

## **What of education in the European Semester's 2022 Country Specific Recommendations?**

### **Background**

On 23 May, the European Commission published its [European Semester](#) Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs)<sup>1</sup> and Country Reports (CRs), which have come to be known as the '[Spring Package](#)'. The European Semester is the EU mechanism used to ensure coordination across economic and employment policies amongst Member States, with the CSRs representing the corrective course prescribed by the Commission to ensure convergence on its annual economic and social priorities. Therefore, the Semester crucially guides Member States' investment and reforming of education and training, even more so considering this is the first set of CSRs since COVID-19 halted this process and since the pandemic's adverse impact on the provision of learning has been documented.

### **All is well in education and training?**

Judging from the current CSRs, one might assess that education and training is thriving, considering that only eight countries received at least one CSR focused on education<sup>2</sup>. This is clearly not the case considering the research, including from the European Commission<sup>3</sup>, on learners' needs within the recovery from the Covid-19 crisis. The glaring omission of education is worsened by an absence of references to lifelong learning across the CSRs' recitals, as only two countries had such reference made<sup>4</sup>, solely from the perspective of labour market relevance. This absence of education can be a symptom of the fact that many of the recitals and recommendations mentioning education are replicated from country to country with little to no change on the wording, revealing a systematic lack of an in-depth analysis of the differences between Member States and their specific needs.

The Lifelong Learning Platform - European Civil Society for Education - recalls that the European Commission's definition for lifelong learning accounts for *formal, non-formal or informal learning taking place at all stages in life and resulting in an improvement or update in knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes or participation in society from a personal, civic, cultural, social or employment-related perspective, including the provision of counselling and guidance services*<sup>5</sup>. The inconsistency between this conceptualisation and the narrowed-down, labour market-focused lifelong learning across CSRs

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<sup>1</sup> Find [here](#) LLLP's mapping of the CSRs for each Member State.

<sup>2</sup> AT, BE, FR, HU, LU, NL, PL, SE.

<sup>3</sup> <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC121071>

<sup>4</sup> AT, BG.

<sup>5</sup> <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-d/glossary-common-terms>

waters down the commitment towards inclusive and equitable education across one's life that the Commission promotes.

We call on the European Commission to expand its analysis of indicators to match the lifelong learning definition it promotes, while we insist on an expansion of the stakeholders consulted in the process of providing information for country analyses.

### **A case of policy divergence**

The [European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#) (see [LLLP Infonote](#)) foresees 60% of all adults participating in training every year by 2030. According to the [European Education Area](#) goals, the share of low-achieving 15 year-olds in mathematics, reading and science should be less than 15%, and the share of 25-34-year-olds with tertiary education attainment should be at least 45%. How can these goals be achieved without guiding investment and reforms via the CSRs? The lack of coherence is ingrained in the Semester as the education CSRs were on a rise in previous iterations, only to observe a sharp decline immediately after one of the biggest crisis ever to have shaken the learning system. The disconnect between education and training and its potential for the post-pandemic rebuilding is replicated also when it comes to highlighting the necessity of education and training in meeting the demands of the green and digital transition, further deepening the lack of coherence between the CSRs and the long-term goals that the EU promotes. Moreover, each country received a CSR in 2022 on ensuring fiscal prudence and reducing public expenditure, at a time when public expenditure in education has been on a descending path<sup>6</sup>, revealing a complete incoherence with the current education and training goals which demand more investment.

The Lifelong Learning Platform urges EU institutions to better connect current initiatives in education and training to ensure the needed policy coherence for meaningfully achieving the European Education Area as well as the Updated Skills Agenda, the European Green Deal and other key EU policies. Concomitantly, the Lifelong Learning Platform calls upon Member States and EU institutions to reform the EU economic governance framework by applying green golden rule that allows for increased public funding to education and training so that all learners have access to inclusive, equitable, public education through a lifelong and life-wide learning approach<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> [LLLP Study on public investment in education](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Sign our Charter to join LLLP's Campaign on Investment.](#)