

europaean lifelong learning stakeholders' forum

**27 november 2023
report**





On 27 November, education and training stakeholders at EU level were reunited by the Lifelong Learning Platform with the support of the Directorate General for Education, Youth, Culture and Sport for the annual European Lifelong Learning Stakeholders Forum. After five years in which the European Education Summit replaced the traditional format of the Forum, this year's edition saw the support of the European Commission as well as the inclusion of the outcomes of the Forum in the Summit discussions.

For a full day, discussions were facilitated to:

- *assess the successes and remaining challenges of the implementation of the European Education Area for each of the main sectors of education and training (early childhood education and care, school education, vocational education and training, higher education, adult education, non-formal education and youth)*
- *discuss the successes and remaining challenges with regard to the six dimensions of the European Education Area*
- *elaborate recommendations on five aspects of the European Education Area*

Elisa Gambardella, LLLP President, welcomed participants to this unique event. She announced it is a record LLLweek in terms of number of events (over 25!). The week kicks off with the EU lifelong learning stakeholders forum organised as a side event of the Education summit. This Forum will be notably dedicated to discuss the mid-term review event of the European Education Area (EEA). Following these short welcoming words, Elisa invites Antonino Talamo from the International Yehudi Menuhin Foundation to break the ice with participants by engaging them in how we can create music with our own body.

The successful and cheering ice-breaking activity is followed by an institutional address on the State-of-the-art on the European Education Area and the work ahead by **José A. Piña Sánchez, Education Attaché at the Permanent Representation of Spain to the EU**. He outlined the progress made in achieving the EEA which was launched in 2017 by Heads of States. In 2020, the Commission issued a Communication for achieving EEA by 2025 which lists 6 dimensions. The Council approved it in 2021 in a Resolution with targets to

achieve by 2030. The Resolution has 5 strategic priorities (not the same as the EC COM but they are related). There is also an Annex, including 7 EU-level targets to reach by 2025 or 2030.

2023 is the year for the mid-term review. In November 2022, the EC published a new Communication about the progress. There has been some progress made but also some remaining challenges. The Spanish Education Attaché focused this presentation on the Council work on it. The Council adopted a new Resolution in 2023. It describes the pending challenges such as, the effect of socio-economic status on achievement and well-being as well as 4 new priorities for 2025: improving equity, inclusion and success via the acquisition of key competences, a focus on the teaching profession and teacher shortages, removing barriers to mobility, and fostering lifelong learning. The Spanish EU Presidency will soon end. Their priorities were:

- EEA progress, digital education and training
- Common EU values and citizenship: renew the civic mission of education
- Remove obstacles in E&T in general, eg mutual recognition

of education...

To conclude on this first part, there is still a long way to go for the EEA, especially regarding persisting (or even increasing) inequalities, in taking care of students and teachers (training, well-being and motivation). From the Presidency, what will be most remembered according to the education attaché are two Council Recommendations (adopted end of November 2023), one about Female talents in STEAM and another one about universities responding to digital education challenges. Final words from José A. Piña Sánchez is that *“Europe is a Union of values. Democracy doesn’t just happen, it’s built in schools, families, communities.”* and *“Learning environments where democracy is not just taught but also learned by practice.”* *“The EEA should be underpinned by a lifelong learning approach, holistic approach. We need to keep working together, policy-makers and the entire educational community”*. Policy-makers are now looking beyond 2025 into the second cycle of EEA’s implementation (2025-2030) with revision of priorities.

The institutional address is followed by a panel discussion

with inspiring practices from practitioners, facilitated by **Brikena Xhomaqi, Director of LLLP**. Speakers will intervene on how they contribute to the EEA and the European Year of Skills and how these EU policies support their work at different levels. **Chiara Piccolo, Learning for Well-being Foundation** and **iBOX Project** partner, explains how L4WB has been focusing on learners’ own uniqueness of individual and inner diversity. The iBOX project aims to mainstream inclusion in diversity. The involvement of all stakeholders is very important. They collect good practices on inclusion and diversity and how NGOs can play a good role in this. There will organise training on three topics of focus: digital transition, support participation in learning processes and inclusion and diversity strategy. **Balázs Németh, EUCEN - University of Pécs**, adds that it is important to recognise changing roles for higher education and to recognise the social role of institutions; to support and train teachers and educators to use better teaching methods. He presented the SMILE project: how universities can become inclusive and provide education to vulnerable groups. They worked with the European Basic Skills Network (ESBN) and

developed 6 MOOCs on basic skills. He regretted that second chance education is no longer on the political agenda (it was on the agenda back in 1995!) but sees a chance of revival with the emergence of microcredentials. A key question for him is how to identify “new learners” in universities. EEA contributes to his work e.g. by highlighting that we not only need the technology but also the basic skills. **Olena Bekh, Coordinator for Innovative Teaching and Learning at ETF**, testifies about her organisation’s approach to “new learning”. Teachers have changed, they are lifelong learners, they support learners differently. ETF does research on innovation in learning and they provide tools.

She brought a new tool, a set of cards, to develop students’ key competences, called Scaffold. The need for the tool emerged from the realisation that the competence frameworks are too “theoretical”. With competence cards, teachers can plan a learning experience from 1 hour to longer durations. They also promote the integrated learning outcomes approach and support EU countries in the introduction of this approach in education.

Stefaan Hermans, Director for Policy Strategy and Evaluation, DG EAC, provided a progress update on the European Education Area (EEA). Despite the challenges (Covid-19, Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine,





inflation), EEA managed to show solidarity thanks to the education community's resilience. Ongoing areas of improvement include equity, access to quality education, and social inclusion, as well as teacher shortages, for which it will be necessary to work on improving the attractiveness of the profession. Sharing of good practices and data gathering is primordial to improve in these areas. Regarding mobility, EEA would like to increase the numbers, for which the proposal for a Council Recommendation 'Europe on the Move' - learning mobility opportunities for

everyone, as part of the Talent Mobility package, is meant to incentivise Erasmus+ and to national education systems to use the available funds, particularly for professional development. For the remainder of the EEA's first cycle, it is expected that there will be a Council Recommendation on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe in April 2024, which will take on board elements of wellbeing, as well as a Council Recommendation on quality assurance in higher education. He highlighted other initiatives such

as University Alliances and VET Centres of Excellence, supported by Erasmus+, and concluded by emboldening the civil society representatives to continue to engage with the EU initiatives, ensuring their implementation, while also fighting for more investment in education and training, keeping the sector high on the agenda of the Member States.

The introduction was followed by three World Café sessions, involving representatives from civil society in education and training from all sectors and levels. The first two sessions aimed to identify the main barriers and enablers identified by civil society for the implementation of the EEA, firstly with regards to their sector of activity and secondly to each dimension of the EEA. Therefore, 6 discussion tables were created first by sector (early childhood education and care, school education, vocational education and training, higher education, adult education, and non-formal education and youth), and second by the six dimensions of the European Education Area and recommendations from civil society in five different areas. The last round gathered recommendations from civil

society in five different areas: firstly, the achievement of the European Education Area (EEA) asks for stable long-term funding at all levels and an integrated framework for EU investment in education and training. The governance of the EEA emphasises open transparency and dialogue, with access to governance platforms like the EEA's High Level Group. A common Directorate-General (DG) dealing with education and Vocational Education and Training (VET), alongside a vice president focusing on lifelong learning, were also proposed.

Policy coherence within the EEA and with EU policies is vital. This includes interinstitutional and intergovernmental dialogue, adopting a whole-government approach, and making education more appealing to finance ministers. The goal is to raise a common understanding of lifelong learning among the larger public, alongside a more rights-based approach to policy. Moreover, involving stakeholder participation in constant monitoring of the EEA implementation and step-by-step engagement at both EU and national levels is also key. Lastly, achieving equity within the EEA is

now a strategic priority, which also requires cohesion in the definition of quality and the establishment of a cohesive framework.

as well as discussion on which skills are needed for social advancement, for which lifelong learning education is crucial. Through a multiannual investment



MEP Dragos Pîslaru, host of LLLWeek, reflected on social investment, particularly in beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries, as key to advance in society. He stated that skills are not only for employment but life and citizenship. To this end, he hoped for the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU to hold a debate on social investment,

approach and localisation of skill development, which are crucial for empowering people, an ecosystem for the development of social investment will be created. Institutions must move from reactive shortage spending to understanding overall ambition. He concluded by explaining that time has come to move beyond considering education and

training as a conveyor belt that outputs skilled workers, and for the EU to reflect on a rethinking of how education and training is performed so as to view learning as an investment and not mere spending. **Karen Haegemans, Deputy Head of Unit A.1, DG EAC**, European Commission, provided the concluding remarks of the European Commission on the European Lifelong Learning Stakeholder Forum, considering how the work of civil society would greatly feature in the mid-term review process of the EEA. This process is described in the [European Education Area midterm review process report](#), for which the following criteria were selected: relevance of strategic priorities, effectiveness

of EU and national policies, efficiency of resources. She informed stakeholders that the European Commission moves into a new stage of work, namely the interim policy evaluation of the European Education Area, which commenced already with a Call for Evidence that closed in September 2023. The next step will be an Open Public Consultation (OPC) on the EEA which will take place in the first half of 2024. The European Commission hoped to see the same lively engagement of civil society with this OPC as so far in the work on the implementation of the EEA.

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**Co-funded by
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