



C/2024/7400

9.12.2024

Council conclusions on strategic partnerships in education and training

(C/2024/7400)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING:

1. The European Council conclusions of 17 and 18 April 2024 ⁽¹⁾, which call for the fostering of high-quality jobs throughout Europe, by stepping up the pursuit of the 2030 headline targets, through reinforced social dialogue on increased participation in the labour market, reskilling/upskilling and lifelong learning, tackling skills and labour gaps in the context of wider demographic trends, including talent mobility to and within the European Union, and ensuring equal opportunities;
2. The Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, which announced a commitment to investing in people's skills, training and education throughout their lives and encouraging talent mobility within the European Union and beyond ⁽²⁾;
3. The Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) ⁽³⁾ and the Council Resolution on its governance structure ⁽⁴⁾, as the strategic framework is the main tool for cooperation between Member States, the European Commission and stakeholders, and consequently is a crucial tool for building and pursuing partnerships between different actors and levels of governance;
4. The political background as set out in the Annex to these conclusions.

UNDERLINING THAT:

5. For the purposes of these Council conclusions, 'strategic partnership' is to be understood as a collaborative endeavour which, in addition to education and training institutions, may involve public authorities and other relevant stakeholders, such as social partners, employment services, chambers of commerce, businesses and business associations, learners' representatives, research organisations, and local and regional economic and social actors, and which aims to achieve common objectives and address societal needs through mutual cooperation and a long-term vision.

ACKNOWLEDGING:

6. The evolving challenges and opportunities presented by the environmental and climate crises, technological advances, demographic shifts, health crises and globalisation, which underscore the need for innovative and strategic approaches to education and training;
7. The diverse education and training landscape across Member States, and the importance of tailoring strategies and policies to local and regional contexts while fostering cross-border cooperation and mobility;
8. The importance of promoting the key competences for lifelong learning ⁽⁵⁾, in particular entrepreneurship competence, and digital and green skills in education and training systems to support the transition towards a sustainable, inclusive and fair society and economy. In times of rapid social and economic change and complex challenges, continuous upskilling and reskilling, as well as lifelong learning, including non-formal and informal learning, are essential for citizens to find personal fulfilment and well-being, to be prepared to adapt and perform in a changing labour market and to engage in active and responsible citizenship;
9. The role of work-based learning and apprenticeship schemes in providing learners with practical, life and social skills and experience relevant to the needs of the labour market and society, as well as in their personal development. Such schemes can be built on sustainable partnerships between the world of work and the world of education and training and are expanding beyond vocational education and training (VET), including higher education;

⁽¹⁾ EUCO 12/24.

⁽²⁾ As set out in the European Council conclusions of 27 June 2024 (EUCO 15/24).

⁽³⁾ OJ C 66, 26.2.2021, p. 1.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 497, 10.12.2021, p. 1.

⁽⁵⁾ As set out in Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning (OJ C 189, 4.6.2018, p. 1).

10. That public-private partnerships can be an efficient way of connecting labour market demands to education and training. Learners can benefit by learning directly from practice, working with the latest developments in each sector; innovation may thus be fostered on both sides;
11. The contribution of education and training ecosystems to local, regional, national and European development, economic growth and social cohesion. Education and training can transfer knowledge, skills and competences across regions and borders, thereby contributing to innovation and economic growth, to the preparation of individuals for a changing labour market in the EU and to their personal development. Balanced brain circulation can ensure that the benefits of mobility and knowledge exchange, which include addressing regional disparities in educational and training opportunities, especially in regions experiencing a talent development trap, are distributed fairly across the EU, thereby fostering cohesion and reducing the risk of depopulation and brain drain. Fostering a positive and inclusive sense of identity and belonging at local, regional, national and EU levels, based on common European values, should be nurtured and encouraged, enabling citizens to broaden their knowledge and contribute to society and the labour market;
12. The value of transnational collaboration, exchange and mobility, as well as of the sharing of best practices in education and training. Such practices promote intercultural dialogue, European values, democratic citizenship and social cohesion, as well as mutual understanding through the enhancement of multilingualism. Skills portability and recognition of qualifications⁽⁶⁾ are important to ensure effective freedom of movement for learners and to tackle Europe's skills gaps. Transnational cooperation expands the ability to gain new perspectives, share ideas and build long-lasting institutional relationships in order to advance knowledge, increase the quality and relevance of education, training and research, strengthen links between education, training, research and innovation, improve employability and skills, and make more effective use of digital technologies and open science, thereby contributing to success in the green transition, among other areas;
13. That national education and training ecosystems at all levels can significantly strengthen transnational cooperation. Structured transnational cooperation at institutional level, such as the European Universities alliances, Alliances for Innovation, the Centres of Vocational Excellence, Erasmus+ Teacher Academies, the Pact for Skills, and Knowledge and Innovation Communities, as well as higher education, VET and adult upskilling and reskilling, can also help to enhance Europe's competitiveness and facilitate the twin transitions;
14. That achieving the European Education Area by 2025 calls for deeper transnational cooperation that builds bridges and empowers education and training institutions to collaborate with one another, facilitating the free movement of learners, graduates, academics, researchers and professional staff across Europe to study, work and conduct research, and also calls for synergies with the European Research Area, where appropriate;
15. That transnational education and training activities resulting from strategic partnerships may cover traditional mobility opportunities for learners, offering micro-credentials and other lifelong learning opportunities, as well as flexible learning pathways for students and participation in joint degree programmes spanning several campuses across Europe.

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THAT:

16. Europe's competitiveness depends on its citizens' being equipped with future-proof skills. Strategic partnerships in education and training, among other factors, play a key role in mapping and addressing skills mismatches and making the most of the green transition and digitalisation, through targeted initiatives and joint actions. By identifying areas where skills gaps exist or where groups in vulnerable situations face barriers and need specific support to fully participate in education, training and employment, strategic partnerships can tailor their efforts to provide targeted support and resources;

⁽⁶⁾ In the specific case of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad, the aim is to achieve automatic mutual recognition, as set out in Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (OJ C 444, 10.12.2018, p. 1) and the Council conclusions on further steps to make automatic mutual recognition in education and training a reality (OJ C 185, 26.5.2023, p. 44).

17. Partnerships and shared commitments are a key principle in the governance of VET systems. The aims of cooperation with stakeholders and local and regional ecosystems, which ensures joint ownership, are, in particular, to develop innovative practices, to enhance the attractiveness and labour-market relevance of VET, to organise, finance and deliver work-based learning schemes and apprenticeships, and to organise the mobility of VET learners;
18. Higher education plays a key role in regional and local development, for example in providing education and training opportunities in response to skills shortages and mismatches. By being flexible, competitive, adequately resourced and accountable, and by attracting and retaining motivated academic and non-academic staff, higher education institutions can become drivers of development in cooperation with other education and training institutions and strategic partners;
19. There is a need for enhanced permeability between various types of education and training, in particular between VET and higher education systems, to ensure smooth transitions for learners and to promote lifelong learning. Permeability between VET and higher education systems, with full respect for institutional autonomy and national qualifications frameworks, enables learners to move seamlessly between the two without facing barriers, such as a lack of credit recognition or redundant coursework. This facilitates learning progression and allows individuals to adapt their learning paths in line with their evolving career aspirations;
20. It is key to support the transition between general education and VET, tertiary education and adult education to improve access to education and training for disadvantaged groups and groups in vulnerable situations, and to help teachers, trainers and professionals, throughout their professional lives, to develop new skills and competences and keep up with the latest technological developments and new teaching approaches and methodologies. Micro-credentials may play a role in this respect;
21. Learning should help tackle new societal and economic challenges and, where appropriate, include elements of work-based learning which can contribute to developing transversal competences and improve career guidance and the labour-market relevance of education and training systems, thus increasing the employability of graduates. Rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach, strategic partnerships can take a future-oriented one, tailoring their interventions to the unique circumstances of different learners, industries or regions;
22. Coordinating education and training pathways with societal and labour market needs and the diverse needs of students and lifelong learners, while respecting the autonomy of higher education institutions and the diversity of national VET and higher education systems, can better prepare the workforce for the challenges of the future. Measures based on a whole-of-society approach allow education and training initiatives to address specific needs within the community, a specific industry or society at large;
23. Strategic partnerships can have a greater impact if they channel resources into areas where they can make the most significant difference. By identifying priority areas for investment or intervention, strategic partnerships can ensure that resources are allocated efficiently and effectively, maximising their impact. Investing in capacity-building, particularly in areas with less developed education, training and research infrastructure, and in educational offers linked to future-oriented economic sectors and technologies is essential. Strategic partnerships, including public-private partnerships, may also be leveraged to develop affordable and adequate student and apprentice housing and green, energy-efficient campuses.

INVITES MEMBER STATES, with due regard for institutional autonomy and academic freedom, and in accordance with national circumstances, to:

1. Promote strategic partnerships at transnational, national, regional and local levels, with a view to enhancing the quality, attractiveness, relevance and inclusiveness of all types of education and training;
2. Foster entrepreneurship competence, creativity and innovation in all levels and types of education and training, by encouraging cooperation with start-ups and incubators and other partnerships with the business community, including social and inclusive entrepreneurship, as well as promoting inter-generational collaboration;

3. Promote the development and implementation of innovative, learner-centred and flexible learning pathways through strategic partnerships, enhancing permeability between various types of education and training, in particular between VET and higher education and adult education systems, and promoting the recognition and validation of prior (formal, non-formal and informal) learning and qualifications;
4. Promote the use of strategic partnerships to strengthen the role of guidance and counselling services, in particular to support learners' transitions between different education and training pathways and between education and training and employment, while fostering lifelong learning and career development;
5. Promote opportunities for work-based learning, quality apprenticeships and other forms of experiential learning through strategic partnerships with employers and social partners;
6. Support and recognise the professional development and mobility of teachers, trainers and education and training staff, to enhance their capacity to deliver or support high-quality, inclusive and innovative learning experiences in strategic partnerships with stakeholders;
7. Foster the integration of education and training ecosystems into local, regional, cross-border and EU development strategies, promoting synergies with other policy areas such as research, innovation, the green and digital transitions, entrepreneurship, community engagement and social inclusion.

INVITES THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, with due regard for subsidiarity and national circumstances, to:

1. Promote the exchange of good practices and experience in the design, implementation and evaluation of strategic partnerships and transnational cooperation in education and training, through peer learning activities, knowledge-sharing platforms and studies that highlight best practices;
2. Provide guidance and identify funding opportunities to support the establishment and implementation of strategic partnerships and transnational cooperation in education and training, within the framework of the Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe programmes, the European Social Fund Plus, the European Regional Development Fund and other relevant EU funding instruments, and further explore and create synergies between education and training initiatives and other EU policy areas to enhance the streamlining of joint EU actions;
3. Continue supporting Member States and education and training institutions in their efforts to enhance strategic partnerships in education and training through various policy initiatives and actions, including the European Universities alliances, the European Alliance for Apprenticeships and the Centres of Vocational Excellence, with a view to strengthening European competitiveness, facilitating the twin transitions and supporting open strategic autonomy through education and training;
4. Provide support to initiatives aiming to roll out upskilling and reskilling in future-oriented sectors and technologies;
5. Carry out a full mapping exercise on existing and planned skills academies, including details on their format, governance, funding and target audience, share it with the Council and update it on a regular basis;
6. Further promote the use of innovative pedagogical approaches and tools through strategic partnerships, including learner-centred and work-based learning, micro-credentials and quality apprenticeship schemes throughout Europe.

ANNEX

Political background

1. European Council conclusions of 27 June 2024 (EUCO 15/24).
2. European Council conclusions of 17 and 18 April 2024 (EUCO 12/24).
3. Council Recommendation of 13 May 2024 'Europe on the Move' — learning mobility opportunities for everyone, OJ C, C/2024/3364, 14.6.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/3364/oj>.
4. Council resolution on the European Education Area: Looking to 2025 and beyond, OJ C 185, 26.5.2023, p. 35.
5. Council conclusions on further steps to make automatic mutual recognition in education and training a reality, OJ C 185, 26.5.2023, p. 44.
6. Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, OJ C 243, 27.6.2022, p. 10.
7. Council conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe, OJ C 167, 21.4.2022, p. 9.
8. Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation, OJ C 160, 13.4.2022, p. 1.
9. Council Resolution on a new European agenda for adult learning 2021-2030, OJ C 504, 14.12.2021, p. 9.
10. Council Resolution on the governance structure of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), OJ C 497, 10.12.2021, p. 1.
11. Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative – Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education, OJ C 221, 10.6.2021, p. 14.
12. Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), OJ C 66, 26.2.2021, p. 1.
13. Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, OJ C 417, 2.12.2020, p. 1.
14. Osnabrück Declaration on vocational education and training as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies (30 November 2020).
15. Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad, OJ C 444, 10.12.2018, p. 1.
16. Council Recommendation of 15 March 2018 on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships, OJ C 153, 2.5.2018, p. 1.