

Education policy: comparing EU developments and national policies

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Introduction

In the field of education, European cooperation goes back a long way (Hingel, 2001; Corbett, 2005; Pépin, 2006 and 2007; Walkenhorst, 2008; Ertl, 2003 and 2006; Lawn and Grek, 2012). However, with the launch of the Lisbon Strategy, education and training gained new momentum. Under this strategy, the ‘Education and Training 2010’ (ET, 2010) work programme established the first comprehensive framework for European cooperation in the field of education. As a result, the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) was introduced in education and training.

In 1992, the Maastricht Treaty explicitly excluded any harmonisation of education and training policy. For this reason the Lisbon Strategy has been accompanied by intergovernmental agreements. This is the case of the so-called Bologna and Copenhagen Processes (Ertl, 2006), developed in the fields of Higher Education (HE) and Vocational Education and Training (VET) respectively.

When in June 2010 the Lisbon Strategy was officially brought to a close and Europe 2020 launched in its place, the primary European instruments for coordination in the field of education were the Bologna Process, the OMC, and the Copenhagen Process. These instruments had been launched at different times, pursue different goals, and involve

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different groups of countries². In this context, Europe 2020 represents a chance to integrate these instruments and to promote their reorganisation under a new umbrella that further reinforces the strategic role of education.

This chapter is developed around two main points. On one hand, we analyse the reinforcement of European governance in education and training achieved by the integration of the ‘old’ instruments (introduced before or during the Lisbon era) and the ‘new’ ones (set up under the umbrella of Europe 2020). We highlight that, as a result, the current framework for coordination is more coherent and contains more instruments than in the Lisbon era. On the other hand, we consider the impact of this reinforced European governance at national level. Specifically, we examine, firstly, the influence on the Member States’ priorities in public spending and, secondly, the outcomes of national systems of education and training (both are assessed using national data on education).

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section investigates the main instruments of coordination. More specifically, it first examines their aims, their evolution, and the way they function. It then examines the progressive overlapping of their aims and their way of functioning. It also examines the process by which these instruments have been integrated under the umbrella of Europe 2020. This analysis shows that, in the field of education and training, European coordination has been progressively reinforced.

The second section examines the main events of 2012, and the ways in which they have reinforced European coordination in education. This includes the Council/Commission Joint Report published at the beginning of 2012, the entire cycle of the European Semester for 2012, and the most recent Communication from the Commission, which was published at the end of the year. In a time of austerity, the strategic role of education and training has been emphasised by the Commission at every available opportunity. Indeed, throughout 2012, its strategic role was stressed in every official document that (directly or indirectly) considered education and training.

2. At present Bologna involves 47 countries, the OMC 31, and Copenhagen 33.

The third section focuses on the impact of European-level coordination at national level. This is not an all-encompassing assessment, but we look at two indicators: 1) the level of public expenditure on education, and 2) the performance of national education and training systems (measured against the benchmarks set out in the framework of the OMC). This part of the analysis shows, firstly, that reinforced European coordination has not affected Member States' decisions about education policy expenditure. In fact, many Member States reduced their investment in education despite the EU's emphasis on it (both under the umbrella of Lisbon and Europe 2020). Secondly, it shows that European coordination has not improved the performance of education policy at national level and there is little evidence of convergence among participant countries. Indeed, an analysis of the benchmarks set in the framework of the OMC and Europe 2020 shows that targets in education are consistently missed. The fourth section concludes with some reflections on the apparent contradiction between the enhanced coordination at European level and the limited impact at national level.

1. European governance in education

1.1 The Bologna Process

The Bologna Process did not come into being under the auspices of the European Union, although the Commission had been involved in the drafting of the Bologna Declaration (Corbett, 2011). Subsequently, in 2004, Bologna came to include the Commission, and more significantly, was included as part of the EU's education policy (Pepin, 2011; Gornitzka, 2010). The success of the Bologna Process quickly drew the Commission's interest. Indeed, the Commission has not only become a partner in the Process, but has also tried to "Lisbonize" Bologna since 2005 (Haskel, 2009; Capano and Piattoni, 2011).

The Bologna Process began with the Sorbonne Declaration, signed in 1998 by four ministries of HE (in France, Germany, the UK and Italy). They proposed to make the national HE systems more homogeneous, through the introduction of commonly recognised degrees in HE. This became the core of the Bologna Process. The Sorbonne Declaration and, later, the Bologna Process aimed to establish a 'European Higher Education Area' (EHEA). This idea of an 'area' or 'space' is concerned

with mobility (of students, staff and knowledge) and the need for common institutional architecture (West, 2012).

The Bologna Declaration fixed six targets, to be reached by 2010, in order to build the EHEA: 1) the adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees to promote European citizens' employability and the international competitiveness of Europe's higher education system; 2) the adoption of a system based on two main cycles, undergraduate (Bachelor's degree) and graduate (Master's degree); 3) the establishment of a system of credits (such as in the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System ECTS) to promote student mobility; 4) the promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement; 5) the promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance by developing comparable criteria and methodologies; 6) promotion of the necessary European dimension in higher education, particularly in curriculum development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes, and integrated programmes of study, training and research.

Every two years, 'Ministerial Conferences' have taken place and the ministers have produced the respective communiqués: Prague (2001), Berlin (2003), Bergen (2005), London (2007), Leuven (2009) and Bucharest (2012). It has been pointed out that these communiqués have significantly expanded the number of participating states, (non-governmental or supranational) actors, and targets being pursued as part of the Process (Voegtle *et al.*, 2011). In 2001 the European Commission became a full member of the Process, while several other organisations (such as the European University Association - EUA and the European Association of Institutions in HE – EURASHE) have come to participate in the Process in an advisory role. These organisations, along with the Commission and a representative from each of the signatory states, became part of a follow-up organisation called the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG).

The number of targets included in the Process has been progressively expanded as well, for example by: 1) introducing a reference to lifelong learning in the Prague Communiqué (2001), recognising it as an

essential part of the EHEA; 2) promoting a link between EHEA and the European Research Area – ERA³ (Berlin Communiqué, 2003); 3) advancing the notion that HE be equally accessible to all, and thus introducing a ‘social dimension’ into HE; 4) increasing the attractiveness (to potential students) of the EHEA and promoting cooperation with education authorities in other parts of the world (Bergen Communiqué, 2005); 5) fostering greater employability (London Communiqué, 2007).

In 2009, the Leuven Communiqué established the priorities of the EHEA for 2020. These priorities are focused on: 1) the social dimension (equitable access to quality education and equal opportunity within HE); 2) lifelong learning; 3) employability; 4) student-centred learning and the teaching mission of higher education; 5) education, research, and innovation; 6) international openness; 7) mobility; 8) improving data collection to monitor progress; 9) developing tools for improving transparency 10) a greater attention to seeking new and diversified funding sources and methods.

After Leuven, Ministerial Conferences took place in March 2010 in Budapest and Vienna, as the ‘anniversary conferences’ to celebrate a decade of the Bologna Process. On this occasion the EHEA (as a common European framework for HE) was officially launched. The subsequent Bucharest Communiqué (2012) reiterated the need for providing quality HE for all, enhancing employability, and strengthening mobility.

1.2 The Open Method of Coordination

As mentioned above, under the umbrella of the Lisbon Strategy, the ‘Education and Training 2010’ (ET, 2010) work programme established the first solid framework for European cooperation and introduced the OMC into this field. ET 2010 defined three strategic objectives of EU policies concerning, respectively: 1) improvements to the quality and

3. The ERA is composed of all research and development programmes, activities, and policies in Europe which adopt a transnational perspective (see http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/index_en.htm).

effectiveness of education and training systems, 2) the facilitation of access to education and training; 3) the opening up of the education and training system to the wider world (Council of the European Union, 2002). Cooperation was renewed in 2009, when 'Education and Training 2020' (ET, 2020) was launched. It included updated strategic objectives for 2020, specifically: 1) making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; 2) improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; 3) promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship; 4) enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training (Council of the European Union, 2009). The use of the OMC in education is intended to improve the performance of national educational systems, and to promote convergence among them by sharing best practices. Both ET 2010 and ET 2020 fixed strategic objectives for EU policies (Council of the European Union, 2002 and 2009) and benchmarks at national level to evaluate national performance (Council of the European Union, 2003 and 2009).

The benchmarks set for ET 2020 show a degree of continuity with the previous ones, although they do include some important new features. Firstly, the new benchmarks set more ambitious targets, even though only one target for ET 2010 has been met. Secondly, there is a new focus on early childhood education. Thirdly, the focus on medium-level educational attainment (where in ET 2010, the target had been for 85% of young people to complete upper-secondary education) has been replaced by a new benchmark focusing on tertiary educational attainment (ETUI, 2011).

Furthermore, new benchmarks were added recently, while another new benchmark will be introduced in 2013. In December 2011 a new benchmark on 'learning mobility' was launched (Council of the European Union, 2011). This benchmark refers both to initial VET and HE, and requires that 20% of higher education graduates and 6% of 18-34 year-olds with an initial VET qualification have a period of study or training abroad. In May 2012 a benchmark on employability was introduced (Council of the European Union, 2012). It calls for the share of employed graduates (20-34 year-olds) having left education and training no more than three years before the reference year to be at least 82%. Finally, a further benchmark on language competences is currently being developed and will be adopted in the first semester 2013 (European Commission, 2012a). Table 1 summarises these benchmarks.

Table 1 ET 2010 and ET 2020: strategic objectives and benchmarks

ET 2010	ET 2020
Strategic objectives	
Improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the EU	Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality
Facilitating the access of all to education and training systems	Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training
Opening up education and training systems to the wider world	Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship
	Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training
Benchmarks	
By 2010, an EU average rate of no more than 10 % early school leavers should be achieved.	By 2020, the share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10%
The total number of graduates in mathematics, science and technology in the European Union should increase by at least 15 % by 2010 while at the same time the level of gender imbalance should decrease.	By 2020, at least 95% of children between 4 years old and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education.
By 2010, at least 85 % of 22 year olds in the European Union should have completed upper secondary education	By 2020, the share of 30-34 year olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40%
By 2010, the percentage of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading literacy in the European Union should have decreased by at least 17% compared to the year 2000	By 2020, the share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%
By 2010, the European Union average level of participation in Lifelong Learning, should be at least 12.5% of the adult working age population (25-64 age group)	By 2020, an average of at least 15 % of adults should participate in lifelong learning
	By 2020, an EU average of at least 20 % of higher education graduates should have had a period of higher education-related study or training (including work placements) abroad, representing a minimum of 15 ECTS credits or lasting a minimum of three months.
	By 2020, an EU average of at least 6% of 18-34-year-olds with an initial vocational education and training qualification should have had an initial VET-related study or training period (including work placements) abroad lasting a minimum of two weeks, or less if documented by Europass.
	By 2020, the share of employed graduates (20-34 year olds) having left education and training no more than three years before the reference year should be at least 82% .

Source: authors' composition.

1.3 The Copenhagen Process

The Copenhagen Declaration, on VET, was signed following a request from the European Council (2002 : 19), as part of the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy. However, the emergence of the Copenhagen Declaration is also closely connected to the Bologna Process. At the end of the 1990s, the broad consensus regarding Bologna (and its ability to promote important reforms at the national level) favoured a ‘spill-over’ from Bologna to Copenhagen. As a result, the Copenhagen Declaration referred to both the Bologna Declaration and the Lisbon Strategy⁴. On the one hand, it was expected to be the equivalent of the Bologna Process in the field of VET (Cedefop, 2010). On the other hand, it has also become one of the major elements in the implementation of the work programme ‘ET 2010’, and has strongly interacted with the OMC (Pépin, 2007).

Moreover, the launch of the Copenhagen process was also closely linked to the emergence, since the mid-90s, of the lifelong learning (LLL) strategy (see the Delors White Paper of 1993). In particular, in 2001 the Commission promoted the establishment of a ‘European area for lifelong learning’. In the view of the Commission, this area had to ensure that citizens can move ‘freely between learning settings, jobs, regions, and countries in pursuit of learning’ (European Commission, 2001: 3). In this context, it is clear that VET played an important role in supporting the LLL strategy. While the LLL strategy was not able to automatically improve mutual recognition of qualifications and competences, the Copenhagen process could promote this further.

The Copenhagen Declaration set out four priorities: 1) to reinforce the European dimension of VET in order to facilitate mobility and raise the profile of European education and training; 2) to increase transparency, information, guidance, and counselling on VET; 3) to develop instru-

4. In particular, the first page the Copenhagen Declaration, on the one hand, highlights that ‘In Barcelona, in March 2002 the European Council (...) called for further action to introduce instruments to ensure the transparency of diplomas and qualifications, including promoting action similar to the Bologna-process, but adapted to the field of vocational education and training. On the other hand, the Declaration also emphasises that ‘The European Council sets the strategic objective for the European Union to become the world’s most dynamic knowledge- based economy. The development of high quality vocational education and training is a crucial and integral part of this strategy (...)’.

ments for the mutual recognition and validation of competences and qualifications; 4) to improve VET quality assurance.

Similarly to the Bologna Process, since the ‘Copenhagen Declaration’, the Commission, the ministers responsible for VET in participating countries, and the European social partners have met every two years to evaluate progress and to rearrange short-term priorities or define new ones. Also resembling the Bologna Process, these meetings have developed different ‘*communiqués*’. These *communiqués* have progressively expanded the objectives of the Process. In 2004, the Maastricht Communiqué reaffirmed the importance of VET. Furthermore, in the Maastricht Communiqué the ministers responsible for VET, the Commission, and the European social partners agreed for the first time to use common instruments, references, and principles to develop the competences of teachers and trainers, and to increase investment in VET. At the same time, the Maastricht Communiqué fixed the aim of making VET more flexible in order to define individual pathways, and address the needs of groups at risk.

Two years later, the Helsinki Communiqué confirmed the priorities fixed in Maastricht. It also emphasised the need to improve the quality and attractiveness (for potential students) of VET, as well as the need for good governance. Furthermore, this second review emphasised the importance of completing and implementing common instruments, references and principles (Cedefop, 2007).

In 2008, the Bordeaux Communiqué also reiterated the importance of implementing common European instruments. Finally, in 2010, the Bruges Communiqué provided long-term strategic objectives for the period 2011-2020. These objectives aim to respond to current challenges and to take into account the principles established during the 8 years of the Copenhagen Process. As a result of the Bruges Communiqué, the Copenhagen Process became part of the ET 2020 work programme and will contribute to achieving the education targets of the Europe 2020 strategy. This is in line with the previous Communication from the Commission entitled ‘A new impetus for European cooperation in Vocational Education and Training to support the Europe 2020 strategy’. This Communication argues that VET should contribute to excellence in lifelong learning systems and to achieving the objective fixed by the Europe 2020 strategy (European Commission, 2010a).

Since the start of the Copenhagen Process, four different instruments have been established: 1) the European Qualification Framework (EQF) that helps compare qualifications throughout Europe to support educational and job mobility - at present, the Member States are defining their own National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) to connect with the EQF; 2) the European Credit System for VET (ECVET) that helps to recognise, validate, and accumulate work-related knowledge and skills abroad; 3) the European Quality Assurance Framework for VET (EQUAVET) that helps Member States to evaluate, improve, and develop the quality of their VET systems; 4) EUROPASS, a collection of documents to support job mobility (Cedefop 2007, 2010).

1.4 Europe 2020 and the European Semester

Europe 2020 has been organised around three integrated pillars (macro-economic surveillance, thematic coordination, and fiscal surveillance under the Stability and Growth Pact), and three priorities (smart growth, sustainable growth, and inclusive growth). In June 2010, the European Council established 'five EU headline targets' to be translated into national targets. One of them concerns education, and highlights the need to improve education levels by reducing school drop-out rates to less than 10% and by increasing to 40% the share of 30 to 34-year-olds having completed tertiary education or an equivalent. As part of Europe 2020, the Council (October 2010) also adopted ten 'Integrated Guidelines'. One of them (Guideline 9) explicitly considers education and training, referring to the need for 'improving the performance of education and training systems at all levels and increasing participation in tertiary education'. Other Guidelines involve this sector as an essential part of active labour market policies. For instance, Guideline 8 calls for 'developing a skilled workforce responding to labour market needs, [as well as] promoting job quality and lifelong learning' (Frazer *et al.*, 2010; Vanhercke, 2011).

The Europe 2020 strategy also introduces seven flagship initiatives, which should promote progress in the priority themes and incorporate a wide range of action at international, European, and national level. Two flagship initiatives involve education policies, specifically 'Youth on the move' and 'An agenda for new skills and jobs'. The aim of 'Youth on the move' is to respond to the challenges that young people face and to

help them succeed in the knowledge economy. It is a comprehensive package of policy initiatives on education and employment involving young people in Europe. This framework agenda announces key new actions, reinforces existing activities, and ensures the implementation of others. 'An agenda for new skills and jobs' includes a series of actions intended to improve flexibility and security in the labour market, to equip people with the right skills, to ensure job quality and better working conditions, and to improve the conditions for job creation. This flagship initiative is implemented in close connection with the initiative (launched in 2008) 'New skills for new jobs' through which Member States should improve their ability to anticipate the skill-needs of European citizens and employers.

In order to enhance socioeconomic governance, the Council has introduced the 'European Semester', which aims to improve economic policy coordination and to help strengthen budgetary discipline, macroeconomic stability, and growth. The Semester starts each year in March, when the Council, on the basis of the European Commission's 'Annual Growth Survey' (AGS), identifies the main economic challenges, and gives advice about policies.

Table 2 **The governance architecture of education in Europe 2020**

EU priorities	(10) Integrated Guidelines	N.8 Developing a skilled workforce responding to labour market needs, promoting job quality and lifelong learning N. 9. Improving the performance of education and training systems at all levels and increasing participation in tertiary education
	(5) Headline targets	The share of early school leavers should be under 10%, and at least 40% of 30 to 34-year-olds should have completed a tertiary or equivalent education
EU-level tools	(7) Flagships	'Youth on the move'; 'An agenda for new skills and jobs'
	European Semester	Annual Growth Survey; Country-Specific Recommendations
National level tools	National Reform Programmes (NRPs)	Include national targets on 'early school leavers' and 'tertiary education'

Source: our own table.

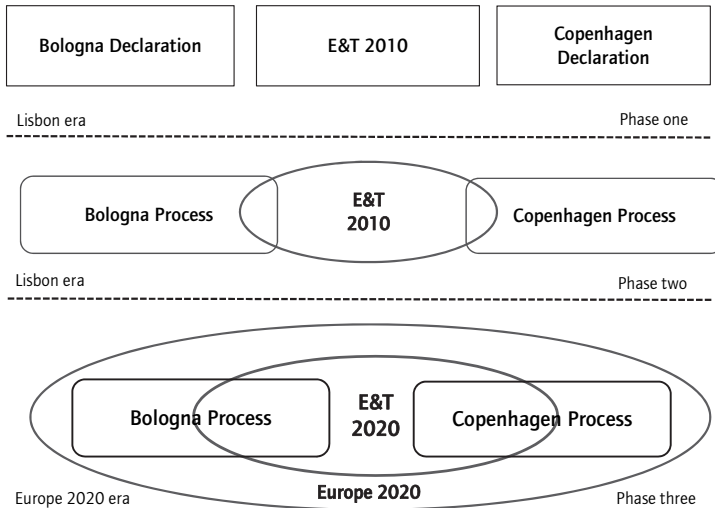
On the basis of this European advice, during April, Member States review their medium-term budgetary strategies and prepare their National Reform Programmes (NRPs), which set out the actions they will undertake, and fix their national headline targets. Afterwards, in June and in July, the European Commission and the Council provide opinions and recommendations to countries before they settle their budget for the following year (Frazer *et al.*, 2010; Vanhercke, 2011). All the instruments introduced by Europe 2020 (directly and indirectly) concern education and training. This sector is increasingly at the centre of the strategy for economic growth and social cohesion. The main instruments for education and training in Europe 2020 are summarised in table 2.

1.5 The integration of European governance instruments

The European instruments of governance in education were developed at different times, pursue different targets, and involve different numbers of countries. For this reason, these instruments tend to be very fragmented, and the launch of Europe 2020 represented a chance to promote their integration.

Since their inception there has been a partial convergence of the Bologna and Copenhagen Processes, and the OMC. This convergence has been progressively reinforced, with their ends and means increasingly overlapping, before finally being integrated and incorporated into Europe 2020. From this point of view, the evolution of the soft policy instruments in education can be divided into three main phases (figure 1). These instruments were launched separately (phase one). With the implementation of ET 2010 they slowly began to overlap (phase two). In the early stages, this was more significant for the Copenhagen Process than with Bologna. With the end of the Lisbon Strategy (June 2010), the targets and the means employed by these instruments were incorporated into the new Europe 2020 strategy (phase three), which further reinforced the strategic role of education.

Figure 1 The evolution of the soft policy instruments



Source: our own figure.

The overlap of these instruments can be considered from four different angles. Firstly, we can consider the complementarity between Europe 2020 and ET 2020. As we saw before, Europe 2020 defines five 'headline targets' to be translated into national targets. One of them emphasises education and is fully consistent with two of the ET 2020 benchmarks. Europe 2020 aims to improve education levels by reducing school drop-out rates to less than 10% and by increasing to 40% the share of 30-34 year olds having completed tertiary or equivalent education. These are two of the eight benchmarks of ET 2020.

Secondly, we can consider the features of the last Joint Report (Council and European Commission 2012a) and the related accompanying documents (European Commission, 2011a). This document is published every two to years to evaluate the implementation of the ET work programme. The 2012 Joint Report is clearly an attempt to incorporate ET 2020 into Europe 2020 and the European Semester. Indeed, the structure of the document, for instance, is organised on the basis of the AGS and Europe 2020 priorities rather than those of ET 2020. Considerations as to the contribution of education and training in the context of Europe 2020,

investment in education and training (in line with the priority of the AGS), and the headline targets for education (defined under the umbrella of Europe 2020) are emphasised at the very beginning of these documents.

Thirdly, all of these European governance instruments overlap, not only in the targets that they set, but also in the means by which they pursue them. This is particularly evident with Bologna and ET 2010. Since 2001, the Bologna Process has been linked to lifelong learning. Indeed, the Prague Communiqué recognised it as an essential part of the EHEA. Likewise, ET 2010 fixed a benchmark on lifelong learning. Similarly, in 2009 the Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué made revisions to the goals of the Bologna Process. They emphasised the social dimension of HE, employability, improving student learning and teaching activities, internationalisation, as well as the development of research and innovation through the promotion of PhDs. They also reemphasised mobility by requiring that ‘in 2020, at least 20% of those graduating in the EHEA should have had a study or training period abroad’ (Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, 2009: 4). The Communiqué highlighted the need to define ‘the indicators used for measuring and monitoring mobility and the social dimension in conjunction with data collection’ (6). Indicators and data collection are core elements of the OMC⁵, where measuring and monitoring are crucial to its functioning.

The same may be said of the Copenhagen Process. As the Cedefop (2010) points out, from 2005, the special Copenhagen working groups became part of a broader process of coordination within the framework of ET 2010. From that moment, the Copenhagen Process has overlapped with ET 2010 and, as a consequence, with the OMC. This has resulted, first of all, in a change in goals: while at the beginning its goals mainly concerned qualifications, attempting to replicate the Bologna Process in the field of VET, they came to include goals more in keeping with the Lisbon

5. In line with the definition of the Presidency Conclusions of the Lisbon European Council (23-24 March 2000), the OMC is composed of four main components: 1) fixing guidelines for the Union combined with specific timetables for achieving the goals which they set in the short, medium, and long terms; 2) establishing, where appropriate, quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks against the best in the world that are tailored to the needs of different Member States and sectors as a means of comparing best practice; 3) translating these European guidelines into national and regional policies by setting specific targets and adopting measures, taking into account national and regional differences; 4) periodic monitoring, evaluation, and peer review organised as mutual learning processes.

Strategy. The main targets were linked to the Lisbon Strategy and established within the framework of the Copenhagen Process: improving the attractiveness of VET as a learning option, encouraging investment in VET: promoting mobility, and improving quality. Furthermore, the overlap between Copenhagen and ET 2010 has also changed the way in which the Process works. As we have seen, the Copenhagen working groups have been absorbed into a broader framework, and now the Copenhagen Process can be considered as ‘an example of the Open Method of Coordination’ (Cedefop, 2010: 17).

Finally, the Bologna and Copenhagen Processes share a handful of specific tools, such as the National Qualification Framework (NQF). This is a tool intended to coordinate qualifications in order to promote international comparability and transferability. This tool was introduced in HE through the Bologna Process. However, in 2008 the formal adoption (in the framework of the Copenhagen Process) of the European Qualification Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning encourages the development of ‘comprehensive NQFs’ able to include all levels and types of education, so that Member States develop only one framework able to include both HE and VET. At present, the Member States are working to develop their NQFs and to link them with the EQF. Furthermore, these NQFs are now monitored by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), an agency that supports the Commission in promoting and developing vocational and continuing training at the European level. Crucially, this agency is closely involved in the monitoring of the Copenhagen Process as well, and by the implementation of NQFs is promoting further overlap between Bologna and Copenhagen.

2. 2012: the main events of reinforcing European cooperation

2.1 The Joint Council/Commission progress reports on education and training

As we saw in section 1.5, under the framework of OMC, every two years a Council/Commission Joint Report is published in order to evaluate the progress being made on the implementation of the ET work

programme. The last Joint Report proposed priorities for the period 2012-2014 (Council of the European Union and European Commission, 2012a). In the framework of the strategic objectives fixed in ET 2020 (see table 1), the Joint Report has to identify priority areas for the biennial work cycle. These priorities are summarised in table 3.

Table 3 **Priority areas for European cooperation in education and training 2012-2014**

Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality
Lifelong learning strategies Work together to complete the development of comprehensive national lifelong learning strategies covering all levels from early childhood education through to adult learning, and focusing on partnerships with stakeholders, competence development of low-skilled adults, measures to extend access to lifelong learning and integrate lifelong learning services (guidance, validation etc.). In particular, implement the Council Resolution of 28 November 2011 on a renewed agenda for adult learning
European reference tools Work together to link national qualifications frameworks to the EQF, establish comprehensive national arrangements to validate learning outcomes; create links between qualification frameworks, validation arrangements, quality assurance and systems for credit accumulation and transfer (EQAVET, ECVET, ECTS); cooperate in projecting demand for skills and better matching of such demand and the provision of learning opportunities (Skills Panorama, European Classification of Skills/Competences, Qualifications and Occupations-ESCO); improve the visibility, dissemination and use of European reference tools in order to accelerate their implementation.
Learning mobility Promote learning mobility for all learners, within Europe and worldwide, at all levels of education and training, focusing on information and guidance, the quality of learning mobility, removing barriers to mobility and promoting teacher mobility. In particular, implement the Council Recommendation 'Youth on the move – promoting the learning mobility of young people'.
Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training
Basic skills (literacy, mathematics, science and technology), languages Capitalise on evidence on reading literacy, including the report of the High Level Expert Group on Literacy, to raise literacy levels among school students and adults and to reduce the proportion of low-performing 15 year olds in reading. Address the literacy challenges of using a variety of media, including digital, for all. Exploit and develop the results of cooperation to tackle low performance in mathematics and science at school; pursue work to improve language competences, in particular to support learning mobility and employability.
Professional development of teachers, trainers, and school leaders Improve the quality of teaching staff, as this is a key determinant of quality outcomes, focus on the quality of teachers, attracting and selecting the best candidates into teaching, quality in continuing professional development, developing teacher competences, and reinforcing school leadership.

Modernising higher education and increasing tertiary attainment levels

Work together to increase the number of graduates, including extending alternative pathways and developing tertiary VET; improving the quality and relevance of higher education; raising the quality of higher education through mobility and cross-border cooperation; strengthening the links between higher education, research, and innovation to promote excellence and regional development; improving governance and funding.

Attractiveness and relevance of VET

Work together, in line with the Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the period 2011-2020, in particular on making initial VET more attractive, promoting excellence and the labour market relevance of VET, implementing quality assurance mechanisms, and improving the quality of teachers, trainers, and other VET professionals.

Efficient funding and evaluation

Examine funding mechanisms and evaluation systems, with a view to improving quality, including targeted support to disadvantaged citizens and the development of efficient and equitable tools aimed at mobilising private investment in post-secondary education and training.

Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship

Early school leaving

Help Member States implement the 2011 Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving and their national strategies on early school leaving in general education and VET.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Work together, in line with the 2011 Council conclusions on early childhood education and care, to provide widespread equitable access to ECEC while raising the quality of provision; promoting integrated approaches, the professional development of ECEC staff and parental support; developing adequate curricula, and programmes and funding models.

Equity and diversity

Reinforce mutual learning on effective ways to raise educational achievement in an increasingly diverse society, in particular by implementing inclusive educational approaches which allow learners from a wide range of backgrounds and educational needs, including migrants, Roma and students with special needs, to achieve their full potential; enhance learning opportunities for older adults and intergenerational learning.

Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training

Partnerships with business, research, civil society

Develop effective and innovative forms of networking, cooperation, and partnership between education and training providers and a broad range of stakeholders including, social partners, business organisations, research institutions, and civil society organisations. Support networks for schools, universities, and other education and training providers to promote new methods of organising learning (including Open Educational Resources), building capacity, and developing them as learning organisations.

Transversal key competences, entrepreneurship education, e-literacy, media literacy, innovative learning environments

Work together to promote the acquisition of the key competences identified in the 2006 Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, including digital competences, and how ICT and entrepreneurship can enhance innovation in education and training, promoting creative learning environments and heightening cultural awareness, expression and media literacy.

Source: Council and European Commission (2012a).

Two Commission Staff Working Documents focusing on the condition of individual countries and on key thematic areas accompany the Joint Report. These documents are prepared mainly on the basis of the National Reports provided by Member States. They contain a summary of the work accomplished at European and national level, and an in-depth cross-country analysis of the progress achieved in a number of key policy areas (European Commission, 2011a and 2011c).

2.2 Education in the European semester

On 10 November 2011, the Commission published the Annual Growth Survey 2012 (European Commission, 2011b). As in the previous AGS 2011 (European Commission, 2010b) and in the following AGS 2013 (European Commission, 2012b), education is defined as strategic for growth and employment, while playing a key role in several other priority areas as well. The AGS for 2012 fixed five priorities: 1) pursuing differentiated growth-friendly fiscal consolidation; 2) restoring normal lending to the economy; 3) promoting growth and competitiveness for today and tomorrow; 4) tackling unemployment and the social consequences of the crisis; 5) modernising public administration.

In the framework of Priority 1, the AGS 2012 reaffirms the need to prioritise ‘growth-friendly’ expenditure. This means that Member States should keep public expenditure growth below the projected medium-term GDP growth rate, while prioritising expenditure in sectors such as education, research, innovation, and energy. Furthermore, in the framework of Priority 1, the AGS 2012 emphasises the need to reinforce or maintain active labour market policies (i.e. training schemes for the unemployed) and employment services.

Education policy also underlies Priority 4, in which the Commission emphasises the need to promote youth employment. In the view of the Commission, particular attention should be given to supporting actions for young people who are not in employment, education, or training; adapting education and training systems in order to reflect labour market conditions and skill demands; ensuring the quality of university programmes and considering measures to support higher education (i.e. introduction of tuition fees for tertiary education, accompanied by

student loan and scholarship schemes, or other sources of funding, such as using public funds in order to leverage private investments).

The draft 'Joint Employment Report' that accompanies the AGS 2012 contains a short evaluation of the reforms and actions undertaken by the Member States on the basis of their NRPs 2011 (European Commission, 2011d). This evaluation considers the areas in which the Member States had to undertake policy reforms (European Council, 2011: 3) under the guidelines for employment policies. These areas include 'investing in education and training', which is linked to Integrated Guidelines 8 and 9 (see table 2). The Joint Employment Reports examined measures adopted at national level to reform education and training. These were targeted mainly at young people, the unemployed, and immigrants. Other reforms aimed to help education systems anticipate needs for skills, or to increase the quality and accessibility of vocational training. Furthermore, the 16 Member States that received specific recommendations regarding investments and reforms in education and training have taken a number of policy initiatives.

In April 2012, the Member States delivered their second NRPs, in which they largely re-confirmed the national targets fixed in 2011. On 30 May 2012, the Commission addressed the specific recommendations (18 Member States had received recommendations on education) and the document 'Action for stability, growth and jobs' (European Commission, 2012c) summarises the general view of the Commission. On the subject of education, this document: 1) reaffirms the need to preserve public investment in research and innovation, education, and energy (in line with Priority 1 of the AGS 2012); 2) confirms the need to do more to link education policy with the needs of the labour market (in line with Priority 3 of the AGS 2012); 3) confirms the need to fight unemployment, reduce early school leaving, improve training and vocational training, and to promote apprenticeship programmes (in line with the Priority 4 of the AGS 2012).

2.3 The communication from the Commission

In November 2012 the European Commission prepared the communication 'Rethinking education: investing in skills for better socio-

economic outcomes' (European Commission, 2012d). In this communication, the European Commission reiterated that education and skills represent a 'core strategic asset for growth'. The emphasis of the communication is on 'delivering the right skills for employment, increasing the efficiency and inclusiveness of our education and training institutions, and on working collaboratively with all relevant stakeholders' (2). Therein, the Commission identifies a number of strategic priorities linked to the Country-Specific Recommendations related to the AGS 2012. Among these priorities, particular attention is given to the fight against youth unemployment, covering four areas essential to address the issue, and in which Member States should increase their efforts. These areas are: 1) developing world-class vocational education and training to raise the quality of vocational skills; 2) promoting work-based learning, including quality traineeships, apprenticeships, and dual learning models to help the transition from learning to work; 3) promoting partnerships between public and private institutions (to ensure appropriate curricula and skills provision); 4) promoting mobility through the proposed Erasmus for All programme.

These four issues are closely connected to the 'Youth Employment Package', a bundle of measures to address youth unemployment and facilitate school-to-work transition, aiming to give young people jobs, education and training. The Commission officially launched this package in December 2012.

The communication is complemented by seven accompanying documents. The first accompanying document (Education and Training Monitor 2012) gives an overview of the current supply of skills and progress towards the Europe 2020 targets. This report is based on the analysis of 12 indicators linked to Europe 2020, ET 2020, and skill supply (see table 4). The second document contains an individual country analysis that reflects the structure of the 'Rethinking Education' Communication, and complements the cross-country analysis presented in the Education and Training Monitor. The third document covers 'language competences for employability, mobility, and growth'. As a reply to the Council, in this document the Commission proposes the first ever benchmark on language competence.

Table 4 Indicators used in the 'Education and Training Monitor 2012'

1. Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)	Europe 2020 targets	
2. Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)		
3. Participation in early childhood education (4 years old - year before start of compulsory primary)	ET 2020 Benchmarks	
4. Employment rate of graduates (age 20-34) having left education and training no more than 3 years before reference year		
5. Adult participation in lifelong learning (age 25-64)	Other indicators	
6. Basic skills Low achievers (15 year-olds; Level 1 or lower in PISA study)		Reading
		Mathematics
		Science
7. ICT skills		% of pupils in 4 th grade using computers at school
		% of individuals aged 16-74 with high computer skills
8. Entrepreneurship		% of 18-64 year-old population who are believed to have the required skills and knowledge to start a business
9. Languages		Average number of foreign languages learned per pupil at ISCED2
		% of students reaching B1 level or higher in their first foreign language at the end of lower secondary school
10a. Tertiary graduates by field. Graduate (ISCED 5-6) in a specific field, as % of all fields		Education and training
	Humanities and art	
	Social science, business, and law of which: business and administration	
	Maths, science, and technology	
	Agriculture and veterinary field	
	Health and welfare	
	Services	
10b. MST graduates	Number of maths, science and technology graduates per 1000 young people (age 20-29)	
11. Skills for future labour markets Projected change in employment 2010-2020 in %	High qualification	
	Medium qualification	
	Low qualification	
12. Investment in education and training (public spending on education, % of GDP)		

Source: our table, based on European Commission (2012a: 6).

This proposed benchmark is based on a dual approach that combines ‘the outcomes of learning in the first foreign language’ and ‘the quantity of pupils learning a second foreign language’⁶. The fourth accompanying document examines lifelong learning. Specifically, it looks at the partnership between several stakeholders and providers of lifelong learning under the premise that cooperation can promote synergies particularly relevant in times of austerity. The fifth document is focused on an assessment of the key competences of initial VET. The sixth and seventh examine respectively the field of VET and the role of the teaching professions in learning outcomes.

3. The governance of education: what impact at national level?

The impact of European soft-governance (and in particular of the OMC) has been widely explored in the relevant literature. The literature on the OMC in particular has highlighted the possibility of assessing these impacts from different points of view. One of these has to do with policy learning (de la Porte and Pochet, 2002 and 2012; Trubek and Trubek, 2005). The OMC is intended to focus peer pressure on poor performers and encourage Member States to change their national policies (Borrás and Jacobsson, 2004; Scott and Trubek, 2002). In such a context, learning may lead to both ‘substantive policy change’ (which concerns changes in the national thinking on policy, changes in the national policy agenda, or changes in specific national policies) and ‘procedural changes’ (such as the reinforcement of horizontal coordination and cross-sectoral integration between interdependent policy fields, or the enhancing of vertical coordination between levels of governance) (Zeitlin, 2009 and 2010).

Though not claiming to be comprehensive, this section assesses the impact of European coordination on national policy choices and on the policy outcomes, based on quantitative data set out in the framework of

6. In particular the benchmark requires that ‘by 2020, at least 50% of 15 year-olds should attain the level of independent user of a first foreign language (compared to the present 42 %)’; and ‘by 2020, at least 75% of pupils in lower secondary education should study at least two foreign languages (compared to the present 61%)’.

OMC education. Even if the literature has shown that the evaluation of the soft governance instruments, to be comprehensive, should be based on broad criteria, the ‘rough’ analysis developed herein is useful to catch relevant trends. In particular, we look at two indicators: 1) general government expenditure (GGE) on education (in order to evaluate the Member States’ ability to follow the Commission’s advice on supporting ‘growth-friendly expenditure’) and 2) the benchmarks set in the framework of ET 2010 (to evaluate the ability of the European governance to promote convergence between the performances of education systems).

As to the first point, Member States have not, by and large, increased public investment in education and training. In the following we refer to two indicators: GGE on education as a share of GDP and the GGE on education as a share of total GGE⁷. As far as the first indicator is concerned, between 2004 and 2010 education expenditure increased slightly. At the aggregate level, Member States’ expenditure on education rose from 5.2% in 2004 to 5.5% in 2010. Only seven countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Hungary, Portugal, Romania, and Sweden) reduced their GGE on education as a proportion of GDP during the period under scrutiny. One country (Poland) in 2010 spent as much as in 2004, while the other countries spent more in 2010 than in 2004, as a percentage of GDP. In each case the changes in spending were not radical. In Bulgaria the reduction was 0.3% of GDP, whereas for Hungary, Portugal, and Romania it was 0.2% of GDP, and 0.1% in Greece, Italy, and Sweden (see table 5).

This apparent increase must be qualified in the light of the impact of the financial and economic crises. GGE on education as a percentage of GDP increased in countries that suffered consecutive years of recession (between 2007 and 2010 there was an increase from 5.1% to 5.5%, while from 2004 to 2007 there was a decrease from 5.2% to 5.1%). In 2009 nearly all Member States were in a recession (i.e. their GDP decreased), which clearly affected education expenditure in absolute terms as well. As we noted (European Commission, 2012a: 11) one third of Member States have been able to maintain the same level of real expenditure

7. ‘General government expenditure (GGE) on education – the total public expenditure from all levels of government – can be seen as the commitment that a country makes to the development of skills and competences’ (European Commission, 2012a: 10).

from 2007 onwards. However, several countries have experienced a drop in real public expenditure on education for one or several consecutive years. This occurred over three consecutive years in Italy (2008-2010) and Hungary (2007-2009) and for two consecutive years (2009 and 2010) in Bulgaria, Greece, Latvia, and Romania.

Official documents from the Commission stress that many Member States have either maintained or decreased public investment in education and training by reducing the number of teachers, freezing the salaries of the teachers, merging and reorganising institutions, increasing class sizes, or cutting expenditure on infrastructure (Council of the European Union and European Commission, 2012a and 2012b).

Many Member States have not been able to follow through on European advice (launched in the framework of Lisbon and re-affirmed by Europe 2020) to invest in this area. In this perspective, it is significant to consider GGE on education calculated as a percentage of total GGE in each Member State (see table 6). This measure is a good indication of the extent to which governments prioritise education as compared to other policy measures (in the context of shrinking budgets). This data shows that among EU members, investment in education has fallen by 0.3% of government spending between 2004 (when it was 11.1%) and 2010 (10.8%). Ten countries (Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta, Austria, Slovakia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom) have increased their spending on education as a percentage of government expenditure. Denmark remains at the same level as in 2004 (although spending had been significantly reduced between 2007 and 2009). The remaining countries have not been able to protect spending on education, and in some cases the reduction in investment has been substantial. This has been the case in Ireland (-4.9%), Latvia (-3.1%), Portugal and Romania (-2.5%), Lithuania (-2.4%), and Estonia (-1.8%).

Table 5 **General government expenditure on education as % of GDP**

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
EU 27 countries	5.2	5.2	5.2	5.1	5.2	5.5	5.5
Belgium	5.8	5.9	5.8	5.8	6.0	6.3	6.3
Bulgaria	4.1	4.3	3.7	3.8	4.1	4.3	3.8
Czech Republic	4.6	4.6	4.7	4.5	4.5	4.8	4.8
Denmark	7.6	7.3	7.0	6.7	6.9	8.0	8.1
Germany	4.1	4.1	4.0	3.9	4.0	4.3	4.3
Estonia	6.3	6.0	6.0	5.9	6.7	7.1	6.8
Ireland	4.6	4.6	4.7	4.9	5.4	6.1	6.0
Greece	3.9	3.9	3.9	3.9	4.1	4.1	3.8
Spain	4.4	4.3	4.3	4.4	4.6	5.1	4.9
France	5.8	5.8	5.7	5.5	5.6	6.0	6.0
Italy	4.6	4.7	4.6	4.6	4.4	4.6	4.5
Cyprus	6.5	6.4	6.4	6.3	6.8	7.2	7.5
Latvia	6.1	5.6	6.0	5.8	6.6	6.8	6.2
Lithuania	5.8	5.4	5.3	5.2	5.8	6.8	6.1
Luxembourg	4.9	4.7	4.4	4.2	4.4	5.0	5.1
Hungary	5.8	5.8	5.8	5.4	5.2	5.3	5.6
Malta	5.8	5.7	5.7	5.4	5.3	5.5	5.8
Netherlands	5.6	5.5	5.3	5.3	5.5	6.0	5.9
Austria	5.3	5.2	5.2	5.2	5.4	5.8	5.7
Poland	5.7	6.1	6.0	5.7	5.7	5.6	5.7
Portugal	6.7	6.8	6.6	6.1	6.2	5.8	6.5
Romania	3.6	3.6	4.1	3.9	4.5	4.1	3.4
Slovenia	6.5	6.6	6.4	5.9	6.1	6.5	6.6
Slovakia	3.9	4.0	3.7	3.9	3.5	4.3	4.5
Finland	6.3	6.2	6.0	5.7	5.9	6.6	6.5
Sweden	7.1	7.0	6.9	6.7	6.8	7.2	7.0
United Kingdom	5.9	6.2	6.1	6.2	6.4	7.0	7.0

Source: European Commission (2012a).

Table 6 General government expenditure on education as % of total GGE

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
EU 27 countries	11.1	11.2	11.1	11.1	11.0	10.8	10.8
Belgium	11.7	11.4	12.0	12.0	11.9	11.8	11.8
Bulgaria	10.6	11.5	10.9	9.5	10.8	10.7	10.0
Czech Republic	10.7	10.7	11.3	10.9	10.9	10.8	10.9
Denmark	14.0	13.9	13.7	13.3	13.4	13.7	14.0
Germany	8.7	8.7	8.9	9.0	9.0	9.0	9.0
Estonia	18.6	17.8	17.8	17.3	16.9	15.7	16.8
Ireland	13.9	13.7	13.6	13.3	12.7	12.5	9.0
Greece	8.5	8.8	8.6	8.1	8.0	7.6	7.5
Spain	11.3	11.1	11.2	11.2	11.1	10.9	10.7
France	10.9	10.8	10.8	10.5	10.5	10.6	10.6
Italy	9.6	9.7	9.4	9.6	9.0	8.9	8.9
Cyprus	15.3	14.8	15.0	15.3	16.1	15.7	16.1
Latvia	17.0	15.7	15.7	16.3	16.8	15.3	13.9
Lithuania	17.3	16.2	15.9	14.9	15.5	15.6	14.9
Luxembourg	11.5	11.4	11.4	11.7	11.8	11.7	12.1
Hungary	11.8	11.7	11.1	10.7	10.7	10.4	11.3
Malta	12.8	12.7	12.8	12.7	12.1	12.7	13.5
Netherlands	12.0	12.2	11.7	11.8	11.8	11.6	11.5
Austria	9.8	10.5	10.7	10.6	10.9	10.9	10.8
Poland	13.4	14.0	13.6	13.4	13.3	12.6	12.5
Portugal	15.1	15.0	14.9	13.8	13.9	11.6	12.6
Romania	10.8	10.7	11.6	10.3	11.4	9.9	8.3
Slovenia	14.1	14.7	14.3	14.0	13.8	13.3	13.3
Slovakia	10.5	10.4	10.2	11.3	10.0	10.4	11.2
Finland	12.5	12.2	12.2	12.1	11.9	11.7	11.8
Sweden	13.1	13.0	13.1	13.1	13.2	13.2	13.3
United Kingdom	13.7	14.0	13.9	14.0	13.5	13.5	13.8

Source: European Commission (2012a).

As for the impact of European coordination on Member State performance, we here consider the benchmarks set out in the framework of ET 2010 (see section 1.2), which were largely reaffirmed and even reinforced in ET 2020 and Europe 2020 (see section 1.5). As table 7 shows, four out of five ET 2010 benchmarks were not reached, with the lone exception being an increase in the number of Maths Science and Technology (MST) graduates. In 2009 this stood at more than twice the targeted figure, which called for an increase in the number of MST of at least 15%. EU-wide, the number of MST graduates increased by 37.2%. In some cases, this improvement was massive: 100% in Poland, 141.3% in Czech Republic, 185.8% in Slovakia, 193.2% in Portugal⁸.

With respect to the other four targets, the results were far less encouraging at both the EU and national levels. The aggregate EU figure has not improved very much. The upper secondary attainment benchmark (set at 85% of 22 year-olds completing upper-secondary education) has seen a limited increase: from 76.6% in 2000 to 78.6% in 2009. Furthermore, while the percentage of low-achieving 15 year-olds in reading literacy in the European Union should have decreased to 17%, it decreased only from 21.3% in 2000, to 20.0% in 2010. The third benchmark not achieved relates to the number of people involved in lifelong learning. Indeed, where the benchmark called for this figure to account for at least 12.5% of the adult working age population, between 2000 and 2011, the EU-wide figure only increased from 8.5% to 8.9%.

The fourth benchmark (early leavers from education and training) was fixed at 10%, but it dropped from 17.6% in 2000 to 13.5% in 2011. Many Member States did not reach the targets, and in some cases they are very far from achieving them. The most interesting element that emerged from this data is the significant variation among EU countries. For example, in 2011 the European average for early school leavers was 13.5%, while in some countries this percentage is much higher (Malta 33.5%, Portugal 23.2%, Spain 26.5%) and in others it was extremely low (Slovakia 5%, Czech Republic 4.9%, Slovenia 4.2%). We find similar variations in lifelong learning, where the European average was 8.9% in 2011: while some countries performed much better (Denmark 32.2%,

8. However, in 7 countries (Denmark, France, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Spain, and Sweden) the benchmark was not met.

Finland 23.8%, Sweden 25.0%), others had fared far worse (Latvia 5%, Greece 2.4%, Hungary 2.7%, Poland 4.5%, Romania 1.6% and Slovakia 3.9%). National trends confirmed not only persistent variations, but also divergence: some countries improved their performance, while many others worsened. For example, adult participation in lifelong learning decreased between 2001 and 2011 in France (7.1% to 5.5%), Italy (6.3% to 5.7%), Greece (2.6% to 2.4%), Hungary (4.5% to 2.7%), Latvia (7.8% to 5.0%), Poland (5.0% to 4.5%), and the UK (20.0% to 15.8%). Indeed, this data shows that European coordination has not seen Member States reach their targets, nor have we witnessed a full convergence in the performance of their education systems.

Such negative performances have been accompanied by very unambitious national targets set in the context of Europe 2020. For early school leavers and improvements in the completion of tertiary education, there is a gap between the EU-level target and the targets set by the Member States for 2020. Indeed, the headline targets fixed at national level by the Member States in their NRPs do not match the more ambitious EU benchmark: the average national target is between 10.3 and 10.5% early school leavers while the EU fixed a target of 10%. A similar gap emerges in tertiary education, where national targets call for an attainment level of around 37.6-38% by 2020, below the headline target of 40% (European Commission, 2011a).

Table 7 EU benchmarks ET 2010/ ET 2020 and EU 2020 and national performance*

EU Benchmarks 2010 (2020)	Graduates in MST 15% of increase		Upper-secondary attainment 85%		Low achievers (reading) 17% (for ET 2020 15%)		Adult participation in LLL 12.5 (for ET 2020) 15%		Early leavers from ET 10%	
	Only ET 2010		ET 2010 and ET 2020		ET 2010 and ET 2020		ET 2010, ET 2020, Europe 2020		ET 2010, ET 2020, Europe 2020	
	2009	2000	2009	2000	2000	2010	2000	2011	2000	2011
EU	37.2	76.6	78.6	21.3	20.0	8.5	8.9	17.6	13.5	
Austria	66.4	85.1	86.0	19.3	21.5	8.6	13.4	10.2	8.3	
Belgium	20.9	81.7	83.3	19.0	17.7	8.6%	7.1	13.8	12.3	
Bulgaria	21.8	75.2	83.7	40.3	41.0	1.3	11.4	20.5	12.8	
Cyprus	58.3	79.0	87.4	-	-	7.9	7.5	18.5	11.2	
Czech Republic	141.3	91.2	91.9	17.5	23.1	5.1	7.5	5.7	4.9	
Denmark	14.3	72.0	70.1	17.9	15.2	24.2	32.3	11.7	9.6	
Estonia	57.1	79.0	82.3	13.6	13.3	6.7	12.0	15.1	10.9	
Finland	59.5	87.7	85.1	7.0	8.1	22.4	23.8	9.0	9.8	
France	5.4	81.6	83.6	15.2	19.8	7.1	5.5	13.3	12.0	
Germany	53.5	74.7	73.7	22.6	18.5	6.0	7.8	14.6	11.5	
Greece	26.5	79.2	82.2	24.4	21.3	2.6	2.4	18.2	13.1	
Hungary	18.9	83.5	84.0	22.7	17.6	4.5	2.7	13.9	11.2	
Ireland	1.0	82.6	87.0	11.0	17.2	5.9	6.8	14.6	10.6	
Italy	62.9	69.4	76.3	18.9	21.0	6.3	5.7	25.1	18.2	
Latvia	11.5	76.5	80.5	30.1	17.6	7.8	5.0	16.9	11.8	
Lithuania	36.4	78.9	86.9	25.7	24.3	5.9	5.9	16.5	7.9	
Luxembourg	11.1	72.7	76.8	35.1	26.0	6.5	13.6	7.1	6.2	
Malta	33.9	40.9	52.1	-	-	4.3	6.6	54.2	33.5	
Netherlands	39.3	71.9	76.6	9.5	14.3	16.4	16.7	15.4	9.1	
Poland	100.0	88.8	91.3	23.2	15.0	5.0	4.5	7.4	5.6	
Portugal	193.2	43.2	55.5	26.3	17.6	4.3	11.6	43.6	23.2	
Romania	89.1	76.1	78.3	41.3	40.4	1.4	1.6	22.9	17.5	
Slovakia	185.8	94.8	93.3	27.8	22.3	3.7	3.9	6.7	5.0	
Slovenia	16.0	88.0	89.4	16.5	16.5	13.3	15.9	6.4	4.2	
Spain	14.8	66.0	59.9	16.3	19.6	10.5	10.8	29.1	26.5	
Sweden	13.3	85.2	86.4	12.6	17.4	17.5	25.0	7.3	6.7p	
UK	17.8	76.7	79.3	19.0	18.4	20.0	15.8	18.2	15.0	

Source: European Commission (2011c, 2011e and 2012a).

*See the original documents for a more detailed presentation of data.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter we evaluated, on one hand, the progress of European coordination in the field of education and, on the other, the impact of this coordination both on the Member States' public spending priorities and on the performance of national education and training systems. To develop the first point, we focused on the main soft governance instruments that directly (or indirectly) affect education policies. We have analysed those instruments established before Europe 2020 (the Bologna process, the OMC, the Copenhagen process) and those set up later (mainly the European Semester with the Annual Growth Survey, the headline targets and the Country-Specific Recommendations). We have analysed their progressive overlapping, especially through Europe 2020. Education is now part of a coherent set of measures: integrated guidelines, headline targets, Country-Specific Recommendations and flagship initiatives. A similar process did not exist in the Lisbon Strategy, where only the ET 2010 programme established European coordination of education and training. Further proof of this increased integration is provided by the incorporation of ambitious pre-existing processes such as Bologna and Copenhagen into the new Europe 2020 strategy.

In line with this long-term development, the main events of 2012 (section 2) confirm this EU focus on education and training. In particular, this sector garnered attention as a strategic instrument to improve the economic performance of the Member States (as was the case in the Lisbon Strategy) in the context of the current economic and financial crisis.

Considering the impact of European coordination on the Member States' performance, evidence presented in this chapter shows some inconsistency between the EU steps towards enhanced coordination and its actual impact at the national level. Regarding ET 2010 and the Lisbon Strategy, data on expenditures and progress towards benchmarks shows that the EU has had limited success in improving national performance in education. Indeed, even while the Commission has stressed the importance of investment in education and training, Member States did not follow its advice. In such a context, the current economic and financial crises have affected expenditure on education in a dramatic way. Even if GGE on education as a percentage of GDP did not decrease (from 2004 to 2010), education expenditure in absolute

terms declined in many Member States. Moreover, GGE on education as a percentage of total GGE decreased up to 2010.

All of this suggests that many Member States (in the context of the crises and reduced budgets) did not prioritise education investments. This trend seems to be largely confirmed by the analysis of the benchmarks set by ET 2010 and confirmed or reinforced by ET 2020 and Europe 2020. Both trends between 2000 and 2009 and most recent data on 2010 and 2011 show that the European targets are far from being achieved. The most worrying trend is the persistent divergence in Member States' performance. As we saw in section 3, there are still striking differences between countries when we consider, for example, the national percentage of early school leavers and participation in lifelong learning programmes. Moreover, the targets of the Europe 2020 strategy (a reduction in the number of early school leavers and increased tertiary education attainment) are unlikely to be achieved, as national targets fixed by the Member States through their NRPs are low and unambitious. While the EU has tried to promote the coordination of national education and training policy (of which Europe 2020 represents a clear step forward) more research is needed to assess the capacity to improve national strategy in the area. An assessment of future trends at Member State level will allow us to confirm or revise our view of the limited progress of the past.

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