

Making the European Education Area a reality: state of affairs, challenges and prospects



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The creation of a “**European Education Area**” (EEA) by **2025** is amongst the **declared key objectives of European education policies**. It is seen not only as a means to harness the full potential of education and culture as drivers for economic growth and job creation, as well as improved social cohesion, but also as an instrument to strengthen a European sense of belonging.

Main observations

The study:

examines three communications on a future European Education Area, highlights existing challenges, and makes 9 concrete policy recommendations.

In November 2017, the Commission presented the idea of a “European Education Area” (EEA). In May 2018, the Commission put forward four flagship initiatives aimed at making the EEA a reality by 2025: the mutual recognition of diplomas and learning periods abroad, the improvement of language learning, the European Student Card initiative and the European Universities initiative.

In September 2020, the Commission published a more ambitious communication on the European Education Area revolving around 6 dimensions: (1) Quality in education and training; (2) Inclusion and gender equality; (3) Green and digital transitions; (4) Teachers and trainers; (5) Higher education; and (6) Geopolitical dimension.

Alongside these areas, the Commission put forward a list of 46 proposals for action, mainly consisting of new initiatives under the Erasmus+ programme, upcoming Council recommendations, the setting-up of new expert groups and support to Member States.

Since the previous communications in 2017/2018, specific topics had gained prominence, including gender equality and green transition, as well as the geopolitical dimension of the EEA. At the same time, other ideas and concepts have lost some of their initial

relevance, such as media literacy or “European identity”, the latter now being supplanted by the “European way of life”.

The envisaged creation of an “enabling framework” can be seen as laying the foundations for a fully-fledged governance body. Among other things, this framework would monitor the achievements of a “strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training” succeeding the current one (“Education and training 2020”), the main novelty of which is a benchmark on low-achievement in computer and information literacy.

Despite the fact that important steps have been taken to convert the ambition of creating a European



Education Area by 2025 into political action, **the EEA continues to resemble a vision rather than being a concrete policy programme**.

Conclusions and policy recommendations

Against this backdrop, the study proposes a series of 9 policy recommendations:

- 1) Set up a concrete **implementation strategy** and draw up a comprehensive **evaluation framework**, in line with the UN’s sustainable development goal 4 on education, in order to monitor progress and identify shortcomings in the implementation of EEA initiatives.



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- 2) Provide clarification on the **geographical scope** of the European Education Area, taking into account current good practices in the Erasmus+ Programme and the implementation of the Bologna Process.
- 3) Clarify **governance arrangements** as regards the type of participation required from Member States and other levels of government having the competency or playing an active role in education policy, in particular local and regional authorities.
- 4) Specify the level of **involvement** expected from stakeholder organisations and engage further with representatives of sectors that have been under-represented so far, such as primary and secondary education, as well as the social sciences and humanities, and society at large.
- 5) Look at how to ensure **synergies** between the European Education Area, the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area.
- 6) Foster **media literacy** at all stages of learning as a central means of empowering responsible European citizens.
- 7) Establish the principle of **academic freedom** as a core principle of the European Education Area.

Key area for EU action:

a **bold policy framework** for future European education policy, transforming the European Education Area from a loose vision of principles into a concrete work programme with a set of measurable objectives.

- 8) Foster **inclusiveness** in the broadest sense of the term, in order to support the participation of disadvantaged learners.
- 9) Ensure that a stronger **European dimension** is included in students' curricula and teachers' training, including through Jean Monnet programmes and the Erasmus Teacher Academies.

Figure 1: The six dimensions of the European Education Area and the means to achieve them:



Source: European Commission, *Achieving the European Education Area by 2025, Factsheet* (Accessed: 8 December 2020)

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