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**Council conclusions on promoting evidence-informed policy and practice in education and training
to achieve the European Education Area**

(C/2024/3642)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Recalling the texts adopted within the Union on education and science for policy matters,

AWARE

1. Of the efforts made by the Member States of the Union at national, regional, and local level and by their education and training institutions to ensure quality and inclusive education and training for all.
2. Of the many challenges facing education and training today that need to be tackled by policy-makers and educational staff, which includes teachers, trainers, educators, leaders of education and training institutions and higher education staff.
3. Of the contribution of research and data to knowledge and quality information in the field of education and training policy and practice and to the analysis of educational, societal and economic challenges.
4. That absolute certainty is elusive when making decisions given the range and complexity of education and training systems.

CONSIDERING THAT

5. Education and training is a crucial and highly visible field within the public sphere due to its important impact on society as a whole and the professional development, personal fulfilment and well-being of each individual.
6. The term 'evidence' refers to information that is systematically and scientifically collected, analysed, and evaluated to inform policy design, policy development, programme implementation, evaluation, and practice. This evidence can come from various sources and take different forms including research, monitoring, evaluation, systematic reviews, quantitative and qualitative validated data, practical experience and expert consensus. For the purposes of these conclusions, the focus is put on evidence derived from research and data.
7. 'Evidence-informed policy and practice in education and training' can therefore be defined as collecting, combining and evaluating multiple reliable sources of information, including the best available and most relevant evidence from research and/or data, as a step towards improving policy and practice in education and training.
8. While evidence from research and/or data should play a vital role in policy-making and practice in education and training, a nuanced interplay of other key considerations needs to be taken into account. These encompass personal and professional experiences, values, norms, practical reasoning, stakeholder perspectives, technical expertise, contextual knowledge, and political, social and economic considerations. The term 'evidence-informed' therefore describes policy-making and practice in education and training better than the term 'evidence-based'.
9. The use of evidence in education and training policies and practices must be contextualised. It should be adapted to the specific needs, experiences, cultures, and circumstances of the respective governance level, and the learning and teaching environment, within the field of education and training. What proves effective and relevant in one context may not necessarily yield the same results in another. The professional judgement of policy-makers and educational staff plays a crucial role in this regard.

AGREEING THAT

10. High-quality, relevant and accessible evidence ensured by a strong research ecosystem and data infrastructure in the field of education and training is an important prerequisite for evidence-informed policy and practice in education and training.
11. Considering evidence and using it effectively is part of the professionalism of policy-makers and educational staff.

POINTS OUT THAT

12. Evidence stemming from quality data and research on what works for whom in what context and for which objectives provides a stronger foundation for policy and practice in education and training. In particular, evidence:
 - a) increases trust in and between policy-makers, researchers, educational staff and society as a whole.
 - b) helps tackle current challenges, identify needs and prepares future policy decisions as it facilitates impact assessments for policy design and reforms.
 - c) is essential to evaluate the effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and relevance of implemented policy measures and investments. Evaluation outcomes feed into the policy feedback loop and help direct funding and resources towards strategies that have a higher chance of success, thereby maximising the impact of policy choices and investments in education and training.
 - d) contributes to the further professional development of policy-makers and educational staff.
13. Evidence-informed policy and practice in education and training supports education and training institutions and their learning environments and teaching and learning practice and has the potential to improve learning outcomes. Educational staff are able to shape education and training by using methods that have proven their effectiveness, among other things.
14. In a context marked by diverse opinions and extensive public debates, evidence-informed policy and practice in education and training offers clearer and objectively documented information on needs, impacts, and feasibility, thereby contributing to societal awareness and acceptance.

IDENTIFIES THE FOLLOWING FOUR PRIORITIES WITH A VIEW TO PROMOTING EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICY AND PRACTICE IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING TO ACHIEVE THE EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA, WITH DUE REGARD FOR NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL COMPETENCES IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING**I. FOSTER A POSITIVE MINDSET TOWARDS EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICY AND PRACTICE IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING AND FURTHER STIMULATE EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH**

Member States and the Commission, in line with its competences, should:

- a) **Further promote** the development of a strong research ecosystem that ensures relevant, accessible and high-quality research in the field of education and training while taking into account the importance of research security and integrity.
- b) **Promote** and **stimulate** the active engagement of researchers and educational staff with education and training policy and practice by creating opportunities and support structures.
- c) **Encourage** educational staff to contribute to and participate in educational research.
- d) **Encourage** policy-makers, researchers and stakeholders to adopt clear and targeted communication actions when disseminating research outcomes.
- e) **Use** research outcomes when designing policies to assess the effects and impact of educational measures or reforms in order to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness.
- f) **Promote** peer learning for a better exchange of practices and experiences in using evidence effectively in policy-making and practice. Draw upon the existing expertise of Member States, as well as that of regional, national, European, and international organisations such as the OECD, UNESCO, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), the World Bank, and others and explore collaborations, exchanges, and partnerships.
- g) **Consider mapping** and **analysing** successful evidence-informed policies and practices in education and training to identify key factors for effectiveness and stimulate synergies.

Member States should:

- a) **Encourage** policy-makers, education authorities, education and training institutions and stakeholders as well as educational staff to use evidence when identifying educational needs and defining actions to address those needs and to continuously evaluate and adapt these actions.

The Commission, with due regard for subsidiarity, should:

- a) **Create** and **stimulate** opportunities for educational research, peer learning, partnerships and policy experimentation for all Member States, stakeholders and intermediary organisations with regard to evidence-informed policy and practice in education and training through EU programmes such as Erasmus+, including its key action 3, Horizon Europe, including its Policy Support Facility, and the Technical Support Instrument.
- b) **Strengthen** actions at EU level to stimulate and support evidence-informed policy and practice in education and training, in particular the Education and Training Monitor, Eurydice, the activities of the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks, the Joint Research Centre, Cedefop, the European Training Foundation, the Learning Lab on Investing in Quality Education and Training, the European Science Advisors Forum, the Scientific Advice Mechanism, and the Knowledge4Policy platform.

II. ENHANCE THE CAPACITY BUILDING OF ALL ACTORS IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING SO THAT THEY CAN USE EVIDENCE AND OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES IN RESEARCH PRODUCTION, MEDIATION AND USE

Member States should:

- a) **Promote** research and data literacy among policy-makers and educational staff, enabling them to access, understand, participate in, and effectively apply research that is relevant to their specific contexts.
- b) **Encourage** initial teacher training and continuous professional development in order to take into account and foster evidence-informed practice, including pedagogy and classroom and school management, as well as training and professional development of educational staff in all sectors.
- c) **Encourage** researchers to cultivate literacy in 'policy and practice' by engaging policy-makers and educational staff throughout the research process.
- d) **Support** and **strengthen** intermediary structures and/or organisations that play a key role in bridging the gap between educational research, policy, practice and society as a whole.
- e) **Explore** the creation of, or **support**, specific units within education administrations that foster and boost evidence-informed policy and practice.

III. PROMOTE THE USE OF DATA IN EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICY AND PRACTICE IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Member States and the Commission, in line with its competences, should:

- a) **Consider integrating** data requirements from the outset of launching any educational policy/action in order to maximise insights regarding its implementation and value, and to encourage the production of evidence.
- b) **Strive** to ensure that data are findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable (FAIR). Promote the availability, access and use of FAIR and open data to support evidence-informed policy and practice.
- c) **Ensure** that data collection and analysis in education and training offers added value proportionate to the resources invested.
- d) **Explore** the possibilities of artificial intelligence in the processing, analysis and use of data, taking into account questions of quality, objectivity and trust.

Member States should:

- a) **Consider exploring a strategy** for FAIR education and training data that addresses the collection, provision, and dissemination of data, taking into account:
 - i) robust data protection measures to safeguard sensitive information, including of learners, as well as the privacy and security aspects of education and training data;
 - ii) the importance of high-quality research instruments to ensure the acquisition of reliable data which are relevant for policy-making in the area of education and training;
 - iii) the dispersed nature of education and training data across public and private domains;
 - iv) the importance of facilitating data accessibility and transferability, including metadata quality.

- b) **Continue** efforts for joint data collection in education and training. **Consider** exploring investments in cost-effective access to and uniform use of administrative data.
- c) **Continue** investing in robust data infrastructure, state-of-the-art data analysis, data value creation and data innovation. Evidence-informed policy and practice in education and training needs high-quality and FAIR data at individual and system level.

The Commission, with due regard for subsidiarity, should:

- a) **Promote** and **support** the sharing of education and training data and best practices among Member States and, where relevant, across public and private domains. Share evidence and provide guidance and support to Member States in implementing effective data practices, methodologies and Union privacy regulations related to education and training data.

IV. FURTHER DEVELOP THE LEARNING LAB ON INVESTING IN QUALITY EDUCATION AND TRAINING AS A VALUABLE UNION TOOL FOR FOSTERING EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICY IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING TO ACHIEVE THE EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA

The Commission, with due regard for subsidiarity, should:

- a) **Broaden**, in consultation with the Member States and, where applicable, the regional and local authorities, the scope of the Learning Lab on Investing in Quality Education and Training to the wider field of evidence-informed policy in education and training. **Ensure** that participation in the activities of the Learning Lab remains voluntary.
- b) **Produce** new evidence and make existing evidence more accessible to EU education and training policy-makers. **Establish** an information repository equipped with tools facilitating access to evidence-informed policy and practice insights, delineated by their respective areas of impact and problem-solving capacities. **Strengthen** the identification of examples of cost-effective investment in education and training. **Explore** synergies with the Eurydice network.
- c) **Organise** capacity-building activities to improve the skills and competences of policy-makers involved in evidence-informed policy in education and training. The training tools should be customised to the various levels of policy-making and to the Member States' respective stages of advancement in evidence-informed policy-making in education and training.
- d) **Support** the establishment of partnerships between the educational research community, policy-makers, and educational staff. **Support** an EU network of intermediary organisations that play a key role in bridging the gap between educational research, policy, practice and society as a whole.
- e) **Engage** and **collaborate** with international organisations, such as the OECD, UNESCO, the IEA and the World Bank, to establish and exploit synergies while avoiding duplication of work to foster evidence-informed policy and practice in education and training.
- f) **Foster** a continuous dialogue and exchange on evidence-informed policy and practice in education and training among Member States, including through the Community of Practice on Counterfactual Impact Evaluation of Education Policies.
- g) **Present** the work plan of the Learning Lab on Investing in Quality Education and Training to the Education Committee for feedback with a view to optimising it with respect to the needs and concerns of Member States. **Report to** and **engage** regularly with the Education Committee on this matter.
- h) **Foresee** sufficient resources in order to ensure that the activities of the Learning Lab have a meaningful impact.

Member States should:

- a) **Explore** participation in the activities offered by the Learning Lab. **Share** their insights during dedicated Education Committee discussions so as to continually enhance the Learning Lab's effectiveness and quality.

CALLS ON MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION, IN LINE WITH ITS COMPETENCES, TO:

Work together on the follow-up of these conclusions in the context of the ongoing work under the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training to achieve the European Education Area.

CALLS ON THE COMMISSION TO

Support these conclusions by taking an evidence-informed approach when designing and proposing new initiatives on education and training. **Conduct** work on proposals, based on and with the expert opinion of the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks. **Prioritise** and take into account the views and concerns of Member States as expressed by the Council and its dedicated preparatory body, the Education Committee.

INSTRUCTS THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE TO

- a) **Pay particular attention** to the use of evidence in its examinations of proposals submitted by the Commission to the Council or of draft Council conclusions and resolutions.
- b) **Deliver an opinion**, where appropriate, on any proposal for an EU indicator or target impacting the field of education and training.
