented “best practice” or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? \*

The value of European cooperation in education and training as a way to achieve the European Education Area lies in features such as an integrated approach covering education and training at all levels, and in a combination of coherence and flexibility. The success of the open method of coordination among EU Member States, that fully respects national prerogatives while offering an open forum for mutual learning and exchange, creating mutual trust and potentially inspiring and backing national reforms, requires, at the same time, political commitment from Member States, strong guidance from Education ministers (Council) and effective working methods at European level.

The role of the Erasmus+ programme in supporting the European Education Area through innovative projects and policy experimentations involving policy makers and key stakeholders, with a wide dissemination of results, should also not be underestimated. In 2025 the European Commission will publish a full report on the European Education Area. On the basis of this evaluation, the Council will review the strategic framework and adjust it to the reality and needs of the European Education Area and to address any major developments in the European Union.

## 12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the “best practice” for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. \*

<https://education.ec.europa.eu/>

ET 2020 Joint Report 2015 : [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.C\\_.2015.417.01.0025.01.ENG](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.C_.2015.417.01.0025.01.ENG)

Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030): [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C\\_.2021.066.01.0001.01.ENG](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2021.066.01.0001.01.ENG)

Education and Training Monitor 2021 : <https://education.ec.europa.eu/about-eea/education-and-training-monitor>

Targets: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/education-and-training\\_en#:~:text=By%202020%2C%20the%20EU%20aims,24%20should%20be%20below%2010%25](https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/education-and-training_en#:~:text=By%202020%2C%20the%20EU%20aims,24%20should%20be%20below%2010%25)

ET2020 framework 2011-2020 : <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2011:070:0001:0003:EN:PDF>

Open\_method\_coordination: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/open-method-of-coordination.html#:~:text=The%20open%20method%20of%20coordination,introduce%20or%20amend%20their%20laws.>