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Delegations will find attached document SWD(2025) 169 final part 1/2.

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PART 1/2

**COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT**

**EVALUATION**

**of the 2021-2030 European Education Area strategic framework**

*Accompanying the document*

**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**

{ COM(2025) 340 final }

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## Glossary

*Terms and acronyms are used for both singular and plural forms.*

<i>Term or acronym</i>	<i>Meaning or definition</i>
AES	Adult Education Survey
AI	Artificial intelligence
CARE	Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe
CB	High-Level Group on Education and Training Coordination Board
CPD	Continuous professional development
CSR	Country-specific recommendations
DEAP	Digital Education Action Plan
DEQAR	Database of External Quality Assurance Results
DG	Directorate-General
DG EAC	Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
DG EMPL	Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
ECEC	Early childhood education and care
EDUC	Education Committee
EEA	European Education Area
EENEE	European Expert Network on Economics of Education
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EIT	European Institute of Innovation and Technology
EIT HEI	European Institute of Innovation and Technology Innovation Capacity Building for Higher Education
EP	European Parliament
EPALE	Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF+	European Social Fund Plus
ET2010	Education and Training 2010
ET2020	Education and Training 2020
ETM	Education and Training Monitor
EU	European Union

EYCS	Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
HLG	High-Level Group on Education and Training
ICILS	International Computer and Information Literacy Study
ICT	Information and communications technology
ITE	Initial teacher training
LFS	EU Labour Force Survey
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer
MS	Member State
NESET	Network of Experts working on the Social Dimension of Education and Training
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
REACT-EU	Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility
SGIB	Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks
SP	Strategic priority
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
TSI	Technical Support Instrument
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UOE	UNESCO-UIS / OECD / Eurostat joint data collection
VET	Vocational education and training
WG	(EEA strategic framework) working group
WG DELTA	Working Group on Digital Education: learning, teaching and assessment
WG ECEC	Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care
WG Equality and Values	Working Group on Equality and Values in Education and Training
WG HE	Working Group on Higher Education
WG Schools	Working Group on Schools
WG Schools – Pathways	Working Group on Schools sub-group Pathways to School Success

WG Schools – Learning for Sustainability	Working Group on Schools sub-group Learning for Sustainability
WG VET and the Green Transition	Working Group on Vocational Education and Training (VET) and the Green Transition

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This staff working document describes the purpose and methodology and presents the main findings of the European Commission's interim evaluation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area (EEA) 2021-2030. The EEA strategic framework was set out by the Council Resolution of February 2021<sup>1</sup>, and complemented by the Council Resolution on the strategic framework's governance structure of November 2021<sup>2</sup> and the Council Resolution 'The European Education Area: Looking to 2025 and beyond' of May 2023<sup>3</sup>.

### **Purpose, scope and methodology of the evaluation**

#### *Purpose*

Based on the 2021 Council Resolution establishing the EEA strategic framework, and in line with the European Commission's [Better Regulation Guidelines](#), the purpose was to evaluate the EEA at the midpoint of the 2021-2030 strategic framework, assessing its effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, relevance and EU added value. In line with the Council Resolution, the results of this evaluation will inform reflections on and preparations for European cooperation towards the EEA in the next cycle (2026-2030), with the aim of reinforcing the EEA's contribution to Europe's competitiveness, preparedness and resilience, social cohesion, equity and fairness, as well as democracy and EU values.

#### *Scope*

Data was collected in a structured way between 2021, when the Council Resolution on the EEA strategic framework was adopted, and June 2024. The evaluation was discussed and completed with inputs from Member State (MS) representatives at the meetings of the High-Level Group (HLG) on Education and Training held in July and December 2024. The evaluation assesses progress towards building the EEA at EU and MS level. It covers the five EEA strategic priorities (SP) outlined in the Council Resolution of 2021 (see Table 2) and the six EEA implementation instruments (see Table 1). The global perspective of cooperation is also considered.

#### *Methodology*

The Commission's interim evaluation has been supported by an external support study, which was carried out between January 2024 and March 2025<sup>4</sup>. It collected evidence through desk research (portfolio analysis, policy context analysis, literature review, citation analysis) and an extensive stakeholder consultation strategy consisting of interviews, surveys and focus groups. The consultation strategy took a fully participatory approach, engaging relevant EEA actors<sup>5</sup> and the wider education and training community through open and targeted consultation activities, as summarised in Figure 1. An interservice group made up of relevant Commission departments oversaw the evaluation.

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<sup>1</sup> [OJ C 66, 26.2.2021](#). This Council Resolution was preceded by the Commission's Communication on achieving the EEA by 2025, ([COM/2020/625 final](#)).

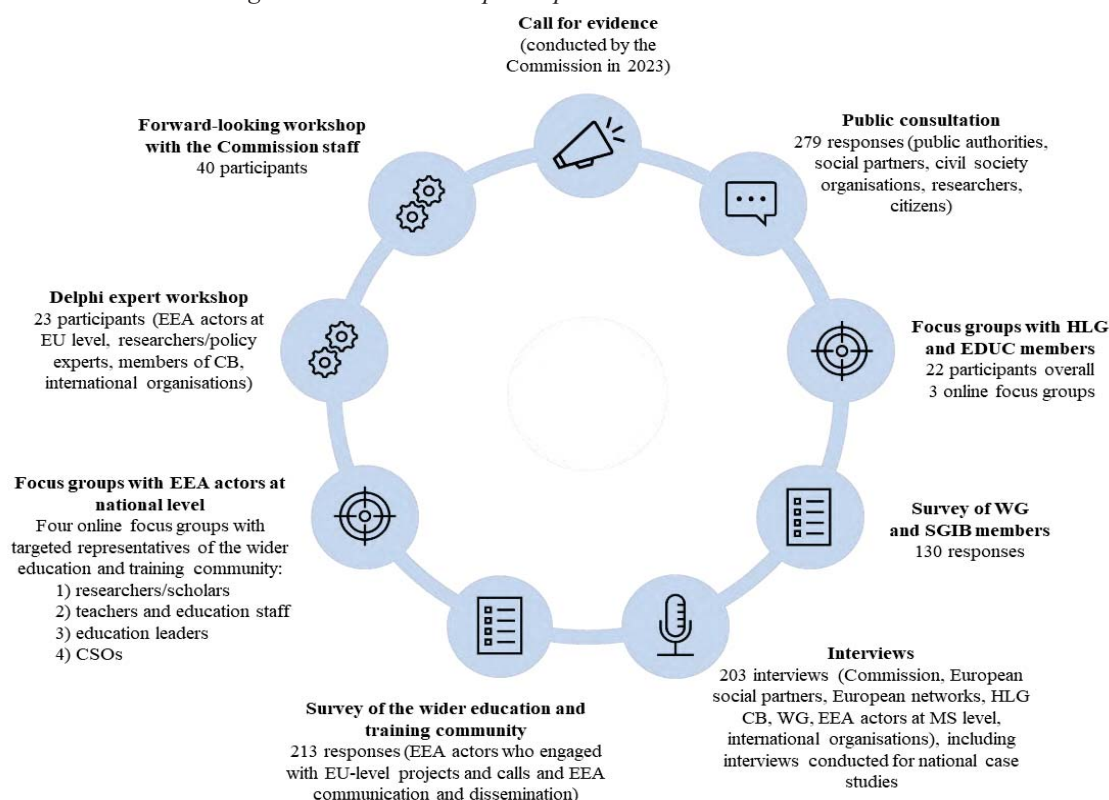
<sup>2</sup> [OJ C 497, 10.12.2021](#)

<sup>3</sup> [OJ C 185, 26.5.2023](#). This Council Resolution was preceded by the Commission's Communication on Progress towards the achievement of the EEA, ([COM/2022/700 final](#)).

<sup>4</sup> See Support study for the interim evaluation of the EEA (2021-2030) (July 2025).

<sup>5</sup> EEA actors are the participants (policymakers, practitioners, stakeholder representatives, experts, etc.) participants in activities under the EEA implementation instruments, who act as multipliers towards their organisations and thus help generate impact at the level of education and training systems.

Figure 1. Stakeholders' participation in consultation activities



The data gathered was analysed by applying five main analytical techniques:

- **portfolio analysis** to assess the comprehensiveness and complementarity of the activities under each of the EEA implementation instruments to achieve progress towards the SP;
- **contribution analysis** to assess the extent to which the EEA and its implementation instruments have contributed to the effects observed;
- **qualitative comparative analysis** to identify the conditions required for EEA implementation instruments to support actual reform processes in MS based on an analysis of national case studies;
- **most significant change narratives** to identify EEA actors' understanding of the EEA, and what they value the most about European cooperation towards the EEA;
- **cost-effectiveness analysis** to assess a selected number of illustrative processes and activities under the EEA implementation instruments in terms of costs accrued and benefits generated.

The EU competence as outlined in the Treaties<sup>6</sup> and the open method of coordination<sup>7</sup> in the field of education carried certain implications for the intervention logic<sup>8</sup>. The EEA contributes to the development of education policies by encouraging cooperation and supporting and supplementing MS' actions. The impact of the EEA relies largely on MS activities, their interest in exchanging and learning from each other, their use of the instruments available at EU level and committing resources at national, regional and local levels to pursue the common objectives.

<sup>6</sup> Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU.

<sup>7</sup> The open method of coordination in the EU may be described as a form of 'soft' law. It is a form of intergovernmental policymaking that does not result in binding EU legislative measures, and it does not require EU countries to introduce or amend their laws.

<sup>8</sup> See intervention logic in Figure 2 below.



The evaluation faced several limitations, in particular:

- the broad scope of the EEA limiting the level of detail the evaluation can provide for each activity and making assessment of overarching impacts challenging;
- the results of the European cooperation towards the EEA on national, regional, and local policies being non-linear and also influenced by the EU's broader agenda and other international initiatives;
- the indirect impact of European cooperation towards the EEA on the ground, making quantification of its contribution to results and impacts impossible;
- the short implementation timeframe limiting the ability of the evaluation to comprehensively assess impacts;
- the lack of a clear baseline to measure progress against, as this is the first evaluation of an overarching EU education and training policy framework.

To mitigate these limitations, the data collection tools were designed to capture concrete examples of impact, and contribution analysis was used to validate assumptions that would allow for conclusions on impact to a higher degree of certainty. The methodology, including how it addressed the above limitations, is detailed in Annexes I and II.

*Table 1. EEA implementation instruments*

EEA implementation instrument	Scope
<b>Governance</b>	Council of the EU (Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council (EYCS)) and the Council's Education Committee (EDUC) HLG and its Coordination Board (CB) Directors-General (DG) formations EEA strategic framework working groups (WG), Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks (SGIB) and other Commission expert groups Communities of practice like the Learning Lab on Investing in Quality Education and Training
<b>Mobilisation of EU funds and instruments for national reforms</b>	Alignment of funding priorities (e.g. European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) including Interreg, Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)) with EEA SP and take-up of structural support for reforms (Technical Support Instrument, TSI)
<b>Strategic EEA initiatives</b>	Initiatives adopted by the Commission and/or the Council, including Commission Communications and Council Recommendations. Evaluation covered 19 of such initiatives (adopted and/or implemented under the first 2021-2025 cycle of the EEA strategic framework). (See Annex III for full list.)
<b>EU-level projects and calls</b>	Projects and calls funded at EU level (primarily through Erasmus+ programme) aimed at learners, practitioners and/or education and training institutions. Evaluation covered 17 of such projects and calls. (See Annex III for full list.)
<b>Reporting, monitoring and evaluating progress</b>	EU-level targets in education and training <sup>9</sup> Education and Training Monitor (ETM) Indicators developed by SGIB Country-specific recommendations (CSR) as part of the European Semester DG EAC-DG EMPL EEA Taskforce
<b>Communication and dissemination</b>	EEA portal European Education Summits EU platforms like the European School Education Platform EEA midterm review event EEA communication contract Sector specific events and communication campaigns linked to specific initiatives or projects

<sup>9</sup> The following seven EU-level targets should be attained to fully realise the EEA: (1) The share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%, by 2030; (2) The share of low-achieving eight-graders in computer and information literacy should be less than 15%, by 2030; (3) At least 96% of children between 3 years old and the starting age for compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education and care, by 2030; (4) The share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 9%, by 2030; (5) The share of 25-34-year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 45%, by 2030; (6) The share of recent graduates from VET benefiting from exposure to work-based learning during their vocational education and training should be at least 60%, by 2025; (7) At least 47% of adults aged 25-64 should have participated in learning during the last 12 months, by 2025.

2. WHAT WAS THE EXPECTED OUTCOME OF THE INTERVENTION?

2.1. Description of the intervention and its objectives

Education and training systems are essential for boosting Europe’s competitiveness, democracy and cohesion, and are the foundation for personal fulfilment, employability, and active and responsible citizenship. The right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning is the first principle of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#). The EEA (2021-2030) is a single overarching framework that brings together education and training policies and investments across the EU to deliver high-quality education and training for all, in line with Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). It supports MS in developing their national education and training systems in line with shared priorities and strengthens transnational cooperation on education and training, which is voluntary. European cooperation towards the EEA builds on previous cooperation frameworks, notably [Education and Training 2020](#) and [Education and Training 2010](#) (ET2020 and ET2010 respectively). Erasmus+ is the main EU programme in the area of education and training and is a key enabler of the EEA.

The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the EEA sets out five SP.

Table 2. EEA SP as set out in the 2021 Council Resolution

SP1	Improving quality, equity, inclusion, and success for all in education and training
SP2	Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality for all
SP3	Enhancing competences and motivation in the education profession (teachers and trainers)
SP4	Reinforcing European higher education
SP5	Supporting the green and digital transitions in and through education and training

European cooperation towards the EEA supports MS in their efforts to build more resilient, high-quality inclusive education that covers all learning contexts (formal, non-formal and informal learning) across all levels – from early childhood education and schools to higher education, vocational education and training, and adult learning. It acknowledges the role of a global perspective in cooperation on education and training, which has become an essential component of EU external policies, grounded in European values and the principles of cooperation and solidarity.

The EEA provides a comprehensive framework for cooperation that can help bridge the innovation gap and equip learners with the digital, green and cross-cutting skills that are essential for creating a resilient and competitive economy. Robust education and training systems are a necessary condition for a thriving single market, which is critical for fostering research and development, driving digital and green innovation, and securing strategic autonomy<sup>10, 11</sup>. Furthermore, European cooperation towards the EEA contributes to the development of a more inclusive and participatory democracy by promoting democratic values and by empowering individuals to participate actively in Europe’s democratic processes. By enhancing access to lifelong learning and facilitating mobility across borders, the EEA strategic framework reinforces social cohesion and ensures that Europe’s knowledge and skills base is future-ready.

<sup>10</sup> [Letta, Enrico. \(2024\). Much more than a market](#)  
<sup>11</sup> [Draghi, Mario. \(2024\). The future of European competitiveness](#)

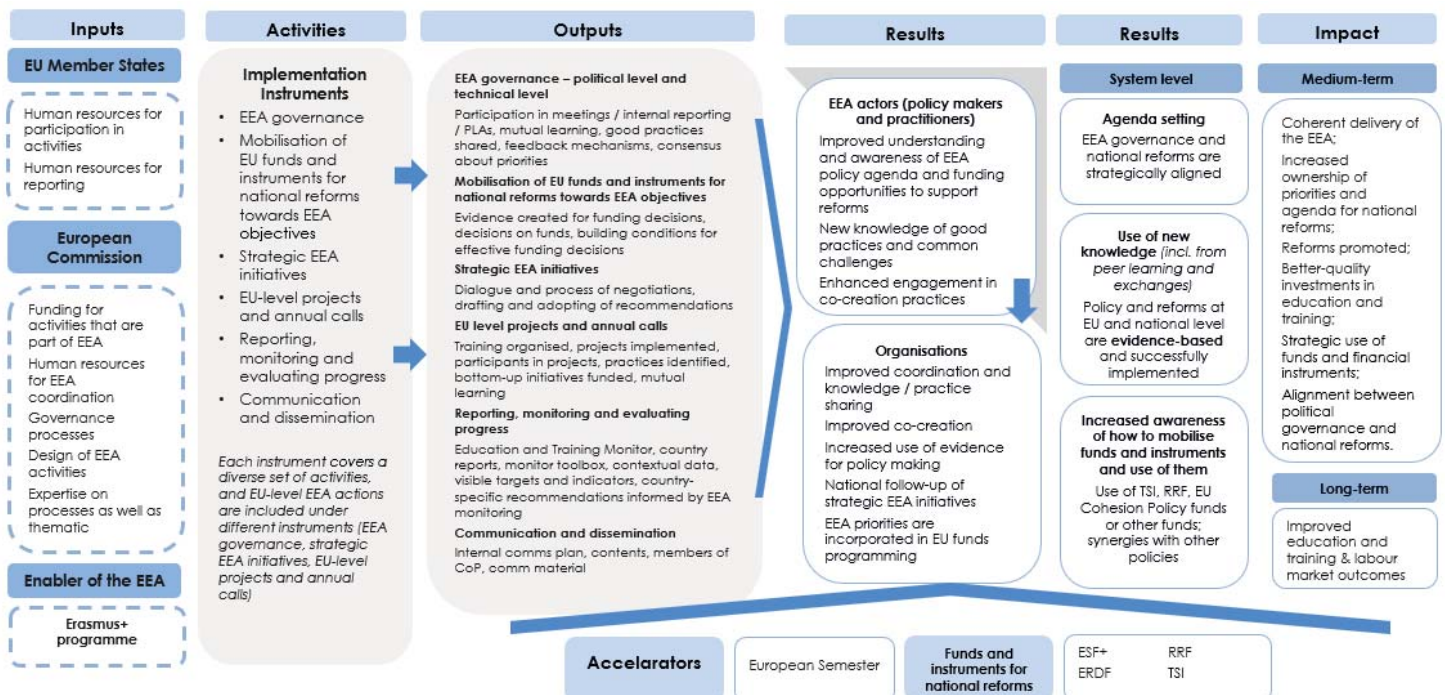
## Intervention logic of the EEA 2021-2030

The EEA supports MS in their efforts to develop, reform and evaluate policies and practices, and strengthens transnational cooperation in education and training. The impact of the EEA on policy debates and decision-making processes can range from agenda setting to direct contributions on shaping new strategies or measures. The EEA also enables more effective cooperation between policymakers, civil society organisations, social partners, practitioners, and academic and policy researchers in the areas related to EEA SP. At operational level this means that European cooperation towards the EEA seeks to:

- build synergies between different levels of governance;
- enable and support co-creation and mutual learning;
- ensure alignment between funding and policy priorities;
- carry out dissemination and communication activities;
- encourage an evidence-informed approach to policy design and investment;
- improve performance monitoring and analysis of progress towards EU-level targets.

These general and operational objectives are pursued through six EEA implementation instruments. Each objective can be addressed through one or several instruments. Each instrument is associated with a set of unique activities and outputs (see Section 3).

Figure 2. Intervention logic of the EEA



## 2.2. Point(s) of comparison

### *Points of comparison between ET2020 and the EEA strategic framework*

There is a high level of connection and continuity between the activities carried out under ET2020 and those carried out under the EEA. The 2019 assessment of ET2020's tools and deliverables highlighted the potential of the initiative to further strengthen European cooperation in education and training<sup>12</sup>. Although the ET2020 strategic objectives were considered broad and flexible, the need to streamline them was highlighted, as this would help make the framework a strong and consistent driving force for change across education and training systems. The governance structure of ET2020 included a High-level group, whose informal nature was highly appreciated, but it was felt that the group needed a stronger role on steering strategic issues. The working groups were assessed as adequate for addressing ET2020 objectives and priorities and considered an important forum for cooperation on sectoral and cross-cutting issues related to education and training.

As such, the EEA strategic framework was designed to build upon previous cooperation frameworks, with some adjustments.

### *Points of comparison between the intended impacts of the EEA strategic framework*

The long-term impacts of the EEA are expected to include improved education and training and better labour market outcomes. To establish a baseline with points for comparison, three groups of indicators were considered as appropriate for measuring the long-term impact of European cooperation towards the EEA, namely: (i) participation in education and training (including attainment of qualifications); (ii) the achievement of skills; and (iii) labour market outcomes. The points of comparison focused on trends – wherever possible – prior to the launch of the EEA strategic framework.

Crises occurring during the period in the focus of this evaluation (such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine) have had a considerable impact on education and training systems and the labour market. It should be noted that the EEA is only one of the contributing initiatives (at various levels) that seek to promote the aims of the SP and the EU-level targets. These trends should therefore not be regarded as illustrating the impact (or lack thereof) of European cooperation towards the EEA, but rather the context in which such cooperation takes place.

### *Participation in education and training, and attainment of qualifications*

Several EU-level indicators relate to the levels of participation in education and training and to obtaining qualifications<sup>13</sup>. On average in the EU, participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) stood at 92.5% in 2021, demonstrating good progress towards the target of at least 96% of children starting ECEC from the age of 3 by 2030. Early school leaving rates have dropped over the past few years, with an EU average of 9.8% in 2021, slightly above the 2030 target of less than 9%. Progress has also been made in tertiary educational attainment, with 41.5% of 25-34-year-olds having completed a short-cycle tertiary, bachelor, master, doctoral or equivalent level of education in 2021 (EU target: at least 45% by 2030). Finally, participation rates in adult learning (excluding guided on-the-job training) steadily increased from 34.4% to 37.4% between 2011 and 2016 (latest available data for establishing a baseline). However, this is still significantly below the

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<sup>12</sup> [Assessment of tools and deliverables under the framework for European cooperation in education and training \(ET2020\)](#), European Commission, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> 2021 is the baseline for the EEA. More recent data are included in Table 6.



EU-level targets of at least 47% by 2025 and the European Pillar of Social Rights headline target of 60% by 2030.

### *Achievement of skills*

Education and training systems play a crucial role in skills acquisition, and therefore in ensuring learners' prospects for future success. According to PISA data<sup>14</sup>, underachievement among 15-year-olds is on the rise in reading, mathematics and science, and well above the EU-level target of an underachievement share below 15%. In 2018, the share of low achieving students stood at 22.9% in mathematics, 22.5% in reading and 22.3% in science. There was also a significant equity gap of 19.3 percentage points on average across the EU, with students of low socio-economic status 5.6 times more likely to underachieve in basic skills than students of high socio-economic status. There was no comparative data available to establish a suitable baseline for the level of digital skills<sup>15</sup> or for work-based learning for VET graduates<sup>16</sup>. The target for reducing underachievement in digital skills has been set at below 15% by 2030 and the target for participation in work-based learning has been set at 60% by 2025.

### *Labour market outcomes*

Obtaining higher levels of qualifications tends to be associated with higher rates of employment, as reflected by the EU-average rates of employment by level of education attained. In 2021, the rate of employment for 20-64-year-olds with less than primary, primary and lower secondary education was 55.0%, while the rate for those with upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education was 72.7% (within this category 62.4% for general education and 76.4% for vocational education) and the rate for those with tertiary education was 85.0%.

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<sup>14</sup> European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, PISA 2018 and the EU – [Striving for social fairness through education](#), Publications Office, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Only seven EU countries (Denmark, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal and Finland) participated in the 2018 International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS), rendering the data unsuitable for establishing a baseline for comparison. 22 EU countries participated in the 2023 ICILS study, including Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany (North Rhine Westphalia), Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden. This broad participation marks a significant step forward, offering a much more comprehensive view of EU students' digital skills proficiency.

<sup>16</sup> There is no available data for establishing a suitable baseline, with the earliest data available dating to 2021. However, participation in work-based learning by VET graduates has surpassed the EU-level target of 60%, with an EU average of 60.5 in 2021, 60.3% in 2022 and of 64.6% in 2023.

### 3. HOW HAS THE SITUATION EVOLVED OVER THE EVALUATION PERIOD?

#### Current state of play

##### *Implementation of the EEA strategic framework 2021-2024*

The first cycle of the implementation of the EEA began with the Council Resolution of 2021 setting out the SP and direction for the work. Several activities have been implemented since then. This section provides an overview of these activities under each of the implementation instruments to support progress towards the EEA SP and EU-level targets. Progress towards the seven EU-level targets has been mixed, with one target reached, several on track to being reached and others still requiring significant efforts. Trends in the progress towards these targets since the EEA's launch are discussed in Section 5.1 (see Table 6).

##### *Governance*

The **EEA governance bodies** provided a political steer and coordinated approaches on shared priorities and challenges. They have demonstrated a high level of flexibility in responding to crises such as COVID-19 and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The **EEA WG** supported mutual learning and exchange of best practices through regular meetings, peer-learning activities and webinars. WG provided opportunities for EEA actors (from MS, non-EU countries, EU agencies, international organisations and stakeholder organisations) to participate in knowledge exchange and co-creation (i.e. setting priorities and developing policies with the input of all actors). The **SGIB** supported the Commission in work towards building supplementary indicators in the areas of equity, teachers and learning for sustainability. Several EU-led initiatives also promoted mutual learning through **expert groups** focused on supportive learning environments and quality investment in education and training, the community of practice of the **Learning Lab**, policy dialogue and Team Europe approaches, and through European guidance for the development of national school education career frameworks.

##### *Mobilisation of EU funds and instruments*

Commission departments have worked together and with MS to support **alignment between the EEA SP and the use of the relevant EU funds**, taking into account the respective scope of their support and their management modes. EU funds and instruments, including ESF+, ERDF, RRF and TSI, facilitated reforms at national and regional levels towards the EEA SP. The ESF+ prioritised skills and workforce resilience, while the ERDF supported infrastructure and equipment for quality and inclusive education as well as skills for smart specialisation and cooperation in education and training in the Interreg context. The RRF supported national reforms and investments in broad policy areas relevant to EEA SP. The TSI provided technical support for related reform projects (72 interventions in 23 MS over 2021-2024). Over EUR 150 bn (EUR 75 bn from RRF<sup>17</sup>, 40.4 bn from

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<sup>17</sup> Estimated expenditure based on the pillar tagging methodology for the Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard and corresponds to the measures allocated to the policy areas 'Adult Learning, Including Continuous Vocational Education And Training; Recognition And Validation Of Skills', 'Early childhood education and care: accessibility, affordability, quality and inclusiveness, including digitalisation and infrastructure', 'General, vocational and higher education: accessibility, affordability, quality and inclusiveness, including digitalisation and infrastructure', 'Human capital in digitalisation' and 'Green skills and jobs', as primary or secondary policy area. Source: European Commission's own calculation. The data was retrieved on 11 February 2025.

ESF+, 8.7 bn from ERDF and over 26 bn from Erasmus+ in 2021-2027.) have been invested in education, skills and infrastructure, promoting progress towards the EEA SP.<sup>18</sup>

### *Strategic EEA initiatives*

Nineteen **strategic initiatives** (mainly Council Recommendations, and some Commission Communications) **were launched or advanced**<sup>19</sup>, guided by extensive consultation and co-creation including in the WG, followed by Commission proposals negotiated in Council. These initiatives provide a structured framework and strategic guidance to drive changes in national policies, supporting progress towards the EEA SP. Council Recommendations addressed all areas of relevance to the EEA SP, such as promoting school success, enhancing mobility, supporting learning for sustainability, improving digital education and skills, or enhancing European higher education. Several initiatives launched before 2021, such as those on inclusive education and language learning and on automatic recognition of qualifications, continued to be supported under the current strategic framework.

### *EU-level projects and calls*

Seventeen **EU-level projects and calls** (most funded under Erasmus+) **supported education and training institutions and practitioners** under the EEA strategic framework.<sup>20</sup> The majority of these projects and calls provided concrete opportunities for beneficiaries to exchange information and experiences and co-create scalable practices, and to develop concrete skills through project-based activities. Projects and calls, such as [Erasmus+ Teacher Academies](#) and [Centres of Vocational Excellence](#), addressed key education priorities, including teacher training and vocational excellence. Tools for facilitating education and training have also been developed as part of this implementation instrument (e.g. the [European Student Card initiative](#), [European Digital Credentials for Learning](#)).

### *Reporting, monitoring and evaluating progress*

The **ETM** tracked progress towards EU-level targets and provided information on the reforms under way in the MS. At the request of the Council, **new indicators** were developed in areas like equity, the teaching profession and sustainability. The ETM country reports were used to inform CSR under the European Semester. In 2024, CSR linked to education and training topics were issued to 18 MS.

### *Communication and dissemination*

Activities to **communicate and disseminate EEA activities** included the [EEA portal](#), European Education Summits, the EEA communication contract, the EEA midterm review event and targeted campaigns. Between 2021 and 2023, the EEA portal, which provides information on resources and funding opportunities, attracted 4.5 million unique visitors and generated 10.2 million page views. The European Education Summits provided stakeholders with a forum to discuss progress and opportunities for collaboration, while social media campaigns amplified the reach of EEA initiatives, including outside the EU.

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<sup>18</sup> An additional 2.6 bn from the external funds has supported international mobilities of EU students, staff, youth and youth workers towards partner countries, as well as partnerships between EU and third countries' higher education and VET institutions.

<sup>19</sup> See Annex III for the list of strategic EEA initiatives.

<sup>20</sup> See Annex III for the 17 EU-level projects and calls that were included in the scope of this evaluation (given their link the EEA strategic framework).

## 4. EVALUATION FINDINGS (ANALYTICAL PART)

### 4.1. To what extent was the intervention successful and why?

In the absence of regulatory power, the EEA's ability to drive impact is indirect and stems from **combining different instruments and support mechanisms**, setting quantified targets, establishing EU policy frameworks, providing policy guidance, supporting cooperation, allocating EU funds, monitoring progress and supporting evaluation of relevant reforms. The first subsection on overall effectiveness summarises main findings in two respects: Firstly, results that participation in the EEA strategic framework (and engagement with its EEA implementation instruments) brought for individual EEA actors (who act as potential multipliers), organisations, and education and training systems. Secondly, it zooms in on the EEA actors who drive the overall governance and are therefore key to the generation of results and impacts. Subsequent sections present an overview of evaluation results on the effectiveness of the six EEA implementation instruments, on progress under the five SP, and on promoting education and training from a global perspective. The chapter concludes by an assessment of the efficiency of EEA implementation instruments and of the coherence of the EEA strategic framework.

#### 4.1.1. Overall effectiveness

*Key findings on results at the level of EEA actors, organisations and systems*

The evaluation assessed results at three interconnected levels:

- **EEA actors:** participants in activities under the EEA implementation instruments (policymakers, practitioners, stakeholder representatives, experts, etc.)
- **organisations:** ministries and stakeholder bodies where follow-up actions towards EEA SP are taken
- **education and training systems** at national/regional level.

The analysis highlighted specific achievements at all three levels, though their extent varies. The **most significant direct results** of the EEA were in the areas of **mutual learning, knowledge generation and structured coordination mechanisms** through various EEA governance bodies. Results were most visible at the level of EEA actors. At **organisational level**, the biggest results were observed for those organisations that take a more **systematic approach to sharing information and organisational learning**. **System-level results** were best achieved when countries were proactive in making the best combined and **coordinated use of several EEA implementation instruments**. An overview of results at the three levels identified with evidence of the contribution of specific EEA implementation instruments is provided in Table 3 below.



*Table 1. Findings on results at different levels*

Results achieved	Evidence of contribution made by the EEA implementation instruments
<b>At individual level among EEA actors</b>	
Improved understanding and awareness of the EEA policy agenda and of the funds that can be used to support reforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved awareness was enabled by EEA governance that engaged EEA actors continuously and enabled the reiteration and internalisation of EEA's SP (to varying degrees among the EEA actors involved in the HLG and WG). EEA governance also contributed to increased awareness on the use of EU funds.</li> <li>Communication and dissemination, especially at European Education Summits, also helped raise awareness on key EEA SP and EU-level initiatives and projects, including among those EEA actors who were not directly involved in the governance bodies.</li> </ul>
Increased knowledge of good practices and common challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EEA governance, through regular meetings and exchanges, allowed EEA actors to build knowledge on good practices and common challenges.</li> <li>EU-level projects and calls provided a foundation for improving the knowledge of those EEA actors not involved directly in governance on good practices and common challenges.</li> <li>Activities that were part of the EEA implementation instrument reporting, monitoring and evaluation were used by EEA actors (e.g. the ETM comparative and country reports) to inform their discussions in the HLG/CB and WG, as well as (to some extent) within organisations at national level.</li> </ul>
Enhanced engagement in co-creation practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engagement in co-creation practices was enabled through EEA governance, including the WG (e.g. through the development of thematic outputs and contribution to strategic EEA initiatives).</li> <li>EU-level projects and calls involved EEA actors in the exchange and co-creation of practices. Many EU-level projects and calls showed positive trends in participation, reflecting enhanced engagement.</li> <li>In some cases (VET), tasks attributed to the WG could have been attributed to other bodies instead (Advisory Committee on Vocational Training).</li> </ul>
<b>At organisation level</b>	
Coordination and knowledge/sharing of practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Results were mixed on improved coordination and knowledge / sharing of practices via EEA governance and EU-level projects and calls. In some cases, the coordination and dissemination of knowledge within organisations (gained via EEA actors in WG) was very well established; in other cases, it was limited and not systematic.</li> </ul>
Co-creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EU-level projects and calls enabled co-creation between participating organisations (e.g. EIT's Innovation Capacity Building for Higher Education initiative (EIT HEI)), but the extent of the results was not always clear.</li> </ul>
Use of evidence for policymaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outputs associated with reporting, monitoring and evaluation of progress (e.g. ETM, Learning Lab) and EEA governance (knowledge gained by EEA actors via WG, thematic outputs) were taken up to a varying extent by the MS in informing their policies. Examples of success were identified, yet they were not applied systematically across MS.</li> </ul>
Follow-up on strategic EEA initiatives by EEA actors at MS level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The extent of further operationalisation of strategic EEA initiatives by EEA actors at national level varied, and the nature of national follow-up was unclear, due to a lack of national reporting.</li> </ul>
<b>At system level</b>	
Agenda setting, innovation and policy development at national level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MS are pursuing reforms that contribute to building the EEA. In some cases, these were directly inspired by involvement in the EEA governance. Alignment between the policies of MS and the EEA SP was observed.<sup>21</sup> However, because the SP are broad, and given the voluntary nature of European cooperation in education and training and its 'soft' instruments, causality (direct influence of the EEA) could not be confirmed.</li> <li>EU-level projects and calls drove policy progress in MS (e.g. the European Universities initiative in relation to facilitating transnational cooperation, recognition, micro-credentials, joint programmes and degrees, etc.).</li> </ul>
Use of new knowledge (including evidence-informed policymaking)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The instrument for reporting, monitoring and evaluating progress contributed to the use of new knowledge, but the systematisation of knowledge was not yet evident.</li> <li>Information produced within the EEA remained to be processed and synthesised into accessible resources. Knowledge transfer within EEA governance requires a more systematic approach – not simply by sharing the growing volume of information, but by organising and distilling the wealth of information into actionable insights. Currently, the sheer quantity of documentation makes navigation challenging for EEA actors. This hinders synergies between governance bodies, as well as across other implementation instruments.</li> <li>The EEA's Learning Lab holds significant potential in this regard, especially for strengthening national capacity to conduct impact evaluations in education and training.</li> </ul>
Increased awareness of EU funds and instruments and their use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EU funds and instruments were used by the MS to support reforms that were in line with the EEA SP. EU funds and instruments appear to be crucial in ensuring that MS have the capacity to pursue reforms that align with the EEA SP.</li> </ul>

<sup>21</sup> In the area of adult learning, the impact has been limited, in particular on interplay and impact with labour market policy and structures.

### *Key findings on the effectiveness of EEA governance*

The evaluation results showed that the reformed governance of the EEA has contributed to **a better understanding of shared priorities and challenges** in education and training **and increased ownership** among participants in the various governance bodies.

**The reformed governance, driven at informal level by the HLG, has contributed to strengthening the political steer** on shared priorities and challenges. The shift towards a more strategic agenda setting and greater continuity in the work of the HLG was attributed to the HLG CB. The efforts to implement the 18-month policy agenda could provide a further boost to strategic agenda setting. However, limitations were seen in various degrees of commitment among Council Presidencies to steer European cooperation on common priorities and challenges. Furthermore, the HLG is still to take up its role in providing steering on the key topics in the two Council Recommendations on digital education and skills of November 2023.

**Mutual learning and the exchange of good practices in the WG are among the EEA activities that have been the most effective in helping to build the EEA.** The WG contributed to the development of strategic EEA initiatives and supported their national follow-up, by providing a valuable forum for information sharing, co-creation, peer learning and exchange on national policy developments. However, these exchanges were not always consistently translated into concrete policy actions at MS level. There is potential to optimise the WG' working methods to strengthen their effectiveness, by exploring different formats and approaches. Further opportunities to provide peer-counselling support to MS for implementing evidence-informed reforms, including for small groups of countries facing similar challenges, could also be explored.

**The SGIB has made progress in promoting the systematic collection of data and has contributed to the development of new types of indicators** and to evidence-informed policy discussions. At the same time, there were gaps in information across governance bodies on the status of implementing key strategic EEA initiatives. According to stakeholder consultations, systematic reporting would help to increase consistency and regularity in the way the evidence is used.

The evaluation concluded that the effectiveness of the EEA strategic framework governance was somewhat limited by an **inconsistent flow of information between WG, DG formations, HLG and EDUC**. In addition, EEA actors did not always clearly understand the specific roles of and the lines of cooperation between some of these governance bodies. Efforts by the HLG CB to streamline activities and links between the WG, the HLG and EDUC still need to be strengthened (see Section 5.2.).

#### **4.1.2. Effectiveness by EEA implementation instruments**

The **delivery and combination of EEA implementation instruments** were given a positive assessment for enabling collaboration, flexibility in crisis response, mutual learning and other ways of supporting national reforms. Table 4 summarises the main findings regarding the most important identified **strengths**, as well as **areas for possible improvement** with a view to improving the instruments' effectiveness.

Table 4. Key results and areas of improvement for the effectiveness of EEA implementation instruments

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<b>Governance</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better understanding of shared priorities &amp; challenges</li> <li>• Stronger political steering &amp; more strategic agenda setting</li> <li>• Highly appreciated mutual learning &amp; knowledge exchange</li> <li>• Co-creation of strategic EEA initiatives &amp; support for national follow-up</li> <li>• Flexibility of EEA governance enabled effective EU-level coordinated response to tackle the education impact of crises (COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify roles of different EEA governance bodies</li> <li>• Reinforce systematic feedback loop and linkages between the various bodies</li> <li>• Optimise WG' working methods and boost dissemination of outputs to facilitate further organisational learning at national level, leading to system improvement</li> <li>• Improve synergies with governance in other sectors (such as employment)</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic EEA initiatives</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing a longer-term comprehensive policy framework &amp; guidance for further work by policymakers and practitioners</li> <li>• Co-creation of initiatives increases ownership by MS &amp; other EEA actors</li> <li>• Impact reinforced where there is complementary support for national follow-up through other EEA implementation instruments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase focus on and limit the number of strategic EEA initiatives, in view of MS' limited capacity for follow-up</li> <li>• Launch evaluations of flagship strategic EEA initiatives (recency of initiatives &amp; lack of MS reporting on implementation limit the evidence base on results &amp; impacts)</li> </ul>
<b>Mobilisation of EU funds &amp; instruments</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of EU funds &amp; instruments align with EEA SP</li> <li>• Increasing awareness &amp; knowledge of available EU funds &amp; technical support in MS</li> <li>• Structured discussions on funding priorities between Commission departments responsible for EU funds and policies help contribution to EEA SP</li> <li>• The European Semester and the CSR serve as channel through which the EEA strategic framework informs programming of EU funds for national reforms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The task of assessing the quality of investments could be supported through more systematic reporting and capacity building support, including at the national and regional level, on the outcomes/results of investments linked to the EEA SP and by embedding EEA SP in impact evaluations of EU funds. These measures could help improve the evidence base.</li> </ul>
<b>EU-level projects &amp; annual calls</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some actions (e.g. EIT HEI initiative, European Universities initiative, European Student Card initiative) achieved high visibility &amp; already demonstrated impact confirmed by external evaluation studies</li> <li>• Enabling internalisation of EEA SP at practitioner level, potential to promote them at learner level</li> <li>• Contribution to system-level change stronger, when clear links with strategic EEA initiatives</li> <li>• Erasmus+ funded activities support progress towards EEA (e.g. increased capacity of organisations, contribution to policy development, promotion of inclusion &amp; diversity, digital &amp; green transitions, participation in democratic life &amp; civic engagement)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication on EU-level projects and calls to use EEA brand and be embedded in renewed EEA narrative</li> <li>• Evidence on the effectiveness of EU-level projects &amp; calls, and their links to EEA SP to be reinforced</li> </ul>
<b>Reporting, monitoring &amp; evaluating progress</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EU-level targets provide a direction for reforms</li> <li>• ETM serves as an important flagship publication providing useful, high-quality quantitative and qualitative evidence that can support policymaking</li> <li>• Under the EEA strategic framework, ETM extended its scope to new indicators fields (some of which can support target-setting)</li> <li>• SGIB &amp; Learning Lab contribute to building a culture of evidence-informed policymaking in education and training, and help guide policy monitoring and evaluation practices, considering especially the identified need for support at national level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring of effectiveness &amp; national impact of EEA implementation instruments (especially follow-up of strategic EEA initiatives) is hampered by lack of engagement of MS in data collection for EU-level monitoring &amp; evaluation. This is a challenge for evidence-informed policymaking through open method of coordination.</li> <li>• ETM could be further used to stimulate policy dialogue at national level</li> <li>• Available channels of data collection on education &amp; training systems (e.g. Eurydice, independent expert networks such as EENEE, NESET) to be better connected with EEA SP and synthesised to inform the EEA</li> </ul>
<b>Communication &amp; dissemination</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building a community of education &amp; training stakeholders who have an aligned view of EEA SP</li> <li>• Better visibility and understanding of EEA activities (e.g. through EEA portal, European Education summit)</li> <li>• Essential in supporting effectiveness of other instruments</li> <li>• Information shared can support national policy design &amp; implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renew and reinforce EEA 'brand' to ensure distinctiveness &amp; recognition among stakeholders who do not participate in EEA activities</li> <li>• Renewed EEA narrative to drive overarching communication strategy ensuring alignment of all EU-level education &amp; training activities</li> </ul>

- **Improvement of ECEC.** This included efforts to improve quality standards through strategic EEA initiatives (the European quality framework for ECEC), supported by mutual learning in WG ECEC, participation of ECEC institutions in Erasmus+ projects, and through mobilisation of EU funds and instruments (RRF, Cohesion Policy funds, TSI).<sup>22</sup>
- **Support for disadvantaged learners.** This included the Pathways to School Success (strategic EEA initiative), policy guidance developed in WG Schools, WG Equality and Values and the Expert Group on supportive learning environments for groups at risk of underachievement and for supporting well-being at school, mobilisation of EU funds and instruments, and monitoring under ETM.<sup>23</sup>
- **Boosting digital skills of learners.** European cooperation towards the EEA, alongside actions under the Digital Education Action Plan (DEAP), provided guidance for enhancing digital skills across all education levels (strategic EEA initiatives), and mobilised substantial EU funding and technical support. They were supported by EU-level projects and calls (European Universities initiative) and mutual learning in WG (including WG DELTA and WG HE).<sup>24</sup>
- **Acceleration of the Bologna Process in higher education.** European cooperation towards the EEA (EEA strategic initiatives, mutual learning under WGs, EU-level projects and calls) accelerated the Bologna Process, which would otherwise have been likely to progress more slowly (or in certain cases not at all). This speeded up the alignment of higher education systems, enhanced mobility, and improved the recognition of qualifications across countries.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> E.g. in Lithuania ESF+ and RRF supported the implementation of the reform to increase inclusiveness and quality in ECEC through renewed curriculum guidelines, established quality assurance mechanism and improved teacher training. In Bulgaria the introduction of a national quality framework was supported under RRF and TSI. (Evidence from national case studies, see evaluation support study, July 2025).

<sup>23</sup> E.g. in Romania implementation of education reform to address equity gaps, attendance, learning outcomes, progression to HE and employment was supported by strategic EEA initiatives (such as the Council Recommendations on Pathways to School Success, and on promoting common values, inclusive education and European dimension of teaching), as well as EU funding (RRF, TSI, ESF+). In Portugal implementation of reforms on inclusive education and school autonomy were influenced by discussions in EEA governance bodies (EYCS, WG Schools), with measures supported by Erasmus+, ESF+, technical support and RRF. CSRs and ETM have been used to inform monitoring progress. (Evidence from national case studies, see evaluation support study, July 2025).

<sup>24</sup> E.g. in Austria reform to digitalise higher education has been supported through EU-level projects and calls (e.g. European Universities initiative), RRF, TSI, Reform is in line with relevant CSRs. In Czechia a comprehensive reform to support digital transition was informed by discussions in WG DELTA, aligned with DigComp, and supported by EU-level projects and calls (European Universities initiative), RRF and TSI. (Evidence from national case studies, see evaluation support study, July 2025).

<sup>25</sup> E.g. in Croatia reform of quality assurance in higher education were supported by mutual learning in WG HE, informed by EEA strategic initiatives, and supported under RRF, ESF+, TSI. In Italy the reform on automatic recognition of qualifications was initiated in reaction to the Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition and was supported under Erasmus+. In Slovakia peer learning under WG HE contributed to amendments of the Higher Education Quality Assurance act, and Erasmus+ and RRF supported implementation. (Evidence from national case studies, see evaluation support study, July 2025).

#### 4.1.3. Effectiveness by EEA strategic priorities

**EEA implementation instruments facilitated progress towards the achievement of the five EEA SP.** Notable progress towards the EEA SP was made at EU level, but this was not consistently translated into progress in each MS at regional and national levels (see Section 5.5.).

The current design of SP, which combines horizontal and sectoral priorities, ensures **comprehensive coverage of education sectors**. Though not every SP is relevant to all education levels, the activities carried out under the EEA strategic framework and complementary framework strategies in education and training (such as the European Skills Agenda) covered all education and training sectors.

**Intensity of support for various SP through different types of EEA implementation instruments varied:** from high coverage (SP1, SP4, SP5 – digital), through medium (SP2, SP5 – green), to low (SP3).

In addition to the EEA implementation instruments, the achievement of progress towards the EEA SP was also influenced by the existence of **other policy frameworks** in education and training.

In particular, **SP3 (teachers and trainers) received a low focus** as, unlike all other SP, it was not supported by a dedicated strategic EEA initiative and there were no other complementary EU policy frameworks that focused on the education profession. The breadth of challenges across all EU MS in this area (teacher shortages, attractiveness of the profession, working conditions etc.) suggests there is a need to strengthen efforts.

Table 5 summarises key evaluation findings regarding the effectiveness (and relevance) of efforts by EEA SP, highlighting:

- **coverage of education and training levels;**
- **coverage by (support through) EEA implementation instruments;**
- **support by other complementary frameworks** in education and training (contributing to impact);
- **the most important results;**
- **persisting challenges** that remain to be addressed.



Table 5. Key findings on SP

SP	Education levels covered	Coverage by EEA implementation instruments	Complementary frameworks	Key results	Key remaining challenges
SP1: quality, equity, inclusion	ECEC: high School: high HE: high VET: high AL: high Non-formal: medium	<b>OVERALL: high</b> Governance: high Mobilisation of EU funds: high Strategic initiatives: high EU-level projects: high Monitoring: high Communication: high	EU Youth Strategy, <u>Child Guarantee</u> , <u>Council Recommendation on vocational education &amp; training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness &amp; resilience</u>	Sharing good practices & fostering mutual learning (WG Schools-Pathways, WG ECEC, WG Equality and Values, other expert groups); Evidence of progress in implementing strategic EEA initiatives (Pathways to School Success, ECEC quality framework); Establishment of common targets & indicators; progress in reducing early school leaving; Inclusion of the equity in education indicator in the 2022 EEA progress report & ETM; Support for learners with fewer opportunities through Erasmus+ & European Solidarity Corps	High underachievement & low top performance in basic skills; Persisting equity & inclusion gaps across and within MS; Structural challenges highlighted by COVID-19; Inclusion & support needs of refugees & displaced persons from Ukraine
SP2: lifelong learning & mobility	ECEC: low School: medium HE: high VET: high AL: high Non-formal: high	<b>OVERALL: medium/high</b> Governance: high Mobilisation of EU funds: high Strategic initiatives: high EU-level projects: covered <sup>26</sup> Monitoring: medium Communication: medium	<u>European Skills Agenda</u> ; <u>Council Recommendation on vocational education &amp; training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness &amp; resilience</u> ; <u>Council Resolution on a European Agenda for Adult Learning</u> ; <u>Osnabrück Declaration</u> ; <u>EU Youth Strategy</u> ;	<b>Lifelong learning</b> Implementation of micro-credentials & automatic recognition facilitated by referencing NQF to the EQF, digitalisation of the Diploma Supplement via Europass, launch of DEQAR by the EQAR; Mutual learning facilitated by WG Adult Learning. <b>Mobility</b> Virtual & blended mobility initiatives integrated into regular programmes & courses; European inter-university campuses developed by the European Universities initiative; Increased inclusiveness & flexibility for all types of learners; Enhanced learners' experiences; Progress in learning mobility enabled by Erasmus+ & European Solidarity Corps	<b>Lifelong learning</b> Low participation in adult learning; Limited visibility of non-formal lifelong learning (all levels); Structural challenges in integrating Ukrainian refugees into education and labour market; Measures for integration and inclusion of refugees remain primarily short-term <b>Learning mobility</b> Inclusivity issues, particularly for disadvantaged learners; Inconsistent implementation of automatic recognition – only 12 MS with fully compliant national legislation for the automatic recognition of higher education qualifications Teacher shortages, especially in STEM & ICT and in remote & disadvantaged regions; Challenges related to attracting, upskilling and retaining talents across the MS; Unsatisfactory working conditions, including well-being at work, level of pay, recognition of the teaching profession; Lack of diversity & inclusion training or measures to ensure the participation of teachers in such training; No strategic EEA initiatives primarily targeting teachers
SP3: teachers & trainers	ECEC: high School: high HE: high VET: high AL: high Non-formal: high	<b>OVERALL: medium/low</b> Governance: medium Mobilisation of EU funds: medium Strategic initiatives: none EU-level projects: medium Monitoring: medium Communication: medium	<u>Council Recommendation on vocational education &amp; training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness &amp; resilience</u> (for VET teachers & trainers)	Teacher Academies & the European Innovative Teaching Award enabled by Erasmus+ funding; European guidance for the development of national career frameworks; Introduction of teacher-related indicators in 2023 ETM; Recognition of progress achieved by EU-level projects & calls supporting SP3 among EEA actors at national level	

<sup>26</sup> While EU projects and calls specifically attributed to EEA as part of this evaluation did not address SP2 as their primary thematic focus, the nature of this instrument and its support through Erasmus + is enabling mobility and lifelong learning as the core of its design, and therefore contributes to the progress of SP2.

SP	Education levels covered	Coverage by EEA implementation instruments	Complementary frameworks	Key results	Key remaining challenges
SP4: European <b>higher education</b>	ECEC: none School: low HE: high VET: high AL: low Non-formal: none	<b>OVERALL: high</b> Governance: high Mobilisation of EU funds: medium Strategic initiatives: high EU-level projects: high Monitoring: medium Communication: high	<a href="#">European Higher Education Area / Bologna Process</a>	Recognised progress among different EEA actors; EU-level target on HE attainment is likely to be achieved; Visibility & recognition of European Degree package, European Universities initiative (65 European University alliances) and HEI initiative (in cooperation with EIT) at institutional level; Mutual learning facilitated by WG HE; EEA-informed reforms in higher education across MS (largely driven by the European Universities initiative); European Student Card initiative scaling up and enabling digital exchanges of student data between HEIs across the EEA; Simplified management of student mobility & cross-border validation of student status through European Student Card initiative	Legal obstacles in MS prevent more effective transnational cooperation; Long-term sustainability of European Universities alliances; Involvement of further European HEIs in digital exchange of data through the Erasmus Without Paper network
SP5: green & <b>digital</b>	ECEC: high School: high HE: high VET: high AL: high Non-formal: high	<b>OVERALL: high</b> Governance: high Mobilisation of EU funds: high Strategic initiatives: high EU-level projects: high Monitoring: medium Communication: high	<a href="#">Digital Education Action Plan</a> <a href="#">EU Youth Strategy</a> ; <a href="#">Council Recommendation on vocational education &amp; training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness &amp; resilience</a>	Initiatives to enhance digital competences & digital readiness of EEA actors; Mutual learning facilitated by WG DELTA; DEAP contributing directly to the EEA; Adoption of Council Recommendations on the key enabling factors for successful digital education & training, and on improving the provision of digital skills & competences in education & training	Tensions between the digital and green transitions due to resource- and energy-intensive nature of digital technologies; Perception of insufficient mainstreaming of achieving green & digital transitions together; Longer legacy of prioritising the digital transition under ET2020 contributing to perception of disparity in focus; Need for greater visibility of activities related to sustainability within the EEA; Room for greater exploitation of innovation in education to advance the green & digital transitions
SP5: <b>green &amp; digital</b>	ECEC: high School: high HE: high VET: high AL: high Non-formal: high	<b>OVERALL: Medium</b> Governance: medium Mobilisation of EU funds: medium Strategic initiatives: medium EU-level projects: high Monitoring: high Communication: high	<a href="#">Green Deal</a> ; <a href="#">EU Youth Strategy</a> ; <a href="#">Council Recommendation on vocational education &amp; training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness &amp; resilience</a>	Adoption of Council Recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development; GreenComp; Mutual learning facilitated by WG Schools and WG VET and the Green Transition; Dedicated community of practice around GreenComp embedded in the Education for Climate Coalition mobilising EEA actors to collaborate on the green transition; Gradual integration of sustainability topics into curricula across all MS; Greener Erasmus+ & European Solidarity Corps providing fundamental support through dedicated calls for forward-looking and policy-experimentation projects; Sustainability as a focus topic in several Erasmus+ Teacher Academies; Researchers at Schools initiative	<b>SP5 - Digital</b> Disparities in infrastructure and access to digital tools; Scepticism of certain MS towards the use of digital tools in education; Advances in AI and concerns linked to AI (ethics, capacity, infrastructure) <b>SP5 – Green</b> Practical implementation of Learning for Sustainability hampered by educators' lack of capacity to design, facilitate & assess transformative learning experiences; Gap between attitudes & actions towards sustainability

#### 4.1.4. Promoting education and training from a global perspective

**Cooperation under the EEA strategic framework contributed to advancing education and training from a global perspective.** This was achieved through the EEA implementation instruments that allow for participation of some non-EU countries. **EU candidate and European Economic Area / EFTA countries participated in some parts of the EEA governance** (in particular in HLG, WG and SGIB), benefited from mutual learning and exchange, and aligned closely with EEA SP. In particular, for EU candidate countries, this participation in the EEA governance and peer learning significantly supported the process of modernisation of their education and training systems, facilitating alignment in view of enlargement.

**Several EU-level projects and calls under the Erasmus+ programme open to some non-EU countries proved effective in advancing the EEA SP and promoting the global perspective** of European cooperation in education and training. One notable example is the European Universities initiative, which brought progress towards the strategic objectives of the Bologna Process by enabling higher education institutions in other Bologna countries to take part in alliances as associated partners. The opening of the European Universities alliances to the Western Balkans helped extend the benefits of this initiative to close partners and potential future EU members. Other examples include EIT HEI initiative, or activities that increasingly emphasise digitalisation, sustainability and international reach through the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programmes.

The **Global Gateway Strategy** and the 2021 **Western Balkans Agenda** reinforced the EU's commitment to supporting non-EU countries' educational advancement, contributing to regional integration and alignment with the EEA SP.

The **EEA served as an inspirational framework for international cooperation**, particularly in the Eastern Neighbourhood, Africa, Asia, and Latin America, through initiatives like Erasmus Mundus and Jean Monnet actions that promoted high-level international joint degrees and EU values outside the EU, and people-to-people dialogue. Cooperation projects under the **international dimension of Erasmus+** met specific needs in non-EU regions, strengthening educational ties and supporting capacity building in higher education and vocational education and training. From the point of view of skills development, these projects supported the modernisation of education systems in partner countries (e.g. looking at curricula and recognition of diplomas), which in turn helps deliver a pool of skilled people the EU MS could tap into in the future.

The **mobilisation of EEA governance allowed for effective reaction to global crises**, playing an important role in particular in ensuring continuation of education and training of Ukrainian refugees following Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

**Enhancing visibility and communication about the EEA's contributions globally** could foster a better understanding and stronger partnerships with non-EU actors, as well as an increased attractiveness worldwide of European education and training systems.

**Streamlining the global perspective across all SP of the EEA strategic framework** would ensure a more consistent approach, leveraging the strengths of international partnerships in education for mutual benefit, strengthening EU's competitiveness and democracy, allowing essential know-how exchanges with partner countries that could support, among others, developments in innovation, STEM and AI-related fields in the EU, strengthen the competitiveness of European universities and attract talent to the EU (see also Sections 4.3., 5.1.).



#### 4.1.5. Efficiency

**Measuring the cost-effectiveness** of efforts under the strategic framework to build the EEA is complex and **constrained by several major limitations**.

A major challenge is that European cooperation towards the EEA comprises a wide and varied range of processes and activities and is influenced by the EU's broader agenda and other international initiatives. Improvements cannot be solely attributed to the EEA, and it is difficult to isolate the EEA's specific impacts as the strategic framework builds on previous cooperation frameworks (ET2020 and ET2010). Furthermore, there is no baseline data.

In view of this, for the analysis information was collected on the costs and benefits of selected illustrative examples of processes and activities under the EEA implementation instruments. This approach was taken to minimise the response burden on the providers of such information and to keep the costs of producing the necessary data in proportion to the importance of the results sought. Due to the **incremental nature of the EEA**, it was not possible to quantify the additional monetary and time inputs due to the EEA (as compared to the previous period under ET2020). **These constraints therefore limit the possibility to generalise the findings and to draw comparative conclusions with regard to cost-effectiveness.**

The **processes and activities covered by the analysis** were the following:

##### *EEA governance*

**HLG and its CB.** The main cost-generating items were HLG meetings, especially those organised in person<sup>27</sup>. Costs relate to time spent by participants (EU MS, European Economic Area / EFTA countries, Commission) preparing for meetings, attending them and doing follow-up work; and, for in person meetings, to costs for the meeting venue, accommodation and travel. The costs of the CB, with most meetings taking place online, were very low. Main benefits included strategic agenda setting and steering, enhanced ownership of EEA priorities by the EU MS, responsiveness and agility of the EEA strategic framework governance in addressing crises (for example, to ensure continuity of education and training for refugees from Ukraine following Russia's war of aggression), and mutual learning. Consulted members of the HLG mostly agreed that the benefits of their participation outweigh the resources invested.

**WG.** External expertise, covered by dedicated contracts, and physical WG meetings and peer-learning activities were the main cost-generating items. Clear benefits include supporting the design of and follow-up to strategic EEA initiatives and advancing the European dimension in education and training. The WG were found to represent an important regular and structured forum for co-creation, mutual learning and dissemination of good practices, with contributions also from social partners, EU-level stakeholder organisations and agencies. The various activities of the WG resulted in almost 80 deliverables – including input papers, reports, factsheets, key policy messages and briefs. The mutual learning and deliverables fed policy development and supported reforms in several MS. For example, they contributed to the reform of ECEC in Bulgaria and Lithuania, the Higher Education and Science Act and the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Croatia, improved governance and modernisation of the VET system in Cyprus, the digital education reform in Czechia, citizenship education reform in Spain, legislation on inclusive education and curriculum flexibility in Portugal, or the integration

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<sup>27</sup> One HLG meeting per Council Presidency took place in person, in the country of the Presidency.

of Ukrainian refugees in Germany. Furthermore, WG supported the global dimension of the EEA by facilitating exchanges and mutual learning with EU candidate and European Economic Area / EFTA countries. They also helped ensure that the EEA strategic framework was aligned with the work of international organisations such as UN agencies or the OECD, who are regular participants in most WG. The survey of WG members revealed that they had favourable perceptions of the cost-benefit ratio<sup>28</sup>. Knowledge gained informed national policymaking and promoted institutional knowledge-sharing, albeit with varying results across countries linked to their level of engagement.

**SGIB.** The twice-yearly SGIB meetings were the main cost-generating items. Benefits included technical advice for DG EAC on data usage and indicator development, covering topics such as equity and inclusion, the teaching profession, learning for sustainability, civic knowledge and learning mobility. Such technical advice contributed to proposals to revise EU-level targets and work on the online Monitor Toolbox (from 2022), which allowed more detailed and transparent monitoring of progress towards existing EU-level targets.

**Expert Group on Quality Investment in Education and Training.** The main cost-generating items were the 16 meetings of the expert group in 2021-2022. Benefits included contribution to EU policy discussions (published a key report on quality investment) and laying the foundations for the establishment of the Learning Lab.

**Learning Lab on Investing in Quality Education and Training.** Contracts on administrative and communication aspects, which also cover the costs of meetings, were the main cost-generating item. The Lab helps to develop a culture of education policy evaluation across the EU to improve the effectiveness of education and training policy and the efficiency of education spending.

#### *Strategic EEA initiatives*

**Council Recommendations.** Four Council Recommendations were included in the analysis<sup>29</sup>. The costs for developing and following up on each recommendation vary widely depending on the nature of each recommendation, and implementation costs at MS level are difficult to estimate.

Regarding benefits, the Recommendation on automatic mutual recognition acted as a strong enabler of European cooperation in education and training by facilitating transnational cooperation and mobility. Progress in implementing the recommendation was made in several MS, with the benefits of the automatic recognition of qualifications being especially important for students moving across borders and for higher education institutions seeking to attract such students. Cost savings are also possible in the qualification recognition process itself, given its expected simplification, although much depends on what institutional solutions are finally adopted. While some progress was made, the ultimate objective of the recommendation is yet to be achieved.

The Recommendation on pathways to school success contributed to a common understanding of school success and of the impact of well-being on educational outcomes.

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<sup>28</sup> Most of the respondents who answered this question considered that the benefits outweighed the time invested by participants (55%; n=130); more than one third (36%; n=130) considered that the benefits were proportional to the time invested; and only 8% had a negative view on the cost-benefit ratio.

<sup>29</sup> The selected Council Recommendations were: Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad adopted in 2018; the Pathways to School Success Council Recommendation (2022); and the 2023 Council Recommendations on the key enabling factors for successful digital education and training and on improving the provision of digital skills and competences in education and training.

It also provided guidance on improving equity and quality in education. The recommendation significantly influenced the inclusive education reforms e.g. in Romania, with the aim to address equity gaps, attendance, learning outcomes, progression to HE and employment.

The Recommendations on digital education and skills brought to light inter alia a lack of availability of high-quality digital education content and pedagogical approaches for teaching computer science. This prompted the establishment of relevant Commission expert groups in 2024 to draw up guidelines to support teachers and school leaders.

#### *Mobilisation of EU funds for national reform*

This implementation instrument invited **MS to make use of EU funds to support national and regional reforms in line with EEA objectives**, e.g. TSI technical support and RRF funds for the VET reform to support the green transition in Denmark and ESF+ funds and technical support for reforms in Estonia to improve the competences and motivation of teachers. There appeared to be only negligible costs involved in promoting the use of these funds to achieve objectives in line with the EEA SP. Such costs would also be very difficult to separate from costs already calculated (e.g. for the functioning of the WG) as raising awareness of EU funds often takes place as part of other activities (e.g. during meetings at different governance levels). Regarding the benefits, the mobilisation of EU funds for national reforms contributed effectively to mainstreaming the EEA SP into MS' policymaking. Evaluating the extent to which this will result in mature reforms and a positive impact on the performance of education and training systems will be possible only in the coming years.

#### *EU-level projects and calls*

**Jean Monnet actions for schools and VET.** The main cost-generating items were an external contract (communication activities linked to the launch of the action) and Commission staff time to prepare project calls. Outputs included over 100 teacher training events and school networks and projects under the Learning EU initiative with a total budget of EUR 21.1 million, contributing to the promotion of European values.

**Education for Climate Coalition.** The main cost-generating items were platform hosting and Commission staff time dedicated to the action. The benefits were 166 online and 8 in-person events, with combined audience of around 5,650 persons between 2021 and mid-2024. The Coalition led to the consolidation of a participatory community of practice that supports teaching and learning for the green transition, with over 8,000 registered users of the online platform. It also led to the mobilisation of EEA actors to collaborate and work towards the green transition and sustainable development. The community is growing, so benefits are expected to rise.

#### *Reporting and monitoring*

**ETM** (comparative and country reports). An external-expert contract and Commission staff time to analyse and draft reports were the main cost-generating items. On the benefits side, the ETM provided regular updates on progress towards targets at EU and national level and was an important source of country-specific and thematic information. In addition to its growing visibility among education experts and policymakers, the ETM's analysis was used internally in the Commission to inform country-specific analysis and recommendations under the European Semester and to guide funding priorities for national reforms, investments and projects across various EU funds and instruments.

**DG EAC-DG EMPL EEA Taskforce.** The main cost-generating item was Commission staff time to prepare for, participate in and follow up on meetings. The Taskforce ensured coordination between DG EAC and DG EMPL units most closely involved in building the EEA. The Taskforce played an important role in monitoring and reporting progress towards the EEA (including the 2022 EEA progress report and this evaluation). There are grounds for concluding that the associated benefits outweighed the costs associated with the time invested.

#### *Communication and dissemination*

The main communication and dissemination activities related to the **EEA portal, European Education Summits, and social media campaigns**. The main cost-generating items were the external contract covering Summit costs, venue costs and other costs related to the Summit (in-person format), and the communication contract. On the benefits side, the portal attracted around 1.5 million users annually, facilitating access to funding opportunities. The summits brought together all key actors in education and training, helped raise awareness on key EEA-related topics and fostered synergies across EEA EU-level actions. The social media campaigns achieved increased engagement and their performance was cost-effective. The communication activities raised awareness and made selected information more accessible for EEA actors and to some extent for the wider education and training community.

More detailed information is provided in Annex IV *Overview of benefits and costs*.

#### **4.1.6. Coherence**

**Overall, the EEA was delivered in a coherent way.** Efforts to build the EEA under the strategic framework were fully **consistent with the priorities of the European Commission (2019-2024)** and of the **EU Strategic Agenda**<sup>30</sup>.

**Complementarity between the EEA strategic framework and other EU-level strategies and frameworks was observed**, including those directly linked to education and training (DEAP, European Higher Education Area, European Skills Agenda, European Qualifications Framework, European Research Area, EU Youth Strategy, New European Innovation Agenda) and in other fields more broadly<sup>31</sup>.

The analysis nevertheless found that the **links between the EEA and other frameworks in education and training were not always clear** for EEA actors, leading to varying interpretations of what the EEA is. It was challenging to build a common understanding of the EEA, delineating it from other complementary frameworks. This requires: (i) a better integration of policies with clearer division of responsibilities relating to skills, VET and adult learning under the EEA; and (ii) improved communication on the links between the EEA and other frameworks in education and training (such as the European Higher Education Area, EU Youth Strategy, European Skills Agenda or the New European Innovation Agenda).

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<sup>30</sup> [EU Strategic Agenda 2019-2024](#) and [2024-2029](#).

<sup>31</sup> European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, New European Innovation Agenda, European Child Guarantee, European Strategy on the Rights of the Child, Gender Equality Strategy 2020 – 2025, EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027, EU Anti-racism Action Plan, European Democracy Action Plan, European Media Literacy actions, Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life 2021-2030, EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020-2030, LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025.

**The EEA SP were found to be consistent with the priorities pursued by the MS.** MS have carried out reforms that complemented the EEA SP (given the broad and consensual nature of the SP, there was no great risk of misalignment). **Some reforms in the MS were directly inspired by the European cooperation**, such as Austria's Universities and Digital Transformation 2030 framework, reform of ECEC in Lithuania, or the Higher Education and Science Act in Croatia<sup>32</sup>.

Furthermore, there was **strong complementarity between the EEA strategic framework and initiatives by other international organisations** like the OECD, UNESCO, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Council of Europe or the World Bank. This was achieved through complementary objectives, the participation of several international organisations in the EEA WG, and active collaboration in delivering joint initiatives.

**The EEA implementation instruments were largely delivered in an internally coherent way.** Synergies were sought and exploited between instruments to ensure more impactful results. The analysis concluded that closely linking different instruments can be a useful strategy for maximising effectiveness.

For example, the **WG** had strong links with several strategic EEA initiatives, helping to shape their development and supporting their implementation. Some EU-level projects and calls also showed clear links with the working groups, for instance the link between Erasmus+ Teacher Academies and the European Innovative Teaching Award with the WG Schools. Since 2021, there has been some attempt to exploit synergies between the WG. This included holding several joint meetings (e.g. joint sessions between WG Schools – Pathways and WG Equality and Values; joint meetings between WG DELTA and WG Schools, and between WG Schools – Learning for Sustainability and WG VET and the Green Transition). The synergies established to date were mostly assessed positively by the WG' members. Nevertheless, there is still potential for more synergies between the WG. Additionally, better integration of the WG' activities and political governance is needed to maximise their contributions to the EEA SP.

Many interviewees noted a strong synergy between the **European Universities initiative** and other EEA implementation instruments. The initiative drove implementation of other EEA activities under various EEA implementation instruments, including the Blueprint for a European Degree, the European Recognition and Quality Assurance System, a possible legal status for alliances of HEIs, or the European Student Card initiative, and at the same time benefits from them. This mutual support enhances the progress and effectiveness of the initiative.

More broadly, however, the evaluation found **evidence gaps regarding the results and impacts of the key strategic EEA initiatives** and EU-level projects and calls (with some exceptions like the European Universities initiative, the Council Recommendation on automatic recognition, or the EIT HEI initiative). Efforts to assess progress with their implementation were often scattered and lacked robust assessment (partly linked to the recency of several initiatives).

**Strong complementarity was established through contributions made to the European Semester, which in turn was linked to RRF and other funding and actual reforms that were financed and implemented.** For instance, the recovery and resilience plans of MS were assessed also based on their capacity to address the CSR advanced in the framework of the Semester. The negotiations for the current cohesion policy programming period (2021-2027) were informed by the challenges and investment

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<sup>32</sup> See national case studies in annex of external evaluation support study (July 2025).



priorities in the field of education and training outlined in the European Semester 2019 country reports. MS were invited to prioritise ERDF and ESF+ investments in line with the CSR falling within the scope of the respective funds. The possibility of using EU funds is also mentioned in several strategic EEA initiatives. The ETM also included information on the use of EU funds, including EU cohesion policy funds, RRF and TSI, in the country reports.

While **EU funds** and instruments contributed to the EEA SP, the ability to assess their impact was hindered by a **lack of consistency in how these investments were monitored and evaluated**.

Moreover, there was **not always clear understanding among EEA actors about the full range of activities entailed by the EEA**. This can hinder internal coherence of the EEA and support for it.

#### 4.2. How did the EU intervention make a difference and to whom?

The primary added value recognised by EEA actors and the wider education and training community consulted was that the EEA strategic framework establishes shared priorities, enables **coordination of policy discussions and mutual learning on how to tackle common challenges across EU MS**. The contribution analysis conducted as part of the external evaluation support study suggested that the EEA strategic framework helped to maintain **political attention** on education and training policies. It offered an internally **cohesive set of implementation instruments**, in addition to those at national level, **to foster improvements in national and regional education and training systems**, and **promoted the European dimension** of education and training. **Significant EU funding was mobilised** to invest in education, skills and infrastructure in Member States, supporting the green and digital transitions, higher education reforms, inclusion and innovation<sup>33</sup>.

##### *Box 2. Examples of the added value provided by the EEA strategic framework*

- **Improvement of ECEC:**
  - ECEC reform in **Lithuania** to improve access to ECEC for all children, especially children with disabilities and those from vulnerable backgrounds. Connected to SP1 and SP3. The reform was inspired by the 2019 Council Recommendation on high-quality ECEC systems and supported by knowledge shared through the WG ECEC and through ESF+ and RRF funds.
- **Enhancing inclusion and equity:**
  - Adoption of policies in **Romania** to establish a more equitable pre-university education system, promoting student-centred practices and ensuring resources for quality education. Connected to SP1 and SP4. The policies were linked to the CSR and aligned with several Council Recommendations (including the 2022 Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success, the 2018 Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching) in strategic documents. They were supported by the TSI, and funding from RRF and ESF+ funds.
  - Reforms in **Portugal** to enhance inclusion, autonomy and curriculum flexibility by creating a structure that gives schools flexibility to adjust pupils' learning path in order to boost inclusion, also leading to a reduction in early school leaving. Connected to SP1. The reforms were informed by the work in different WG and ETM country reports, EU-level targets and CSR to track progress on policy reforms. They received technical support as well as funding from ESF+, RRF, and Erasmus+.
- **Boosting digital skills:**
  - Digital education reform in **Czechia** to modernise the content of education, equipping schools with digital technologies and supporting the digital literacy of teachers. Connected to SP5. This

<sup>33</sup> Mobilisation of EUR 75 billion under the RRF, EUR 40.4 billion under ESF+ and EUR 8.7 billion from ERDF (2021-27).

reform was informed by discussions in WG DELTA, including through peer-learning activities, and supported by RRF and Erasmus+ funding and the TSI.

- In **France**, recent school reforms to improve the digitalisation of education and digital skills have been influenced by European cooperation and EEA SP and has benefitted from RRF funding and technical support through the TSI.
- School reform in **Greece** aiming to support the development of skills and competences needed for various societal and labour market transformations, including green and digital skills, was inspired by common European priorities. Aligned with CSR and ETM findings, the reform received ESF+ and Erasmus+ funding, as well as technical support.
- **Improvement of VET:**
  - A series of reforms to improve and modernise the VET system in **Cyprus** have been influenced by European cooperation, including the Council Recommendation on VET for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience. Funding from the RRF and Just Transition Fund been instrumental in designing and implementing the national reform.
- **Strengthening higher education:**
  - The adoption of the Universities and Digital Transformation 2030 strategic framework in **Austria** aims to address universities' digitalisation issues, including learning and teaching, as well as research, supporting organisation and infrastructure in terms of digital transformation. Connected to SP4 and SP5. The framework was informed by the work in the WG HE and aligned with CSR, and received RRF and Erasmus+ funding and technical support through the TSI.
  - Reform in **Italy** to establish an institutional framework for the recognition of qualifications which has led to a simplified recognition of the qualifications process and improved international mobility. Connected to SP4. The framework was aligned with the 2018 Council Recommendation on promoting the automatic mutual recognition and benefitted from Erasmus+ funding to support the recognition of qualifications and to establish an international database of higher education entry qualifications.
  - In **Slovakia**, the adoption of the Higher Education Quality Assurance Act led to the development of new accreditation standards and a more university-led approach to quality assurance. The reform was informed by peer learning opportunities in WG HE and received technical support, as well as Erasmus+ and RRF funding.

In terms of mutual learning and knowledge-sharing, added value was most visible at the level of individual EEA actors (i.e. policymakers and practitioners, who participated in various activities under the EEA implementation instruments); and at organisational level, for those organisations that had a more systematic approach to sharing information and organisational learning. **At system level, added value was best achieved when countries were proactive in making the best combined and coordinated use of several of the EEA implementation instruments.**

**For small EU countries and those with limited resources, the added value** of participating in mutual learning activities under the EEA strategic framework was **particularly pronounced**. These countries were also more likely to see the benefit of using EU-level guidance to open up to transnational cooperation and to access EU funds to support educational reforms.

**All countries**, regardless of their size and level of advancement on certain topics, **can benefit from support under the EEA strategic framework**, including the variety of instruments and funds available, which might not yet be fully utilised.

**For EU candidate countries**, the participation in the EEA governance and peer learning supported **modernisation of their education and training systems**, facilitating alignment in view of enlargement.

The consultations carried out show that most countries acknowledge that **it was much easier for some challenges to be addressed at EU level**. For instance, challenges relating to **digitalisation and AI in education and training**, including data protection and security, can be addressed more efficiently through cooperation at EU level.

Such structured cooperation was particularly beneficial at times of crises, such as the **COVID-19 pandemic** and **Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine**<sup>34</sup>, when coordinated response and mobilisation of EU support were crucial to maintaining the continuity and quality of education and training.

**Strengthening European cooperation in education and training served as a clear indicator of added value.** The EEA strategic framework facilitated the development of advanced structural cooperation structures that extend beyond individual MS, such as the European Universities initiative or the Centres of Vocational Excellence.

*Continued added value*

**The importance of continuing European cooperation in education and training towards the EEA was widely recognised** by the EEA actors consulted.

According to the consulted actors, the **main risks associated with discontinuing European cooperation towards the EEA** are as follows.

- **For individual EEA actors: reduced opportunities for knowledge creation and sharing.** According to members of the WG and SGIB surveyed (83 %; n=130), the discontinuation of the EEA would disrupt connections between policymakers across the EU. Moreover, individual EEA actors may also have **potentially reduced mobility opportunities**.
- **For organisations: reduced opportunities for policy learning.** Organisations would also be most negatively affected by the loss of European dimension of education and training, focused on enabling advanced structures for cooperation that go beyond individual MS. The **progress towards internationalisation of organisations, especially in higher education, and its possible transfer to other areas, would be hindered**. Organisations would have **reduced project opportunities** and would face an **increased burden** in terms of time, human and financial resources to tackle education issues on their own.
- **At system-level:** loss of coordinated approaches and reduced access to EU guidance could **widen gaps between MS. Progress on pressing issues would likely slow down, in particular on digital education, quality and equity across educational levels or higher education** as these areas have advanced significantly through the activities under various EEA implementation instruments. Discontinuing the EEA would **hinder the implementation of national reforms** according to 73% (n=130) of respondents to the WG and SGIB survey. Furthermore, for half of the policymakers surveyed (n=107), ending the EEA would **negatively affect education policy development in their country**.

Discontinuing European cooperation towards the EEA would have a likely negative impact beyond the education and training field.

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<sup>34</sup> For example, 25 MS participated in a joint data collection on the inclusion of displaced children from Ukraine in education systems, organised by the Council Presidency and the European Commission. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/224f94b0-32a8-11ef-a61b-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>



### 4.3. Is the intervention still relevant?

The various analyses conducted as part of the external evaluation study<sup>35</sup> strongly indicated that the **thematic focus of the EEA strategic framework is considered highly relevant** by the EEA actors and the wider education and training community consulted. The EEA SP are **highly pertinent** and **well-aligned with national priorities and issues within national education systems**, including teacher shortages, declining basic skills, low levels of digital skills, and widening equity gaps. National representatives that were interviewed (including members of the WG) pointed out that while country-specific challenges exist, the activities under the EEA strategic framework cover a wide spectrum of issues that matter to them.

While all SP were considered relevant, with no significant differences in the perceived importance of one over another, respondents considered the EEA particularly significant in **tackling low levels of digital skills and competences**, with 72% (n=130) of respondents agreeing on this. This was followed by the contribution of the EEA to **raising the quality of education and training provision** (68%; n=130) and to **reducing inequalities** in education and training (66%; n=130). Two thirds of respondents believed that the EEA could help **address teacher shortages and the lack of attractiveness of the teaching profession**, while 53% agreed that it can help to **tackle skills mismatches** between the supply of skills and labour market demand.

The EEA remains **relevant even when faced with crises** such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine<sup>36</sup>. The EEA strategic framework mobilises EU funds and cooperation efforts to support national education systems, in line with the EEA SP on promoting quality, equity and inclusion. In fact, EEA actors further confirmed that the EEA SP are even more relevant during these crises, as collaborative efforts are instrumental in addressing immediate needs, adopting responsive strategies and upholding a consistent approach to these common challenges.

#### *The continued relevance of the EEA SP*

The EEA's **flexibility and focus on long-term, overarching priorities ensure its continued relevance**. Consulted EEA actors provided examples of issues of continued high relevance for EEA SP to emphasise, in light of the new EU priorities and persistent challenges:

- The EEA strategic framework needs to ensure continued and reinforced focus on **diversity, mental health, well-being, and resilience**, at all levels of education and training. Tackling underachievement and **building basic skills** should be further prioritised in light of decreasing performance.
- **Inclusiveness** should remain a priority for access to lifelong learning and cross-border mobility, targeting especially learners with disabilities, students from migrant backgrounds and students from a disadvantaged socio-economic background. In addition to SP1, equity should be mainstreamed as a cross-cutting objective under all EEA SP.
- More attention should be given to improving the **working conditions of teachers** and the **attractiveness of the teaching profession**.

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<sup>35</sup> See external evaluation support study for details on the analyses (July 2025).

<sup>36</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, '[Progress towards the achievement of the EEA](#) – Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions', Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022.

- Priority should be given to **sustaining the transnational cooperation** necessary to boost the EU's competitiveness globally, while increasing inclusivity and equal access for vulnerable students.
- A sustained focus on digital skills is needed, with more attention also given to **developments in AI**. Synergies between **digital education and learning for sustainability** should be further enhanced. There should also be more focus on **innovation in and through education**.

While the current SP were seen as broadly relevant, the EEA actors consulted mentioned a need to further streamline the EEA SP to address common and national challenges more effectively. The evaluation identified **three potential pathways** to ensure the EEA's continued relevance and effectiveness in its upcoming 2026-2030 cycle.

**Pathway A: Maintain the agreed broad SP with strengthened focus on relevant (re)emerging and persistent challenges under each of the current SP.**

The EEA actors consulted considered that the long-term SP should remain sufficiently broad to accommodate emerging issues. Nevertheless, respondents suggested that the strategic framework could benefit from identifying a limited set of priority issues to be addressed (e.g. basic skills, innovation, STEM, teachers, etc.).

**Pathway B: Introduce cross-cutting objectives across the current SP, and revise them to improve their clarity**

EEA actors saw the benefit of introducing cross-cutting objectives (such as lifelong learning and skills development; socio-economic, regional/territorial, and gender equality; innovation in and through education, and the global perspective) across current SP to address cross-cutting issues. These objectives can create a cohesive framework, allowing for targeted initiatives while maintaining a general framework that addresses a range of challenges.

At the same time, overarching objectives aligning with the new EU political priorities – such as boosting Europe's competitiveness, preparedness and resilience, social cohesion and fairness, and promoting democracy and EU values – could drive progress towards the SP.

**Pathway C: Consider introducing a new SP (namely, in the area of citizenship education).**

The increased importance of citizenship education was highlighted throughout the consultations, as well as in numerous recent EU documents (for example, the [EP's 2024 resolution on the Commission's 2023 Rule of Law Report](#), the [2023 Issue Paper on Citizenship Education of the WG on Equality and Values](#), the [2023 Council conclusions](#), and [Conference on the Future of Europe report](#)). The EEA actors consulted also stressed the importance of continuing efforts to improve the implementation of citizenship education, calling for the development of a common citizenship education framework and for action to enhance its role and improve its quality across MS.

## 5. WHAT ARE THE CONCLUSIONS DRAWN AND LESSONS LEARNT?

The evaluation found that the EEA in its first cycle (2021-2025) proved its strong added value by reinforcing agreement on shared priorities across the wider education and training community, boosting EU resilience in the face of crises, and mobilising support for structural reforms. The EEA strategic framework provides an overarching strategy for quality education and training in all contexts, at all levels and in all forms, underpinned by lifelong learning across borders. Since 2021, the building blocks of a comprehensive approach towards developing the EEA, serving as a solid basis for further work, have been gradually put in place. In recent years this comprehensive approach has brought together education and training actors at different levels to share experiences, cooperate and co-create the EEA. The overall assessment of European cooperation in education and training is positive.

The strategic framework will continue to be relevant beyond 2025, by offering a platform for mutual learning, knowledge creation, and policy and funding support to address common challenges and opportunities shared by education and training systems across the EU. EEA actors and the wider education and training community consider the EEA as a framework that helps Member States build high-quality and inclusive education and training systems, and which advances the European dimension of education and training by enabling structured cooperation and promoting mobility, citizenship education and EU values. At the same time, the evaluation identified some room for improvement to further boost results and impacts. Six key conclusions were formulated, each paired with lessons learnt. This chapter concludes with a table providing a structure for operationalising work under EEA SP.

### 5.1. EEA SP and EU-level targets

**There was progress on the five EEA SP, supported by European cooperation under the EEA strategic framework.** European cooperation towards the EEA contributed to an increased ownership and understanding of common priorities in education and training across EEA actors and stakeholders in the wider education and training community. MS pursued reforms that are aligned with EEA SP (see Section 5.5. below).

Coverage of both SP and education sectors was varied, with some priorities supported more than others in the first cycle (2021-2025) of the EEA strategic framework (see Table 5). Addressing persisting and (re)emerging challenges will require even greater efforts and the prioritisation of issues that have not made sufficient progress during the first cycle of implementation (see column on priority themes in Table 7, section 5.7.).

**EU-level targets and supporting indicators provided a valuable tool for both driving and tracking progress.** At the same time, EU-level targets were not fully aligned with the EEA SP (see Table 6 below), as some priorities (and related education challenges) do not lend themselves for being measured quantitatively via a single target domain. While SP1 has several targets that can be associated with it, no targets cover SP3 (teachers and trainers) or learning for sustainability (under SP5). But the Commission has developed indicator areas for both (as well as equity), with the support of the SGIB, at the request of the Council.

Trends towards meeting the EU-level targets show a mixed picture. On the plus side: we see a **trend of positive upward convergence** (since 2020) with EU-average progressing towards the achievement of several long-standing 2030 targets (early school leaving, tertiary attainment and participation in ECEC). Moreover, the 2025 target on VET has been exceeded. Despite some progress, significant efforts are needed on adult learning. There are significant warning signs of a persistent and even growing level of **underachievement in basic and digital skills**, hitting disadvantaged students especially hard.

Table 6. Progress towards EU-level targets and need for adjustments

EEA SP	EU-level target <sup>37</sup>	Current value	Progress & need for adjustment
SP1 – quality, equity, inclusion and success for all	Early childhood education and care: ‘By 2030, at least 96% of children between 3 years old and the starting age for compulsory primary education should participate in ECEC’	94.6% (UOE 2023)	<b>Progress towards achieving the target.</b> Further <b>efforts needed</b> to achieve target by 2030 <sup>38</sup> . Target remains relevant (together with the second Barcelona target for under 3-year-olds), also because increased provision of ECEC is seen as a key contributor to the European Pillar of Social Rights EU target linked to employment for 2030 <sup>39</sup> . Increase in the 2030 target value would be unrealistic.
	Early school leaving: ‘By 2030, the share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 9%’	9.3% (LFS 2024)	<b>Progress towards achieving the target.</b> Reducing early school leaving is also seen as a key contributor to the European Pillar of Social Rights EU target linked to adult participation in training for 2030 <sup>40</sup> . It is also one of the headline targets on the Social Scoreboard <sup>41</sup> . Target level could be made more ambitious.
	Basic skills: ‘By 2030, the share of underachievement in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%’	26.2% in reading 29.5% in maths 24.2% in science (PISA 2022)	<b>Falling even further short of the target. Significant effort needed</b> to fully explore the reasons and achieve the target. The target remains highly relevant for helping to improve equity and the quality of education and training and thus boosting EU competitiveness, social cohesion and fairness. More ambitious target value would be unrealistic.
	Work-based learning in VET: ‘By 2025, at least 60% of recent VET graduates should have experienced work-based learning as part of their VET programme’	65.3% (LFS, 2024)	<b>2025 target has been exceeded.</b> Decisions on VET targets will be taken as part of the forthcoming European Strategy for Vocational Education and Training.
SP2 – Lifelong learning & mobility	‘By 2025, at least 47% of adults aged 25-64 should have participated in learning during the last 12 months’ <sup>42</sup>	39.5% (AES 2022)	<b>Progressing towards achieving the target. Significant effort needed</b> to achieve the target. EU level target for 2030 (as taken forward in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan) remains relevant.
	‘By 2030, at least 60% of adults aged 25-64 should have participated in learning during the last 12 months’ ( <i>European Pillar of Social Rights</i> )		
SP 4 – Higher education	The share of 25 to 34-year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 45% by 2030	44.2% (LFS 2024)	<b>Progressing towards achieving the target.</b> Target remains relevant. Target level could be made more ambitious.
SP5 – Digital	Digital skills: ‘By 2030, the share of underachievement in digital skills should be less than 15%’	42.5% <sup>43</sup> (ICILS 2023)	<b>Significant gap</b> between the target value and the level of achievement. Given the rapidly changing technological landscape and the future needs of the labour market this target will continue to be highly relevant for contributing to the EU’s preparedness and competitiveness.

<sup>37</sup> EU-level targets as set under the 2021 EEA strategic framework resolution, see Annex II. Except the 2030 AL target.

<sup>38</sup> European Commission: *Employment and social developments in Europe 2024*, 2024.

<sup>39</sup> *Council Recommendation of 8 December 2022 on early childhood education and care: the Barcelona targets for 2030* (2022/C 484/01). European Commission, *The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan*, 2021.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Eurostat, *Social Scoreboard*.

<sup>42</sup> Target also adopted by *2021 Council Resolution on a new European agenda for adult learning 2021-2030* (Annex II).

<sup>43</sup> Share of eighth-graders were below Level 2 proficiency. IEA, ‘*IEA Releases Latest Results of the International Computer and Information Literacy Study, ICILS 2023*’, 2024.

### Lessons learnt

- While current SP were recognised as providing a good basis for further work, there is room for increasing impact by focusing work-strands on **issues related to the most pressing challenges** (see Table 5 on SP).
- Systematically tackling **cross-cutting objectives** (e.g. innovation in and through education; socio-economic, regional/territorial or gender equality, or the global perspective) across all SP could increase their impact. In addition, promoting lifelong learning and skills development might be more effective as a horizontal priority to increase its coverage across all sectors of education and training.
- Introducing a new **SP on citizenship education** would enhance the EU's democracy and preparedness, and help address calls from the European Parliament, the Council and the Conference on the Future of Europe<sup>44</sup>.

## 5.2. EEA design

**The overall design of the EEA strategic framework was found to be appropriate and fit for achieving strategic priorities.** In the absence of regulatory power, the ability of the EEA strategic framework to create impact arises from its combination of various 'soft' implementation instruments. These include: (i) setting quantified targets; (ii) providing concrete policy guidance (on the implementation of strategic EEA initiatives); (iii) fostering mutual learning and exchange; (iv) supporting transnational cooperation between policymakers, practitioners and education and training institutions; (v) mobilising relevant EU funds and instruments for national reforms; (vi) monitoring progress; and (vii) supporting the evaluation of relevant reforms.

While **EEA implementation instruments, their combination and delivery were overall positively assessed**, further **prioritisation** (of most relevant challenges to tackle and strategic EEA initiatives to implement) and a more **systematic combination of several EEA implementation instruments could lead to stronger results** and national impacts. As highlighted by some EEA actors consulted for this evaluation, the strategic framework risks becoming overly ambitious, by aiming to deliver on too many strategic EEA initiatives. Given limited resources, pursuing SP through a high number of diverse activities could result in dispersed efforts (at EU level) and constraints on implementation capacity (at national level). This could hinder effectiveness and coherence. **Prioritising through more concentrated efforts a smaller number of strategic EEA initiatives, supported by a systematic combination of other EEA implementation instruments and periodic evaluation** of their implementation, would also help fill evidence gaps, feeding into policy reviews and increasing impact (for new flagship initiatives that could be prioritised see bold in column 'strategic initiatives' in Table 7, see also section 5.3. below on filling evidence gaps).

EEA governance bodies proved suitable for supporting collaboration on SP, enabling mutual learning, and allowing flexibility in reacting to crises. At the same time, the EEA governance architecture would profit from further reform, including **clarification of the specific roles and responsibilities of governance bodies and ensuring more systematic feedback loops between them and stronger linkages with governance bodies in other relevant policy areas.**

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<sup>44</sup> [European Parliament Resolution on the implementation of citizenship education actions](#) (2022); Conference on the Future of Europe (April 2021-March 2022) [final report](#); [Council conclusions on the contribution of education and training to strengthening common European values and democratic citizenship](#) (2023).



#### Lessons learnt

- **A more focused approach with key strategic EEA initiatives supported by a systematic combination of EEA implementation instruments** could lead to stronger outcomes and impact, and open the door to **exploring targeted approaches for supporting and tracking progress**. This could include identifying under each SP one or two flagship initiatives as framework strategies setting out work and mobilisation of EEA implementation instruments.
- Further governance reforms setting out clear roles for various governance levels, ensuring a **continuous feedback loop between political steering, implementation and monitoring of progress** towards the EEA and reinforced connection with business and other relevant stakeholders (social partners, labour market and civil society actors), could foster a **whole-of-government approach** driving further development of the EEA. A reinforced governance with improved cross-sectoral linkages could also ensure synergies across education and skills and employment policies.

### 5.3. EEA reporting, monitoring and evaluation

**Reporting and monitoring under the EEA focused on assessing the effectiveness of education and training systems** using EU-level targets and supporting indicators, such as participation, attainment and quality of education. This approach helped focus attention on and drive national reforms and contributed to building a more systematic and coherent body of evidence, supported by the work of the SGIB. Tools like the ETM informed policymaking but could be further used to stimulate policy dialogue at the national level.

While the **EEA strategic framework** has developed a regular monitoring practice around the EU-level targets and a growing number of supporting indicators, it **lacks a mechanism for systematically building and collecting evidence on national reforms aimed at achieving EEA SP** (including the national implementation of strategic EEA initiatives and the impact of EU funding on progress towards EU-level targets), or on outcomes and impacts of activities carried out under EEA implementation instruments<sup>45</sup>. The **absence of systematic monitoring and evaluation** to track progress on achieving EEA SP, reforms in line with strategic EEA initiatives and the use of other EEA implementation instruments, **hinders learning about the impact of strategic EEA initiatives, and creates a knowledge gap** weakening its potential to drive evidence-informed policymaking.

Importantly, it makes it difficult to identify and support with robust evidence how national governments are following up on strategic EEA initiatives and translating them into concrete policies and practices. It also hinders the assessment of the effectiveness of other EEA implementation instruments, such as EU-level projects and calls, to support meaningful change within MS (or at EU level). While some strategic EEA initiatives have been evaluated, this is not true of all, and evaluations are not repeated regularly. Without systematic and targeted monitoring and evaluation, it is **not possible to identify implementation gaps and barriers** (such as regulatory mismatches, resource constraints or lack of political will), which could impede the realisation of the EEA SP.

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<sup>45</sup> There have been efforts to track the EEA's delivery at the output level, including the 2022 EEA progress report, the present evaluation, and internal reporting to track progress of activities under EEA implementation instruments.

### Lessons learnt

- A limited number of EU-level education and training targets should be maintained to ensure that they are effective in mobilising action. A **layered system of targets and indicators** that differentiates between thematic targets (e.g. on basic skills, including citizenship education and digital skills, as well as STEM or equity), sectoral targets (on attainment and participation in different levels of education and training) and relevant supporting indicators. As the EEA strategic framework ultimately seeks to promote progress towards the SP, each SP could be linked to indicators/targets.
- A **more comprehensive EEA monitoring and evaluation scheme**<sup>46</sup> could consist of:
  - regular impact evaluations of national reforms in line with EEA priorities or of the follow-up of flagship strategic EEA initiatives;
  - periodic impact evaluations and monitoring of the use of EU funds, with embedded focus on EEA SP;
  - light but consistent reporting by MS (e.g. national implementation plans on specific strategic EEA initiatives or overall follow-up on Union of Skills / EEA) to enhance comparability and feed mutual learning;
  - enhanced synthesis and analysis of data — with a focus on progress towards EEA SP and implementation of strategic EEA initiatives — collected from various sources and European Commission knowledge providers<sup>47</sup> to create a cohesive understanding of progress and impact.

## 5.4. EEA communication and dissemination

**Strengthening the shared understanding of the EEA strategic framework and its benefits is essential for further progress.** The success of the EEA in supporting improvements to national education and training systems, and fostering effective transnational collaboration, depends on two key factors: (i) a clear understanding by national-level actors of the benefits of cooperation and active engagement in EEA governance bodies (for stronger multiplier effects at the organisational and system levels); and (ii) ownership by these actors of the activities supported through the EEA implementation instruments. Communication activities directed at EEA actors and stakeholders at the EU-level, and their active engagement disseminating knowledge and outputs of EEA governance processes (such as WG deliverables) could therefore have a significant impact on the overall effectiveness of the EEA strategic framework.

According to the consultation carried out for this evaluation, the precise scope of the EEA remains somewhat unclear to some stakeholders, leading to varying interpretations of the EEA strategic framework and its instruments. The **lack of a comprehensive communication strategy at EU level driven by a strong EEA narrative** was a barrier to reaching a consistent and shared understanding. Enhancing the EEA's branding and visibility is therefore essential both for achieving a stronger impact at national level and for reinforcing transnational collaboration. The communication strategy could draw on activities that have proven effective such as the EEA portal, European Education Summits and other participatory events (under the Learning Lab, Jean Monnet actions or linked to a SP, such as the Digital Education Dialogues). Due to their participatory formats, such events were found to help participants gain a deeper insight into EEA activities and achievements, fostering greater visibility of strategic EEA initiatives and EU-level projects, and increasing co-creation and networking within the education and training community.

<sup>46</sup> Such comprehensive monitoring and evaluation would require additional resources and analytical capabilities.

<sup>47</sup> Such as European Semester Country Reports, Eurydice, ENESET network, independent expert network, EACEA Feedback-to-policy reports.

### Lessons learnt

- **An overarching EU education and skills communication strategy, driven by a renewed EEA narrative with a strong focus on branding** (ensuring consistent visual identity across activities under all EEA implementation instruments) with clearly defined target groups and communication channels could support the effectiveness of EEA implementation instruments. Communication to EEA actors and the wider education community should provide clarity on the overall design of the EEA strategic framework (what is included in it, how the EEA and the Union of Skills will interact, etc.).
- Communication on specific EEA implementation instruments should **systematically use the EEA brand** and its central messages to boost the visibility of the EEA. National/regional/local events that mobilise the education and training community could be encouraged to cover EEA topics, share results of the strategic EEA initiatives / EU-level projects and calls and their contribution to the EEA. The EEA portal's user-friendliness and attractiveness could be further enhanced by reviewing the search functionality, creating mobile-friendly designs and interactive content (e.g. success stories, case studies, progress dashboards, etc.).

## 5.5. Results at Member State level

European cooperation towards achieving the EEA laid an important foundation for improving education and training systems in Europe. One of the key objectives of the EEA strategic framework was to support reforms in MS. It did so by engaging EEA actors (policymakers, practitioners, education and training institutions and other education and training stakeholders) in cooperation and co-creation focusing on the EEA SP, supported by various EEA implementation instruments.

**MS pursued reforms that were aligned with and contributed to the achievement of the EEA SP. Progress varies by MS** and depends on several factors. This is partly due to the nature of European cooperation (i.e. voluntary cooperation and no regulatory power at the EU level). Box 3 shows selected examples at various education levels from ECEC, through primary and compulsory secondary to VET and higher education.

### *Box 3. Examples of national reforms that aligned with and contributed to the achievement of EEA SP*

- Adoption of the National **ECEC** Quality Framework in **Bulgaria** (as a direct follow-up of the 2019 Council Recommendation on high-quality ECEC systems, informed by WG ECEC, supported by TSI, linked to a CSR under the European Semester). The implemented reforms aligned with SP1 (improving quality, equity, inclusion, and success for all in education and training) led to improvements in quality standards in ECEC through their institutionalisation, professional development of staff and the creation of monitoring instruments.
- In **Spain**, educational reforms have made **citizenship education** a compulsory subject since 2021, contributing to SP1. The reform outlines the basic and specific competences for citizenship education in **primary and compulsory secondary** education. The Spanish EU Presidency prioritised citizenship education, and, ahead of its presidency, hosted a peer-learning activity under WG Equality and Values in 2023, followed by a discussion in the HLG. These discussions informed the 2023 Council Conclusions on the Contribution of Education and Training to Strengthening Common European Values and Democratic Citizenship, connecting the technical and the political levels of the EEA strategic framework.
- In **Germany** **inclusion of refugee learners in schools and VET and employment opportunities to teachers from Ukraine** was supported by mutual learning and policy transfer through WG, and funding opportunities (for integration efforts, language support, education infrastructure, teacher training) from ESF+, CARE and REACT-EU, as well as Erasmus+ Horizon Europe projects.
- The **higher education** reform in **Croatia** (including new legislation on governance) aims to strengthen quality assurance, accreditation, and enable joint programmes thus supporting the European dimension, internationalisation. The new legal framework directly incorporates core aspects of strategic EEA initiatives in higher education. Regular participation of Ministry representatives and experts in the EEA governance structures (WG HE) ensured policy consistency between the national reforms and strategic EEA initiatives. Significant EU funding (RRF, ESF+, Erasmus+) as well as TSI support has been mobilised to support the implementation of the reforms, and the broader digitalisation of higher education.
- The reforms in the **Netherlands** to address the pressing challenges facing teachers, aims to enhance the **competences and motivation of teachers**. Having used WG Schools as a knowledge-exchange forum, the reform is fully aligned with SP3.



The evaluation identified the following **EEA pathways of influence on national reforms**:

Contributing to agenda setting through building consensus on the shared priorities (including guiding policy development in line with Council Recommendations)	→	EEA SP are reflective of the needs of the MS, as they are agreed by consensus. <b>When specific national needs closely align</b> (become salient), political will is more likely to facilitate the translation of priorities into concrete actions.
Providing opportunities for mutual learning	→	EEA impact is greater <b>if national policymakers actively participate</b> in meetings of different governance bodies. WG and their peer-learning activities serve as crucial fora for discussing policy issues. These policymakers play a key role in disseminating the knowledge gained and promoting EEA SP within their institutions and broader national contexts. When the guidance developed and the good practices discussed are systematically shared at the national level, they inspire reforms and foster policy innovation.
Ensuring complementary use of different EEA implementation instruments	→	EEA impact is greater <b>if the EEA implementation instruments are used in synergy</b> . For instance, using strategic EEA initiatives to guide ongoing policy reforms and addressing CSR can help identify which challenges to act upon, including through a collaborative search for solutions.
Aligning use of EU funding to support national reforms on EEA SP and providing project-based funding opportunities	→	The evaluation found that <b>strong complementarity has been established between the EEA and the European Semester, which in turn is linked to the RRF, TSI, and Cohesion Policy funding</b> and the actual reforms financed, supported and implemented. The use of EU funding and technical support to design and implement national reforms is instrumental in supporting the implementation of EEA SP.

#### Lessons learnt

In the light of the evaluation findings and considering the ‘soft’ nature of the EEA strategic framework, more impact at national level could be achieved by:

- ensuring **better sharing of results by national EEA actors** participating in EEA governance with their counterparts in the respective education systems (e.g. disseminating outputs across their administrations, feeding into national reforms and the follow-up of strategic EEA initiatives) to enhance multiplier effects, and build a more solid evidence base to develop the EEA;
- further supporting MS’ reform processes and **inclusive dialogue at national level** (e.g. use annual recovery and resilience plans meetings to discuss progress, present selected EEA initiatives, bring together education authorities, practitioners, and national level stakeholder organisations; build on national ETM launch events to engage the education community);
- further supporting MS in **building a culture of evaluation** and evidence-informed policymaking on education and training at national level through the Learning Lab on Investing in Quality Education and Training.

## 5.6. Results at European level

While the EEA strategic framework aims to support MS in achieving their educational objectives, its ambition extends beyond this role. The framework creates a European dimension by facilitating a transnational exchange of experiences, mutual learning and co-creation among policymakers and other education and training stakeholders and by promoting transnational cooperation between education and training institutions and learning mobility.

While the EEA strategic framework builds on the legacy of the earlier frameworks that promoted transnational cooperation and mobility, this objective was further strengthened through efforts to **consolidate sustainable structures of European cooperation**, embodied in activities under EEA implementation instruments. Such activities include the European Universities initiative, Centres of Vocational Excellence, the European Degree and the European Student Card initiative.

**In its first cycle, the EEA demonstrated its potential to foster more sustainable and structured transnational cooperation in education and training**, by making significant progress in promoting mobility, innovation and shared standards. Several initiatives (including those on learning mobility, micro-credentials and recognition) already demonstrated significant benefits (documented by evaluations)<sup>48</sup>, such as boosting mobility, fostering more flexible learning pathways and enhancing recognition of qualifications. This facilitated smoother collaboration, especially at the level of HEIs, which would probably not have been achieved without European cooperation. These activities also contributed to new knowledge and practices being developed through transnational cooperation, and to increased mobility and the reduction of legal obstacles to further cooperation. At the same time, hurdles related to regulatory diversity and legislative alignment might impede full implementation and the broader goal of fostering transnational collaboration.

Under the first cycle of the EEA strategic framework, **work supporting the promotion of a European dimension of education and training through the work on citizenship education, learning about the EU, its values and democracy also intensified** (e.g. through WG Equality and Values and the Jean Monnet Actions - Learning EU initiatives). Platforms like the European School Education Platform which provides the Toolkit for Schools, the Digital Education Hub, EPAL communities for adult learning and VET, and the EEA portal contributed to **creating a common European knowledge space for educators and policymakers**. Frameworks like the European Quality Framework on ECEC, Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, DigComp and GreenComp advanced **shared standards**, contributing to **building a European approach to education**. Finally, initiatives such as the Erasmus+ Teacher Academies strengthened collaboration and **professional development across borders**.

The EEA strategic framework has also proven instrumental in **responding to crises**, such as COVID-19 and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, where a **coordinated EU response** helped limit disruption and ensure continuity in education and training.

#### Lessons learnt

- European cooperation in education and training is particularly strong under the SP focused on (i) reinforcing European higher education; and (ii) making lifelong learning and mobility a reality. Work towards these priorities goes beyond cooperation and includes **transnational measures**. Expanding such efforts to other areas, such as school education, digital skills and green competences, would embed an even stronger European dimension throughout the EEA. This is especially relevant when fostering common approaches to skills development.
- The EEA's ability to ensure effective coordinated response to crises like the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine illustrates its **potential to act as a unifying force** for addressing common challenges faced by European education systems. Any further reforms of the EEA governance should aim to safeguard and reinforce the EEA strategic framework's flexibility and agility to boost preparedness and resilience.

<sup>48</sup> See evaluations of individual Council Recommendations such as that on automatic recognition, or selected EU-level projects and calls such as the EIT HEI initiative, as well as the RRF or Erasmus+ evaluations.

### **5.7. EEA priorities, action strands and monitoring**

Based on the above findings of this evaluation, table 7 sets out a structure that could inform the Council's review and guide work on EEA priorities (themes to focus on), action strands (flagship strategic EEA initiatives and EU-level projects and calls) and target/indicator domains for monitoring progress.

Table 7. EEA priorities, action strands and monitoring

SP	Priority themes	Strategic initiatives (to be proposed or implementation)	Flagship projects / calls	Relevant M&E target/indicator areas
1. Quality, equity, inclusion	Basic skills & top performance; Quality and inclusiveness (diversity, gender, well-being at school)	<b>Action Plan on Basic Skills</b> with Basic Skills Guarantee; Pathways to School success, ECEC quality framework	Girls and women's participation in STEM studies and careers (also under SP5)	<b>UNDERACHIEVEMENT &amp; TOP PERFORMANCE</b> in literacy, mathematics and science <b>EQUITY</b> (learners from a disadvantaged socio-economic background with good achievement in at least one domain) STEM enrolment by sex
2. Mobility	Learning mobility & inclusiveness	Europe on the Move <b>EU Talent Magnet framework</b>	EU Talent Pool & Talent Partnerships; M. Skłodowska-Curie Action 'Choose Europe' pilot project	<b>INTERNATIONAL ATTRACTIVENESS</b> (inward degree mobile tertiary graduates from outside the EU) Learning mobility indicators (outward credit and degree mobile tertiary graduates)
3. Education profession (teachers and trainers)	Teacher shortages; Working conditions; Attractiveness of the profession; ITE, CPD	<b>EU Teachers Agenda</b> with European competence framework for academic staff	Erasmus+ Teacher Academies; European Innovative Teaching award; Erasmus+ pilot on European School Alliances	Teaching profession indicator area (online Monitor Toolbox)
4. European higher education	Reducing obstacles to cooperation; Inclusiveness and accessibility	<b>European degree:</b> Action plan on accessibility of higher education; European Quality Assurance and Recognition System; Attractive & sustainable careers in higher education, European Strategy for Universities	European Universities alliances EIT HEI initiative	Tertiary attainment Enrolment in STEM at tertiary level <i>See also learning mobility indicators under mobility above.</i>
5. Green and digital	STEM; AI; Digital skills; Enhanced links between learning for sustainability and digital skills, gender and digital equity	<b>Roadmap on the future of digital education and skills;</b> <b>STEM education strategic plan;</b> STEM competence framework, European Degree for engineers, Council Recommendation on AI in education; Council Recommendations on digital (with DigComp) and on learning for the green transition and sustainable development (with GreenComp)	Girls and women's participation in STEM studies and careers (Girls Go STEM and STEM Futures and Fellowships); STEM education centres; STEM skills foundries, STEM Tech Talent Induction, European Advanced Digital Skills Competitions, International Partnerships on STEM; Education for Climate Coalition	<b>DIGITAL SKILLS</b> (underachievement) Enrolment in <b>STEM</b> (VET & tertiary), ICT (PhD) Learning for sustainability indicators (online Monitor Toolbox)
6. Citizenship education	Teaching and learning through, about and for democracy; European dimension of teaching and promotion of EU values	<b>Competence framework for active and democratic citizenship education</b> , adapted to the EU; Guidelines to improve the supply and quality of democratic citizenship education; Strategic guide for EU VET policymakers and providers to effectively promote citizenship competences in initial VET; Guiding principles on protecting fundamental academic values	Jean Monnet actions for Schools and VET; Erasmus+ Teacher Academies; Erasmus+ School / Culture Collaborations for Civic Engagement and Critical Citizenship Education project; EU citizenship module for Erasmus; Eurydice study: Citizenship education at school	<b>CIVIC KNOWLEDGE</b> (adequate performance in civic knowledge)
HORIZONTAL PRIORITY: <b>LIFELONG LEARNING &amp; SKILLS DEVELOPMENT</b>				
	Lifelong learning mindset; Skills & qualifications; recognition	<b>European framework for the automatic recognition of study qualifications and learning periods abroad at school, VET &amp; HE levels; European Qualifications Framework;</b> Individual learning accounts; Micro-credentials; <b>Skills Portability Initiative;</b> VET strategy	European Digital Credentials for learning; Erasmus+ pilots on university-business partnerships and on a European VET diploma; European Centres of Vocational Excellence Skills Academies; Pact for Skills	ECEC participation; early school leaving; <i>/VET/</i> ; tertiary attainment; <b>adult participation in learning</b>