



# Education and Training in Europe 2020

*Responses  
from the EU Member States*

**Eurydice Report**

*Education and  
Training*





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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report presents a focused comparative analysis of national responses to the Europe 2020 priorities in the field of education and training. It concentrates on recent and forthcoming national reforms across four thematic areas that have a direct relevance to the Europe 2020 strategy: early school leaving (ESL), higher education, youth employment and vocational education and training (VET) and lifelong learning.

Based on national information collected through the Eurydice network, this report presents a factual cross-country reporting of recent reforms, which can support policy makers at national and European level. This comparative stock-taking has a particular relevance in the framework of the Europe 2020 strategy and the follow up of the European Semester.

The report should be seen as complementary to the analysis contained in the Education and Training Monitor and other recent documents produced by DG Education and Culture. It does not provide an assessment of the progress made by individual countries, as this assessment is available in the 2013 staff working documents accompanying the Commission's proposal for the 2013 Country-specific Recommendations <sup>(1)</sup> and in the country reports of the 2013 Education and Training Monitor <sup>(2)</sup>. Moreover, an interim overview of the state of play in the implementation of the Country-specific Recommendations is available in the staff working document accompanying the 2014 Annual Growth Survey <sup>(3)</sup>.

The report reviews policy measures undertaken since 2011, the year following the launch of the Europe 2020 strategy, as well as any measures currently at an advanced stage of preparation for implementation. The report is based on two main sources of information: Eurypedia (The European Encyclopedia on National Education Systems), Chapter 14 'Ongoing reforms and policy developments' <sup>(4)</sup> and the 2013 national reform programmes submitted by EU Member States to the European Commission <sup>(5)</sup>. The report covers the EU-28 Member States.

The comparative analysis comprises four chapters addressing the following policy areas:

- Chapter 1: Tackling early school leaving
- Chapter 2: Improving attainment levels and the quality and relevance of higher education
- Chapter 3: Improving skills and VET for youth employment
- Chapter 4: Increasing adult participation in lifelong learning

The important issue of investment in education and training and efficiency of spending has not been addressed. A more in-depth collection of information is necessary to enable reporting of national policy measures in this area.

Overall, since 2011, EU countries have launched or prepared to implement a wide range of measures to respond to the key challenges identified in the European Semester. These responses reflect Member States' positions in relation to the Europe 2020 and Education and Training 2020 targets and

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<sup>(1)</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/index_en.htm)

<sup>(2)</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/progress\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/progress_en.htm)

<sup>(3)</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/2014/csrimpl2014\\_swd\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/2014/csrimpl2014_swd_en.pdf)

<sup>(4)</sup> [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/eurypedia\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/eurypedia_en.php)

<sup>(5)</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm)

benchmarks, Country-specific Recommendations (CSRs) in the area of education and training and national circumstances.

This summary provides a synopsis of the main trends and reforms by thematic areas/chapters.

## **Tackling early school leaving**

EU countries report reforms to tackle early school leaving that span across several education levels. Initiatives have been undertaken by countries with rates both above and below the EU headline target on early school leaving. Even countries with the lowest proportions of early leavers report measures that should impact positively on early school leaving rates (CZ, PL, SI and SK). Several countries (DK, ES, IT, LV, HU, MT and RO) have taken measures in line with the 2012 and 2013 CSRs in this area.

Overall, most of the reported national reforms related to early school leaving are focussed on prevention measures. Among these measures, more than two-thirds of European countries (BE fr and BE nl, BG, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FR, HR, LV, LT, HU, MT, AT, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK, FI, SE and UK) report recent or forthcoming initiatives to facilitate access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) and improve its quality. Recent reforms include, for example, expanding provision and supporting children's attendance by statutory means and/or by providing financial assistance.

A second large group of countries (BE, BG, CZ, DK, ES, FR, LV, HU, PT, RO, SI, SK, FI and UK-ENG/WLS) is currently developing preventive measures in the form of policies to support disadvantaged pupils, who are often from a migrant or Roma background, and who are also often amongst those with learning difficulties and poor achievement levels. Measures in this area focus on language training for migrant children, strategies for better integration of Roma children, additional resources to schools with high share of disadvantaged pupils and strengthening remedial measures for students with learning difficulties.

Almost half of the countries report that some reforms to prevent early school leaving are related to improving the VET sector (BE de, DK, EL, ES, FR, LT, MT, NL, PL, PT, FI, SE and UK-ENG). Recent measures focus on making VET programmes more appealing through improving guidance, diversifying the range of qualifications by modularising courses, or facilitating the transfer to the higher education sector. These measures represent important ways of making sure that educational pathways do not lead to dead-ends with no possibility for further progression. Moreover, several countries have also strengthened links with the labour market through work-based learning or updated curricula (see Chapter 3). Two of the countries with the highest proportions of early school leavers (ES and PT) have taken steps to bring forward the opportunity to join a VET programme already at lower secondary level.

Of the intervention policies designed to avert early school leaving, career guidance is usually the focus of most recent reforms. Initiatives to strengthen networking with parents and develop cross-sector cooperation have been reported in three (BG, DE and SI) and four countries (BE fr, FR, LU and MT) respectively.

Compensatory measures to assist early school leavers are reported much less often. Only six countries (EE, FR, LU, HU, MT and RO) refer to recent initiatives for establishing or reinforcing second-chance education programmes, in particular in the field of VET. Targeted individual support has been developed in five countries (ES, FR, AT, SE and UK) as part of recent measures to get early leavers back into education and training.



Finally, collecting and analysing data on early school leaving and developing evidence-based policies is crucial to tackle the problem effectively; recent developments in this area have taken place or are underway in around one third of the countries (BE nl, BG, FR, IT, LV, LT, HU, MT, NL, PL, SE and UK-WLS).

### **Improving attainment levels and the quality and relevance of higher education**

The Europe 2020 target of increasing the number of young people with higher education qualifications and the 2012 and 2013 CSRs to ten countries (AT, BG, CZ, EE, HU, IT, LV, RO, SI and SK) on participation of disadvantaged groups, completion rates, quality improvement and relevance to the labour market have been translated into a number of large-scale initiatives. Most countries report that they aim to widen participation in higher education by providing support to disadvantaged students, improving access routes to higher education (see Chapter 4) and reforming their systems of student support. There is less attention on measures to improve completion rates, with less than half of all Member States (BE fr, CZ, DK, DE, EL, FR, IT, HU, NL, AT and FI) reporting such measures as strengthening career guidance or providing financial incentives for timely completion of studies. Moreover, a minority of countries (BG, ES, HR, SI, SK and SE) do not report any recent or forthcoming reforms to either widen participation or improve completion rates; among these, Bulgaria and Croatia currently have relatively low student participation in tertiary education.

Improving the quality and relevance of higher education is also given a high priority. Two thirds of the countries refer to policy developments in the areas of quality assurance and employability of higher education graduates respectively. In the area of quality assurance, there is a trend towards establishing a single quality assurance and accreditation body that aims to provide more integrated and transparent services, as well as a move from programme to institutional accreditation. In some countries (BE fr and BE nl, HU, LU, PT and SI) efforts to improve the employability of higher education graduates include, among others, recent steps to establish or further develop shorter, more practically oriented courses which often focus on economic sectors experiencing skills shortages (see also Chapter 3).

Several countries report that they have recently undertaken (IT, HU and PL) or are launching (DK, LV and FI) large-scale initiatives to both improve attainment levels and increase the quality and relevance of higher education.

### **Improving skills and VET for youth employment**

The ET 2020 benchmark on graduate employability and an increasing number of 2012 and 2013 CSRs (BG, DK, DE, EE, ES, FR, IT, CY, LV, LT, LU, MT, HU, AT, PL, RO, SE, SI, SK, FI and UK) focus on the contribution of education and training in tackling youth unemployment and, in particular, in overcoming the challenges related to school-to-work transitions. In particular, twelve countries (BG, ES, FR, IT, LV, LT, HU, PL, RO, SE, SK and UK) received 2013 CSRs that directly refer to the implementation of a Youth Guarantee scheme.

Although national situations differ, enhancing young people's skills and reforming VET to improve youth employment has been a focus of all countries' policy initiatives since 2011. As recommended at European level, Youth Guarantee schemes which entail the offer of a job, good-quality apprenticeship or a traineeship, or continued education are under preparation in the EU Member States. Some countries (EL, ES, IT, LV, LT, HU, MT, PT, SK, SE and UK) report comprehensive policy initiatives to tackle youth unemployment. These initiatives integrate a range of measures similar to those implemented under the Youth Guarantee scheme.

Two-thirds of countries (BE, BG, CZ, DE, ES, FR, EL, IT, CY, LV, HU, MT, AT, PL, PT, SE, SK and UK) report policy measures to improve school-to-work transition by further developing work experience opportunities, either in VET or in general education, from secondary to tertiary level. Most countries (except BG, CZ and CY) emphasise measures linked to work experience in the VET sector. The majority of these measures focus on implementing a dual system model and introducing more work-based learning and apprenticeships and many initiatives are in line with the CSRs issued in 2012 and 2013.

To address skills mismatches, a few countries (IE, LV, PL and PT) report recent initiatives to develop skills forecasting and monitoring systems. Measures to strengthen the links between education and training and the labour market, notably by involving companies and social partners in curricula development in VET, have been mentioned by a number of countries (BE fr and BE nl, IE, EE, LT and LV) as an important instrument to ensure that provision keeps pace with the changing needs of the economy.

Almost two-thirds of countries report initiatives to provide more opportunities to upgrade young people's skills; in particular, in relation to sectors with labour market potential or shortages (BE fr, IE, ES, FR, EL, MT, SI, FI and UK-ENG) and entrepreneurship skills (BG, ES, EE, LT, HU, PT, RO, SI and UK-WLS) respectively. These initiatives largely refer to short-term training courses and target mostly those who are unemployed and early leavers from education and training (see also Chapter 1).

Among the countries with the lowest employability levels, Spain, Portugal and Slovakia each report initiatives at least in four action fields such as work experience opportunities, entrepreneurial skills training (see Annex 2). In contrast, Bulgaria and Croatia have low levels of graduate employability but have only reported a limited number of initiatives.

## **Increasing adult participation in lifelong learning**

Adult participation in lifelong learning is far from reaching the 15 % benchmark in the majority of EU countries; only five Member States (DK, NL, FI, SE and UK) have exceeded this target.

Six countries (BE, EE, FR, ES, PL and SI) received 2012 and 2013 CSRs related to lifelong learning. Recommendations refer to challenges linked to the need to adopt a lifelong learning strategy, provide adults with low-level skills access to lifelong learning and strengthening the coherence between education, lifelong learning, VET and employment.

Member States address the policy objective of increasing adult participation in lifelong learning by implementing a number of large scale initiatives such as improving career guidance, awareness raising, offering more flexible study opportunities and pathways, focus on low-skilled/low qualified groups and financial incentives for participation in LLL. In general, the lower performing countries (for instance BG, HR and RO) report fewer large scale initiatives than the high performers (EE, LU and FI).

Measures for improving career guidance for LLL have been reported by almost half of the countries (BE de and BE nl, CZ, EE, CY, LU, AT, PT, RO, SI, SK, FI and UK-ENG). Support for flexible modes of delivering learning content (distance learning, evening courses and education better tailored to the need of the individual) and wider participation of adult learners in higher education have been a recent focus in ten countries (BE nl, DE, EE, EL, ES, FR, LV, MT, FI and SE). Financial support for participation in LLL has been reported by eight countries (EE, ES, LT, LU, HU, AT, SI and UK). Three countries (EE, ES and SI) with 2012 and 2013 CSRs for improving access of low skilled adults to lifelong learning report measures such as special training programmes.

Validation and recognition of informal and non-formal learning has been recognised as one of the tools to motivate adults to engage in further learning. A few countries (IT, LU, MT, PL and SK) report that they have recently introduced a procedure for the validation of learning outcomes in an informal and non-formal context. The work to develop qualifications frameworks is progressing in all Member States, with countries referencing their National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). In addition, some countries (EE, EL, PL and PT) have taken measures to enhance the transparency of training provision in VET. More than half of the countries report measures addressing qualifications standards and quality assurance in VET.



## INTRODUCTION

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Education and training has a prominent place in the Europe 2020 strategy. A headline target has been set for education which specifies twin goals on early school leaving and higher education attainment, while under the European semester of economic governance, the key messages of the Annual Growth Survey (AGS) as well as the Country-specific Recommendations have strong links with education and training <sup>(1)</sup>. Moreover, the 'Strategic framework for cooperation in education and training until 2020' (ET 2020) and the 'Rethinking education' strategy <sup>(2)</sup> focus attention on the major challenges facing the sector, and highlight the areas that need to be improved if it is to fulfil its role in helping to create a stronger European economy.

### Objectives

This report aims to provide a focused stock-taking and analysis, which can support policy makers at national and EU level. It examines the national responses to the Europe 2020 strategy in the field of education and training, and presents a factual cross-country reporting of recent reforms. It should be seen as complementary to the analysis provided in the Education and Training Monitor. The report does not provide an assessment of the progress made by individual countries, as this assessment is available in the 2013 staff working documents accompanying the Commission's proposal for the 2013 Country-specific Recommendations <sup>(3)</sup> and in the country reports of the 2013 Education and Training Monitor <sup>(4)</sup>. An interim overview of the state of play in the implementation of the Country-specific Recommendations is available in the staff working document accompanying the 2014 Annual Growth Survey <sup>(5)</sup>.

### Scope

The report concentrates on recent and forthcoming national reforms across several thematic areas that are explicitly linked to the Europe 2020 strategy. Measures that do not have a direct relevance to the Europe 2020 priorities have not been included, even if they ultimately have an impact on overall education policies and outcomes. The report reviews policy measures undertaken since 2011, the year following the launch of the Europe 2020 strategy, as well as any measures currently at an advanced stage of preparation for implementation. Some on-going initiatives with a time frame spanning the period immediately before and after 2011 are mentioned as well, as an illustration of possible policy measures to address common challenges. However, the report does not consider policies and practices that were well-established before 2011, even if these are recognised to be working and making a substantial contribution to current education and training outcomes. When references to such well-established policies and practices are made, it is done in order to provide some background and situate the post-2011 reforms and policy developments in the national context.

### Structure and methodology

The comparative analysis comprises four chapters addressing the following policy areas:

- Chapter 1: Tackling early school leaving
- Chapter 2: Improving attainment levels and the quality and relevance of higher education
- Chapter 3: Improving skills and VET for youth employment
- Chapter 4: Increasing adult participation in lifelong learning

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<sup>(1)</sup> For further information on the Europe 2020 Strategy and the European Semester, see [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm)

<sup>(2)</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/rethinking\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/rethinking_en.htm)

<sup>(3)</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm)

<sup>(4)</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/progress\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/progress_en.htm)

<sup>(5)</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/2014/csrimpl2014\\_swd\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/2014/csrimpl2014_swd_en.pdf)

Each chapter begins with an overview of the priorities outlined in the policy framework at European level, as defined in the Europe and ET 2020 reform processes, as well as in recent Council conclusions and policy documents produced by the Commission. These priorities, together with the scope of the 2012 and 2013 Country-specific Recommendations (CSRs) determine the thematic coverage and structure of each chapter and are presented in graphic form at the beginning of each chapter. The latest statistics in the respective areas have also been provided as background information. Chapters are necessarily closely interrelated and cross-references are systematically provided.

Each chapter contains a comparative overview of recent reforms in a particular policy area. This overview is complemented by a limited number of country examples, which serve as an illustration of specific and recent policy measures undertaken by Member States with related CSRs, as well as by other Member States. Annex 1 provides a list of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs in the area of education and training. Annex 2 contains diagrams with detailed information on recent and forthcoming measures in the EU-28 in the four respective policy areas. Further country examples, which are not exhaustive, are provided in Annex 3. Annex 4 contains information on recent or forthcoming initiatives in two non-EU countries (Norway and Turkey) which are not discussed in the comparative part.

### **Sources and country coverage**

The report is based on two main sources of national information:

- Eurypedia (The European Encyclopedia on National Education Systems), Chapter 14 'Ongoing reforms and policy developments', as updated in March 2013 <sup>(6)</sup>;
- 2013 national reform programmes submitted by EU Member States to the European Commission in April/May 2013 <sup>(7)</sup>.

These two sources present national information and refer to central level reforms and policy initiatives.

The report covers the EU-28 Member States with a separate reporting for the education systems in Belgium (the French and Flemish Communities and the German-speaking Community) and the United Kingdom (England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland).

Eurypedia, which is available at [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/eurypedia\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/eurypedia_en.php), contains further detailed information on national reforms. This information is regularly updated by the Eurydice National Units.

Several Eurydice reports to be published in 2014 will examine in further detail some of the areas covered in this report. In particular, the forthcoming Eurydice reports on early childhood education and care; funding mechanisms and decision-making in school education; policies to tackle early school leaving; access, retention and employability in higher education; and the report on adult education, will provide in-depth analysis of current national policies, academic research and best practices.

This report has been produced in close cooperation with DG EAC and has been reviewed by CEDEFOP.

All Eurydice National Units have checked and provided additional information for this report. Contributors are acknowledged in a separate final section.

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<sup>(6)</sup> Eurypedia is available at: [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/eurypedia\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/eurypedia_en.php)

<sup>(7)</sup> The 2013 National reform programmes are available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm)



## GLOSSARY

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### *Country codes*

<b>EU-28</b>	European Union
<b>BE</b>	Belgium
<b>BE fr</b>	Belgium – French Community
<b>BE de</b>	Belgium – German-speaking Community
<b>BE nl</b>	Belgium – Flemish Community
<b>BG</b>	Bulgaria
<b>CZ</b>	Czech Republic
<b>DK</b>	Denmark
<b>DE</b>	Germany
<b>EE</b>	Estonia
<b>IE</b>	Ireland
<b>EL</b>	Greece
<b>ES</b>	Spain
<b>FR</b>	France
<b>HR</b>	Croatia
<b>IT</b>	Italy
<b>CY</b>	Cyprus
<b>LV</b>	Latvia

<b>LT</b>	Lithuania
<b>LU</b>	Luxembourg
<b>HU</b>	Hungary
<b>MT</b>	Malta
<b>NL</b>	The Netherlands
<b>AT</b>	Austria
<b>PL</b>	Poland
<b>PT</b>	Portugal
<b>RO</b>	Romania
<b>SI</b>	Slovenia
<b>SK</b>	Slovakia
<b>FI</b>	Finland
<b>SE</b>	Sweden
<b>UK</b>	The United Kingdom
<b>UK-ENG</b>	England
<b>UK-WLS</b>	Wales
<b>UK-NIR</b>	Northern Ireland
<b>UK-SCT</b>	Scotland

### *Statistical code*

: Data not available



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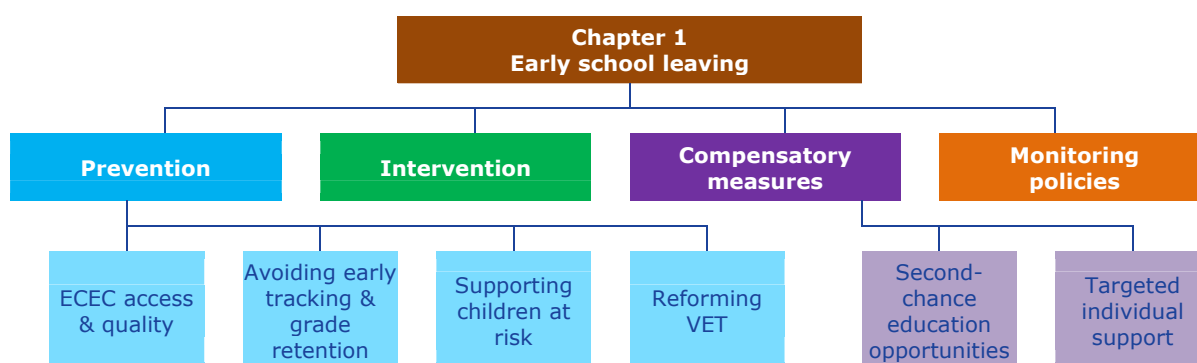


## CHAPTER 1: TACKLING EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

The Europe 2020 strategy highlights the completion of upper secondary education as the minimum level of educational attainment for young people in today's society. Indeed, one of the two education targets for the EU by 2020 is to reduce the rates of young people leaving education and training with no more than lower secondary education <sup>(1)</sup> to below 10 %. Early school leavers are more likely to have their life chances limited in today's society as they lack the crucial qualifications needed for successful integration into the labour market and they are at greater risk of social exclusion and poverty. Early leavers from education and training <sup>(2)</sup> are also more likely to find it difficult to participate in civic and democratic life. For these reasons, early school leaving may represent significant social and economic costs for society.

The Council <sup>(3)</sup> has recommended that Member States should ensure that evidence-based comprehensive strategies to reduce early school leaving are in place by 2012. The recommended framework defines three areas of policy: prevention, intervention and compensation. Prevention policies include system-based and other reforms to remove obstacles to achievement and thus prevent early school leaving. Intervention policies are intended to avert problems for individuals already showing signs that they may not complete their schooling; and compensation policies include the provision of 'compensatory' education – special programmes or customised support – for those returning to education after leaving early (second-chance programmes). It should also be noted that these three categories overlap to some extent with some measures performing more than one function, for example, a measure categorised as preventative may also serve to intervene in helping to avert problems for those already showing signs of disengagement (European Commission 2011a, p. 13).

This Chapter describes recent reforms undertaken by EU Member States to reduce early school leaving. It also emphasises 2012 and 2013 Country-specific Recommendations (CSRs) related to the EU target of reducing early school leaving. The scope and structure of this Chapter, as illustrated below, have been defined in relation to the EU level policy framework. However, it is important to underline that its structure does not fully correspond to the content of the EU policy framework, because it is limited to related measures taken since 2011 across Europe.



<sup>(1)</sup> The end of lower secondary education corresponds to the end of compulsory education in many EU Member States.

<sup>(2)</sup> The terms 'early leavers from education and training' and 'early school leavers' are used interchangeably.

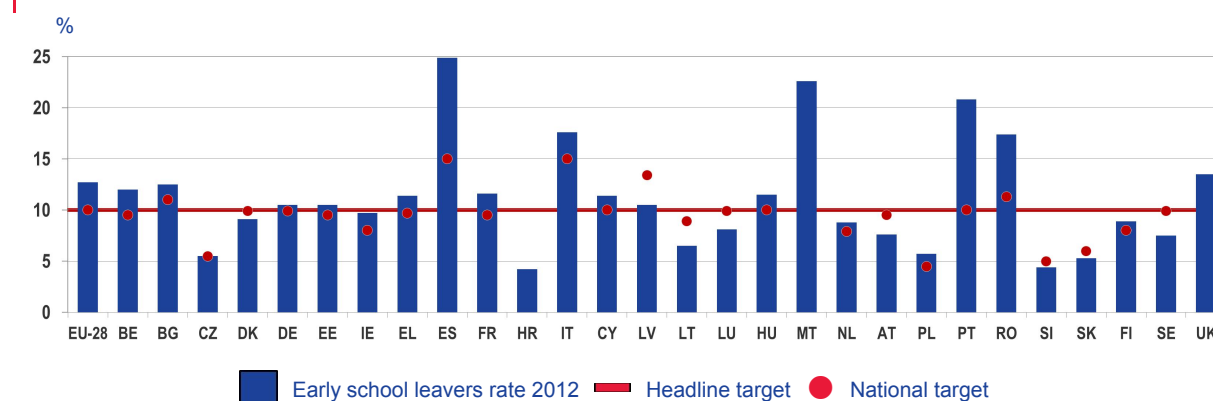
<sup>(3)</sup> Recommendation of the Council of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving, OJ C191/1, 1.7.2011.

## Key statistics

Significant disparities exist between countries' early school leaving rates (see Figure 1.1). In 2012, the EU-28 average for the population aged 18-24 with lower secondary education at most and not currently in further education or training was 12.7 %. However, five countries showed a proportion of early leavers from education and training well above the EU average. In Italy and Romania, the rates of early school leavers were around 17.5 % in 2012; whereas in Spain, Malta and Portugal, they ranged between 20 and 25 %. In the remaining countries, the proportions of early school leavers were close to the EU-27 average or below, with the lowest rates observed in Croatia (4.2 %), Slovenia (4.4 %), Slovakia (5.3 %), the Czech Republic (5.5 %) and Poland (5.7 %).

Taking into account the twin Europe 2020 headline targets on education, Member States have set national targets that reflect their country's starting position and national circumstances (see Figure 1.1). Nine Member States have already met or exceeded their 2020 national target for this indicator (the Czech Republic, Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Austria, Slovenia, Slovakia and Sweden).

**Figure 1.1: Early school leavers rate 2012, Europe 2020 target and national targets**



%	EU-28	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY
	12.7	12.0	12.5	5.5	9.1	10.5	10.5	9.7	11.4	24.9	11.6	4.2	17.6	11.4
LV	LT	LU	HU	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK
10.5	6.5	8.1	11.5	22.6	8.8	7.6	5.7	20.8	17.4	4.4	5.3	8.9	7.5	13.5

Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey (data extracted 25 September 2013).

### Explanatory note

Early leavers from education and training refers to persons aged 18 to 24 fulfilling the following two conditions: first, their highest level of education or training attained was ISCED 0, 1, 2 or 3c short; and second, they declared that they had not received any education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey (numerator). The denominator consists of the total population of the same age group, excluding those who answered 'no' to the questions on 'highest level of education or training attained' and 'participation in education and training'. Both the numerators and the denominators come from the EU Labour Force Survey.

### Country specific notes

**Malta:** The definition of the current national target does not fully correspond to the definition of the data published in this table and is therefore not shown.

**Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Poland:** Provisional data.

**United Kingdom:** No national target.



## 1.1. Reforms to prevent early school leaving

Early school leaving is acknowledged to be the result of factors which belong to two main categories which interact with each other: school-based factors and factors related to social, family or individual background (Thibert, 2013).

The policy framework agreed by Member States to tackle early school leaving contains a number of measures which are preventative in nature <sup>(4)</sup>. These measures seek to avoid the conditions that lead to early school leaving. They not only include school policies which can help mitigate the negative effects of disadvantaged backgrounds on school completion (e.g. individualised support to pupils) but they also address certain features of education systems which are more likely to lead to early school leaving, such as intensive use of grade retention or lack of good quality vocational education and training.

Beyond the scope of this chapter, reforms aimed at improving the education system are also expected to impact on early school leaving rates. These include, for instance, broad curricular reforms, reorganising school time, and developing quality assurance systems.

### 1.1.1. Increasing participation in early childhood education and care and improving its quality

It is well documented that exposure to high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) favours success in a child's future school career (Mullis et al., 2012; OECD, 2011). ECEC is defined as pre-school education and childcare services for children between birth and compulsory school age. It may, furthermore, potentially decrease the negative effects of coming from a disadvantaged background. ECEC is a major element in preventing early school leaving and low educational performance (European Commission 2012b, p. 29).

Acknowledging the importance of this first stage of education, the Council of the European Union adopted an ET 2020 benchmark in 2009 on the participation in ECEC of children aged four to compulsory school-attendance age. Participation rates should be at least 95 % by 2020 <sup>(5)</sup>. The latest statistical data available <sup>(6)</sup> highlight that, in 2011, these children's participation was already more than 95 % in 13 <sup>(7)</sup> of the 28 current Member States. However, other countries are below the EU benchmark. The lowest participation rates (Greece, Croatia, Poland, Slovakia and Finland), range between 70 % and 80 %. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that low participation rates in ECEC can be due to parental preferences for alternative types of provision which are not included in the figures, such as family day care in private homes (EACEA/Eurydice, 2009). For instance, in Finland, all parents are entitled to have a public day care place for their under school-aged children, but participation depends on families' choices.

This sub-section focuses firstly on recent national measures aiming to increase young children's participation in ECEC, and then presents initiatives to improve the quality of available provision. Since 2011, a majority of EU-28 Member States, including the five which had a 2012 and 2013 CSR in this area, have either already introduced or are preparing reforms to widen access to and/or improve the quality of ECEC (see Figure 1.2). When interpreting absence of recent measures to promote participation in ECEC, it is important to keep in mind that participation rates are already very high in several countries (see above).

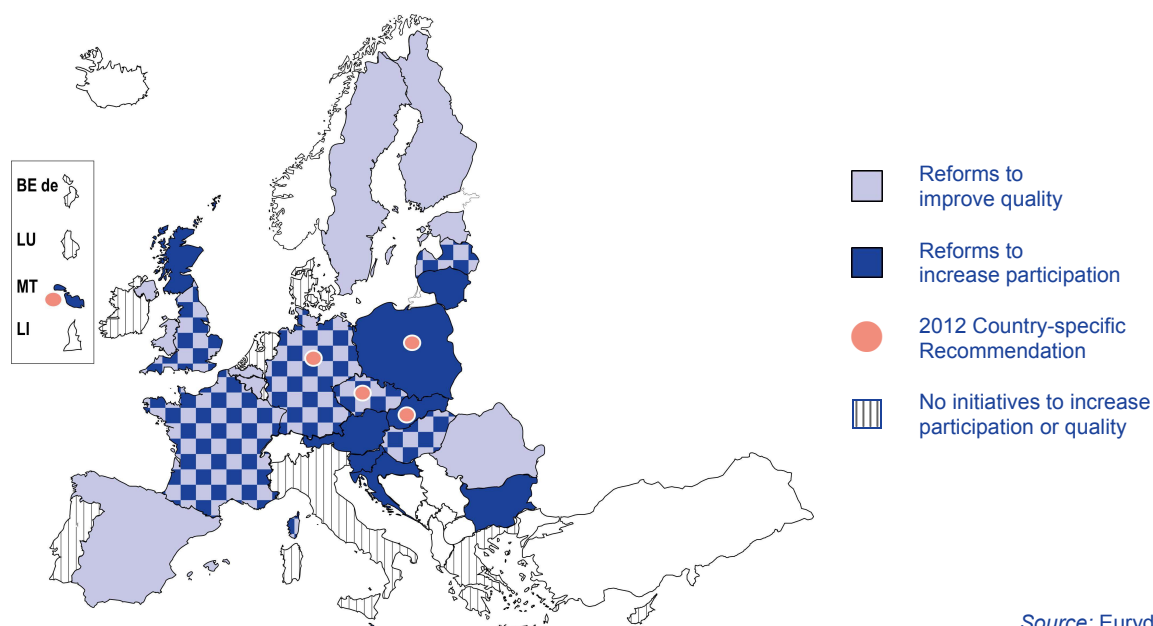
<sup>(4)</sup> Recommendation of the Council of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving, OJ C191/1, 1.7.2011.

<sup>(5)</sup> Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020'). OJ C 119, 28.5.2009.

<sup>(6)</sup> <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00179&plugin=1>

<sup>(7)</sup> Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Spain, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

**Figure 1.2: Large-scale initiatives to increase participation or improve quality in early childhood education and care in EU-28, implemented since 2011 or in preparation**



Source: Eurydice.

### Explanatory note

'Large-scale initiatives' refers to measures that are applied across the whole education system and which have been launched since 2011, or are in an advanced stage of development prior to implementation.

## Increasing participation in ECEC

Recent measures aimed at widening the participation of young children in ECEC include changing the conditions of entry to the last years of ECEC, before the start of compulsory or primary education, by making attendance compulsory, a legal entitlement, or more affordable for parents.

In **Bulgaria**, the last two years of pre-primary education will become compulsory from 2016/17.

In **Poland**, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, since September 2013, a central grant for increasing the number of places and reducing the costs borne by parents has been assigned to local governments, which have the option to introduce partial or total fee waivers for parents. The legal entitlement to pre-primary education will be established for four-year-olds from September 2015, and for three-year-olds, from September 2017, whereas for five-year-olds, it has been compulsory since September 2011.

In **Slovakia**, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport is working on the creation of legislative conditions for making attendance at kindergartens free-of-charge from the age of 4. In parallel, the government is cooperating with the founders of kindergartens in order to expand the capacities of existing facilities. A new legal provision will come into force in September 2013, allowing kindergarten directors to increase the maximum number of children in their institution if necessary, under certain circumstances.

National efforts to promote young children's access to ECEC also focus on extending current provision by additional public investment or subsidies to providers; by alleviating the regulations for establishing ECEC settings; or by widening the approved qualifications held by staff. However, in the context of the economic downturn, as seen below, some measures have been taken that have raised the cost of ECEC services for parents.

In the **Czech Republic**, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, the range of persons qualified to care for children aged from 0 up to compulsory schooling in ECEC settings (with the exception of nursery schools) has been widened, due to the Government's approval of extended qualifications for childcare staff in 2012. Draft legislation still to be submitted to the government and Parliament will introduce a new type of childcare service (i.e. children's groups) and new tax measures to support all types of childcare services. The measures are expected to come into force in 2014. The Government has also removed some legal barriers to the establishment

of ECEC settings by public and private companies in 2011, e.g. by allowing them to give preference in admissions to the children of their employees.

In **Slovenia**, in early 2013, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport drafted the amendments to the Kindergarten Act, in order to award companies the right to receive public funds for ECEC settings even if they have been established only for employees' children. However, the coordination with the stakeholders regarding this legislative change is still on-going. Some previous benefits towards the cost of kindergarten fees have been decreased due to the severe financial circumstances and the need to cut public expenditure. Following the adoption of the Fiscal Balance Act at the end of May 2012 by the National Assembly, parents of two or more children attending ECEC settings (from 1 to 6-years olds) must now cover a share (i.e. 30 %) of the charge for the second child. However, they do not need to pay for any additional child.

Finally, some countries target specifically younger children in their efforts to increase participation in ECEC. Indeed, according to the latest statistical data available, in ten Member States only, at least 33 % of children under three were enrolled in formal structures in 2011 (European Commission, 2013a). In the remaining countries, either information is not available or participation is lower than 33 %.

In **France**, at the end of 2012, the government committed itself to reversing the decreasing trend in enrolment rates of two-year old children in pre-primary schools (*école maternelle*), in order to bring it to over 30 % by 2017, against 11.6 % in 2011 (Ministère de l'éducation nationale, 2012). This objective has been further emphasised in the new guidance and programming law for restructuring schools adopted in June 2013. Children in urban and rural disadvantaged areas are specifically targeted. Some of the 1 000 newly recruited teachers at the start of the 2012/13 school year for the whole pre-primary and primary provision have been assigned to this goal, as will be some of the 3 050 teaching posts created at the beginning of 2013/14.

In **Germany**, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, the legal entitlement to a place in an ECEC setting has been extended for children aged one and two from August 2013. In order to establish the basis for fulfilling this new legal right, the Federal Government, *Länder*, and local authorities have expanded the provision of day-care places for children under three years old over the last few years to meet the target of 750 000 places available (i.e. 35 per cent of children under three) as agreed in 2007. However, recent parent surveys reveal that childcare facilities are now required for 39 per cent of all infants, which means that 780 000 places have to be provided nationwide. The Federal Government is thus providing investment funds and financial aid for operating costs to the *Länder* for the additional 30 000 places needed nationwide.

In **Malta**, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, the Maltese Government is presently striving to increase the number of childcare centres (0-3 years) in densely populated localities and areas with high concentrations of workers. Over the last few years, the Foundation for Educational Services has increased the number of government-funded childcare centres, and the number of children attending these centres has increased by around 70 % between 2011 and 2012. As from 2014, to improve the affordability of childcare services, families who are in-work would benefit from free childcare. This initiative will be financed by the government through a public private partnership and will complement existing government childcare services.

## Improving the quality of ECEC

In parallel to or independently of efforts to widen access to ECEC, maintaining or improving quality is just as crucial for the subsequent successful integration of children into the school system and hence the prevention of early school leaving. All European countries have implemented measures to support disadvantaged children in ECEC. These measures include, for instance, training in the language of instruction for children with different mother tongues, or the provision of additional staff or funds (EACEA/Eurydice, 2009). Recent measures aimed at improving the quality of provision for young children include reviewing central guidelines, revising child/staff ratios, increasing the number of specialist staff or reforming governance.

In **Belgium (Flemish Community)**, regulations adopted in 2012 provide for an increase in the number of counselling and support staff for children in pre-primary education, which is now the same as for primary education. This measure, which entails an additional investment of EUR 52.7 million, brought an 8.8 % increase in pre-primary counselling and support staff, and enables schools to form smaller classes.

In **Germany**, from 2011 to 2014, the Federal level of government is devoting a EUR 400 million budget to allow 4 000 day-care centres, which increasingly offer facilities for children under the age of three, to focus on integration and the acquisition of German

language. A federal budget of EUR 25 000 has been dedicated to enable each day-care centre involved to appoint additional and suitably qualified educational staff, tasked with the promotion of early German language skills for children below the age of three who come from a migrant or disadvantaged background.

In **Portugal**, in 2014, revised curriculum guidelines and a quality assurance system for pre-primary education for children aged three to six should be implemented.

In 2013 in **Finland**, the drafting of legislation, administrative guidelines and governance of day-care services and early childhood education for which the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health was responsible have now been transferred to the Ministry of Education and Culture. The purpose of this reform is to develop early childhood education and care as one operational whole, (instead of being divided between two administrative sectors in the central government) and support a better educational continuum from the early age to the end of school education.

### 1.1.2. Avoiding 'early tracking' and limiting grade retention

Some features of education systems, such as the extensive use of grade retention or the early streaming of students by ability into different tracks or schools, are acknowledged as factors contributing to early school leaving. This is particularly the case in education systems with differentiated pathways and significant disparities in performance levels between schools (Thibert, 2013).

Research shows that 'early tracking' <sup>(8)</sup> increases socio-economic segregation between schools, which deepens inequality in pupil achievement (Causa and Chapuis, 2009); postponing the choice between educational pathways may have a positive impact on educational outcomes. For instance, an OECD analysis (2010) shows delaying vocational education tracking from age 15 to 16 has had a significant and positive impact on young people's reading literacy skills in Poland.

Several European countries practise early tracking, although some have been undertaking steps towards or attempting to carry out reforms in this area of their education system.

**Austria**, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, is currently attempting to address the negative effects of early tracking on the educational outcomes of disadvantaged young people. However, so far, a national consensus on this issue has not yet been reached, despite a 2012 parliamentary decision providing the legal basis for a comprehensive school at lower secondary level. Traditionally, pupils aged ten have had to choose between two types of general secondary school, one (*Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schulen – AHS*) being more academically oriented than the other (*Hauptschulen*). By 2018/19, general secondary schools (*Hauptschulen*) will become New Secondary Schools (*Neue Mittelschule*), which build on individualised learning, support measures and a competence-based approach, whereas the lower stages of maximum 10 % of the academic secondary schools (AHS) have the option of joining on a pilot basis.

**Malta**, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, is continuing with the phasing out of its dual secondary education system. Up to 2010/11, pupils who started secondary education were distributed between Junior Lyceums and Area Secondary Schools, according to their ability as shown in the standardised examinations which took place at the end of primary education. As from September 2011, secondary school-age pupils started attending comprehensive College Secondary Schools. This reform is being phased in year by year until 2015, when eventually all secondary school-age pupils should attend College Secondary Schools.

Evidence shows that the extensive use of grade retention (holding students back to repeat a school year) has a long-term social and academically negative impact. Indeed, retention rates are higher for children from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds (European Commission, 2008). Furthermore, it deepens the achievement gap between those who have repeated a grade and their peers, so that pupils who repeat a grade are more likely to leave education and training early (OECD, 2012).

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<sup>(8)</sup> 'Early tracking' refers here to placing children into separate schools, for instance offering either academic or vocational programmes, based on their prior achievements before the age of 13 (European Commission 2006, p. 6).

There are wide variations between European countries in the use of grade retention. In a majority of EU countries, a very low percentage of pupils repeat a primary school year. However, Pisa 2009 data show that the proportion of those repeating a year in primary education is particularly high in six countries (Belgium, Spain, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Portugal), ranging from 12.2 % in Spain to 22.4 % in the Netherlands and Portugal (EACEA/Eurydice 2011b, p. 34). Several countries have recently introduced or intend to introduce measures to reduce the use of grade retention.

In March 2012, **Belgium (French Community)** launched a pilot project *Décolâge!* (Take-off), aimed at reducing grade retention rates for pupils aged from two and a half to eight. Schools voluntarily decide to participate in the project, which involves drafting an action plan on the main areas for improvement. Various activities are available for teachers, head teachers and other staff members involved in the project, including continuous professional development sessions, support from colleagues, and use of interactive platforms. The aim is to promote exchanges of information and expertise on alternative practices to grade retention, such as enhanced use of diagnostic evaluation followed by an individualised remedial plan.

In **France**, the new guidance and programming law for restructuring schools promulgated in July 2013 requires that the use of grade retention should become very rare.

In **Latvia**, since 2012, following an amendment to education legislation, the option to repeat a year has been further restricted. Schools are obliged to provide special support measures for pupils with learning difficulties in order to avoid repetition of a school year.

In **Portugal**, in 2012, the introduction of external examinations in the 4th and 6th year of compulsory education was accompanied by a specific initiative targeting pupils at risk of retention in the 4th year because of insufficient marks. After the end of the school year, these pupils are expected to attend extra support classes and retake the national examination. In 2013/14, this measure will be extended to pupils in the 6th year of compulsory education.

### 1.1.3. Supporting children at risk

Although the combination of factors which leads to early school leaving is highly specific to each individual, they are strongly associated with economic and social disadvantages. Children from low socio-economic, migrant or disadvantaged minority backgrounds, or from ethnic minorities, are more likely to leave education and training before completing upper secondary education (European Commission, 2011a). European countries have developed a set of equity-driven education policies, such as positive discrimination measures or systematic language support (European Commission, op. cit.), which target groups of children acknowledged as being at greater risk of leaving school early.

Recent measures to improve education provision for pupils from a migrant background usually focus on an increase in the provision of language classes or developing specific in-service training programmes for teachers.

In **Belgium (French Community)**, a new decree on the reception, integration and schooling of newly arrived migrant pupils between two-and-a-half and eighteen years was issued in 2012. The main improvements brought include an extension of the number of pupils who may benefit from reception classes, the development of continuing professional development (CPD) programmes for teachers providing these classes, or an increase in the number of these classes.

In **Finland**, measures to further promote the education of immigrant children, including strengthening reception classes and increasing language training, appear in the 2011-2016 Development Plan for Education and Research <sup>(9)</sup>.

Allocating additional resources to schools with a high concentration of disadvantaged populations is a widespread practice in Europe, as for instance the case in Greece with the Educational Priority Zones or in Ireland with the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in School policy. These positive discrimination measures seek to support improvements to educational provision at school level, such as reducing the pupil/teacher ratio or providing additional support to pupils. Extra resources are allocated following the

<sup>(9)</sup> <http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Julkaisut/2012/liitteet/okm03.pdf>



identification of areas or schools with particular population groups (newcomers, ethnic minorities, etc.) or other educational needs criteria (European Parliament 2011, pp. 66-68). In some countries, new positive discrimination measures have either recently been introduced or soon will be.

In the **Czech Republic**, in line with the Long-term Plan for Education and the Development of the Education System 2011-2015, a development programme for schools where at least 15 % of pupils are socially disadvantaged or 5 children (ISCED 0) or 10 pupils (ISCED 1, 2 and 3) have health disadvantages was introduced in 2012. Schools which fulfil the mentioned criteria must submit an application to the region or directly to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (depending on their status), in order to receive financial assistance to offer incentives (additional salary payments) to teachers educating the targeted children.

In **France**, 1 000 pre-primary and primary school teaching jobs created in September 2012 were assigned as a matter of priority to the most problematic areas (those with high children/teacher ratios, a large proportion of schools enrolling children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and rural areas where classes had previously been cancelled). An additional 2 500 staff (head supervisors, teaching and other assistants) have been assigned to the most at-risk schools. During the 2012-2017 period, more of the approximately 14 000 teaching posts created for pre-primary and primary schools will be assigned to those in the most problematic areas.

New additional funding allocations to schools to tackle educational inequality were introduced in the **United Kingdom (England and Wales)** in 2011 and 2012 respectively. Schools receive the Pupil Premium (England) and the Pupil Deprivation Grant (Wales) for each disadvantaged pupil aged 5-16. Schools decide how to use this additional funding for the additional provision deprived pupils need. In **Northern Ireland**, changes to the common funding scheme for schools from April 2014 will include additional support for pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. In **England**, the 16-19 Bursary fund was introduced in the 2011/12 school year. It is made up of two parts: the vulnerable student bursary for defined vulnerable groups such as young people in public care and a discretionary bursary fund which schools and colleges can allocate for students facing genuine financial barriers to education and training. It was introduced following the withdrawal of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) in 2011, a means-tested benefit based on household income paid directly to the student.

Draft national strategies, action plans and projects for a better inclusion of Roma children in education systems have recently been developed in some countries, including Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia, which received CSRs in both 2012 and 2013 with respect to the Roma population.

In **Bulgaria**, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, a draft national strategy for Roma integration was developed in 2012.

In **Hungary**, which has received related CSRs in 2012 and 2013, the National Social (Roma) Inclusion Strategy was adopted in December 2011. The government also set a related action plan for 2012-2014, which includes measures in the fields of child welfare, education, employment, healthcare, housing, stakeholder involvement and anti-discrimination. In addition, two programmes that target the inclusion of Roma children in the education system, i.e. Preventing Multiple Disadvantaged Children from Early School-leaving through Mentoring Facilities and 'Equity-based Development of Schools', were launched in 2012.

In **Slovakia**, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, a national project to improve provision in all-day primary schools attended by marginalised communities (including Roma) was launched at the beginning of 2013.

Early school leavers are likely to have developed poor patterns of academic achievement (Nesse, 2010). Some preventive measures deal with increased use of diagnostic procedures followed by appropriate remedial measures to address learning difficulties.

In **Bulgaria**, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, an on-going pilot project co-funded by European structural funds deals with the prevention and early diagnosis of children aged three to seven with special educational needs, as well as more generally promoting the idea of inclusive education among parents and the whole population.

In **Spain**, the Bill on the Improvement of the Quality of Education, which will modify the 2006 Education Act when approved, establishes new programmes to improve the performance of students with particular learning difficulties in the first three years of secondary education. A specific methodology is used in this programme: content organisation, practical activities and, if appropriate, subjects may differ from the normal curriculum. At the end of each school year, the teaching team offers guidance for choosing the most suitable education pathway: i.e. either remaining in general lower secondary or entering the basic vocational training pathway (see 1.1.4).



In **Romania**, in 2012/13, the Ministry of National Education has asked schools to test students at the beginning of the school year and implement remedial measures as necessary. Furthermore, the Ministry of National Education asked the school inspectorates to monitor the application, at local level, of a set of measures aimed at improving results in national examinations. Finally, the Ministry of National Education has also developed and approved the methodologies for the implementation of the School after School programmes which provide remedial education activities outside normal classes.

#### 1.1.4. Reforming vocational education and training

The European framework for reducing the number of early leavers from education and training <sup>(10)</sup> emphasises the role played by vocational education and training (VET) sectors in that process. Further developing high quality VET pathways can indeed motivate some young people to remain longer in education and training, by providing them with alternatives to general education which may better suit their interests and needs.

In order to make VET pathways more attractive and strengthen their role as alternatives to general education, easily accessible and high-quality information, guidance and counselling services are crucial. Several countries have undertaken steps to improve their educational and career guidance across primary and secondary education (see Section 1.2). In addition, some countries report that one of their current priorities is the development of a more comprehensive national approach to support guidance activities in schools, VET centres, employment services and companies.

In **Lithuania**, project activities aimed at strengthening the methodology underpinning vocational guidance services, the training of career specialists, and the improvement of counselling infrastructure were implemented in 2012.

Other strategies to make the sector more attractive seek to reinforce measures to ensure that VET programmes are effective and lead either directly to employment or provide opportunities for further studies. These strategies include diversifying the range of qualifications available and facilitating transfer to the higher education sector.

In **Finland**, the flexibility of vocational qualifications at upper secondary level will be increased through a four-year programme (2013-2016) which aims, for example, to diversify opportunities by allowing students to take modules from other vocational qualifications (including further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications) or to undertake polytechnic degrees in existing subject areas. The programme will also enhance the development of guidance counselling and pedagogical solutions to help students complete their studies. The goal of the programme is to allow students to create individual learning paths and increase their motivation for graduating as well give education providers more opportunities to meet the demands of the regional and local economy.

In the **Netherlands**, the government has launched a programme intended to encourage young people in secondary VET to continue to study longer and to choose a course with greater relevance for the labour market. Central exams for Dutch (2014/15) and maths (2015/16) that will give access to higher professional education are being introduced for students in secondary VET level 4. The central exams for students in secondary VET level 2 and 3 will start a year later. Most level-4 VET courses (Middle-Management VET '*Middenkaderopleiding*') will be shortened from 4 to 3 years, while the number of supervised teaching hours will be increased.

Some other measures intended to make VET more attractive focus on increasing 'permeability' between general and vocational education, through mutual recognition of learning outcomes or more closely aligned provision.

In **Belgium (German-speaking Community)**, a project aiming to increase permeability between general education and vocational training at upper secondary level started in 2011. The project focuses on the introduction of the recognition and validation of learning outcomes acquired in each pathway when moving from one to another.

<sup>(10)</sup> Recommendation of the Council of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving, OJ C191/1, 1.7.2011.

In **Malta**, as from September 2011, vocational-related subject-areas were introduced as an option for students starting their third year of secondary education. This project is being piloted in a number of state and non-state secondary schools. The project is piloting four vocational subject areas – engineering, hospitality and tourism studies, IT practitioner, and health and social care.

In **Poland**, since September 2012, a new common core curriculum has been taught in all types of schools at the first grade of ISCED level 3 (upper secondary education), with the intention of creating a better educational continuum across ISCED levels 2 and 3. For schools providing vocational education, this new curriculum applies to the general element of their provision.

More measures to make VET pathways more appealing, by strengthening their links to the labour market needs can be found in Chapter 3.

Alongside the issue of the attractiveness of VET pathways, some countries have also been focusing on the rates of early leavers from the sector. Some of the measures to reduce the number of early leavers centre on increasing the weight of practical training in relation to theoretical learning.

In **Denmark**, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, the government entered an agreement on improved VET programmes as part of the Finance Act Agreement in 2013. Among other things, the agreement is expected to contribute to reducing drop-out from VET by increasing the number of available places for students to enter in-company practical work experience and enhancing schools' responsibility in finding apprenticeship places. In addition, the most recent measures require all VET schools to prepare an action plan for improving completion rates.

In **Sweden**, in 2011, at upper secondary level, general education and vocational pathways have been further differentiated. To reduce the number of students who fail to complete upper secondary school and improve transition from school to work, since 2011 more time has been devoted to vocational subjects in the vocational pathway (for information, see also 3.2.1 in Annex 3).

Finally, other reforms to VET that are expected to impact positively on early leaving rates from education and training consist of bringing forward the opportunity to join a VET pathway at lower secondary level, specifically for low achievers or those who have repeated a grade.

In **Spain**, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, the above-mentioned Bill on the Improvement of the Quality of Education will bring forward the possibility of entering vocational training, without having completed general lower secondary education.

Since September 2012, the Ministry of Education and Science in **Portugal** has been implementing a pilot project introducing vocational education for students over 13 years old, specifically those who have repeated grades. Twelve schools have been involved so far. During 2013/14, the pilot project will be enlarged, to involve 500 schools and around 9 000 students.

## 1.2. Intervention measures to avert early school leaving

Intervention measures to avert early school leaving seek to develop appropriate solutions and support for children who have shown first signs that they may not complete their schooling, such as absenteeism or disengagement. Intervention measures not only include policies and actions implemented at school level, but rely also heavily on parents as well as on a vast range of public institutions and professionals from outside the school with expertise in various fields. It is worth mentioning that the types of initiatives described below (such as cross-sector cooperation or educational and career guidance), although categorised as intervention measures, may also be applied as preventive or compensatory measures (European Commission, 2011a).

### Equipping teachers to address early warning signs

It is essential that teachers receive appropriate education and training to deal with diversity in the classroom and work effectively with pupils at risk, in order to be able to react to the first signs that a young person may be in danger of leaving school prematurely. Recent measures for teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) focus on this.

In the **United Kingdom (Wales)**, the 'Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan' 2011-2015 launched in January 2011 seeks to improve CPD to help teachers identify and support pupils at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

## Networking with parents

As stated above, increased cooperation with parents can contribute to young people's success at school, especially for students at risk of leaving school early. Parent participation at school is widely promoted across European countries, including through counselling services for parents who need support, training courses organised by government authorities and civil society organisations (EACEA/Eurydice, 2012a). Recent initiatives in this area continue to be carried out across Europe.

In **Bulgaria**, a national support programme for the schools implementing a strategy to address pupil truancy and reducing early school leaving envisages a compulsory component 'working with parents'.

In **Germany**, the 'Opportunities for Parents are Opportunities for Children' federal programme, launched in 2011, trains up to 4 000 'parental advisors' to advise and support parents in child-parent-centres, parental support services and day-care centres which are part of the Language and Integration priority area. From 2012, 100 parental support projects (*Elternbegleitung Plus*) are intended to demonstrate how a network of parental advisors based in parenting support facilities, day-care and education centres can offer accessible ECEC services to parents.

In **Slovenia**, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport is co-financing (with the support of the European Social Fund) the project 'Raising the social and cultural capital in local communities for the development of equal opportunities and promoting social inclusion' (1.2.2013-31.8.2014), which tackles early school leaving and improves the quality of pre-primary and compulsory education by networking with parents and other stakeholders.

## Cross-sector cooperation

Given the complexity of the processes leading to early school leaving, education systems need to cooperate with external bodies from various professional fields, such as youth, health, justice, or employment. Initiatives to develop cross-sector cooperation in order to reduce early school leaving occur at different levels. They not only relate to multi-professional work at school level but also to creating synergies between services or ministries at higher political level, affecting whole regions or the entire country.

In **Belgium (French Community)**, a draft decree aiming to set up cross-sector mechanisms for policies implemented at school, local and Community level in favour of school retention, violence prevention, as well as education and guidance, is being prepared. The aim is to join up the various relevant areas (school, family, culture), and to target young people of school age regardless of whether they are attending school or not.

In **France**, since March 2013, new networks labelled *Formation Qualification Emploi* (FoQualE) (training-qualifications-employment) have succeeded the 'network nouvelle chance' initiated in December 2012. These training-qualifications-employment networks aim to coordinate all the local services likely to intervene when young people show warning signs of leaving school early (information and guidance centres within schools – *les missions de lutte contre le décrochage scolaire*; *les groupes de prévention du décrochage scolaire*; etc.). Furthermore, in each school with high rates of early school leaving, a named person will be charged, under the supervision of the school head, with coordinating preventive actions, liaising with the parents of pupils concerned, and helping with the reintegration of early leavers.

In **Luxembourg**, in order to support cooperation between national institutions and services dedicated to guidance and counselling, as well as facilitating access to them, five services from three different ministries have been reorganised under one 'House of Guidance', which opened in 2012.

In **Malta**, the National Referral System for cases of absenteeism, which seeks to improve the referral process and enables the multi-disciplinary teams to work together on a case when required, began to be piloted in three schools in 2012/13. It is envisaged that the National Referral System will be implemented in all primary and secondary schools as from the beginning of school year 2013/14.

## Educational and career guidance

The provision of educational and career guidance can help keep learners in education and training systems for a longer period. These services support young people's awareness of different options in terms of learning pathways and may help them avoid making the wrong choice of study which may ultimately cause them to become demotivated and leave school early. Recent measures or projects aimed at developing and improving educational and career guidance focus on improving staff qualifications and training and providing them with the right tools, extending the role of schools in this area, or enhancing cooperation with parents and local services.

In **Belgium (German-speaking Community)**, when teaching careers skills to students, all primary and secondary staff must use the guide to Career Choice Preparation and Career Guidance adopted by the Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium in early 2011. This guide determines which sub-skills students need to acquire at the various levels of education.

In the **Czech Republic**, an ESF 2012 project aims at improving the quality of services provided in schools and school counselling institutions by school psychologists, special educational needs teachers and methodologists.

In **Luxembourg**, new guidance procedures for the transition between primary and lower secondary education have been applied since September 2012. These new procedures strengthen parental involvement and increase transparency in decision-making.

In **Latvia**, the school guidance counsellor was added to the Government's approved list of professions and posts for pedagogues in 2012. Furthermore, since 2013, municipalities and schools have been requested to provide career guidance support for children and youth following an amendment to the Education Law.

In **Italy**, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, a national plan on guidance and dropout was published in 2011 following guidelines on guidance for lifelong learning issued in 2009. The plan, which has been further defined at regional level for full implementation, aims to shift current guidance services from an informative role into a proper career and guidance counselling function. It also provides for the activation of 'local integrated services', ensuring the appropriate reception, needs analysis and response to each individual case.

In recent years in **Austria**, in the third and fourth years of the 'new secondary school', the subject 'career guidance' was introduced in 2012 as a compulsory subject with at least one lesson a week.

In the **United Kingdom (England)**, there is a new duty on schools to secure access to independent and impartial careers advice for pupils in years 9 to 11 (ages 13 to 16 years). This duty was extended in September 2013 to cover year 8 (ages 12/13) and students aged 16 to 18 in schools and colleges.

In some cases, reforms to guidance services target specifically young people at risk of early school leaving or showing early warning signs.

In **Malta**, career guidance for students in the last two years of compulsory education who show a lack of interest in continuing further education has been developed since 2011. As from the 2011/12 school year, students in the penultimate year of compulsory school with a high rate of absenteeism, or with low achievement levels, must be contacted and provided with career guidance sessions. As from the 2012/13 school year, the college and trainee career advisors started to identify those students in the last year of compulsory education who were not interested in sitting for the Secondary Education Certificate examinations. This process involves having professionals meeting each individual student identified as 'at risk' and helping them formulate an individual career plan focusing on their interests and capabilities.

In **Austria**, the youth coaching initiative launched in 2012 aims to provide intensive counselling on further educational or vocational pathways to young people who suffer from individual impairments, social disadvantages or who are at risk of not attaining any qualification at lower or upper secondary level. This initiative starts from school year nine, as young people reach the age limit of compulsory education.

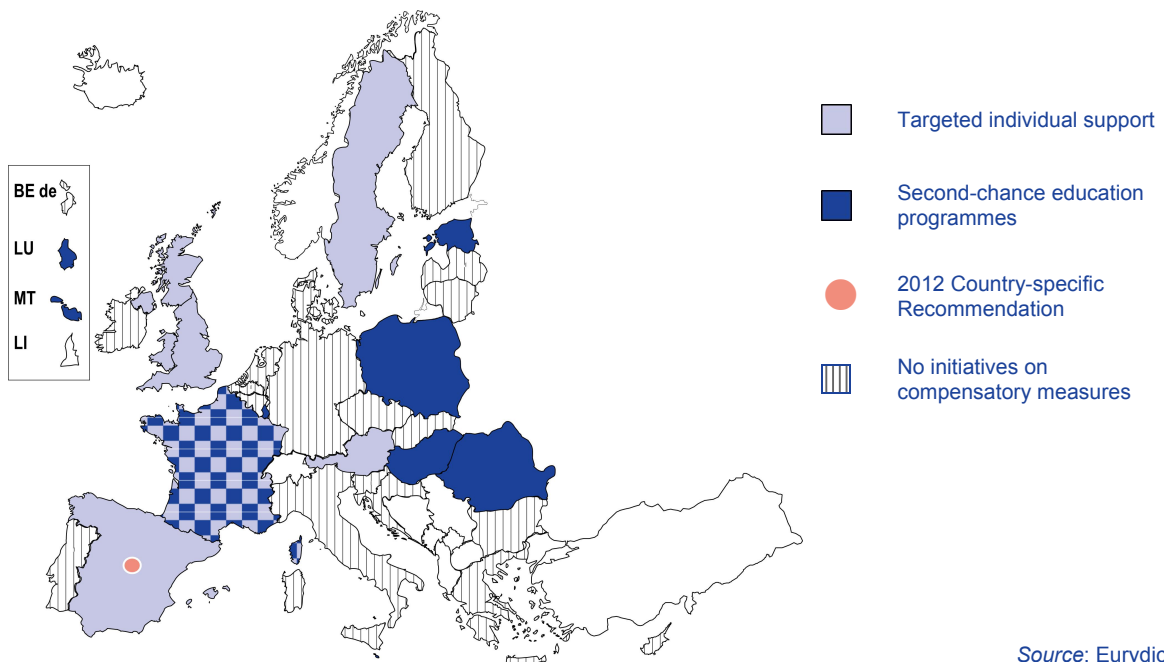
In **Sweden**, the Government is investing in strengthening guidance and careers counselling. The Government has set aside SEK 10 million for 2013, primarily for further training guidance and careers counsellors and calculates SEK 26 million for the same purpose for 2014-2016. In addition, the Government intends to develop further training measures for guidance and career counsellors at upper secondary schools, focusing in particular on how to help young people with disabilities gain a foothold in the labour market, and focusing on the various kinds of support young people can obtain from different authorities.

### 1.3. Compensatory measures for early school leavers

Compensatory measures exist to help individuals who have left school prematurely to obtain the qualifications they lack. Although early leavers might have found a job or set up a business and therefore may not be unemployed, they should, nevertheless also be offered the option of enrolling in 'second-chance' education programmes. Such programmes offer a different form of learning which is flexible and responds to the specific needs of those learners who have already left the system once. Targeted support is therefore essential.

The reintegration of those who have left school early is at the core of national policy measures to address young people who are NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training). These young people are given support for enrolling in second-chance education programmes. In some countries, there are specific programmes providing a comprehensive package for young people who are out of the education and training system and not in employment.

**Figure 1.3: Large-scale initiatives on compensatory measures in the EU-28, implemented since 2011 or in preparation**



Source: Eurydice.

#### Explanatory note

'Large-scale initiatives' refers to measures that are applied across the whole education system and which have been launched since 2011, or are in an advanced stage of development prior to implementation.

As the map shows in Figure 1.3, since 2011, few countries have introduced or plan to introduce compensatory measures. The policy initiatives reported by countries are intended either to provide second-chance education programmes or they focus on giving individual support. No country has reported having addressed both aspects recently.

In addition to compensatory measures, following a recommendation by the Council, the EU Member States are preparing the establishment of Youth Guarantee schemes<sup>(11)</sup> which include among their objectives the return of young people to education and training. Under Youth Guarantee schemes, every young person under the age of 25 must receive an offer to continue their education, or be given

<sup>(11)</sup> Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee, OJ C 120/01, 26.04.2013.

employment, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. These initiatives might entail measures to support young people re-entering education or training through second-chance opportunities. For details on Youth Guarantee schemes or similar comprehensive policy initiatives, see Chapter 3.

Recent or forthcoming initiatives concerning vocational education and training as well as lifelong learning might also include young people; details of these can be found in Chapter 4.

### 1.3.1. Second-chance education opportunities

Second-chance education programmes are an integral part of the education and training system in many European countries. Figure 1.3 shows that few countries have recently redesigned their existing provision or created new programmes. Where new second-chance education programmes have been introduced, they seek to provide opportunities for students to complete their educational qualifications at secondary level. Vocational education and training is the particular focus of programmes designed to provide second-chance opportunities for all those who left the system prematurely, regardless of whether they originally left vocational or general education.

In **Estonia**, as part of the new Vocational Education Act, vocational upper secondary programmes will be opening gradually from 2013 to 2015 for those without basic education and aged at least 22 years.

**Luxembourg** has launched two types of second-chance education programme: the vocational course for young people aged under 18 (*Cours d'orientation et d'initiation professionnelle*) and the second-chance school (E2C – *école de la deuxième chance*) in general education for those aged 16 to 24 years old.

Although second-chance education programmes for early leavers already existed in **Hungary**, such as the DOBBANTO programme created in 2008, new types have been created by the Public Education Act in December 2011. There is, for instance, the school-based programme called the Bridge programme (*Híd program*) that will start from September 2013. It is open to poor performers in basic education as well as to those who have not completed lower secondary level.

In **Malta**, second-chance education programmes are offered through new openings into the vocational education sector by the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology.

In **Romania**, 'a Second Chance' programme created for persons who have not completed either primary or lower secondary education was created in 2012. The programme is therefore developed for each educational level. For primary education, there can be full-time education, evening classes, merged and intensive education. The administration council of each school makes the decision after having consulted the students enrolled in the programme. For lower secondary education, the programme has a standard duration of four years with weekly courses alternating classroom learning with practical training for a professional qualification.

The recognition and validation of prior learning and especially of informal and non-formal learning outcomes can also play an important role in motivating young adults to remain in education and training or return to it (European Commission 2011a, p. 36). This facility is either under development or already in place in most European countries (see Chapter 4). For instance, in Estonia, Latvia and Romania, the recognition and validation of prior learning is used in the context of second-chance education programmes.

### 1.3.2. Targeted individual support

Early school leavers may need individual and integrated support in order to return to education and training. Existing programmes must provide learning experiences which reinforce self-esteem and centred on the needs and circumstances of the individual student (Ibid, pp. 36-37). The provision of targeted individual social, financial, educational and psychological support is therefore essential. To this end, the existing systems to monitor early school leavers (see Section 1.5) play a major role in identifying those who have dropped out. Once this first stage is accomplished, specialist staff are able to intervene and advise individuals of the education and training opportunities available. This type of



service has been implemented by a small minority of countries since 2011, and is included under the large-scale initiatives shown in Figure 1.3.

In line with the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, regional education authorities in **Spain** have been setting up, since January 2013, guidance units specifically for monitoring and supporting young people aged between 16 and 24 who have dropped to re-enter the system. This is being carried out through adult education institutions and local corporations. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport will finance these units, at the proposal of the Autonomous Communities, through the Plan to Reduce Early Drop-Out.

Intensive counselling is also provided under the youth coaching initiative in **Austria** (see Section 1.2) which addresses *inter alia* the needs of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs).

In the **United Kingdom (Northern Ireland)**, the 'Pathways to Success' strategy for those who are NEET, includes the Careers Service which manages young people who drop out of provision or do not have a positive destination on leaving school. Similarly in **Wales**, 'the Traineeship programme' for 16-to-18 year-olds is a flexible programme providing the support young people need to progress to further education, an apprenticeship or a job. The 16-17 year-olds strand of the Youth Contract in **England** is built around tailored support to the individual. In **Scotland**, after the pilot phase in ten local authority areas, the Government has decided on the implementation of Activity Agreements across Scotland as from March 2011. An Activity Agreement is a signed agreement between a young person and an adviser that the young person will take part in a programme of learning and activity which helps them to become ready for formal learning or employment. Activity Agreements provide 'stepping stone' provision, in a community or third-sector setting for those young people who are not ready or able to access formal learning post-16, and those at greatest risk of disengagement.

## 1.4. Developing monitoring policies

To be fully effective, prevention, intervention and compensatory measures need to be framed by a body of data and knowledge on the national or local context of early school leaving. Evidence-based approaches, involving the systematic collection and analysis of information as well as the dissemination of findings on effective practices, can inform policies and bring significant improvement to education systems.

However, only a few countries have implemented the systematic collection and analysis of information over time on early school leavers, in order to investigate the causes of this phenomenon and highlight effective practices to tackle the problem (COM, Thematic fiche on Early school leaving <sup>(12)</sup>). For instance, in Estonia, problems associated with early school leaving are monitored in greater detail using the Estonian Education Information System (EHIS), which contains information on every student. Indicators on non-completion rates and early school leaving are drawn up by level of education and age group.

Recent developments in the monitoring of early school leaving include: improvements to procedures for reporting pupil absences to parents and local or central bodies; identifying early school leavers so they may be contacted by support services; and using surveys or databases to identify patterns in early school leaving.

In **France**, there have been five campaigns since 2011 by the organisation for the inter-departmental exchange of information (SIEI) which has allowed the identification of young people who have left the education system without qualifications. SIEI is now able to identify these young people by cross-checking databases at different levels of government including the ministries of education and agriculture, and the Centre for Apprenticeship Training. The resulting information is now being passed on twice a year to the bodies responsible for monitoring and supporting disengaged young people.

In **Latvia**, in February 2011, the Cabinet of Ministers issued a regulation introducing a standardised procedure stipulating how an education institution should inform parents, municipal or public institutions when a pupil is absent without a justified reason. Furthermore, a systematic reporting system for pupils aged 3 to 16 has been implemented at local authority level since the end of 2012. The local authority also sends reports to the Ministry of Education.

<sup>(12)</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/key-areas/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/key-areas/index_en.htm)

In the **United Kingdom (Wales)**, on 1 October 2013, the Welsh Government launched the 'Youth Engagement and Progression Framework Implementation Plan' which strengthens measures to tackle early school leaving. Key elements of the plan include improved tracking of young people through the education system and the setting of core standards for early identification of young people most at risk of disengagement by local authorities <sup>(13)</sup>.

Future developments in monitoring systems are envisaged in several countries.

In **Belgium (Flemish Community)**, since September 2013, all schools and institutions providing secondary part-time education have to systematically report data on pupil attendance, enrolments, deregistrations and pupil characteristics in a centralised system 'Discimus', managed by the Ministry of Education and Training. In this context, an ICT project for processing the data in order to assess current policies and suggest improvements to the system is being developed.

In **Bulgaria**, a draft national strategy for reducing the number of early school leavers by 2020 was prepared in 2012. This strategy envisages monitoring the problem through detailed data analysis. However, its adoption is subject to the priorities of the new government formed following the May 2013 elections.

In **Italy**, the national plan for guidance and fighting early school leaving, which has been further defined at regional level, envisages the systematic collection of useful information, including non-completion date. However, it has not yet been fully implemented.

In **Malta**, in April 2013, a Strategy to Reduce Early School Leaving was launched by the Minister for Education and Employment. Following a period of public consultation, the ministry will propose a new ESL target for Malta within the context of the EU 2020 targets.

In **Hungary**, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, work is being carried out to list the problems and signs associated with early school leaving, and to identify the relationships between specific symptoms and their potential consequences. Evidence drawn from this process will guide the forthcoming national strategy on early school leaving, which will be supported by measures such as widening the access of young children to education, strengthening basic competences, reforming education to promote success in school (e.g. providing support measures for student groups who require special attention, updating teaching methods), and introducing compensatory (*Bridge – Hid*) and second chance (*Második Esély*) programmes.

Finally, in **Poland**, since mid-2012, legislation is being gradually implemented for the development of a national education electronic database (Educational Information System), which should help identify reasons for absences at compulsory pre-school and full-time school education (up to lower secondary completion), as well as the reasons for leaving compulsory part-time education (up to the age of 18).

## Summary

Current reforms to tackle early school leaving can be found in countries with rates both above and below the EU headline target on early school leaving, i.e. reducing to less than 10 % of young people leaving school with qualifications no higher than lower secondary level. Even countries with the lowest proportions of early leavers from education and training report measures that should impact positively on early school leaving rates (i.e. the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia). Reforms covering all three areas of the EU policy framework – prevention, intervention and compensation – have been reported by France, Hungary, Austria, Malta and the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland). Countries with early school leaving rates well above the EU average and/or with 2012 and 2013 CSRs in this area are in the process of developing relevant policies.

Overall, most of reported national reforms pertaining to early school leaving are focussed on prevention measures.

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<sup>(13)</sup> For further information: <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/skillsandtraining/youthengagement/lang=en>

Among these measures, a majority of EU-28 Member States report recent initiatives to facilitate access to ECEC and to improve the quality of its provision. These include, for example, expanding provision and supporting children's attendance by statutory means and/or by providing financial assistance. A second large group of countries is currently developing preventive measures in the form of targeted policies to support disadvantaged pupils, who are often from a migrant or Roma background, and who are also often amongst those with learning difficulties and poor patterns of school achievement.

In almost half of EU-28, reforms to prevent early school leaving were related to the VET sector. These include Denmark, Spain and Latvia, who received 2012 CSRs on reducing early school leaving dealt with VET. Recent measures in this area focus on making VET pathways more appealing through better guidance, introducing more flexibility between VET pathways or increasing permeability between VET and general or higher education; these all represent important ways of making sure that educational pathways do not lead to dead-ends with no possibility for further progression. In order to make VET pathways more attractive, several countries have also strengthened links with the labour market through work-based learning or updated curricula (see Chapter 3). In Denmark and Sweden, measures focus on decreasing the number of early leavers in the VET sector through increasing the weight of practical and work-based training in relation to theoretical learning. Two of the countries with the highest proportions of early school leavers (Spain and Portugal) have taken steps to bring forward the opportunity to join VET pathways at lower secondary level, specifically for low achievers or those who have repeated a grade.

Finally, a small number of countries have carried out system-related reforms that, in fact, are relevant to only a minority of EU countries, i.e. extensive use of grade repetition and early tracking; these reforms intend to limit the occurrence of these practices.

Career guidance is usually the focus of most recent reforms for the intervention policies designed to avert early school leaving among students showing signs of disengagement. Guidance may, however, also be beneficial as a prevention tool and it may also serve as a compensatory measure helping to steer people who left school prematurely back into the system to gain the qualifications they missed. Recent or forthcoming reforms to strengthen networking with parents and develop cross-sector cooperation can be found in a few countries. However, cross-sector cooperation may be seen as particularly significant due to the complex nature of the problem of early school leaving, which requires joined-up and concerted efforts to limit its occurrence and its effects.

In an effort to implement compensatory measures, six countries have adopted large scale initiatives for establishing or reinforcing second-chance education programmes, in particular in the field of vocational education and training. Targeted individual support has been developed in five countries as part of recent measures to get early leavers back into education and training.

Finally, collecting and analysing data on early school leaving and developing evidence-based policies is crucial to tackle the problem effectively; recent developments in this area have taken place or are underway in twelve countries.



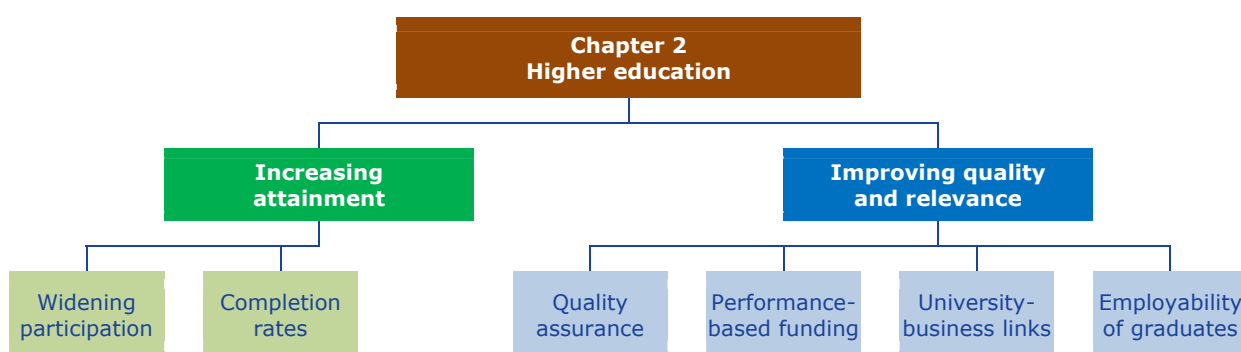
## CHAPTER 2: IMPROVING ATTAINMENT LEVELS AND THE QUALITY AND RELEVANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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The Europe 2020 strategy highlights higher education <sup>(1)</sup> as a key policy area where reforms can directly contribute to jobs and economic growth. In this context, one of the 2020 twin targets on education refers to the commitment made by Member States that *at least 40 % of young people (aged 30-34) should have completed tertiary or equivalent education by 2020* <sup>(2)</sup>.

The European Commission has defined an agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems which outlines the main areas for reform (European Commission, 2011b). Against this backdrop, among the important challenges discussed within the framework of the European Semester are widening access to tertiary education by facilitating entry and improving the retention of students from disadvantaged groups <sup>(3)</sup> and increasing efficiency by improving completion rates <sup>(4)</sup> and reducing the time taken to complete degree courses.

The scope and structure of this chapter has been defined in relation to the policy priorities for higher education at European level and the content of the 2012 and 2013 Country-specific Recommendations (CSRs). The two main goals of increasing tertiary attainment levels <sup>(5)</sup> and improving the quality and relevance of higher education are, in turn, the object of significant measures reported by Member States.



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<sup>(1)</sup> The terms higher and tertiary education are used synonymously.

<sup>(2)</sup> 'Europe 2020', a strategy for jobs and smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, adopted by the European Council on 17 June 2010, EUCO 13/1/10 REV 1.

<sup>(3)</sup> See the results of the Peer Review on Higher education and VET organised on 17 September 2012.

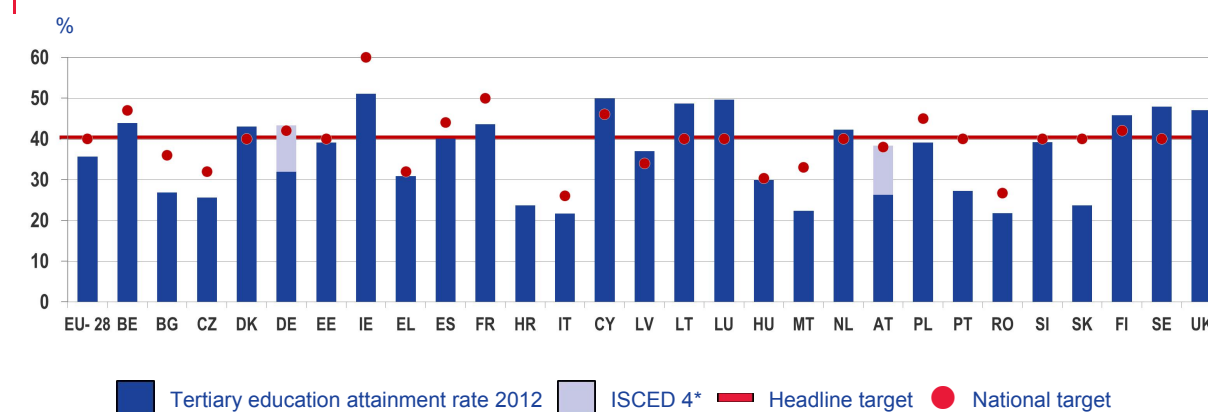
<sup>(4)</sup> Completion rates: the percentage of students completing the course of tertiary education they have started.

<sup>(5)</sup> Increasing tertiary attainment levels: increasing the percentage of the population attaining tertiary-level qualifications.

## Key statistics

In 2012, tertiary attainment levels continued to improve and, across the EU, 35.7 % of individuals aged 30 to 34 achieved this level of qualification (see Figure 2.1). The highest proportions of those aged 30 to 34 having achieved tertiary-level education were found in Ireland (51.1 %), Cyprus (49.9 %), Luxembourg (49.6 %) and Lithuania (48.7 %), and the lowest in Italy (21.7 %), Romania (21.8 %) and Malta (22.4 %). Several Member States have already met or exceeded their 2020 national targets in this area.

**Figure 2.1: Tertiary education attainment levels or equivalent, Europe 2020 target and national targets, 2012**



%	EU-28	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY
	35.7	43.9	26.9	25.6	43.0	43.3	39.1	51.1	30.9	40.1	43.6	23.7	21.7	49.9
LV	LT	LU	HU	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK
37.0	48.7	49.6	29.9	22.4	42.3	38.3	39.1	27.2	21.8	39.2	23.7	45.8	47.9	47.1

Source: Eurostat – Labour Force Survey (data extracted 24 September 2013)

### Explanatory note

Tertiary attainment rate refers to the percentage of the population attaining tertiary level education or its equivalent, ages 30-34. Tertiary education covers ISCED levels 5A and 5B and 6; including high level vocational education.

### Country specific notes

**Germany:** The lighter blue part denotes ISCED 4 post-secondary attainment (national data) which Germany has decided to include in the definition of the national target.

**France:** The 50 % national target refers to the 17-33 age group. This target is a 'net graduation rate' i.e. estimated percentage of an age group that will complete tertiary education, based on graduation data and on current patterns of graduation.

**Luxembourg:** The rate reflects, to a large degree, the highly educated immigrant population living and working in the country, but not necessarily the outcome of the Luxembourgish education system.

**Netherlands and Poland:** Provisional data.

**Austria:** The lighter blue part denotes ISCED 4A post-secondary attainment (national data) which Austria has decided to include in the definition of the national target.

**Finland:** The national target is defined more narrowly than the EU headline target and excludes VET at tertiary level (ISCED 5B) which has been phased out.

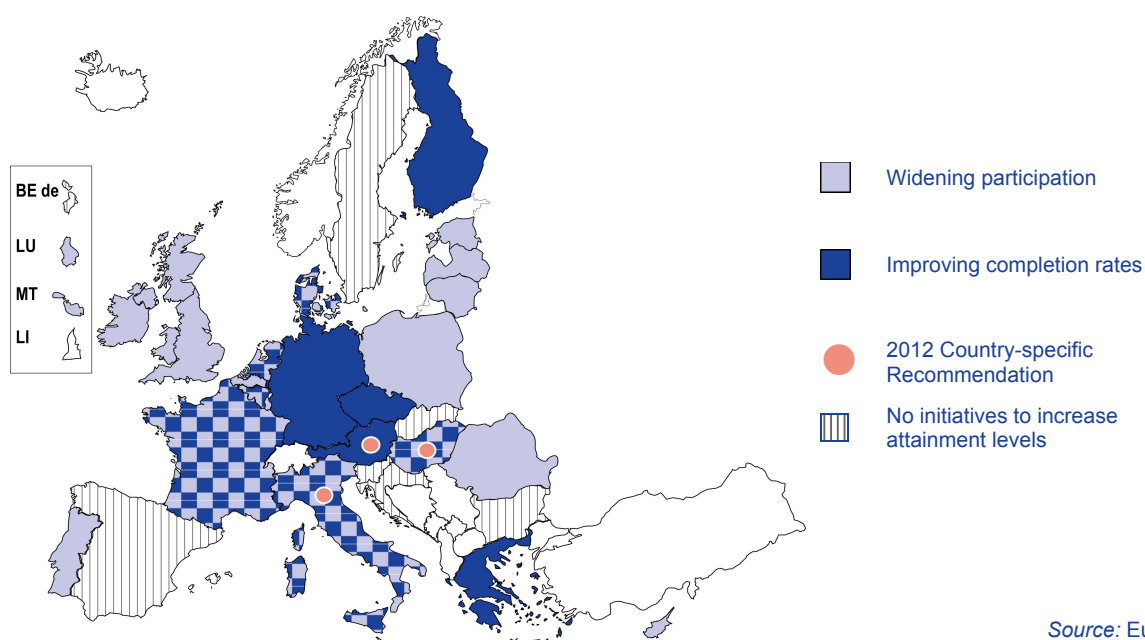
## 2.1. Reforms to increase higher education attainment levels

The majority of European countries are implementing a range of measures that are expected to improve higher education participation rates and attainment levels (see Figure 2.2). These measures are often closely related and their impact is mutually reinforcing. In higher education, they are also often linked to structural changes and improvements in other phases of education. For instance, efforts to prevent early school leaving (see Chapter 1) and the consequent increase in the proportion of an age cohort attaining an upper secondary qualification can have a positive impact on tertiary participation and attainment rates. Higher education may also benefit from developments in adult

education such as the provision of alternative access routes to higher education, which often target non-traditional learners (see Chapter 4).

Figure 2.2 shows that the majority of EU countries report recent or forthcoming measures to widen participation in higher education. There is less attention on initiatives to improve completion rates, with less than half of all Member States (Belgium – French Community), Czech republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, France, Italy, Hungary, the Netherlands, Austria and Finland) having undertaken or planning to implement such measures. Moreover, a minority of EU countries (Bulgaria, Spain, Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia and Sweden) do not report any recent or forthcoming reforms to either widen participation or improve completion rates; among these, several countries (Bulgaria and Croatia) currently have relatively low levels of participation in tertiary education.

**Figure 2.2: Large-scale initiatives to increase higher education attainment levels in the EU-28, implemented since 2011, or in preparation**



#### **Explanatory note**

'Large-scale initiatives' refers to measures that are applied across the whole education system and which have been launched since 2011, or are in an advanced stage of development prior to implementation.

#### **2.1.1. Widening participation in higher education**

Approaches to widening access and participation in higher education can take different forms: a general policy approach targeting all categories of students; measures focusing on different under-represented groups; or, as in most cases, a combination of the two (EACEA/Eurydice 2012e, p. 80). Targeted measures can range from financial support to special admission arrangements, or provision of specific guidance to students. A recent Eurydice research indicates that while special measures to assist specific groups based on socio-economic status, gender, disability or migrant status do exist in many countries, these are rarely a core element of higher education policy (EACEA/Eurydice, 2011c).

The 2013 Council conclusions on the social dimension of higher education invited Member States to 'adopt national objectives which are aimed at increasing the access, participation and completion rates of under-represented and disadvantaged groups in higher education' <sup>(6)</sup>.

<sup>(6)</sup> Council conclusions of 16 May 2013 on the social dimension of higher education, OJ C168, 14.06.2013.



## Focus on under-represented groups

A number of countries, in which overall tertiary attainment rates are already high, undertake systematic actions to attract students from under-represented groups:

In **Belgium (Flemish Community)**, since 2013, higher education institutions have been required to draw up a strategic plan for student support with concrete targets and performance indicators. The special funds allocated to attract and retain students from socially disadvantaged groups are being maintained, but will be reformed. Procedures will be adjusted and concrete targets on the participation of underrepresented groups will be put in place.

In **Ireland** (which in 2012 had the highest tertiary attainment rate in the EU at 51.1 %), the monitoring of progress towards the 2020 national target includes performance indicators for access and participation by under-represented and disadvantaged groups. These include the number of adults participating in higher education, the number of students in part-time education, and the number of courses available through flexible provision.

In 2012, in the **United Kingdom**, the **Northern Ireland** Executive published 'Access to Success', a new integrated regional strategy for widening participation in higher education, which includes measures to target disadvantaged groups; a single co-ordinated approach to raising aspirations to progress into higher education; the development of non-traditional routes into higher education through Adult Access Courses and increased part-time opportunities; and enhanced application procedures for intractable pockets of under-representation.

Other countries also report recent initiatives aimed at increasing the participation of disadvantaged groups.

In line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs made to **Hungary**, access by disadvantaged groups is supported by the scholarship programme Road to Higher Education and the award of extra points in the admission procedure. Measures being planned include extending the programme and making the specialist Roma colleges more secure, and extending mentoring and counselling services in higher education institutions. A new student loan scheme has been introduced, in addition to the existing one, to cover tuition fees.

In **Malta**, 'Broadening Access in Education: An Initiative by the University of Malta' is targeting regions with low levels of participation in post-secondary and tertiary education with the aim of increasing the number of students who continue with their studies. This initiative includes activities such as a mentoring programme, family and community support programmes, career guidance and personal counselling at school level and the opening of a Resource Centre to further assist youths coming from a disadvantaged background.

## Tuition fees and financial support for students

Although no CSRs refer directly to policy issues related to student fees and support, some recent reforms in these areas are reported below because of the impact they could potentially have on participation and attainment. The Council has also recently noted the need to 'consider how financial support can be best targeted to improve access, participation and completion rates' <sup>(7)</sup>.

There is great diversity across Europe in the amount of student fees charged and the conditions associated with student support <sup>(8)</sup>. Depending on the country, tuition and/or other fees may be payable by all or some students, whilst elsewhere students do not pay any fees at all. The most common form of student support is grants, although student loans are becoming more widespread. A majority of countries provide some grants on the basis of financial need and others on the basis of academic performance. Denmark, Finland and Sweden have a system of universal grants for full-time students (EACEA/Eurydice 2012e, pp. 90-101).

Some recent measures to alleviate the financial burden of tuition fees include:

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<sup>(7)</sup> Council conclusions of 16 May 2013 on the social dimension of higher education, OJ C168, 14.06.2013.

<sup>(8)</sup> A detailed overview of national public fee and support systems across European countries is available at: [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/facts\\_and\\_figures/fees\\_support.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/facts_and_figures/fees_support.pdf)

In **Belgium (French Community)**, since 2011, disadvantaged students or those who receive a study grant have paid lower admission fees or no fee at all for enrolling into higher education or its exams. In addition, the financial contribution paid by all other students will not increase until 2015.

In the **United Kingdom (England)**, since 2012, universities have been able to charge up to £9 000 a year for tuition, subject to committing to adopting more ambitious measures to widen access. These tuition costs will not be paid up front. A support package of loans for living costs and non-repayable grants is available, based on household income.

In the **United Kingdom (Scotland)**, from 2013, students will be guaranteed a minimum annual income of £7 250 through a combination of bursaries and loans.

Several countries refer to recent measures to restructure and/or simplify student support systems.

In **Ireland**, to deliver a significant service enhancement, a single unified grant scheme was created in 2011. Special grants are provided for eligible disadvantaged students who receive almost twice the level of an ordinary grant payment. A Student Grants Appeals Board was established in 2011.

In **Italy**, the National Observatory on the right to study at university, established in 2013, will create an information system on grant distribution and beneficiaries and will evaluate the costs of study. It will also propose improvements to the minimum levels of performance (LEPs) for student services for those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These services include accommodation, canteen facilities, guidance and tutoring, part-time programmes, and transport. Another body, the Foundation for Merit, will provide student loans and awards for excellence, through public and private funds.

### 2.1.2. Improving completion rates

A number of broad policy measures, although not directly targeting an increase in completion rates, are expected to contribute to an improvement in this area. Measures that aim, for example, to expand guidance and counselling, promote flexible learning paths, improve student support, recognise periods of study in another higher education institution, including abroad, can positively affect completion rates.

Some countries have already adopted comprehensive strategies that address a range of factors which may contribute to non-completion. Such strategies combine initiatives at both national and institutional level and include incentives for both higher education institutions and students. Furthermore, these measures are supplemented by well-developed monitoring mechanisms (EACEA/Eurydice 2012e, pp. 109-110).

Early awareness in secondary education of issues related to educational career planning, as well as widely available opportunities to find out about existing course options are some of the measures that can contribute to reducing non-completion rates as well as helping to avoid the need for students to change their programme of study. Both can make a significant contribution in some higher education systems.

The **Netherlands** already has a tertiary attainment rate above the level of the EU headline target (42.3 % in 2012). However, the non-completion rate is still very high: the likelihood of success in both higher professional and university education is below 70 %. The government has concluded multi-year agreements with institutions to improve completion rates. Targeted funding is available for improving course information for prospective students, strengthening career advice and coaching, especially for immigrant students, and interviewing prospective students before they choose their course of study.

Factors such as the wrong choice of course or subject, poor preparation and lack of readiness and commitment are common reasons for non-completion of studies. Recognising the fact that experience during the first year of higher education has a great impact on student completion rates, several countries have put in place special measures that concentrate on pre-admission and first-year counselling and support. In some cases, these measures specifically target socially disadvantaged groups or students in specific academic fields.

In **France**, the Multi-annual Plan for Success in Bachelor Programmes (*Plan pluriannuel pour la réussite en licence*) has led to specific measures for tackling drop out in the first cycle, e.g. induction periods, increased educational supervision and support for struggling students. Diversified pathways, progressive specialisation and bridges for redirecting students to different fields are also being introduced. The 2013 Law on Higher Education and Research aims to build up on existing initiatives and further intensify efforts in this respect.

Initiatives that have been undertaken in relation to one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs made to **Austria** include educational counselling and career guidance with a catalogue of measures that are offered in the final years of secondary school. Other initiatives include the increase of targeted funding for the 'mathematics, informatics, science and technology initiative' (MINT-Offensive) at universities and the expansion of the Universities of Applied Sciences (*Fachhochschule*) and others.

Some initiatives to improve completion rates focus on the financing of institutions and the organisation of studies. They can include a funding formula that takes into account whether students have completed a programme within the prescribed study period. For instance, according to information from 2012, in Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom, public funding already depends in part on student completion rates. Moreover, higher education institutions can be required to follow up on students at risk of not completing their course, strengthening study support, offering advice and providing flexible learning paths to those concerned (EACEA/Eurydice 2012e, pp. 109-110).

Examples of recent policy measures to strengthen a range of financial incentives are presented below.

In **Finland**, in 2013, the university funding model was revised to further take into account the number of completed qualifications and study progress. The reform aims, amongst other things, to improve completion rates and accelerate the transition to working life. In 2014, the funding model of the universities of applied sciences ('polytechnics') will be revised along the same lines.

The student support system can also have arrangements that support and encourage the timely completion of studies.

In **Denmark**, the 2013 reform of the educational support system limits the availability of the student grant to the standard time limit if the student embarks on a course of study more than two years after gaining the entry qualification. It also increases the demands on students regarding progress in their studies, actively supports the completion of courses and reviews the grants available to students living with their parents.

In **Hungary**, students in state-funded places who do not obtain a diploma within one and a half times the prescribed study time are required to repay 50 % of the state support they have received.

## 2.2. Reforms to improve the quality and relevance of higher education

In many countries, reforms to broaden participation and increase tertiary attainment levels are undertaken in parallel with measures to improve the quality and relevance of higher education, or to help institutions achieve or maintain excellence.

### 2.2.1. Development of quality assurance systems

Several European countries report significant reorganisations of their national systems of accreditation and quality assurance since 2011. An important common objective has been to increase the transparency of information about quality assurance and strengthen efforts to make this information easily available to both students and the general public. Developing comparable criteria and methodologies has been a noticeable recent trend that has also been influenced by the Bologna process.

In several cases, recent reforms have been characterised by the merger of several qualifications agencies and/or the establishment of a new independent body. In other countries, measures such as these had already been introduced at an earlier date.

In **Austria**, the 2012 Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education regulates, among other things: the establishment of a single agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation, the integration of the existing agencies; the central framework for quality assurance procedures across sectors, the mandatory publication of review results; and the establishment of a Students' Ombudsman.

In **Ireland**, in 2012, three qualifications awarding authorities were formally merged into one organisation – the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Authority of Ireland. This new structure will provide a more integrated efficient service to learners across further and higher education.

In **Denmark**, the new accreditation system for higher education, which was adopted by law in June 2013, moves from programme to institutional accreditation, includes an examination of programmes with particular challenges, and places a focus on the social relevance of new programmes.

In line with one of the **Czech Republic's** 2012 and 2013 CSRs, a number of individual projects funded through the European Structural Fund aim to improve the quality of higher education. The adoption of amendments to the Act on Higher Education is planned for 2014 and should include, amongst other measures, changes in the accreditation system.

### 2.2.2. Expanding performance-based funding

Public funding accounts for a large majority of total higher education funding in Europe. Countries report a range of measures designed to improve quality by moving away from input-based funding towards mixed models, where a share of funding is allocated according to pre-defined performance or output criteria. These criteria can be determined using evaluation (or certification) results, national ranking systems, or performance agreements with higher education institutions. Around half of Member States report recent or forthcoming initiatives to expand the use of performance-based funding in higher education (see also Annex 2).

In **Austria**, performance agreements between higher education institutions and the Government are concluded every three years. Moreover, part of the EUR 1 billion additional funding to universities in the period 2013-2015 will be allocated on the basis of efficiency criteria. The University Structural Funds Ordinance, which has been in force since 1 January 2013, provides for an indicator- and project-based allocation of funds for this period. The highest proportion of funding will be allocated on the basis of the number of active students.

In the **Netherlands**, the achievement of performance goals in the individual agreements between the state and higher education institutions will determine around 7 % of funding.

In the **Czech Republic**, in 2013, 22.5 % of public funding for universities has been allocated according to quality indicators.

In line with one the 2012 and 2013 CSRs made to **Latvia**, changes in the accreditation system and definition of study outcomes by all HEIs have been introduced. A new funding model is in preparation.

### 2.2.3. Closer links between universities and business

Effective partnerships between education institutions, research and business can enhance the contribution of higher education to innovation and growth (European Commission, 2011b). A number of countries report recent initiatives that focus on better knowledge transfer between companies and higher education and research institutions, and between the public and private sector. Increased attention on the role of education programmes in enhancing the capacity for innovation is also featured.

In **Ireland**, a detailed framework to respond to the needs of business is currently being implemented. It includes structured employer surveys and interaction, increased work placement opportunities, staff mobility to enterprise and a renewed focus on generic skills. The HEA has also published guidelines for the establishment of higher education institutional clusters to support enterprise development and employment needs.

In **France**, the 2013 Law on Higher Education and Research provides for the simplification of research management and more efficient use of existing investment schemes. Special support will be provided for technological research, with a view to revitalising the innovation capacities of France's industrial base and contributing to the development of new branches creating employment.

In **Sweden**, higher education institutions and their holding companies are receiving special funds (SEK 19 million in 2012, then SEK 12 million per year) to build up 'idea banks' of research results.

## 2.2.4. Enhancing the employability of higher education graduates

Employment rates of higher education graduates vary widely between European countries and this is one important factor that could explain the existence or absence of recent initiatives in this area (see Chapter 3). Measures to improve the employability of higher education graduates can include improved counselling on course selection, enhancing skills/experience for employability within courses, better support for transition to the labour market and further developing skills forecasting tools. There has also been an emphasis on the role of universities in fostering entrepreneurial skills (see Chapter 3).

Recent initiatives in the EU countries often focus on strengthening the engagement of employers with the learning process in order to incorporate a practical dimension into higher education. Efforts are being made to involve employers actively both in the development of study programmes, so that they include practical market-relevant skills, and in the provision of these study programmes.

In some countries, higher education institutions have been encouraged to form councils that include representatives of employers' associations, business people and financial institutions.

In the **United Kingdom (Scotland)**, the Higher Education Employability Forum (SHEEF) initiates, develops and supports a wide range of employability-related activities. These include work placements, internships and developing opportunities to undertake work based projects as an optional alternative to the traditional master's dissertation.

However, in some cases, the range of higher education degree programmes on offer is not completely in line with labour market demands. Governments are taking measures to reconcile higher education supply and labour market demand, and are encouraging the design of study programmes and structures that better meet labour market requirements (see Chapter 3).

In **Bulgaria**, measures to address one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs include the establishment of a register of Bachelor's and Master's degrees and individual projects for updating curricula and strengthening entrepreneurial skills in 2012.

In **Malta**, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) has, since 2011, offered a specialised programme which has been designed in collaboration with the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry and the Employment and Training Corporation. In the same institution, the scheme 'Increasing ICT Student Capacity' helps students pursue further education and training in programmes related to the digital media sector and emerging ICT sub-sectors which suffer from skills shortages.

In the **United Kingdom (Wales)**, GO Wales, the Graduate Opportunities Wales Programme (January 2009-December 2014), matches students and graduates with paid and unpaid work experience opportunities and provides support for their training and development.

In an effort to boost the labour market relevance of higher education qualifications, several countries report that they have been reforming the higher education sector.

The **Czech Republic** concentrates on enhancing the status of undergraduate education and supports on-the-job oriented Bachelor's degree programmes. Shorter, more practically-oriented training that rapidly transfers sufficient basic skills in particular areas will be piloted.

In **Italy**, the new higher technical institutes have been set up, together with the regions to respond to the skills demands of local economies, in particular in technological areas that correspond to the projects for industrial innovation in the plan 'Industry 2015'.

The 2013 AGS identifies the short-cycle, two-year tertiary qualifications, focused on areas where a skills shortage exists, as being particularly effective in improving the link between education and labour market needs (European Commission, 2012a). Such programmes already exist in some education systems. In others, there have been recent steps to establish or further develop them.

In **Belgium (French Community)**, since 2011, the 'Brevet d'enseignement supérieur' can be obtained after two years of training in fields of high demand in the labour market. With an additional course of at least 60 credits and under different admission conditions, the student is able to get a Bachelor's degree.

In **Belgium (Flemish Community)**, a parliamentary act on the creation of a short-cycle higher professional education (HBO5) was adopted in 2013. This act introduces a range of measures to guarantee and reinforce the quality of associate degree programmes.

In **Hungary**, the short-cycle vocational higher education programmes have been reformed to include one semester of traineeship. These programmes can only be launched by higher education institutions if they have entered into long-term cooperation with businesses providing traineeship places.

Some measures that have been taken in relation to one of **Slovenia's** 2012 and 2013 CSRs include the development of short-cycle higher vocational programmes and university career centres.

Finally, some countries report specific measures to address concerns about skills shortages in mathematics, science and technology (MST) and other fields. Most commonly, for instance in the case of Estonia, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Portugal and Sweden, countries provide additional places in these disciplines.

## Summary

All European countries, regardless of current levels of tertiary attainment and progress towards their respective 2020 national targets, or 2012 and 2013 CSRs in the area of higher education, report that a range of policy measures have been put in place and continue to be developed in order to improve attainment, quality and relevance in European higher education. Several countries have recently undertaken (Italy, Hungary and Poland) or are launching (Denmark, Latvia and Finland) large-scale initiatives in most policy areas reviewed in this chapter. In line with 2012 and 2013 CSRs that address the participation of disadvantaged groups, non-completion rates, quality improvements and increasing relevance to the labour market, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria, Latvia, Malta and Slovenia have either already undertaken or intend to introduce targeted policy actions in the near future that aim to respond to the individual country challenges as identified through the European Semester process.

The policy objective of increasing the number of young people with higher education qualifications has been translated into a number of large-scale initiatives to widen participation in general and in particular among under-represented groups. Most countries are doing this by providing targeted support to disadvantaged groups, improving access routes to higher education (see Chapter 4) and reforming their systems of student support. There is less attention on measures to improve completion rates, with less than half of all Member States having recently launched, or intending to implement such measures as strengthening career guidance and support or providing financial incentives for timely completion of studies. Moreover, a minority of countries (Bulgaria, Spain, Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia and Sweden) do not report any recent or forthcoming reforms to either widen participation or improve completion rates; among these, Bulgaria and Croatia currently have relatively low tertiary attainment levels.

Improving the quality and relevance of higher education is also given a high priority. Two thirds of the countries report policy developments in quality assurance and employability of higher education

graduates respectively. In the area of quality assurance, there is a trend towards establishing a single quality assurance and accreditation body that aims to provide more integrated and transparent services, as well as a move from programme to institutional accreditation. Efforts to improve the employability of higher education graduates include, among others, an emphasis on shorter, more practically oriented courses which often focus on economic sectors experiencing skills shortages (see also Chapter 3).

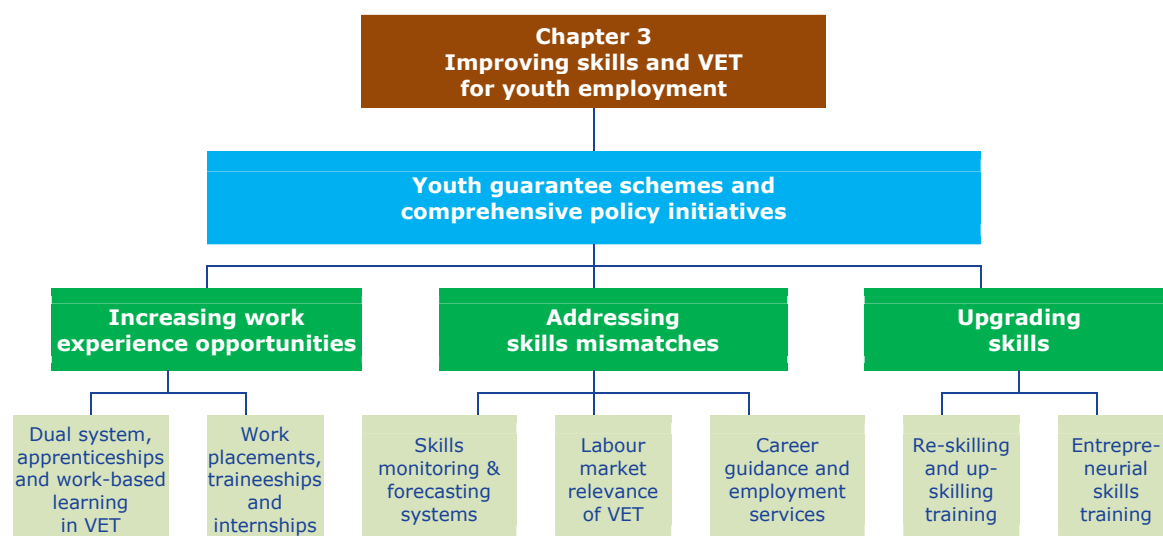


## CHAPTER 3: IMPROVING SKILLS AND VET FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

This chapter focuses on the role of education and training in tackling youth unemployment within the framework of the Europe 2020 strategy. The European Commission has been encouraging Member States to introduce measures in the field of education and training, in particular in the vocational sector, to improve employability levels among young people. The 2013 Annual Growth Survey notes the increase in youth unemployment rates and calls for specific measures for young people that ‘support access to jobs or a return to the world of work’ (European Commission 2012a, p. 11).

In order to monitor progress in this field, the Council of the European Union adopted a new ET 2020 benchmark on graduate employability in May 2012. The aim is to reach a graduate employment rate of at least 82 %. The term ‘graduate’ refers to any person who has left education and training with at least upper secondary or post-secondary, non-tertiary qualifications (ISCED 3 to ISCED 4, excluding ISCED 3C short), or with tertiary qualifications (ISCED 5 and 6) and applies to those aged between 20 and 34 who left education and training no more than three years prior to the reference year.

The Communication ‘Rethinking Education: investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes’, presented in November 2012 by the European Commission, sets strategic priorities for Member States to boost skills supply and fight youth unemployment (European Commission, 2012d). Since 2008, the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs has also supported concrete actions for assessing and anticipating the demand for skills, identifying mismatches and improving graduate employability.



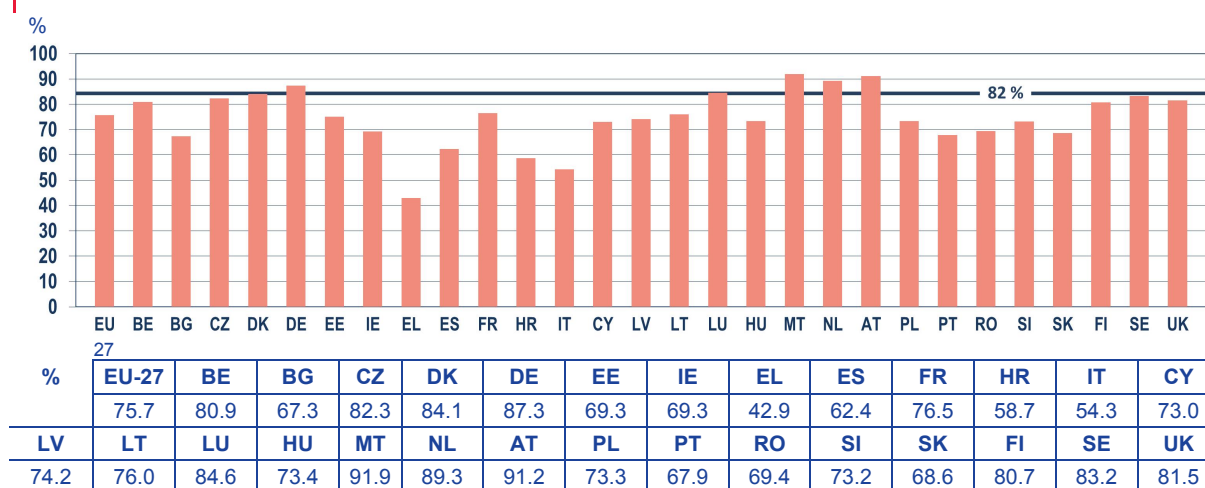
The scope and structure of the chapter, as defined above, take into account the policy documents and initiatives adopted, including the 2012 and 2013 Country-specific Recommendations (CSRs). This chapter looks at recent policy developments to enhance the skills of young people and to improve VET in order to increase youth employment levels. The chapter focuses on measures that specifically target young people aged between 20 and 34 years old. Initiatives directed at jobseekers in general are not taken into account, unless the young unemployed are defined as a specific target group. It should be recalled that there may already be measures directed at the whole labour force which include young people; and there may also be measures for boosting youth employment focused directly on employers, for instance, a financial contribution from the state to employ young, recent graduates in their first paid job, for the countries where no recent policy developments on enhancing youth employability through education and training have been reported. However, this chapter does not address these specific types of policy measures.

## Key statistics

Figure 3.1 presents the most recent data on employment rates for 20 to 34 year-olds who graduated from at least upper secondary education no more than three years earlier (the ET 2020 benchmark on graduate employability). In 2012, the employment rates of young graduates were the highest in Malta, the Netherlands and Austria (around 90 %). Denmark, Germany and Luxembourg also had high rates. The countries with the lowest proportion of recent graduates aged 20 to 34 in employment in 2012 were Croatia, Italy and Greece. In the first two countries, the rates were above 50 % while in Greece, less than half of 20-34 year-old recent graduates had a job.

Another important statistical indicator at EU level concerns the youth unemployment rate. This indicator is mainly used to monitor the integration of young people aged 15-24 into the labour market. According to Eurostat data, the EU-28 average was 23 % in 2012.

**Figure 3.1: Employment rates of graduates from upper secondary education and above, aged 20-34 who graduated no more than three years prior to the reference year, ISCED 3-6, by country, 2012**



Source: Eurostat – Labour Force Survey (data extracted 3 July 2013).

Note: The EU-27 average does not include Croatia.

### 3.1. Youth Guarantee schemes and comprehensive policy initiatives

As mentioned in the chapter on early school leaving, EU Member States were recommended to implement a Youth Guarantee scheme <sup>(1)</sup>. In addition, twelve countries (Bulgaria, Spain, France, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Slovakia and the United Kingdom) have received 2013 CSRs that directly refer to the implementation of a Youth Guarantee scheme. These schemes aim to ensure that every young person who has recently graduated or become unemployed is provided with continuing education opportunities or a good-quality offer of employment or work experience opportunity, for instance, an apprenticeship.

Following the Commission Communication 'Working together for Europe's young people. A Call to Action on Youth Unemployment' (European Commission, 2013c) and the related European Council conclusions <sup>(2)</sup>, Member States with regions experiencing youth unemployment rates above 25 % were requested to submit a Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan by December 2013, whereas the

<sup>(1)</sup> Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee, OJ C 120/01, 26.04.2013.

<sup>(2)</sup> European Council – Conclusions. Brussels, 27-28/06/2013, available at: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/137634.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/137634.pdf)

remaining Member States are expected to do this in 2014. Some countries, in particular, Austria and Finland, have experience in establishing such schemes.

In **Finland**, the new Youth Guarantee was implemented at the beginning of 2013 and is in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs. The new Youth Guarantee is open to all persons under 25 years of age and recent graduates under 30 years of age. An employment plan must be drawn up for each unemployed young person within two weeks of registration as a job seeker. It also includes an educational guarantee that secures every basic school graduate a place in a general upper secondary education, vocational education, an apprenticeship or some other education and training programme. The aim is to provide all young people with opportunities to acquire a post-basic education qualification and find a job.

Other countries have undertaken a range of preparatory activities for the introduction of a Youth Guarantee scheme.

**France** has adopted the scheme '*garantie jeunes*' whose objective is to enable young people (aged 18-25) who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and are at risk of falling into poverty to find a job. The pilot phase of the scheme was launched in September 2013. The objective is that 100 000 young people per year will benefit from this scheme as from 2016.

In **Portugal**, a Youth Guarantee scheme (*Garantia Jovem*) will be implemented in 2014 and will include, for instance, grants for young people who had previously dropped out of higher education to resume their studies.

Across Europe, there are also comprehensive policies and programmes aimed at tackling youth unemployment which integrate a range of measures similar to those implemented under youth guarantee schemes. There may also be a coordinated approach by the various organisations involved in supporting young people finding a job or undertaking work placements. These types of comprehensive policies might include some of the specific measures that will be dealt in detail in the next sections of this chapter such as work experience opportunities and skills training.

In **Latvia**, the 2009-2014 operational programme 'Human Resources and Employment' addresses challenges identified under the 2012 and 2013 CSRs. Promotion of social inclusion is one of the priorities of this programme and one of the objectives is therefore to increase employment opportunities for young unemployed as one of the groups-at-risk.

In **Malta**, the recently launched National Youth Employment Strategy 2015 targets young jobseekers as well as those who, although integrated in the labour market, are considered as early school leavers. One of this strategy's aims is facilitating the transition between education, training and employment. One of the strategy's activities is providing young people with second-chance opportunities. Young people are supported on returning to education and training, to complete their qualifications and achieve a higher attainment level. Formal validation of training achieved is also foreseen. Other activities planned include the offer of traineeships and apprenticeships.

In line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, **Slovakia** adopted a Youth Action Plan this year. Priority activities include vocational education and training, the identification of sector-specific demands for particular skills in the labour market, and the incorporation of these skills into the vocational education and training curriculum. Entrepreneurship education and the promotion of youth entrepreneurship are also activities supported by the action plan.

In the **United Kingdom**, recent policy developments are in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs. In the United Kingdom, England and the devolved administrations of Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, strategies are in place to increase the participation of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). In **England**, the Building Engagement, Building Futures strategy launched in December 2011 aims at maximising the participation of 16-24 year-olds. The Youth Contract is one of the policies being implemented under the strategy, offering a range of opportunities to 18-24 year-olds to alleviate unemployment and additional support for disengaged and vulnerable 16 and 17 year-olds. In **Wales**, the 'Youth Engagement and Progression Framework Implementation Plan' launched in October 2013 (see Section 1.4 for more details) builds on the Youth Engagement and Employment Plan 2011-2015. It includes the development of a new 'youth guarantee' to ensure young people have access to a suitable place in learning post-16. This means either a full- or part-time course in school, college, with an independent provider or a traineeship, an apprenticeship place or a training course during employment equivalent to Level 2 of the National Qualifications Framework. In **Northern Ireland**, the Pathways to Success strategy, introduced in May 2012, is supporting the re-engagement of young people who are NEET. In **Scotland**, Opportunities for All forms part of the Scottish Government strategy and is a commitment to offer all those NEET aged between 16 and 19 a place in learning or training.

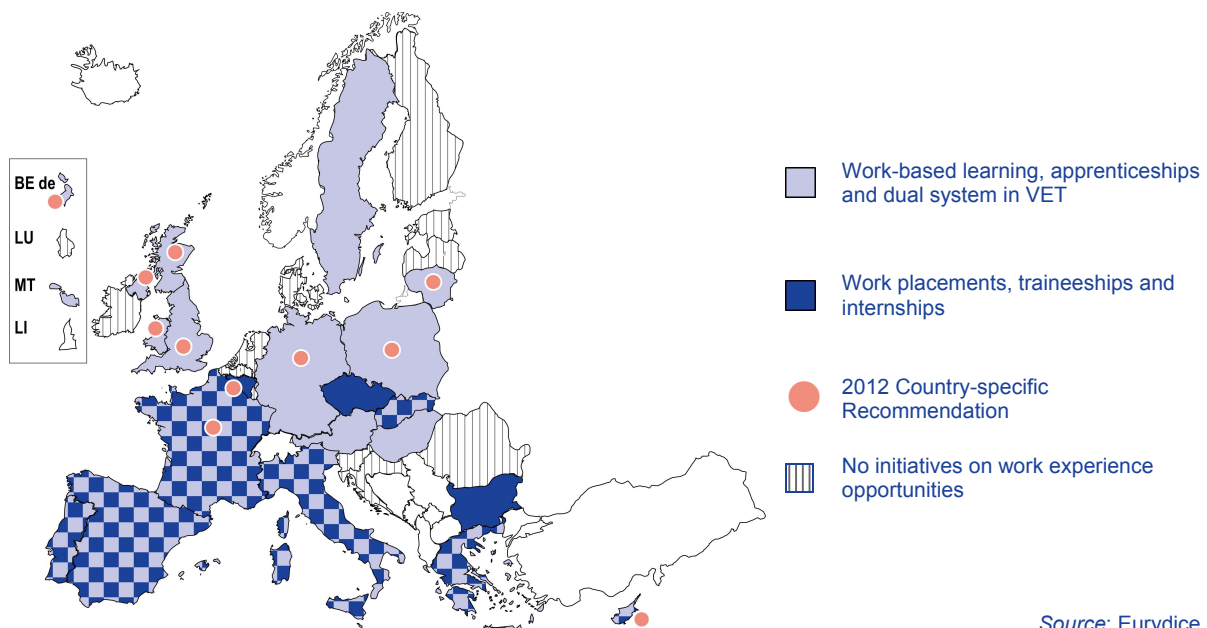
### 3.2. Increasing work experience opportunities

Work experience opportunities are essential if young people are to have a smooth transition from education to the labour market. As mentioned above, the EU actively supports the implementation of a Youth Guarantee and other national schemes and initiatives targeting NEETs and young unemployed people that seek to provide them with more work experience. In the Bruges Communiqué (European Commission, 2010), European countries have committed themselves to maximising work-based learning. Recent data shows that graduates from VET programmes with a strong workplace focus are more successful in finding employment (Cedefop, 2012c). Launched in July 2013, the European Alliance for Apprenticeships aims at contributing to fight youth unemployment by improving the quality and supply of apprenticeships.

Work experience is essential because it completes theoretical learning by ‘providing the practical experience, knowledge and skills’ needed by young people (European Commission 2012c, p. 4). It is at the core of vocational education and training (VET) but it is also vital at school and university. There is a wide range of work experience opportunities across countries depending on the type and level of education and in terms of provision and organisation.

This section looks first at recent and forthcoming measures put in place for developing dual systems, apprenticeships and work-based learning in VET. Subsequently, it concentrates on measures to provide more opportunities for work placements, internships and traineeships for young people.

**Figure 3.2: Large-scale initiatives to support the provision of work experience opportunities in the EU-28, implemented since 2011 or in preparation**



Source: Eurydice.

#### Explanatory note

‘Large-scale initiatives’ refers to measures that are applied across the whole education system and which have been launched since 2011, or are in an advanced stage of development prior to implementation.

#### 3.2.1. Work-based learning, apprenticeships and dual system in vocational education and training

In vocational education and training, there are various models to provide and organise work-based learning. In the school-based programme model, training may be provided entirely in an educational institution or training centre; in this case, work-based learning is achieved through for instance "on-site labs, workshops, simulations or real business/industry project assignments which aim to create a 'real

life' work environment" (European Commission 2012e, pp. 4-5). Alternatively, school-based programme can also include on-the-job training periods in companies, known as 'work placements'.

Other models are also provided in VET, combining practical training and hands-on experience at the work place and 'block-release' or 'off-the-job' period in the classroom at an education and training institution. Under these programmes, companies share the training provision with the VET school or the training centre. Such programmes are often described as 'alternance' schemes or apprenticeships. They are also known in Germany and Austria as the 'dual system' of education and training <sup>(3)</sup>. These two countries have some of the lowest youth unemployment rates in Europe. This positive impact of the dual system on transition to work has been acknowledged and a number of other countries have recently taken measures to implement similar models and/or to improve the quality of the existing programmes (see Figure 3.2).

In **Spain**, the Government laid the foundations for a dual system of training in November 2012.

In **Hungary**, in 2012, the Vocational Training Act introduced the 3-year dual vocational training system, which provides practical training from the first year of vocational school. The practical training will be mainly provided in company instead of at school and will be regulated by apprenticeship contracts.

In **Austria's** case, the 2011 amendment to the vocational Training Act aims to improve the quality of apprenticeship and training as well as counselling and guidance services for apprentices and their employers. For example, in order to improve quality assurance, training guidelines for the company-based part of the apprenticeship will be developed with the aim of improving the design and planning of training.

A Memorandum of Understanding between **Portugal** and Germany (5 November 2012) includes the creation of a dual system of training. Among the initiatives that will be undertaken are a pilot project of technicians training courses and a mobility programme for apprenticeships abroad.

The value of work-based learning – and notably of apprenticeships or dual training systems – in facilitating youth employment and increasing economic competitiveness is clearly recognised (European Commission 2012a, p. 5) and therefore there is still a need to enhance work experience opportunities in VET. The importance of further efforts to develop, increase and improve the quality of work-based learning and apprenticeship schemes in VET are reflected in an increasing number of 2012 and 2013 CSRs <sup>(4)</sup>. In particular, sixteen countries have received 2013 CSRs with focus on reforming VET programmes by increasing their labour market relevance through a stronger work-based learning component and apprenticeships.

In **France**, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, a bill for developing apprenticeship and careers education will be presented to the Council of Ministers by the end of 2013.

**Italy**, which received CSRs in 2012 and 2013 in this area, is currently taking measures to introduce a dual model of VET by increasing 'alternance' training, which envisages periods of on-the-job training without an individual work contract.

In **Lithuania**, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, the amendment to the 'Practical VET Resources Development Programme' was approved in 2012. On the basis of this, Lithuania will launch a project aimed at developing vocational training in real working conditions during 2013.

The 2012 reform of VET in **Poland** is in line with the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, as exemplified by the implementation of the 'Business for Education' project. The key activity of this project will be the implementation of 11 educational programmes by the end of 2014. The objective of the Programmes will be to develop forms of cooperation between a given enterprise and an educational institution that will increase the knowledge, skills and competences of pupils and students, and help them to adapt to the needs of the labour market.

<sup>(3)</sup> Please consult the CEDEFOP's glossary where these terms 'alternance' schemes, apprenticeships and the dual system of education and training are defined: [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4064\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4064_en.pdf)

<sup>(4)</sup> For an overview of key VET developments by country, including measures to address CSRs, see <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Information-services/vet-in-europe-country-reports.aspx>

In **Slovakia**, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, the above-mentioned Youth Action Plan includes as part of its priority activities, the involvement of companies in vocational education and training programmes.

In the **United Kingdom**, in line with one of the CSRs, there is a commitment to increasing the quality and availability of apprenticeships in England and the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. For example, in England, the Government has accepted recommendations which aim to give employers more control over apprenticeships and ensure that all apprenticeships are rigorous and responsive to employers' needs.

### 3.2.2. Work placements, traineeships and internships

As shown in Figure 3.2, in the last two years, a certain number of countries have adopted measures to encourage the provision of work placements, internships and traineeships for young people. Outside the VET sector, work experience organised as an integral part of a course of education is also referred to as 'work placement'. However, the term 'internship' is also becoming more common as well as the term 'traineeship' which has been referred to in recent Commission documents <sup>(5)</sup>. These terms are near synonyms and there are no commonly agreed definitions at European level. All in all, these three terms can refer to work experience undertaken by students during, after or even outside their formal education at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels.

Countries have taken measures for supporting and ensuring that young people have high-quality internships/traineeships. Most have been focused on ensuring that trainees/interns receive the financial compensation they are entitled to for the tasks carried out. In addition, some countries have decided to target specific groups of young people such as those already mentioned in Chapter 2, tertiary education graduates with limited experience in the workplace experience and young job seekers. Two of the countries (Greece and Portugal) that have registered high levels of youth unemployment since the start of the economic crisis report recent measures in this area.

In line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, in **Belgium** (Brussels-Capital Region), unemployed young graduates from upper secondary education or below, aged between 18 and 24 years old, form the target group of the newly created initiative '*stages de transition en entreprise*' (transition work placement). In addition, the institute that coordinates traineeships (IFAPME – *Institut wallon de Formation en Alternance et des Indépendants et des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises*) has been reformed, and a single contract for traineeships that form part of compulsory education will be presented to the government in 2013. In the future, these traineeships will lead to a certificate equivalent to upper secondary schooling. A new system combining training and employment for young job seekers is being put in place. Moreover, a more general use of traineeship within secondary schooling is under discussion.

In **Greece**, a special voucher system has been introduced for unemployed people aged up to 29 years. The system was launched in 2013 under the 'Human Resources Development programme' of the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Welfare. Depending on their qualification, the voucher entitles young people to a period of internship or work experience of five months, corresponding to 500 hours of training, with an allowance included. Trainees also receive mentoring from the provider, before and during the internship.

In line with one of the 2012 CSRs for **Cyprus**, the initiative 'job placement and training of tertiary education graduates' was launched under the authority of the Human Resource Development Authority. It targets young tertiary education graduates with less than 12 months of relevant work experience. This entails in-company practical training and work experience of six months duration.

Under the *Impulso Jovem* programme launched in **Portugal** in June 2012, the Employment Passport (*Passaporte Emprego*) offers traineeship opportunities covered by a monthly allowance to young people registered as jobseekers with the national employment centres.

In some countries, recent schemes also offer students the opportunity for work placements abroad. Finally, emphasis is also put on disseminating information about traineeships and internships using publicly-supported online services such as web portals and dedicated websites.

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<sup>(5)</sup> See in particular European Commission, 2012c.



### 3.3. Addressing skills mismatches

Improved integration of young people into the labour market calls for addressing the issue of skills mismatches, which is defined in terms of ‘excess or deficient qualifications or skills possessed by individuals relative to job requirements’ (CEDEFOP 2012b, p. 11). As with the entire labour force, young people might be in a situation of being over- or under-qualified or of being over- or under-skilled. The former means that an individual, here a young person, holds a qualification either higher or lower than their current job requires. In the latter situation, either the individual is not able to fully utilise his or her skills and abilities in their current job or he/she lacks the skills to perform it well (CEDEFOP, 2010b).

This section therefore looks at recent or forthcoming policy measures that exist across Europe to identify, assess or address skills-to-job mismatches. At system level, there is the use and development of skills forecasting tools and instruments which are often combined with the gathering, processing and disseminating of information about evolving patterns of skills needs. Educational curricula being in tune with labour market needs is also of high importance, in particular in the vocational education and training field. Finally, the third way to address skills mismatches is at individual level through career guidance and employment services.

#### 3.3.1. Skills monitoring and forecasting systems

Since its launch in December 2012, the EU Skills panorama website has been sharing data and forecasts on skills mismatches compiled at EU and Member States level. Details on occupations, vacancies and shortages are provided by sector, profession and country. In addition, the trends apparent in certain fields are highlighted in order to provide deeper insight into labour markets needs. Activities in this area are increasing in importance and some countries have recently undertaken new initiatives.

In a number of countries, projects, reports and surveys on monitoring skills demand and supply have been initiated and conducted in the last two years. Some countries have assigned specific bodies the task of gathering information for skills forecasting purposes. In others, specific authorities have been designated to analyse how well existing education and training programmes match the skills and qualifications required in the labour market. It has been recognised that monitoring how tertiary education graduates are integrated into the labour market represents valuable information on the employability of such groups and that this information can feed into skills forecasting activities. Some countries have started tracking individuals after their graduation.

In line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs for **Estonia**, special task forces work on two fields: skills and competences and lifelong learning strategy.

In **Latvia**, higher education institutions have been gathering information and tracking students under the 2010-2012 Action Plan on Necessary Reforms in Higher Education and Science.

For **Luxembourg**, in line with the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, the training observatory (*observatoire de la formation*) started a seven-year longitudinal study in 2011, analysing transitions from education to the labour market as well as trends in the career destinations of students. One of the long-term objectives of the training observatory's activities is to provide analyses on changes in occupational sectors.

In **Portugal**, since 2013 a regular report on the numbers of higher education graduates registered with the government employment agency is being compiled each semester. This monitoring is carried out in collaboration with the Portuguese Institute for Employment and Professional Training (*Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional* – IEFP) and is being shared with higher education institutions.



### 3.3.2. Labour market relevance of vocational education and training

Making education and training relevant to labour-market needs is crucial for employability and this can only be achieved by establishing strong links between education and the workplace. Chapter 2 has already indicated examples of good practice at the level of higher education. The earlier sections of this chapter have shown the importance given to improving and extending work experience for young people, in particular through work-based learning and apprenticeships.

This subsection focuses on measures to increase the relevance of vocational education and training (VET) to labour market needs. Measures that have been taken by countries range from updating curricula to focus on learning-based outcomes, to including businesses and regional authorities in the planning and delivery of professional development for VET teachers. The need to link training and education more effectively with labour market needs is reflected in several 2012 and 2013 CSRs.

In line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, all communities in **Belgium** have started the discussion about ways to achieve coherence between labour market needs, education and training. In cooperation with the social partners, the **Flemish Community** has increased its training offer for 'bottleneck' and future-oriented occupations. The industries have been encouraged to develop a shared vision of their competence and training needs, and the creation of a database with professional competence profiles will help to take better account of the competence needs of the labour market through a reinforced automatic matching process. A new career policy is under development, and a career voucher will allow all workers to buy eight hours' worth of career guidance with a registered provider every six years. Moreover, a growth pathway has been put in place for individual professional training within companies. **Wallonia** is opting for a strong local partnership between the worlds of education and training on the one hand, and the social partners on the other, aiming to improve the balance between training supply and demand and an improvement in its quality.

In **Estonia**, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, the main purpose of the new Vocational Education Act in force since 1 September 2013 is to modernise VET programmes to make them more suited to labour market needs.

In **Ireland**, decisions by Solas, the new further education and training authority, on a training course mix to be provided in centres at local level will be based on a variety of local data including the expected recruitment demand from new or expanding companies and intelligence gathered from employers making direct contact with the authority when seeking training programmes to supply them with entry-level skilled workers. National level data from the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs will also be used.

In **Latvia**, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, there is a three-year European Social Fund project for the 'development of a system of sector qualifications and restructuring of the vocational training system' that has started in late 2010. The project sets on a partnership between the State Education Development Agency, Employers Confederation, Free Trade Union Confederation, the National Centre for Education and the State Service of Education Quality. The objective of this project is to adjust VET curricula with labour market by developing skills system by sector, reviewing VET standards and developing a system of accreditation of vocational training.

### 3.3.3. Career guidance and employment services

As noted in the previous chapters, career guidance and counselling services at school level are important tools that can support students in making decisions about their further education or professional career. One aspect of particular relevance is the provision of information about sectors with skills shortages.

Once young people have graduated, they can benefit from career guidance and employment services. Such services are commonly provided in Member States, often run by public employment services, and responsible for providing information to job seekers and assisting them in their search for employment. However, the issues of youth unemployment and skills-to-job mismatch call for more tailored services for young people to help them enter the labour market. Some countries have reported new initiatives in this field.

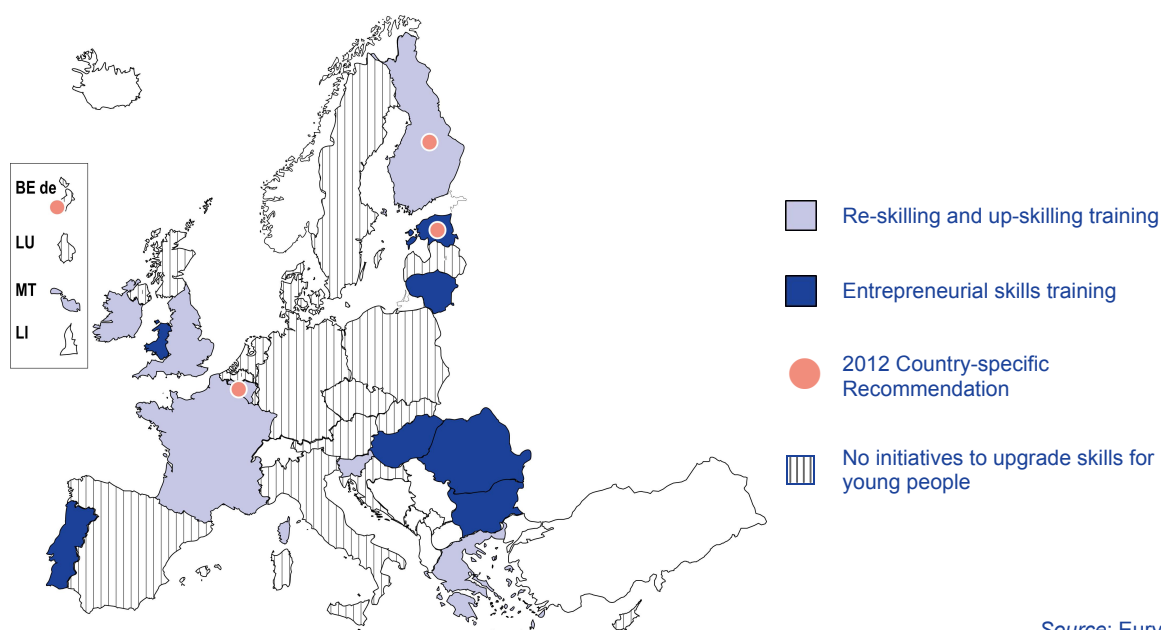
In line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs for **Luxembourg**, information and guidance services are being provided by the newly created counselling organisation (*maison de l'orientation*) already mentioned in the chapter on early school leaving. It plays a major role in advising young people in their transition from school to work.

Until the end of 2013, several labour offices in **Poland** will be implementing the project 'Your Career Your Choice'. The aim of the project is to design and test new measures for unemployed persons under 30 years of age. A young person will receive support for on-the-job training, a vocational course, training in a vocational school or a post-graduate study. Labour offices finance the training while the young person chooses the type of training and the institution providing it. Once the measures have been tested in the pilot phase, they will be included in the regulations.

### 3.4. Upgrading skills

In a situation of unemployment, acquiring higher level or new skills through training and professional development courses increases the chances for any individual to find a job, especially in areas where there is a shortage of skills. Young people are usually the ones in the labour force with the most recent and up-to-date qualifications. However, the recent unemployment figures have shown that even a higher education degree no longer protects young people from being jobless. At the other end of the scale, young people who have left education and training prematurely form a particularly vulnerable group, suffering the most from a lack of basic skills and qualifications (see Chapter 1).

**Figure 3.3: Large-scale initiatives to upgrade skills for young people in the EU-28, implemented since 2011 or in preparation**



Source: Eurydice.

#### Explanatory note

'Large-scale initiatives' refers to measures that are applied across the whole education system and which have been launched since 2011, or are in an advanced stage of development prior to implementation.

This section only looks at policy initiatives specifically targeting young people under the age of 34. Please see Chapter 4 on adult participation in lifelong learning for other measures also designed for this group. All types of training are covered, including non-formal learning and labour-market oriented courses. A range of skills, for instance entrepreneurship, ICT and foreign languages skills can all enhance the employability of young people. A special sub-section below is devoted to entrepreneurial skills training due to the high number of recent initiatives focusing on this area.

### 3.4.1. Re-skilling and up-skilling training

Figure 3.3 shows that a number of countries have recently launched nation-wide initiatives offering training opportunities for young people to acquire new skills. The reported policy measures mainly focus on offering courses with a strong link to labour market requirements and needs. Some take particular account of the shortages that exist in certain work areas. Alongside national initiatives, there are also EU-funded projects, some with limited application to this field of action such as in Latvia and Romania. Young jobseekers are the target group of most of the initiatives reported.

In line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs for **Belgium**, the Brussels training centre '*Tremplin Jeunes*' (in the Brussels-Capital Region) offers training modules for the young unemployed (18-24). It aims at achieving one of the high priorities of the regional government which is to tackle the high level of unemployment among low-qualified people aged below 25 years in the Brussels-Capital Region. The training ranges from deep learning diagnosis to qualifying training, including basic skills training and work placements. Since its creation in mid-2011, 3 144 young people have used the services of '*Tremplin Jeunes*'. 1 481 of them undertook training. It is estimated that nearly 20 % of the young unemployed in the Brussels-Capital Region have benefited from these services over a time period of 24 months.

In **Ireland**, the Momentum Training Fund, launched in late 2012 as part of the Action Plan for Jobs Programme, focuses on the long-term unemployed. It targets interventions to tackle skills shortages by providing training places in particular sectors of the Irish economy where vacancies are identified. Young unemployed people are once again a specific target group. It will provide up to 6 500 training places for the long-term unemployed. Some of the places have been targeted specifically at young unemployed people.

In **France**, there is also the initiative 'Contract Future Jobs' (*contrats emplois d'avenir*) created in October 2012 for young unemployed people aged 16 to 25 years old who have few or no qualifications and face difficulties in finding a job. This contract aims at supporting their integration into the labour market in sectors with a social purpose or with a strong potential of creating jobs. The competences that the young individual will acquire on the job will be recognised and certified, increasing his/her level of qualifications.

In line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs for **Finland**, a skills programme for young adults (as part of the Youth Guarantee) has been adopted for the 2013-2016 period. This programme is intended for young people aged 20-29 who lack post-basic education qualification. It provides such young people with the opportunity to acquire a vocational qualification.

### 3.4.2. Entrepreneurial skills training

In a certain number of countries, nation-wide programmes and projects focus on developing skills that foster entrepreneurial mind-sets and business start-up skills (see Figure 3.3). It has been recognised that entrepreneurial skills not only contribute to new business creation but also to the employability of young people (European Commission 2012d, p. 4). School curricula in European countries include knowledge, skills or attitudes in the broad field of 'entrepreneurship education' (EACEA/Eurydice, 2012c). In the majority of countries, higher education students appear to be the target group for receiving training and guidance in entrepreneurial skill, and it is at this level that initiatives have been mainly reported.

In **Bulgaria**, the National Program for Youth (2011-2015) includes a three-year project (2010-2012) on the 'Building and development of centres for the promotion of entrepreneurship in higher education'.

In **Estonia**, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs, the government's 2011-2015 action programme stipulates that by 2013 all higher education students of non-economic specialities will be able to study entrepreneurship within the scope of their curricula.

In **Romania**, the Young Successful Entrepreneur programme initiated by the Ministry of National Education for the 2010-2013 period aims at increasing the entrepreneurial potential of students and graduates in higher education.

## Summary

Although national situations are different, enhancing young people's skills and thus raising the rate of employment has been a focus of all countries' policy initiatives since 2011. The ET 2020 benchmark on graduate employability adopted in 2012, has set a goal to reach an average employment rate of 82 % for 20-34 year-old graduates (from upper secondary education or above) who left education and training not more than three years prior to the reference year. In 2012 and 2013, a large number of Country-specific Recommendations (CSRs) focus on the contribution to be made by education and training in tackling youth unemployment. School-to-work transition is the area where most countries are recommended to take action or implement further measures. It is also important to note that among the countries which have received a CSR in this area, there are some that either have employability levels around the EU-average (Belgium – French Community and Lithuania) or are well-performing countries with levels already close to the benchmark (Estonia and the United Kingdom); these countries have, nevertheless, introduced a certain number of initiatives which tend to be targeted at the most vulnerable, for instance, the lowest qualified or skilled, or those who are not in employment, education or training (NEET).

Overall, since 2011, EU countries have put in place a number of large-scale initiatives, confirming the urgent need to tackle youth unemployment through education and training. Most commonly, countries have adopted policy measures in three main fields of action: increasing work experience opportunities, addressing skills mismatches and upgrading young people's skills. In nearly half of all countries, these issues are addressed through comprehensive policy initiatives for youth employment. As recommended at European level, Youth Guarantee schemes are currently under preparation in the EU Member States.

Nearly two-thirds of countries have put in place or are preparing to implement policy measures to improve school-to-work transition by supporting the provision of work experience opportunities, either in vocational education and training or in general education, from secondary to tertiary level. There are slightly more countries putting emphasis on work experience in the VET sector. The majority of these initiatives are intended to gradually implement a dual system model in the long term and introduce more work-based learning in line with the CSRs issued in 2012 and 2013. Financial compensation for employers and young people are very common under the policy measures focusing on work placements, traineeships and internships.

To address the issue of skills mismatches, few countries (Ireland, Latvia, Poland and Portugal) have recently launched large-scale initiatives to develop skills forecasting and monitoring systems. Other countries have also developed projects which touch on this field in the last two years (see Annex 2). Strengthening the links between education and training and the labour market is, in a certain number of countries, the means to ensure that provision keeps pace with the changing needs of the economy development and thus avoid skills mismatches (Belgium – Flemish and French Communities, Ireland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, the Netherlands and Romania). Most of the initiatives in this area involve business and employers in curricula development and educational programme design. Finally, a few countries (Luxembourg, Greece, Cyprus, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and the United Kingdom) have launched new initiatives in the area of career guidance and employment services, to better meet the needs of the unemployed and other vulnerable groups by providing them with customised services.

In almost two-thirds of countries, there are large-scale initiatives implemented since 2011, or currently in preparation to provide young people with more opportunities to upgrade their skills; in particular, in relation to sectors with skills shortages (Belgium – French community, Ireland, Spain, France, Greece,

Malta, Slovenia, Finland and the United Kingdom – England) but also entrepreneurship skills (Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Hungary, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and the United Kingdom – Wales). Initiatives target mostly those who are unemployed and early leavers from education and training (see also Chapter 1).

The range of actions undertaken varies between countries. Greece, Spain, Lithuania, Portugal, and the United Kingdom have launched policy initiatives in most fields, particular those concerning work experience opportunities and training for upgrading skills. Moreover, among the countries with the lowest employability levels (as reflected in their employment rates), three of them (Spain, Portugal and Slovakia) have at least four large-scale initiatives aimed at tackling youth unemployment through education and training. In contrast, Bulgaria and Croatia have low levels of graduate employability but have only reported a limited number of initiatives.

## CHAPTER 4: INCREASING ADULT PARTICIPATION IN LIFELONG LEARNING

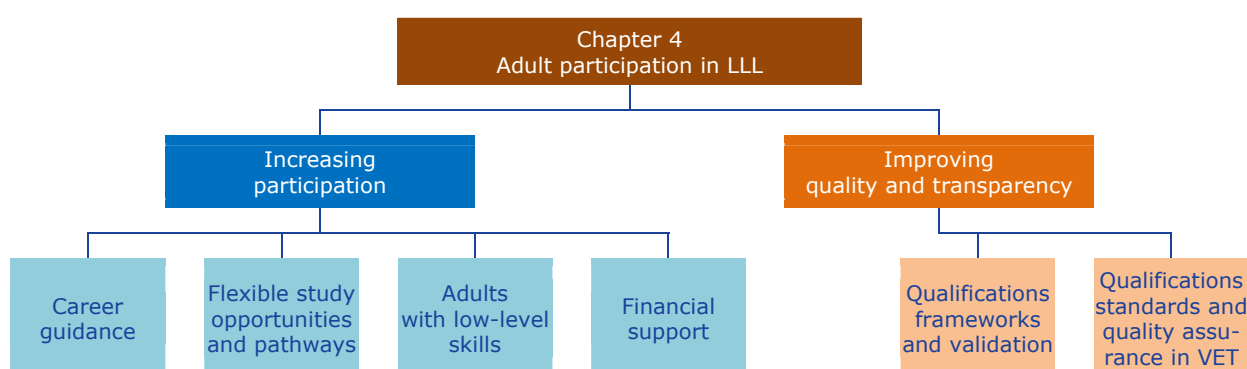
The economic crisis, the need for new skills and demographic changes have all contributed to a recognition that adult learning and lifelong learning strategies should play a key role in the policies for competitiveness and employability, social inclusion and active citizenship.

Taking this into account, the Council has established a benchmark for adult participation in lifelong learning and adopted a resolution on a renewed agenda for adult learning. The benchmark objective is that, by 2020, 15 % of European adults (age 25-64) should be participating in lifelong learning activities <sup>(1)</sup>.

The Commission's Communication 'Rethinking education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes' invites Member States to push forward educational reforms to combat youth unemployment and to boost skills supply through a range of actions. In order to reduce the number of adults with low-level skills, the key actions are setting national targets and devising strategies to improve take-up of adult learning. These might include, for example, providing information on access to lifelong learning services, information on the validation of non-formal and informal learning and career guidance, and offering tailored learning opportunities to individual learners (European Commission 2012d, p. 15).

The 2013 Annual Growth Survey also emphasises the need to improve access to lifelong learning throughout working life, including for older workers, by strengthening partnerships between the public and private institutions involved in the provision, application and updating of specific skills (European Commission 2012a, p. 11).

Following the European policy agenda in the field of lifelong learning and the 2012 and 2013 Country-specific Recommendations (CSRs), this chapter first looks at the reforms and types of measures that Member States have undertaken since 2011 to increase adult participation in lifelong learning. The second section looks at the reforms to improve the quality and transparency of adult education.



<sup>(1)</sup> Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European Cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020'), OJ C119, 28.5.2009.





There are several types of reform common in a number of countries to increase adult participation in lifelong learning. Some of them aim to improve the access to lifelong learning.

In line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs for **France**, a personal training account (*compte personnel de formation*) is being created which lasts for the entire duration of an individual's working life (Law No°2013-504 of 14 June 2013) independently of its work status. This move is intended to facilitate employees' access to LLL even when they are between jobs.

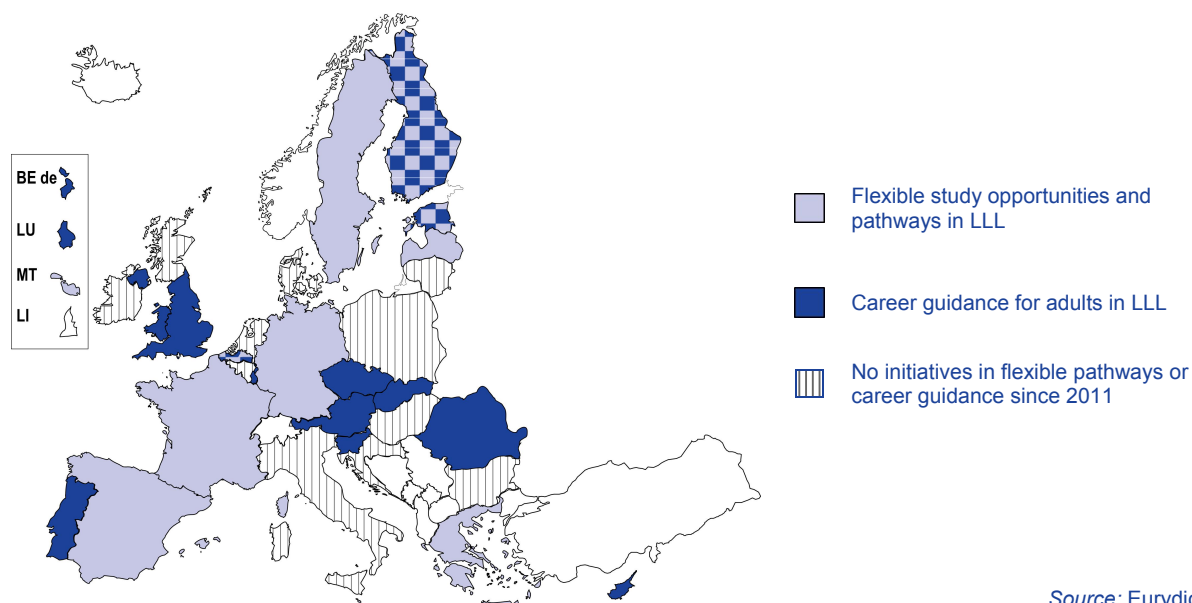
The state, the regions and the unions of both employers and workers at national and inter-professional level initiated a dialogue before 1 July 2013 on the implementation of the personal training account. Before 1 January 2014, the partners will carry out the necessary changes to the existing inter-professional regulations in force, with the Government reporting to the Parliament about how the former 'individual right to training' (DIF – *droit individuel à la formation*) will be replaced by the new system, and how the training hours gained under the DIF will be transferred to the new personal training account.

Member States have agreed to promote lifelong learning by developing coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies (European Commission, 2001). The majority of Member States have developed a strategy for lifelong learning.

In accordance with one of the 2012 and 13 CSRs made to **Poland**, the Lifelong Learning Perspective strategy which specifies the government's related policy directions was adopted in September 2013. The policy intends to provide easier access for everybody to good quality learning in various forms, places and at every stage of life, as well as to create coherent and transparent systems of assessing learning outcomes. It covers the whole process of learning, in all its aspects (formal, non-formal and informal), at all life stages and at all levels of competences and qualifications.

Figure 4.2 shows that almost half of the Member States report recent or forthcoming initiatives to improve career guidance for adults while about one third of the Member States report initiatives to develop flexible pathways in lifelong learning. Only, Belgium (Flemish Community), Estonia and Finland report reforms in both categories.

**Figure 4.2: Large-scale initiatives to develop flexible study opportunities and pathways or career guidance for adults, implemented since 2011, or currently in preparation, EU-28**



Source: Eurydice.

#### **Explanatory note**

'Large-scale initiatives' refers to measures that are applied across the whole education system and which have been launched since 2011, or are in an advanced stage of development prior to implementation.

#### 4.1.1. Improving career guidance and awareness raising activities for adults

The provision of coordinated lifelong guidance seems to be of growing importance in all Member States. Many Member States have set up access points (one-stop shops) that integrate different learning services such as the validation of prior learning and career guidance, and offer to provide tailored learning programmes to individual learners. Almost half of the countries report that they are extending and coordinating educational and career counselling services to assist adults.

In the **United Kingdom (England)**, in April 2012, the National Careers Service was launched building on the former 'Next Step' service. It provides information, advice and guidance on careers, skills and the labour market, covering further education, apprenticeships and other types of training and higher education.

Providing easily accessible information and guidance are important measures in increasing participation; many countries have therefore put in place web-based guidance.

For example, in **Finland**, as a part of the Action Programme on eServices and eDemocracy (SADe), the Ministry of Education and Culture is setting up an electronic education centre, which will list all adult education and training programmes; individuals will be able to apply for these through the internet service. The service is being developed between 2011 and 2014.

Several Member States have taken recent measures to better integrate migrants and disadvantaged groups.

For example, in the context of the 2011 reforms to improve the integration into society of disadvantaged groups and new citizens, **Belgium (Flemish Community)** has set up career guidance centres in adult education.

Raising awareness of the benefits of high quality, easily accessible and equitable adult learning is key to increasing participation. Some countries, for instance, Bulgaria, Estonia, Luxembourg and Finland have carried out campaigns to make adults more aware of the benefits of lifelong learning.

**Estonia** has launched different initiatives to raise the awareness and increase the motivation of adults to participate in lifelong learning; these include TV and radio shows, newsletters, and an 'adult education week' supported by the ESF (European Social Fund, 2007-2013).

In **Bulgaria**, the participation of adults in lifelong learning is among the lowest in Europe. The government is implementing a national project aiming to establish a National Council for Lifelong Learning and a National Information System for Lifelong Learning. The short term aim of the project is to raise awareness about adult education provision. In the long term, the aim is to develop national standards in the provision of adult learning.

By encouraging their employees to take part in lifelong learning, employers could also help to increase participation.

For example, in **Slovenia**, in order to develop human resource management and career guidance in companies, the new programme for Career Guidance for Employers and Employees has been in force since 2011. The programme aims to give support to employers in the area of human resource management. It also provides in-company training for managers and/or human resource departments (where they exist) in the area of career guidance/career development with the intention of providing/developing effective career guidance for their employees and to improve their access to lifelong learning.

#### 4.1.2. More flexible study opportunities and pathways in lifelong learning

One of the basic measures to increase the overall participation of adults in lifelong learning is removing barriers to participation. In order to do this, many Member States support new modes of delivering learning content such as distance learning, evening courses and education tailored to the needs and circumstances of the individual.

In **Latvia**, in order to support evening schools, *Amendments to the General Education Law* were adopted in 2011 which define the role and tasks of these institutions in relation to adult education. In addition, evening schools were allowed to implement non-formal adult education programmes, for instance, courses in languages, computing and management. In this way, adult education

programme options and their availability are being expanded. In addition, evening schools cooperate with the State Employment Agency providing programmes for both job seekers and employed persons.

In **Sweden**, the new Education Act of 2011, which applied to adult municipal education as from 1 July 2012, encourages the provision of education tailored to the needs and circumstances of the individual. The Act strengthens the use of individual study plans and gives the validation of prior learning a more prominent role as a normal part of the educational process.

**Finland** is working on establishing a lifelong learning system based on individual needs. According to the development plan, adult education and training is currently supply-based and provision does not necessarily respond to individual needs. To develop a more demand-driven system, the Ministry of Education and Culture appointed reviewers to prepare proposals for the adoption of personal training accounts at the end of 2012.

Moreover, learners are offered alternative, more flexible pathways to achieve higher education qualifications.

In 2011, **Malta** launched an initiative facilitating the entry of adult learners into higher education by offering more evening courses in addition to the traditional daytime courses.

In **Greece**, the Law 4009/2011 on the organisation of higher education has introduced the operation of lifelong learning programmes, in Lifelong Learning Schools established in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In particular, HEIs have been given the opportunity to offer programmes of lifelong learning through distance learning.

### 4.1.3. Adults with low-level skills

Adult learning provides a means of up-skilling or re-skilling those affected by unemployment, restructuring and career transition. The Renewed European agenda for adult learning (2011) <sup>(2)</sup>, calls on Member States to focus on low-skilled/low-qualified groups to take their basic skills 'one step up'. The importance of giving people with low-level skills access to lifelong learning is reflected in the 2012 and 2013 CSRs.

In line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs made to **Estonia**, the vocational education program Kutse was extended in 2011 to include not only individuals who had not completed vocational school but also adults without any vocational or other qualification.

Similarly, in line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs made to **Slovenia**, in accordance with the Guidelines for the Implementation of Active Employment Policy Measures for 2012-2015 adopted in November 2011, special attention will be given to younger and older job-seekers. Among the activities implemented are: training programmes (national vocational qualifications – preparation and assessment of NVQ and BVQ); further training programmes (institutional training, Project Learning for Young Adults; inclusion of unemployed persons in support and development programmes; the Pokolpje regional programme – active and functional; Training for Success in Life; adult training and education); on-the-job training and education programmes.

In line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs to **Spain**, a contribution system for companies including workers aged over 50 in collective redundancies has become operational. At least 50 % of the contributions from companies will be used for the reintegration of workers aged over 50 into employment. In addition, recognising professional competences acquired through work experience, and non-formal training, is one of the instruments to encourage adults, especially those who left school without qualifications, to reintegrate into the education system.

In **Finland**, the threshold to participate in adult education and training has recently been lowered by exempting adults with no vocational qualifications from the fees charged for education and training leading to competence-based qualifications. In addition, measures will be taken to develop outreach actions (i.e. to find, reach and motivate adults to participate in training) in cooperation with business and industry.

Countries report that they aim to engage local authorities more in outreach work with, in particular, adults who have low levels of education, the unemployed, migrants, and those who have left school early. The aim is to increase the involvement of these groups in lifelong learning.

<sup>(2)</sup> Council Resolution on a Renewed European agenda for adult learning, OJ C372, 20.12.2011.

For example, in the **United Kingdom (England)**, in 2012/13 locally-based 'community learning trust models' have been piloted to channel 'Community Learning' funding and lead the planning of local provision in cities, towns and rural settings. The trusts are expected to take account of the views of local government, local communities and local business leaders to ensure that the funding is deployed to meet local needs.

#### 4.1.4. Financial support for participating in lifelong learning

Financial incentives are important to raise adult participation in lifelong learning. Countries report different incentives for encouraging individuals and companies to participate in lifelong learning. Nineteen Member States have loan schemes but most of them are aimed at higher education (see Chapter 2 for details on financial support for students in higher education). However, they could, nevertheless, benefit adult learners as they might facilitate adult access to higher education (European Commission 2012e, p. 16).

In the context of prioritising further education funding for young adults (19-24), those who need to improve their English and maths and those seeking work, the **United Kingdom (England)** has introduced the '24+ advanced learning loans' scheme from the 2013/14 academic year. The scheme supports individuals aged 24 and over wishing to undertake education or training at level 3 (two A levels or the vocational equivalent), level 4 (higher vocational education, equivalent to ISCED 5B) or advanced and higher apprenticeships.

Other financial incentives reported are training vouchers for further training and re-training, the reimbursement of enrolment fees, and an entitlement for workers to have the right to request time away from work to train etc.

In **Austria**, there is an opportunity for educational leave. In 2011, the circle of beneficiaries was expanded and, since 2012, access to educational leave for all employees has been facilitated.

In recent years, **Luxembourg** has introduced a series of measures aimed at allowing adults to continue education and training or to allow them to obtain initial education and training qualifications. These include, for example, paid training leave for employees, self-employed persons and those exercising accredited liberal professions.

In **Hungary**, a project has been launched for developing foreign language and IT competences among the adult population in order to improve their employability. The aim is to involve 100 000 persons in language and IT training courses offered by accredited training institutions between December 2012 and August 2014. Participants have to be over 18 and cannot participate in another state-funded education programme (at school or university) at the same time. 95 to 98 % of the tuition fee is covered by the state, depending on participants' place of residence (disadvantaged areas receiving a higher proportion of funding). A network of 800 mentors has been set up to carry out needs assessment, communicate with learners, recruit and motivate participants and provide information on how to register. This is in line with the Act on Adult Education, in force since July 2013, which primarily focuses on vocational training, language teaching and the regulation of training programmes supported by the state or the EU. The Act prioritises training programmes that are capable of meeting labour market needs.

Public financial support for adult learning in all Member States is concentrated on the unemployed and those at risk of losing their job. In the majority of countries, 'second chance' programmes for the completion of basic or lower secondary education are provided free of charge. Completing upper secondary school education at public education and training institutions, including through alternative modes of study (e.g. part-time courses), is, in some countries, free of charge for individuals regardless of age (e.g. Czech Republic, Estonia, Spain and Sweden) (EACEA/Eurydice 2011a, p. 60).

Encouraging companies to improve employees' qualifications and invest in employee training is a way to increase adult participation in lifelong learning.

In **Estonia**, exemption from the fringe benefit tax on work related studies was introduced in 2012. As a result of this change, expenses on degree-level education related to employees' work will no longer be viewed as a fringe benefit. The reform will promote investment by companies in improving employees' qualifications and thereby support an increase in productivity and general competitiveness.

The European Social Fund (ESF) and the Structural Funds are significant tools for supporting the implementation of lifelong learning measures.

In **Lithuania**, the EU Structural Funds remain one of the major sources of investment in the provision of lifelong learning. One of the key priorities for the allocation of the EU Structural Funds assistance has been the improvement of the availability and quality of education and studies. Funds have been allocated to projects aimed at upgrading the infrastructure of education, vocational training and higher education and research institutions, and also the development of lifelong learning. These funds have been used to create the National Qualifications Framework in compliance with the needs of the labour market, develop vocational training standards, encourage young people to stay in education and obtain professional qualifications, and also to organise a variety of training courses for adult learners.

## **4.2. Reforms to improve the quality and transparency of adult education**

In many countries reforms to increase adult participation in lifelong learning and raise educational attainment levels are undertaken in parallel with measures to improve the quality and transparency of both adult education and vocational training. This is being carried out, in particular, through the development of qualifications frameworks and procedures to accredit prior learning.

### **4.2.1. Development of qualifications frameworks and validation of non-formal and informal learning**

A lot of learning takes place informally and without tutoring, intentional but less organised. This may include learning activities that occur in the home or in daily life. Validation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired in the workplace and elsewhere has been part of European policy since 2001, but only a minority of countries had a highly developed system to validate non-formal and informal learning before 2010 (Cedefop 2012a, p. 10).

Validation can be used to support a range of specific target groups such as job seekers, those with low-level qualifications, as well as experienced and older workers, to enable them to access a formal qualification or employment, or simply to develop a 'taste' for learning and the motivation to take forward a personal development plan or pathway. Validation of non-formal and informal learning represents a useful addition or an alternative way to help various target groups gain new opportunities (a 'second chance') to (re) enter the labour market or engage in further education and training (Cedefop, 2010a).

A few countries report that they have recently introduced a procedure for the validation of learning outcomes in an informal and non-formal context (Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland and Slovakia).

In **Italy**, to facilitate connections between labour supply and demand and to increase transparency in learning and the recognition of certifications, a legislative decree has established a national system for the certification of skills, including the identification and recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

The recognition and validation of prior non-formal and informal learning goes hand in hand with moves towards establishing National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) based on learning outcomes. There are a number of initiatives that are being implemented to enhance the transparency, recognition and quality of competences and qualifications, facilitating the mobility of learners and workers. The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is one such initiative<sup>(3)</sup>. The Council adopted the Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, which invites countries to put

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<sup>(3)</sup> The EQF uses eight reference levels describing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do. It provides a common reference framework which assists in comparing the national qualifications systems, frameworks and their levels. It serves as a translation device to make qualifications across different countries and systems in Europe easier to read and understand, and thus promotes lifelong and life-wide learning, and the mobility of European citizens whether for studying or working abroad.

in place arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, linked to NQFs, by 2018 <sup>(4)</sup>. All 36 countries participating in the EQF by 2013 are developing or implementing their own National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and EU Member States are committed to link arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning to their NQFs, as foreseen in the mentioned Council Recommendation. In compliance with the Recommendation, the majority of Member States had referenced their NQFs to the EQF by mid-2013: Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Ireland, Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and the United Kingdom. According to the EQF Advisory Group in September 2013, the remaining countries are expected to complete this task by 2014.

In line with one of the 2012 and 2013 CSRs made to **Belgium**, transparency and recognition tools are being further developed. In the **Flemish Community**, the preparation of a regulatory framework in which high-quality information centres and assessment centres for earlier acquired competencies has started. A draft parliamentary act on the validation of non-formal and informal learning is being prepared and will be presented to the Flemish Government. A **French-speaking** framework of certifications should be finalised during the year 2013 to connect with the European certification framework (EQF). The French-speaking framework with 8 levels will be based on tools developed in the other Communities of the country. In the **German-speaking Community**, the NQF is foreseen to be adopted by the end of 2013.

#### 4.2.2. Development of qualification standards and quality assurance in VET

Across Europe, frameworks of learning outcomes-based qualifications have started to become reference points for the development and renewal of VET qualification standards. Work on qualifications frameworks has been progressing as seen above in 4.2.1.

Some countries, for instance, Estonia, Greece, Poland and Portugal, have taken measures to enhance the transparency of training provision in VET.

In **Estonia**, the renewal process of professional standards has been initiated. To date, more than 700 valid vocational standards have been developed for about 100 professions; about 75 000 certificates have been issued. In parallel, actions have also been taken to ensure that the quality of vocational education and awareness of labour market needs are kept when planning curriculum development and the in-service training of vocational teachers, as well as e-learning development which takes place within the framework of two European Social Fund programmes – Substantial Development of Vocational Education and Development of E-learning in Vocational Education. In addition, the modernisation of the infrastructure of vocational education institutions is another important method for guaranteeing conformity to contemporary demands. This takes place with the support of the European Regional Development Fund measure 'Modernisation of the Learning Environment in Vocational Education Institutions' over the years 2008-2015.

In line with one of the 2012 CSRs made to **Poland** the reform of its vocational education system was launched in 2012. This includes changes to the classification of professions and a new flexible approach to obtaining vocational qualifications, changes of the structure of VET and its examination system, including opening it up to the validation of learning outcomes acquired within the non-formal learning process. The modernisation of the core curriculum is aimed at ensuring it is better adapted to labour market needs.

In line with one of the 2012 CSRs to **Slovenia**, some new and updated upper secondary vocational, upper secondary technical and short-cycle higher vocational programmes are being introduced.

Quality assurance in VET is a key priority at EU level to promote increased transparency of VET policy developments between Member States, thereby enhancing trust, the mobility of workers and learners and lifelong learning in general (Cedefop, 2013). About two-thirds of the countries report measures addressing qualifications standards and quality assurance in VET, with 14 countries (Belgium – Flemish Community, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Ireland, Spain, Lithuania, Austria,

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<sup>(4)</sup> Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, OJ C 398, 22.12.2012.



Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland, the United Kingdom (England) and Sweden) improving the quality assurance systems. For details on development of quality assurance systems in higher education, see Chapter 2 (Section 2.2.1: Development of quality assurance systems).

EQAVET (European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training), which was adopted by EU Member States in June 2009 <sup>(5)</sup>, is a reference tool for policy-makers based on a four-stage quality cycle that includes goal setting and planning, implementation, evaluation and review. It respects the autonomy of national governments and is a voluntary system to be used by public authorities and other bodies involved in quality assurance. Member States are encouraged to use the framework, and develop, by mid-2011, a national approach to improving quality assurance systems that involves all relevant stakeholders. This approach should include the establishment of national reference points for quality assurance, as well as active participation in the relevant European-level network <sup>(6)</sup>. According to the EQAVET Progress Report <sup>(7)</sup> on the Implementation of the EQAVET Framework, presented in May 2013, significant progress has been made in the VET quality assurance process among EU-27 countries. Most countries have developed policies, structures and processes in order to devise and establish their national approaches to improving quality assurance systems at national level and making best use of the EQAVET Framework; and at EU-27 level, 23 (72 per cent) of national VET systems have devised a quality assurance approach to VET in line with the EQAVET Framework. The remaining systems are currently preparing their approach.

In **Austria**, the VET Quality Initiative (*QualitätsInitiative BerufsBildung*) aims to implement systematic quality management in VET schools and colleges. The quality management system not only extends down to the level of individual schools, but also includes all system levels, including management of the education system at federal level and school supervision at regional level. In terms of its objectives, guiding principles and structure, the VET Quality Initiative is in line with the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET. In the 2012/13 school year, adaptations to the peer-review procedure (Peer Review in QIBB) used for quality development in schools will be pilot-tested. In autumn 2013, two pilot training courses for quality process managers and executive managers (QUALI-QIBB) will start.

In **Romania**, in order to improve the quality of VET, from 2012-2013, a methodology and instruments are being developed in a project for the implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework. These include the creation of 16 cooperation networks for quality assurance in VET schools.

## Summary

Adult participation in lifelong learning is far from reaching the 15 % benchmark in the majority of EU countries; only five Member States (Denmark, the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom) have exceeded this target. However, current policies to increase adult participation in lifelong learning can be found in countries with rates both above and below the 15 % benchmark target. But in general, the lower performing countries report fewer measures than the high performers taken since 2011 to increase adult participation in lifelong learning. Apart from developing qualifications frameworks and validation of non-formal and informal learning, which all countries are doing, the five countries performing under 3 % in adult participation in lifelong learning (Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Hungary and Romania) report the following measures being implemented: Bulgaria reports large scale initiatives since 2011 in awareness raising activities, Greece reports large scale initiatives in flexible pathways since 2011, Hungary reports large scale initiatives for financial support since 2011 and Romania reports large scale initiatives since 2011 in career guidance (see Annex 2).

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<sup>(5)</sup> Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the council on the establishment of a European quality assurance reference framework for vocational education and training, OJ C 155, 08.07.2009.

<sup>(6)</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/eqavet\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/eqavet_en.htm)

<sup>(7)</sup> [http://www.eqavet.eu/Libraries/Annual\\_Forum\\_2013/Results\\_of\\_EQAVET\\_Secretariat\\_Survey\\_2012.sflb.ashx](http://www.eqavet.eu/Libraries/Annual_Forum_2013/Results_of_EQAVET_Secretariat_Survey_2012.sflb.ashx)



Six countries (Belgium, Estonia, Spain, France, Poland and Slovenia) received 2012 and 2013 CSRs related to lifelong learning. Recommendations refer to the need to increase participation in lifelong learning; adopt a lifelong learning strategy, widen the access to lifelong learning for people with low-level skills and strengthening the coherence between education, lifelong learning, VET and employment. All six countries report measures currently being taken or in the planning stages to meet their CSRs.

The policy objective of reaching the benchmark target for adult participation in lifelong learning is being tackled by Member States with large scale initiatives aimed at improving access to lifelong learning for adults. Almost half of the countries report large-scale initiatives for improving career guidance, ten countries/regions (Belgium – Flemish Community, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Latvia, Malta, Finland and Sweden) report large scale initiatives for flexible provision and pathways in lifelong learning, and for financial support (Estonia, Spain, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Austria, Slovenia and the United Kingdom (England/Scotland)). Four countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Luxembourg and Finland) have carried out awareness-raising activities since 2011.

Estonia is the only country that reports large scale initiatives in all these areas, but Finland and Luxembourg are following closely behind.

The need for continuously upgrading skills and matching competences to meet evolving labour market demands is recognised throughout Europe. A lot is done to increase adult participation generally in lifelong learning, but only Slovenia reports measures by employers that encourage their employees to take part in lifelong learning. Three countries (Estonia, Spain and Slovenia) with 2012 and 2013 CSRs for improving access of adults with low-level skills to lifelong learning report measures, such as special training programmes. Overall, very few of the measures to increase participation in lifelong learning are specially targeted to adults with low-level skills and when this is done measure include financial support and outreach activities.

Validation and recognition of informal and non-formal learning is on the rise and is used as one of the tools to motivate adults to engage in further learning. The work of developing qualifications frameworks is progressing with countries referencing their NQF to the EQF. In addition, some countries (Estonia, Greece, Poland and Portugal) have taken measures to enhance the transparency of training provision in VET. About two-thirds of the countries report measures addressing qualifications standards and quality assurance in VET, with 14 countries improving the quality assurance systems.

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## ANNEXES

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### Annex 1. Country-specific Recommendations, 2012-2013: the Member States for which CSRs in the area of education and training were adopted by the Council in 2012 and in 2013.

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#### AUSTRIA

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 2:** Take further steps to strengthen the national budgetary framework by aligning responsibilities across the federal, regional and local levels of government, in particular by **implementing concrete reforms aimed at improving the organisation, financing and efficiency of healthcare and education.**

**CSR 5:** Continue to implement measures to improve educational outcomes, especially of disadvantaged young people. Take measures to reduce drop-outs from higher education.

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 3:** Take new measures to increase the labour market participation of women, namely by **further improving child care and long-term care services** and address the high gender pay and pension gaps. **Fully use the labour market potential of people with a migrant background by continuing to improve the recognition of their qualifications and their education outcomes.** Reduce the effective tax and social security burden on labour for low income earners in a budget-neutral way by relying more on other sources of taxation less detrimental to growth, such as recurrent property taxes.

**CSR 5:** Improve educational outcomes, in particular of disadvantaged young people, including by enhancing early childhood education and reducing the negative effects of early tracking. Further improve strategic planning in higher education and enhance measures to reduce drop-outs.

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#### BELGIUM

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 5:** Significantly shift taxes from labour to less growth-distortive taxes including for example environmental taxes. Pursue the initiated reform of the unemployment benefit system to reduce disincentives to work and strengthen the focus of employment support and activation policies on older workers and vulnerable groups, in particular people with a migrant background. **Take advantage of the planned further regionalisation of labour market competencies to boost interregional labour mobility and to strengthen the coherence between education, lifelong learning, vocational training and employment policies.** Extend existing activation efforts to all age groups.

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 1: (...) Present growth-friendly structural measures for 2014 by 15 October 2013** which ensure a sustainable correction of the excessive deficit and sufficient progress towards its medium-term objective.



**CSR 6:** Further reduce disincentives to work by ensuring effective enforcement of job-search requirements and personalised job search assistance for all unemployed. Take measures to increase interregional labour mobility. **Simplify and reinforce coherence between employment incentives, activation policies, labour matching, education, lifelong learning and vocational training policies for older people and youth.** Develop comprehensive social-inclusion strategies for people with a migrant background.

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## BULGARIA

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### CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 1:** Continue with sound fiscal policies to achieve the MTO by 2012. To this end, implement the budgetary strategy as envisaged, ensuring compliance with the expenditure benchmark, and stand ready to take additional measures in case risks to the budgetary scenario materialise. **Strengthen efforts to enhance the quality of public spending, particularly in the education and health sectors** and implement a comprehensive tax-compliance strategy to further improve tax revenue and address the shadow economy. Further improve the contents of the medium-term budgetary framework and the quality of the reporting system.

**CSR 3:** Accelerate the implementation of the national Youth Employment Initiative. Ensure that the minimum thresholds for social security contributions do not discourage declared work. Step up efforts to improve the Public Employment Service's performance. To alleviate poverty, improve the effectiveness of social transfers and the access to quality social services for children and the elderly and **implement the National Roma Integration Strategy.**

**CSR 4: Speed up the reform of relevant legal acts on schools and higher education and of accompanying measures by focusing on modernising curricula, improving teacher training, and ensuring effective access to education for disadvantaged groups.** Improve the access to finance for start-ups and SMEs, in particular those involved in innovative activities.

### CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 1:** Preserve a sound fiscal position by ensuring compliance with the medium-term objective and **pursue a growth-friendly fiscal policy** as envisaged in the convergence programme.

**CSR 3:** Accelerate the national Youth Employment Initiative, for example through a **Youth Guarantee.** Further strengthen the capacity of the Employment Agency with a view to providing effective counselling to jobseekers and **develop capacity for identifying and matching skill needs.** Enhance active labour-market policies, in particular concerning national employment schemes. Undertake a review of the minimum thresholds for social security contributions to ensure that the system does not price the low-skilled out of the labour market. **Ensure concrete delivery of the National Strategies on Poverty and Roma integration.** Improve the accessibility and effectiveness of social transfers and services, in particular for children and older people.

**CSR 4: Adopt the School Education Act and pursue the reform of higher education, in particular through better aligning outcomes to labour-market needs and strengthening cooperation between education, research and business. Improve access to inclusive education for disadvantaged children, in particular Roma.** Ensure effective access to healthcare and improve the pricing of healthcare services by linking hospitals' financing to outcomes and developing out-patient care.



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## CYPRUS

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 5: Improve the skills of the workforce to reinforce their occupational mobility towards activities of high growth and high value added.** Take further measures to address youth unemployment, with emphasis on work placements in companies and promotion of self-employment. Take appropriate policy measures on the demand side to stimulate business innovation.

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

Programme country

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## CZECH REPUBLIC

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 6: Adopt the necessary legislation to establish a transparent and clearly defined system for quality evaluation of higher education and research institutions. Ensure that the funding is sustainable and linked to the outcome of the quality assessment. Establish an improvement-oriented evaluation framework in compulsory education.**

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 1: Prioritise growth-enhancing expenditure** including committing on time remaining projects co-financed with EU funds under the current financial framework.

**CSR 4:** Take additional efforts measures to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of the public employment service. **Increase significantly the availability of inclusive childcare facilities with a focus on children up to three years old, and the participation of Roma children, notably by adopting and implementing the law on provision of childcare services and strengthening the capacities of both public and private childcare services.**

**CSR 6: Establish a comprehensive evaluation framework in compulsory education and take targeted measures to support schools that rank low in educational outcomes. Adopt measures to enhance accreditation and funding of higher education.** Increase the share of performance-based funding of research institutions.

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## GERMANY

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 1:** Continue with sound fiscal policies to achieve the MTO by 2012. To this end, implement the budgetary strategy as envisaged, ensuring compliance with the expenditure benchmark as well as sufficient progress towards compliance with the debt reduction benchmark. Continue the growth-friendly consolidation course through additional efforts to enhance the efficiency of public spending on healthcare and long-term care, and by using untapped potential to improve the efficiency of the tax system; **use available scope for increased and more efficient growth-enhancing spending on education and research at all levels of government.** Complete the implementation of the debt brake in a consistent manner across all Länder, ensuring timely and relevant monitoring procedures and correction mechanisms.

**CSR 3:** Reduce the high tax wedge in a budgetary neutral way, in particular for low-wage earners, and maintain appropriate activation and integration measures, in particular for the long term unemployed. Create the conditions for wages to grow in line with productivity. **Take measures to raise the educational achievement of disadvantaged groups, in particular through ensuring equal opportunities in the education and training system.** Phase out the fiscal disincentives for second earners, and **increase the availability of fulltime childcare facilities and all-day schools.**

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 1:** Preserve a sound fiscal position as envisaged which ensures compliance with the medium-term objective over the programme horizon. **Pursue a growth-friendly fiscal policy** through additional efforts to enhance the cost-effectiveness of public spending on healthcare and long-term care through better integration of care delivery and a stronger focus on prevention and rehabilitation and independent living. Improve the efficiency of the tax system, in particular by broadening the VAT base and by reassessing the municipal real estate tax base; **use the available scope for increased and more efficient growth-enhancing spending on education and research at all levels of government.** Complete the implementation of the debt brake in a consistent manner across all Länder, ensuring that monitoring procedures and correction mechanisms are timely and relevant.

**CSR 2:** Sustain conditions that enable wage growth to support domestic demand. To this purpose, reduce high taxes and social security contributions, especially for low-wage earners and **raise the educational achievement of disadvantaged people.** Maintain appropriate activation and integration measures, especially for the long-term unemployed. Facilitate the transition from non-standard employment such as mini-jobs into more sustainable forms of employment. Take measures to improve incentives to work and **the employability of workers, in particular for second earners and low-skilled,** also with a view to improving their income. To this end, remove disincentives for second earners and **increase the availability of fulltime childcare facilities and all-day schools.**

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## DENMARK

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 3:** Implement announced measures, without delay, to improve the cost-effectiveness of the education system, reduce drop-out rates, in particular within vocational education, and **increase the number of apprenticeships.**

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 2:** Take further steps to improve the employability of people at the margins of the labour market, including people with a migrant background, the long-term unemployed and low-skilled workers. **Improve the quality of vocational training to reduce drop-out rates and increase the number of apprenticeships. Implement the reform of primary and lower secondary education in order to raise attainment levels and improve the cost-effectiveness of the education system.**

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## ESTONIA

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 3: Link training and education more effectively to the needs of the labour market, and enhance cooperation between businesses and academia. Increase opportunities for low skilled workers to improve their access to life-long learning.** Foster prioritisation and internationalisation of the research and innovation systems.

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 1: Pursue a growth-friendly fiscal policy** and preserve a sound fiscal position as envisaged, ensuring compliance with the medium-term budgetary objective over the programme horizon.

**CSR 3: Continue efforts to improve the labour-market relevance of education and training systems, including by further involving social partners and implementing targeted measures to address youth unemployment. Significantly increase the participation of the low skilled in life-long learning.** Intensify efforts to prioritise and internationalise the research and innovation systems and enhance **cooperation between businesses, higher education and research institutions.**

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## GREECE

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

Programme country.

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

Programme country.

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## SPAIN

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 2:** Ensure that the retirement age is rising in line with life expectancy when regulating the sustainability factor foreseen in the recent pension reform and **underpin the Global Employment Strategy for Older Workers with concrete measures to develop lifelong learning further**, improve working conditions and foster the reincorporation of this group in the job market.

**CSR 6:** Review spending priorities and reallocate funds to support access to finance for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), research, innovation and young people. **Implement the Youth Action Plan, in particular as regards the quality and labour market relevance of vocational training and education, and reinforce efforts to reduce early school-leaving and increase participation in vocational education and training through prevention, intervention and compensation measures.**

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 4:** Finalise the evaluation of the 2012 labour market reform covering the full range of its objectives and measures by July 2013, and present amendments, if necessary, by September 2013. Adopt the 2013 national Employment Plan by July 2013 and enact swiftly a result-oriented reform of active labour market policies, including by strengthening the targeting and efficiency of guidance.

Reinforce and modernise public employment services to ensure effective individualised assistance to the unemployed according to their profiles and training needs. **Reinforce the effectiveness of re-skilling training programmes for older and low-skilled workers.** Fully operationalize the Single Job Portal and speed up the implementation of public-private cooperation in placement services to ensure its effective application already in 2013.

**CSR 5:** Implement and monitor closely the effectiveness of the measures to fight youth unemployment set out in the Youth Entrepreneurship and Employment Strategy 2013-2016, for example through a **Youth Guarantee. Continue with efforts to increase the labour market relevance of education and training, to reduce early school leaving and to enhance life-long learning, namely by expanding the application of dual vocational training beyond the current pilot phase and by introducing a comprehensive monitoring system of pupils' performance by the end of 2013.**

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## FINLAND

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 3: Implement the ongoing measures to improve the labour market position of young people and the long-term unemployed, with a particular focus on skills development.** Take further steps to encourage the employment rate of older workers, including by reducing early exit pathways. Take measures to increase the statutory retirement age in line with the improved life expectancy.

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 1: Pursue a growth-friendly fiscal policy** and preserve a sound fiscal position as envisaged, ensuring compliance with the MTO over the programme horizon.

**CSR 3:** Take further steps to increase the employment rate of older workers, including by improving their employability and reducing early exit pathways, increasing the effective retirement age by aligning retirement age or pension benefits to changes in life expectancy. Implement and monitor closely the impact of on-going measures to **improve the labour-market position of young people and the long-term unemployed, with a particular focus on the development of job-relevant skills.**

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## FRANCE

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 2:** Introduce further reforms to combat labour market segmentation by reviewing selected aspects of employment protection legislation, in consultation with the social partners in accordance with national practices, in particular related to dismissals; continue to ensure that any development in the minimum wage is supportive of job creation and competitiveness; **take actions to increase adult participation in lifelong learning.**

**CSR 3:** Adopt labour market measures to ensure that older workers stay in employment longer; **improve youth employability especially for those most at risk of unemployment, by providing for example more and better apprenticeship schemes which effectively address their needs;** step up active labour market policies and ensure that public employment services are more effective in delivering individualised support.

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 1: Maintain a growth-friendly fiscal consolidation course** and further increase the efficiency of public expenditure, in particular by proceeding as planned with a review of spending categories across all sub-sectors of general government.

**CSR 6:** Implement fully and without delay the January 2013 inter-professional agreement, in consultation with the social partners. Take further action to combat labour-market segmentation, in particular to address the situation of interim agency workers. Launch urgently a reform of the unemployment benefit system in association with the social partners and in accordance with national practices to ensure sustainability of the system while ensuring that it provides adequate incentives to return to work. Enhance the employment rate of older workers and stimulate their participation in the labour market. **Take specific action to improve the employment perspective of older unemployed people in particular through specific counselling and training. Increase adult participation in lifelong learning, especially of the least qualified and of the unemployed.** Ensure that public employment services effectively deliver individualised support to the unemployed and that active labour market policies effectively target the most disadvantaged. **Take further measures to improve the transition from school to work through, for example, a Youth Guarantee and promotion of apprenticeship.**

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**HUNGARY**

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 4:** Strengthen the capacity of the Public Employment Service to increase the quality and effectiveness of training, job search assistance and individualised services, with particular regard for disadvantaged groups. Strengthen the activation element in the public work scheme through effective training and job search assistance. **Implement the National Social (Roma) Inclusion Strategy, and mainstream it with other policies.**

**CSR 6: Prepare and implement a national strategy on early school-leaving by ensuring adequate financing. Ensure that the implementation of the higher education reform improves access to education for disadvantaged groups.**

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 1: Implement a credible and growth friendly fiscal strategy** by specifying the necessary measures focusing on expenditure savings and preserve a sound fiscal position in compliance with the medium-term objective over the programme horizon.

**CSR 4: Address youth unemployment, for example through a Youth Guarantee.** Strengthen active labour market policy measures and enhance the client profiling system of the Public Employment Service. Reduce the dominance of the public works scheme within employment measures and strengthen its activation elements. **Reinforce training programmes to boost participation in lifelong learning. Continue to expand child-care facilities** to encourage women's participation. **Ensure that the objective of the National Social Inclusion Strategy is mainstreamed in all policy fields in order to reduce poverty, particularly among children and Roma.**

**CSR 6: Implement a national strategy on early school-leaving and ensure that the education system provides all young people with labour-market-relevant skills, competences and qualifications. Improve access to inclusive mainstream education, for those with disadvantages, in particular Roma. Support the transition between different stages of education and towards the labour market. Implement a higher-education reform that enables greater tertiary attainment, particularly by disadvantaged students.**

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## IRELAND

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

Programme country

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

Programme country

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## ITALY

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 3: Take further action to address youth unemployment, including by improving the labour-market relevance of education and facilitating transition to work, also through incentives for business start-ups and for hiring employees. Enforce nation-wide recognition of skills and qualifications to promote labour mobility. Take measures to reduce tertiary education dropout rates and fight early school leaving.**

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 1: Pursue the structural adjustment at an appropriate pace and through growth-friendly fiscal consolidation so as to achieve and maintain the MTO as from 2014.**

**CSR 4: Ensure the effective implementation of the labour market and wage setting reforms to allow better alignment of wages to productivity. Take further action to foster labour market participation, especially of women and young people, for example through a Youth Guarantee. Strengthen vocational education and training, ensure more efficient public employment services and improve career and counselling services for tertiary students. Reduce financial disincentives for second earners to work and improve the provision of care, especially child and long-term care, and out-of-school services. Step up efforts to prevent early school leaving. Improve school quality and outcomes, also by enhancing teachers' professional development and diversifying career development. Ensure effectiveness of social transfers, notably through better targeting of benefits, especially for low-income households with children.**

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## LITHUANIA

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 3: Tackle high unemployment, in particular among youth, low-skilled and long-term unemployed, by focusing resources on active labour market policies while improving their efficiency. Enhance the effectiveness of apprenticeship schemes. Amend the labour legislation with regard to flexible contract agreements, dismissal provisions and flexible working time arrangements.**

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 1: Ensure growth friendly fiscal consolidation** and implement the budgetary strategy as planned, pursuing a structural adjustment effort that will enable Lithuania to reach the medium-term objective. **Prioritise growth-enhancing expenditure.**

**CSR 3:** Tackle high unemployment amongst low-skilled and long-term by refocusing resources on active labour market policies while improving their coverage and efficiency. **Improve the employability of young people, for example through a Youth Guarantee, enhance the implementation and effectiveness of apprenticeship schemes, and address persistent skill mismatches.** Review the appropriateness of labour legislation with regard to flexible contract agreements, dismissal provisions and flexible working time arrangements, in consultation with social partners.

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**LUXEMBOURG**

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 4: Continue efforts to reduce youth unemployment by reinforcing stakeholders' involvement, and by strengthening training and education measures, in particular for those with low education levels, with the aim of better matching young people's skills and qualifications to labour demand.**

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 5:** Step up efforts to reduce youth unemployment by improving the design and monitoring of active labour market policies. **Strengthen general and vocational education to better match young people's skills with labour demand, in particular for people with migrant background. Reinforce efforts to increase the participation rate of older workers, including by improving their employability through lifelong learning.**

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**LATVIA**

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 3: Take measures to reduce long-term and youth unemployment by fighting early school leaving, promoting more efficient vocational education and training and its apprenticeship component, enhancing the quality, coverage and effectiveness of active labour market policy and its training component and through an effective wage subsidy scheme.**

**CSR 7: Continue reforms in higher education, inter alia, by implementing a new financing model that rewards quality, strengthens links with market needs and research institutions, and avoids fragmentation of budget resources.** Design and implement an effective research and innovation policy encouraging companies to innovate, including via tax incentives, upgrading infrastructure and rationalising research institutions.

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 3:** Tackle long-term and youth unemployment by increasing coverage and effectiveness of active labour market policies and targeted social services. **Improve the employability of young people, for example through a Youth Guarantee, establish comprehensive career guidance, implement reforms in the field of vocational education and training, and improve the quality and accessibility of apprenticeships.**



**CSR 5: Implement the planned reforms of higher education concerning, in particular, the establishment of a quality-rewarding financing model, reform of the accreditation system, consolidation of the institutions and promotion of internationalization.** Take further steps to modernise research institutions based on the on-going independent assessment.

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## MALTA

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 3: Take steps to reduce the high rate of early school leaving. Pursue policy efforts in the education system to match the skills required by the labour market.** Enhance the provision and affordability of more childcare and out-of-school centres, with the aim of reducing the gender employment gap.

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 1:** Specify and implement the measures needed to achieve the annual structural adjustment effort set out in the Council recommendations under the EDP in order to **correct the excessive deficit by 2014 in a sustainable and growth-friendly manner**, limiting recourse to one-off/temporary measures.

**CSR 3: Continue to pursue policy efforts to reduce early school leaving, notably by setting up a comprehensive monitoring system, and increase the labour-market relevance of education and training to address skills gaps, including through the announced reform of the apprenticeship system.** Continue supporting the improving labour-market participation of women by promoting flexible working arrangements, in particular by **enhancing the provision and affordability of child-care and out-of-school centres.**

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## THE NETHERLANDS

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 1:** Ensure timely and durable correction of the excessive deficit. To this end, fully implement the budgetary strategy for 2012 as envisaged. Specify the measures necessary to ensure implementation of the 2013 budget with a view to ensuring the structural adjustment effort specified in the Council recommendations under the excessive deficit procedure. Thereafter, ensure an adequate structural adjustment effort to make sufficient progress towards the MTO, including meeting the expenditure benchmark, and **ensure sufficient progress towards compliance with the debt reduction benchmark whilst protecting expenditure in areas directly relevant for growth such as research and innovation, education and training.** To this end, after the formation of a new Government, submit an update of the 2012 Stability Programme with substantiated targets and measures for the period beyond 2013.

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 1: (...) Protect expenditure in areas directly relevant for growth such as education, innovation and research.**

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## POLAND

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 3: To reduce youth unemployment, increase the availability of apprenticeships and work-based learning, improve the quality of vocational training and adopt the proposed lifelong learning strategy. Better match education outcomes with the needs of the labour market and improve the quality of teaching.** To combat labour market segmentation and in-work poverty, limit excessive use of civil law contracts and extend the probationary period for permanent contracts.

**CSR 4: Reinforce efforts to increase the labour market participation of women and raise enrolment rates of children in both early childcare and pre-school education, by ensuring stable funding and investment in public infrastructure, the provision of qualified staff, and affordable access.** Tackle entrenched practices of early retirement to increase exit ages from the labour market. Phase out the special pension scheme for miners with a view to integrating them into the general scheme. Take more ambitious, permanent steps to reform the KRUS to better reflect individual incomes.

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 1: (...) With a view to improving the quality of public finances minimise cuts in growth-enhancing investment.**

**CSR 3: Strengthen efforts to reduce youth unemployment, for example through a Youth Guarantee, increase the availability of apprenticeships and work-based learning, strengthen cooperation between schools and employers and improve the quality of teaching. Adopt the proposed lifelong learning strategy.** Combat in-work poverty and labour market segmentation including through better transition from fixed-term to permanent employment and by reducing the excessive use of civil law contracts.

**CSR 4: Continue efforts to increase female labour market participation, in particular by investing in affordable quality childcare and pre-school education, by ensuring stable funding and qualified staff.** With a view to improving sectoral labour mobility, take permanent steps to reform the farmers' social security scheme KRUS. Phase out the special pension system for miners with a view to integrating them into the general scheme. Underpin the general pension reform with measures promoting the employability of older workers to raise exit ages from the labour market.

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## PORTUGAL

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

Programme country

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

Programme country

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## ROMANIA

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

Programme country

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 2: Ensure growth-friendly fiscal consolidation** and implement the budgetary strategy for the year 2013 and beyond as envisaged, thus ensuring achievement of the medium-term objective by 2015.

**CSR 4:** Improve labour market participation, as well as employability and productivity of the labour force, by reviewing and strengthening active labour market policies, to provide training and individualised services and **promoting lifelong learning**. Enhance the capacity of the National Employment Agency to increase the quality and coverage of its services. To fight youth unemployment, implement rapidly the National Plan for Youth Employment, including for example through a **Youth Guarantee**. To alleviate poverty, improve the effectiveness and efficiency of social transfers with a particular focus on children. Complete the social assistance reform by adopting the relevant legislation and strengthening its link with activation measures. **Ensure concrete delivery of the National Roma integration strategy.**

**CSR 5: Speed up the education reform including the building up of administrative capacity at both central and local level and evaluate the impact of the reforms. Step up reforms in vocational education and training. Further align tertiary education with the needs of the labour market and improve access for disadvantaged people. Implement a national strategy on early school leaving focusing on better access to quality early childhood education, including for Roma children. Speed up the transition from institutional to alternative care for children deprived of parental care.**

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## SWEDEN

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 3: Take further measures to improve the labour market participation of youth and vulnerable groups, e.g.** by improving the effectiveness of active labour market measures, **facilitating the transition from school to work**, promoting policies to increase demand for vulnerable groups and improving the functioning of the labour market. Review the effectiveness of the current reduced VAT rate for restaurants and catering services in support of job creation.

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 1: Implement the measures necessary to pursue a growth-friendly fiscal policy** and preserve a sound fiscal position ensuring compliance with the medium-term objective over the programme horizon.

**CSR 4:** Reinforce efforts to improve the **labour-market integration of low-skilled young people and people with a migrant background by stronger and better targeted measures to improve their employability** and the labour demand for these groups. **Step up efforts to facilitate the transition from school to work, including via a wider use of work-based learning, apprenticeships and other forms of contracts combining employment and education. Complete the Youth Guarantee to better cover young people not in education or training.** Complete and draw conclusions from the review of the effectiveness of the current reduced VAT rate for restaurants and catering services in support of job creation.

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## SLOVENIA

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 2:** Take urgent steps to ensure the long-term sustainability of the pension system, while preserving the adequacy of pensions, by: (i) equalising the statutory retirement age for men and women; (ii) ensuring an increase in the effective retirement age, including through linking the statutory retirement age to life expectancy; (iii) reducing early retirement possibilities; and (iv) reviewing the indexation system for pensions. **Increase the employment rate of older workers also by further developing active labour market policies and lifelong learning measures.**

**CSR 5:** Improve the matching of skills with labour market demand, particularly of low-skilled workers and tertiary graduates, and continue reforms of vocational education and training.

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 1: (...) Safeguard growth-friendly spending.**

**CSR 3:** Ensure that wage developments, including the minimum wage, support competitiveness and job creation. Monitor closely the effects of the recent labour market reform and if necessary identify the areas where further action is needed to foster job creation and tackle segmentation, including through the regulation for student work. **Take further measures to increase employment of young tertiary graduates, older persons and the low-skilled by focusing resources on tailor-made active labour market policy measures while improving their effectiveness. Address the skills mismatch by improving the attractiveness of the relevant vocational education and training programmes and by further developing cooperation with the relevant stakeholders in assessing labour market needs.**

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## SLOVAKIA

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 5:** Adopt and implement the youth action plan, in particular as regards the quality and labour market relevance of education and vocational training, including through the introduction of an apprenticeship scheme. Improve the quality of higher education by strengthening quality assurance and result orientation.

**CSR 6:** Take active measures to improve access to and quality of schooling and pre-school education of vulnerable groups, including Roma. Ensure labour market reintegration of adults through activation measures and targeted employment services, second-chance education and short-cycle vocational training.

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 1: (...) Avoid cuts in growth enhancing expenditure** and step up efforts to improve the efficiency of public spending.

**CSR 3:** Take measures to enhance the capacity of public employment services to provide personalised services to jobseekers and strengthen the link between activation measures and social assistance. More effectively address long-term unemployment through activation measures and tailored training. Improve incentives for women employment, by **enhancing the provision of child-**

**care facilities, in particular for children below three years of age.** Reduce the tax wedge for low-paid workers and adapt the benefit system.

**CSR 4:** Step up efforts to address high youth unemployment, for example through a **Youth Guarantee**. Take steps to attract young people to the teaching profession and raise educational outcomes.

In vocational education and training, reinforce the provision of work-based learning in companies. In higher education, create more job-oriented bachelor programmes. Foster effective knowledge transfer by promoting cooperation between academia, research and the business sector. Step up efforts to improve access to high-quality and inclusive pre-school and school education for marginalised communities, including Roma.

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## THE UNITED KINGDOM

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CSR adopted by the Council in 2012

**CSR 3:** Continue to improve the employability of young people, in particular those not in education, employment or training, including by using the Youth Contract. Ensure that apprenticeship schemes are taken up by more young people, have a sufficient focus on advanced and higher-level skills, and involve more small and medium-sized businesses. Take measures to reduce the high proportion of young people aged 18-24 with very poor basic skills.

CSR adopted by the Council in 2013

**CSR 1: (...)** Pursue a differentiated, growth-friendly approach to fiscal tightening, including through prioritising timely capital expenditure with high economic returns and through a balanced approach to the composition of consolidation measures and promoting medium and long-term fiscal sustainability.

**CSR 3:** Building on the Youth Contract, step up measures to address youth unemployment, for example through a **Youth Guarantee**. Increase the quality and duration of apprenticeships, simplify the system of qualifications and strengthen the engagement of employers, particularly in the provision of advanced and intermediate technical skills. Reduce the number of young people aged 18-24 who have very poor basic skills, including through effectively implementing the Traineeships programme.

**CSR 4:** Enhance efforts to support low-income households and reduce child poverty by ensuring that the Universal Credit and other welfare reforms deliver a fair tax-benefit system with clearer work incentives and support services. Accelerate the implementation of planned measures to reduce the costs of childcare and improve its quality and availability.

## Annex 2. Diagrams of recent and forthcoming policy measures in the EU-28

The diagrams below provide detailed information on recent and forthcoming measures in the EU-28 related to the policy areas covered in each chapter.

### Explanatory note

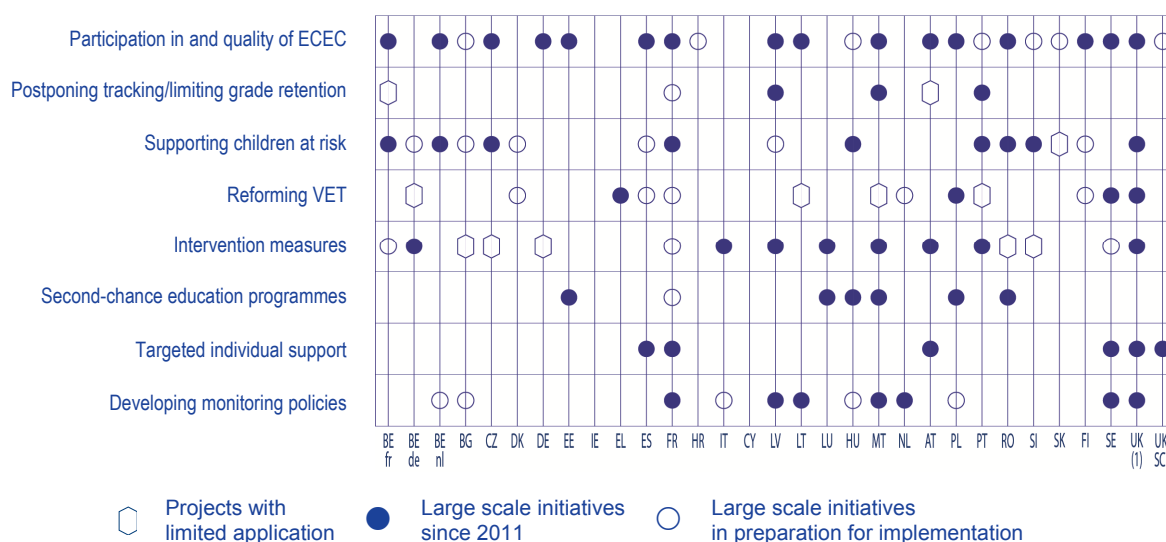
'Large-scale initiatives' refers to measures that are applied across the whole education system and which have been launched since 2011, or are in an advanced stage of development prior to implementation.

'Projects with limited application' refers to small scale projects that are not applied across the whole education system, but only in certain schools or higher education institutions. These projects are often time-limited. They can be projects financed through the European Social Funds or other pilot projects that are not part of general legislative changes or other generalised reforms.

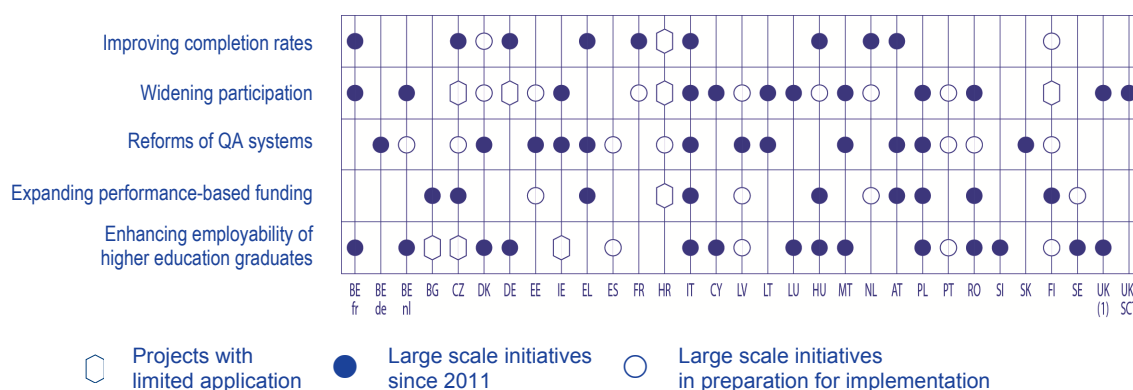
### Country specific notes

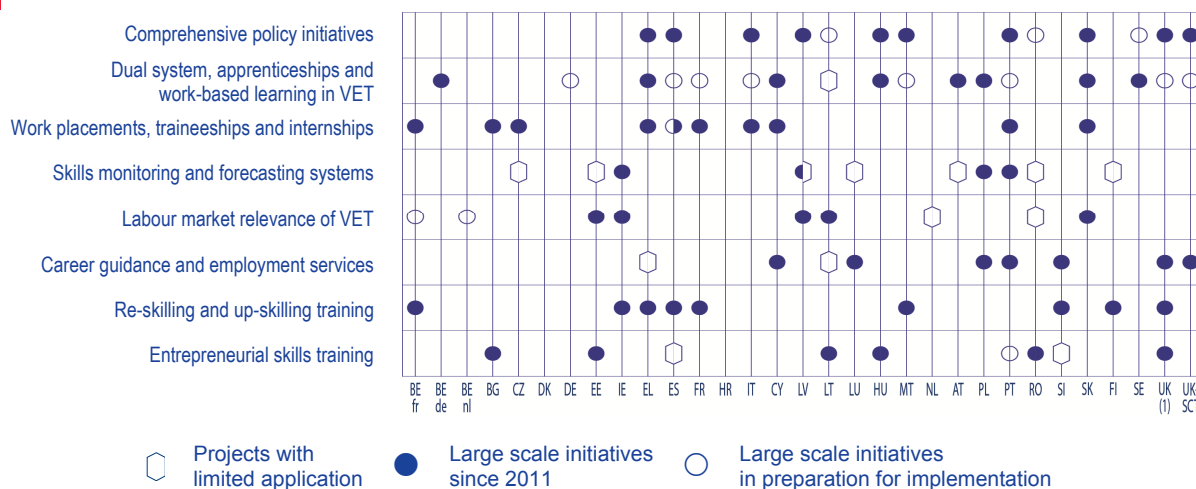
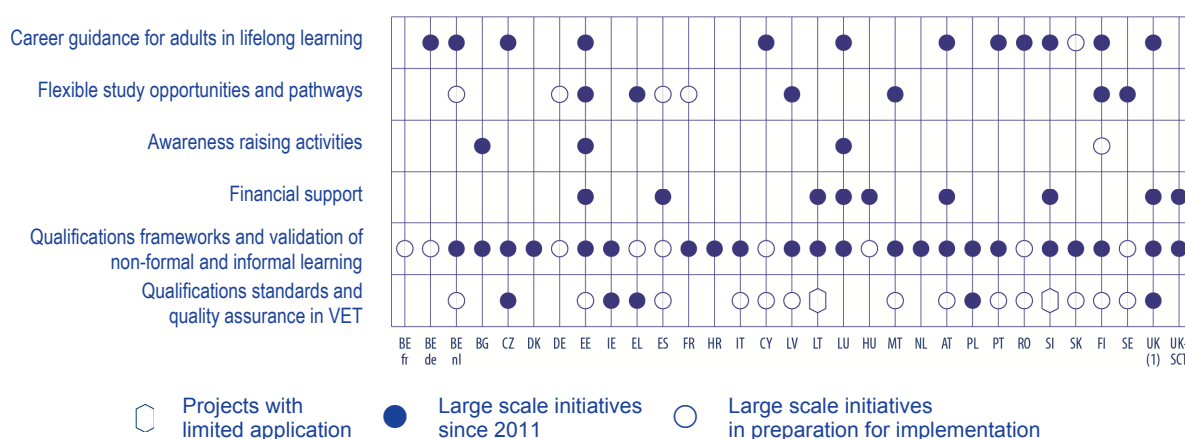
**United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland):** UK (1) key covers three separate jurisdictions – England, Wales and Northern Ireland. A sign for UK (1) in a category means that there is an initiative in at least one of these jurisdictions.

### Chapter 1: Recent and forthcoming measures to tackle early school leaving in the EU-28



### Chapter 2: Recent and forthcoming measures to improve attainment, quality and relevance in higher education in the EU-28



**Chapter 3: Recent and forthcoming measures to improve skills and VET for youth employment in the EU-28****Chapter 4: Recent and forthcoming measures to increase adult participation in lifelong learning in the EU-28****Annex 3. Further examples of recent and forthcoming policy measures in the EU-28 to respond to the Europe 2020 priorities in the area of education and training****Chapter 1: Tackling early school leaving****1.1. Reforms to prevent early school leaving****Increasing participation in early childhood education and care**

In **Croatia**, the last year of pre-primary education will become compulsory from 2014/15.

In **Hungary**, compulsory attendance of pre-primary education will be lowered from 5 to 3 as of 2014.

In **Austria**, the Federal government has initiated and supported the extension of early childhood education and care (ECEC) places during the last years. Between 2011 and 2014, it will make a total of EUR 55 million in subsidies available for child care, and the provincial governments will co-fund these efforts with matching contributions. The focus of these expansion efforts is on child care offerings for children under 3 years of age, promoting qualified child-minder offerings, and extending opening times during the year.



In the **United Kingdom (Scotland)**, the government is legislating, through the Children and Young People Bill, to increase the current legal entitlement to 475 hours per year of pre-school education for 3- and 4-year-olds to a minimum of 600 hours per year of early learning and childcare, as well as for 2-year-olds who are looked after by the State or by a family other than their natural parents, from 2014.

In **Lithuania**, the National Programme for the Development of Pre-School and Pre-Primary Education for 2011-2013, adopted in 2011, provides for a set of measures to increase the supply of early childhood education and care (ECEC). Hence, the 'pre-school' basket, a public subsidy for pre-school institutions meant to cover the cost of 20 hours of ECEC per week, was introduced in 2011. Furthermore, procedures to establish ECEC settings, specifically in private companies, have been made less onerous since 2011. Finally, one further measure to improve accessibility is the establishment and development of universal, multi-functional early childhood education and care centres in rural areas.

In **Poland**, amendments to the Act of 4 February 2011 on care for children below 3 years of age adopted in May 2013 aim to facilitate the creation of childcare institutions. The amendments include: lowering the level of the local government's financial contribution in the application process for central budget funds aimed at the establishment and functioning of care institutions; extending the catalogue of entities entitled to employ day carers; enabling the organisation of joint services between childcare institutions and pre-primary institutions or schools.

The National Development Plan of **Latvia** for 2014-2020 defines measure to promote access to age-appropriate, guaranteed and high-quality pre-school education for every child from the age of a year-and-a-half. In addition, under the European Structural Fund programme 2008-2013, the ECEC infrastructure is being developed through the construction of new institutions and the extension of existing centres, in order to increase the number of publicly funded and modern ECEC places available for children.

In the **United Kingdom (England)**, following the Local Authority (Duty to Secure Early Years Provision Free of Charge) Regulations 2012, which came into effect in September 2013, the criteria for benefiting from the entitlement to 15 hours of free early education per week have been extended. The entitlement now applies to two-year-olds living in households which meet the eligibility criteria for free school meals, along with children who are looked after by the state.

### Improving the quality of ECEC

In **Belgium (French Community)**, according to a May 2012 decree, an additional EUR 1.3 million budget has been dedicated to enable all pre-primary schools (children aged 2.5 to 6) to benefit from the expertise of physical education specialists. Furthermore, in order to facilitate the integration of young children into pre-primary schools, the same decree also provides for fewer pupils per teacher for a limited period of time at the beginning of the school year.

In the **Czech Republic**, a review of the Framework Educational Programme of Pre-Primary Education began in 2012 and is continuing in 2013.

In **Spain**, the National Strategic Plan for Children and Adolescents, approved in April 2013, is intended to consolidate the provision of free education in the second cycle of pre-primary education, as well as ensuring early intervention for children with disabilities, allowing them maximum opportunity to reach their full potential.

In **France**, the national policy for restructuring schools initiated in April 2013 includes the redefinition of pre-primary education's objectives, through the implementation of a more coherent approach across pre-primary years as of September 2014 and the strengthening of relationships with parents.

In **Latvia**, in 2012, the Government approved new national guidelines for pre-school education (children aged 3 to 7), which increase the number of Latvian language lessons per week for children from ethnic minorities to between two and five, depending on their age.

In **Hungary**, kindergarten care improvement programmes will be implemented in the 2013-14 period with EU financing through the regional operational programmes.

In **Romania**, within the framework of two on-going projects co-financed by European social funds, the National Curricula for pupils aged 3-6/7 were reviewed and the Methodological Guidelines for the Implementation of Reviewed Curriculum were adopted during 2012. Moreover, training and VET programmes focused on developing new skills for teaching staff (including auxiliary staff) to implement the newly revised curricula, were developed.

In **Sweden**, a new curriculum for pre-school came into force in 2011. In this context, in 2012, the Swedish National Agency published general guidelines and advice on systematic quality procedures and increasing the effectiveness of the school system.

In **Estonia**, the modifications to the pre-school child care Act to improve access to ECEC planned for adoption in 2013 highlight the need to provide support for children with special needs or any other educational difficulties during pre-primary education (for children aged 1.5-7). Accordingly, guidance materials and a counselling system to support these children were developed in 2012.

In the **United Kingdom (England)**, a revised and slimmed down statutory framework for the development, learning and care of children from birth to five was introduced in September 2012. The new framework aims to reduce the regulatory burden on practitioners so they can focus more on supporting children's development. In **Northern Ireland**, the foundation stage (currently the first two years of compulsory primary education) will be extended to include a non-compulsory pre-school year with a single foundation stage curriculum covering all three years. The change is designed to improve transition from pre-primary to primary. Full implementation is scheduled for 2014/15. In **Wales**, the Early Years and Childcare Plan published in 2013 sets out measures to improve quality, based around the experience of the child, the environment, leadership and the workforce.

### **1.1.3. Supporting children at risk**

In 2012 and 2013, **Belgium (Flemish Community)** adapted its legal framework for the integration of newcomers into the education system. The adopted measures include: a change in the rules defining the study offer by each institution; the introduction of different financing conditions; the option for schools in primary education to determine a separate capacity for non-Dutch speaking new pupils.

In **Belgium (German-speaking Community)**, an amendment to the decree for the schooling of newly arrived pupils is planned for the first half of 2014.

In **Denmark**, a comprehensive reform of the primary and lower secondary schools to be implemented in 2014/15 intends to increase completion rates by reducing the significance of pupils' social background on their academic results.

In **Greece**, within the framework of the Operational Programme 'Education and Lifelong Learning' (National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013), two different projects aimed to promote the education of children with migrant backgrounds started to be implemented at the end of 2010. The first project 'Education of Foreigners and Repatriates' targets primary and secondary public institutions with more than 10 % of immigrants and repatriates in their student population. Its main objective is to improve school performance among the targeted pupils through, for example, providing special

reception classes or fostering intercultural communication at school level. The second programme aims to support the integration of children from the Muslim minority into the educational process, whether in public schools or in private ethnic minority schools.

Since October 2012, **Slovenia** has implemented the renewed Guidelines for the Inclusion of Migrant Children in Education, from pre-school to upper secondary school. The guidelines define principles and suggest strategies, as well as teaching-related modifications and methods for cooperating with and integrating of migrant children and their parents.

In **Portugal**, in 2012, following a new education law, the autonomy of schools has increased and they are now able to take immediate measures (e.g. co-teaching; temporary homogeneous classes; weekly study support on math and Portuguese) as soon as learning difficulties are detected. Furthermore, the government is currently assessing the results of a set of existing measures to combat school failure and social exclusion and intends to further the educational projects developed in Priority Intervention Educational Territories. The Portuguese government also intends to identify best practices and integrate them into a coherent and flexible programme.

In **Greece**, within the framework of the above-mentioned Operational Programme 'Education and Lifelong Learning', an initiative aiming to the promote education of Roma children began at the end of 2010. It includes, for instance, the following actions: improving access and attendance in pre-school education, school interventions to support the integration of and regular attendance by Roma pupils, further training of teachers, or linking schools, families and the local community.

In **France**, the Minister of Education issued new guidelines for regional education authorities on better inclusion of travelling children and newcomers into the education system, in October 2012. A network of regional centres has been set up, dedicated to support teachers regarding the schooling of newcomers and travelling children.

In **Latvia**, a European Social Fund programme on the development of inclusive education for young people with functional disabilities and from socially disadvantaged families has been carried out since 2009 through various projects. By the end of 2013, it is expected that the support system for young people at risk of social exclusion will be nationally implemented, providing the necessary teachers and support staff with improved skills, as well as increased capacity in institutions.

In **Cyprus**, the Ministry of education has launched a programme for developing early diagnosis of literacy problems during the first three years of primary education over the period 2010-2012, with a special focus on migrant students. It includes a continuing professional development component for pre-primary and primary teachers.

In **Hungary**, the new Public Education Act effective from 1 September 2012 emphasises the inclusion of remedial activities, such as small group activities in curricula, in order to support poorly performing pupils.

#### **1.1.4. Reforming vocational education and training**

In **France**, one of the measures in the new guidance and programming law for restructuring schools and the new law on higher education and research, both promulgated in July 2013, is to encourage and facilitate access to short cycles of higher education for VET students who graduate with honours.

In **Greece**, according to a new law on general and vocational upper secondary education adopted in September 2013, practical training has been strengthened. An optional additional (fourth) year, entitled the 'apprenticeship class', has been offered to graduates of vocational upper secondary

schools. In addition, specific vocational education and training certificates have been introduced and professional rights established.

In the **United Kingdom (England)**, VET is being reformed, following the Wolf Review (accepted by the Government in 2011). The remit of the Wolf Review was to improve VET for 14-19 year olds in order to promote successful progression into the labour market and into higher level education and training routes. The key was to introduce a more structured and rigorous framework in which students have the opportunity to study coherent, well thought out programmes which offer them breadth and depth, are rigorously assessed, and which do not limit their options for future study and work.

## 1.2 Intervention measure to avert early school leaving

In **Germany**, the initiative 'Educational chains leading to vocational qualifications' (*Anschluss und Abschluss – Bildungsketten bis zum Ausbildungsabschluss*), which was launched in 2010, aims at avoiding school dropouts and achieving efficient transitions to dual training as well as its completion, especially for young people in need of particular support. Guidance and support start two years prior to the end of full-time compulsory schooling and last for up to two years after leaving school, or until the end of the first year of vocational training.

In **Romania**, the 'Jobs' project aims to guide students in the final years of compulsory schooling, helping them make the right choices regarding further education and training or career options. The project involves the introduction of a new project-based learning area timetabled for three hours per week throughout the school year. Students will have the opportunity to get in touch with the businesses, public institutions or companies offering jobs in their region, investigate employment opportunities, and study economic conditions. Students will also prepare data for presentations and portfolios, focusing on particular projects. The 'Jobs' project started in two schools in 2011 and 2012 and is being extended to all schools in Brasov region up to 2015.

In **Portugal**, following an ordinance adopted in March 2013, new Centres for Qualification and Vocational Education (CQEP) are being set up: these have the dual mission of providing counselling and guidance both for young people and adults. In 2013/2014 there will be 206 new CQEPs.

In the **United Kingdom (Northern Ireland)**, the 'Pathways to Success' strategy includes the development of a tracking system to identify young people who are at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) by 2014.

## 1.3. Compensatory measures for early school leavers

### 1.3.1. Second-chance education opportunities

In **France**, the last annual report on performance launched in 2013 by the Ministry of Economy and Finance states that the Government aims to achieve a more complete and balanced network of second chance education schools. It therefore intends to expand the network under the existing cooperation framework with the regions and local partners.

In **Malta**, a pre-employment training scheme for early school leavers from secondary education has been offered since 2010 by the Institution of Tourism Studies with the Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association and four Colleges (St Theresa, St Claire, St Ignatius and St Nicholas). At the end of the training, learners obtain a certificate in food and housekeeping operations. The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology also offers a second-chance education programme through the provision of new openings into the vocational education sector.

In **Poland**, the Voluntary Labour Corps (VLC) provide education and training opportunities, notably for young people who have dropped out of school and are socially deprived. Since 2012, the VLC's activities targeting NEETs have been intensified.

### 1.3.2. Targeted individual support

In **France**, the above-mentioned network (FoQualE) *Formation Qualification Emploi* (Training Qualification Employment) offers a personalised return pathway to education and training to every school leaver.

In **Sweden**, a special initiative on affordable student economic aid for 20 to 24 year-olds has been in place since 2011. This special initiative targets unemployed young people without lower or upper secondary education and aims to help them complete their interrupted education.

## Chapter 2: Improving Attainment, Quality and Relevance of Higher Education

### 2.1. Reforms to increase higher education attainment

#### 2.1.1. Widening participation in higher education

A priority in the **United Kingdom (Scotland)** is to encourage higher education participation among individuals from the 20 % most deprived areas in the country. The Scottish Government has funded specific initiatives, providing additional student support.

In **Cyprus**, in 2012, the main scheme for granting education subsidies for higher education has been changed to include income criteria, aiming to address the needs of the most vulnerable groups.

In **France**, the government has announced that from 2013 academic year 55 000 new scholarships of EUR 1 000 per year will be made available to low-income students, who were not previously eligible for such support.

In **Lithuania**, from 2012, students who complete a secondary education programme with the best results and pay tuition fees are eligible for a scholarship amount to the normative cost of studies. All students are able to take state-sponsored study loans.

In **Luxembourg**, since 2011, changes in the rules for providing financial assistance have led to the steady increase in the number of students receiving financial support.

In **Portugal**, from 2014, in order to extend the range of options in higher education, the Ministry of Education and Science will establish the New Technology-focused Higher Education courses at polytechnics. These short courses will be level-five higher education courses with a strong link to the world of work, and closely-tied to the development of the local and regional economy. They will aim to attract graduates from upper-secondary vocational education as well as adults.

#### 2.1.2. Improving completion rates

In **Greece**, one of the objectives of the 2011 legislative changes (Law 4009/2011) is to lower the number of non-active students by introducing a mandatory enrolment of students in each semester, putting a time limit on the duration of studies, making the publication of teaching material on the Internet mandatory and other measures.

In the **Czech Republic**, according to the Higher Education Act, students who exceed the normal time for completing their studies by more than a year have to pay fees. With the amendment No 48/ 2013, students who are parents have been exempted from this obligation.

In **Finland**, from August 2014, student social aid will be index-linked. The student financial aid system will be reformed in accordance with the Government programme and the Government statement on structural policy to support full-time studies and faster graduation. Commencement of tertiary studies will be accelerated through a reform of the selection process for entry into higher education.

## **2.2. Reforms to improve the quality and relevance of higher education**

In **Belgium (French Community)**, a 2013 reform proposed for the higher education sector aims to optimise resources and improve performance through research excellence, consistent services, the quality of education and the promotion of academic achievement. The aim is to develop synergy and collaboration between institutions, to standardise the status of students, to clarify the paths through a modular structure and to organise regular institutional audits.

### **2.2.1. Development of quality assurance systems**

In **Belgium (Flemish Community)**, a new system of quality assurance was adopted in 2012. All existing programmes are being redesigned, and will be accredited from the academic year 2014 onwards.

In **Estonia**, the new system of external quality assessment (starting from 2009 and implemented on the ground since 2011) focuses on two main elements: compulsory institutional accreditation that takes place every 7 years (instead of the previous study programme accreditation) and quality assessment of 28 groups of study programme which are based on the ISCED 97 classification.

In **Italy**, following Law 240/2010 and the creation of the National evaluation Agency (Anvur), the Ministry of Education, University and Research has issued decree No. 47/2013 which defines the procedures and indicators for the accreditation and evaluation of study programmes and universities.

In **Lithuania**, in the period 2012-2014, all higher education institutions will undergo external evaluation by the Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre (MOSTA) and the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC). Upon positive assessment, institutions will be accredited for 6 years.

In **Poland**, a 2011 amendment to the Law on Higher Education has introduced new rules for the functioning of the Polish Accreditation Committee in relation to the evaluation of study programmes and higher education Institutions. The amendment concerns the evaluation of learning outcomes which has been introduced in parallel with the implementation of the Polish Qualification Framework.

In **Finland**, from 2014, the Education Evaluation Centre, a single body created by the merger of three institutions, will aim to deliver more efficient, effective and consistent evaluation.

In **Slovakia**, the amended Act on Tertiary Schools, which has been in force since 1 January 2013, has introduced changes to the internal quality assurance system and the arrangements for part-time studies and has introduced measures for improving the quality of tertiary teachers and increasing international cooperation.

### **2.2.2. Expanding performance-based funding**

In **Bulgaria**, on the basis of the university rating system, the best faculties were granted up to 25 % additional funds in 2012.

In **Italy**, the university reform, which was launched under the Law 240/2010 and been gradually implemented since 2011, has led to an increase of the share of public funding allocated on the basis



of teaching and research performance. The Legislative Decree n° 19/2012 details the principles and procedures for implementing performance-based funding. The share of public funding allocated according to these principles amounted to 13 % in 2012.

In **Hungary**, the 2011 Higher Education Act introduced three types of certification procedures which may grant 'priority' or 'research' status and entitle institutions to extra funding for specific tasks. Some of the funding depends on the assessment of institutions' Development Plans and the evaluation of their strategic objectives.

In **Poland**, in 2012 a quality-oriented subsidy based on three types of calls for proposals was systematically introduced to the funding of the higher education system. It includes the support to the Leading National Research Centres (KNOWs), co-financing of university units evaluated as exceptional by the Polish Accreditation Committee, and of university units which have embarked on the implementation of quality improvement system and NQF. Allocation of the quality-oriented subsidy continues in 2013 and 2014.

In **Sweden**, since 2013, additional resources (1.5 % of the total funding) are allocated to study programmes, based on evaluations carried out by the Swedish Higher Education Authority (*Universitetskanslersämbetet*).

### 2.2.3. Closer links between universities and business

In **Germany**, the federal Ministry of Education and Research has recently launched the funding initiatives *Spitzencluster-Wettbewerb* (Leading-Edge Cluster Competition) and *Forschungscampus* (Public-Private Partnership to Foster Innovation) to support long-term strategic partnerships between science and business. Besides cooperative research and development, the development of innovative, advanced academic training and novel degree programmes in close cooperation with industry are important elements.

In **Portugal**, since 2013, the 'Programme for applied research and technology transfer to enterprises' supports doctoral programs by promoting 'hybrid' doctoral training and the creation of national and international consortia of universities, businesses and research units; it also allocates new PhD scholarships in priority fields, provides tax incentives to private companies that hire PhD holders in science and technology and creates Masters' courses in areas such as Science Administration and Management, Technology and Entrepreneurship.

In the **United Kingdom (England)**, the 2012 review of business-university collaboration (Wilson, 2012) has recommended increasing opportunities for students to acquire relevant work experience, such as sandwich degree programmes, internships and work-based programmes. It also called for the establishment of a 'skills supply chain' between universities and local businesses integrating placements, internships and employment services.

### 2.2.4. Enhancing the employability of higher education graduates

In 2012, **Cyprus** created a new type of institution and education programme: the post-secondary institutes for technical and vocational education and training.

In **Ireland**, one of the measures in the ICT action plan launched in 2012 is the roll-out of intensive conversion courses in higher education institutions designed and delivered in partnership with industry.

In **Luxembourg**, the newly established short cycle programmes lead to an Advanced Technicians' Diploma (BTS – *Brevet de technicien supérieur*).



In **Poland**, the Graduate Rights Ombudsman function at the Main Council of Science and Higher Education was established in 2011. The tasks of the Ombudsman include analysing the situation of graduates on the labour market and their access to specific professions, as well as monitoring to what extent university curricula match economy needs.

In **Portugal**, from 2013, the government has increased the number of places on higher education nursing programmes and has maintained the number of places in medicine, but it has decided that initial teacher training institutions should reduce the number of places offered by at least in 20 %.

In **Sweden**, the government is proposing the creation of additional tertiary education places in engineering and nursing programmes in 2013 and 2014.

### Chapter 3: Improving Skills and VET for Youth Employment

#### 3.1. Youth guarantee schemes and comprehensive policy initiatives

In **Greece**, the National Action Plan for Youth Employment announced early in 2013 will integrate all the actions and programmes of the National Strategic Reference Framework (2007-2013) directed at young people. It is funded by the European Social Fund as well as by the European Regional Development Fund. This new Action Plan aims to implement targeted policies and measures to develop employment and entrepreneurship for two age groups – 15-24 year olds and 25-35 year-olds – placing particular emphasis on those less qualified. Three ministries cooperate together: the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Welfare; the Ministry of Development and Competitiveness; as well the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. The total budget of the Action Plan is EUR 600 million and approximately 350 000 people are expected to benefit.

**Spain** has launched the 2013-2016 Entrepreneurship and Youth Employment Strategy. It supports various fields of action such as: supporting young people who are unemployed to return to the education system to obtain new qualifications and thus improve their employability; the development of university programmes and curricula, which must be guaranteed to meet the needs of business and social sectors; the promotion of entrepreneurship and innovation among university students; the adaptation of training to the needs of the private sector; and the inclusion from the private sector of young people since they start their university or vocational training studies through work placements.

**Italy** has adopted the Action Plan for the Employability of Young people through the Integration of Learning and Work – Italy 2020. This is a policy document adopted jointly by the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education in September 2009. The Action Plan is part of a framework of interventions that aim to support the transition from school to work by promoting apprenticeships, traineeships and on-the-job training activities.

In **Lithuania**, a strategy for increased employment is planned for 2014-2020. Youth would be the particular focus. Cooperation between employers, providers of educational services and municipalities is planned in order to shape and implement employment policy.

In **Luxembourg**, a guarantee for job seekers is being prepared under the Youth Employment Action Plan launched in March 2012.

In **Hungary**, the Government adopted at the end of 2011 the 'New Generation Programme' which is a comprehensive framework programme with several youth-related topics including youth employment and school-to-work transition. This is strongly related to the National Youth Strategy adopted in 2009, currently implemented through the 2012-2013 action plan which also supports youth employment.

In **Portugal**, under the agreements on the consolidation of vocational training in the Commitment for Growth, Competitiveness and Employment, the government has defined an action plan for 2012-2014

to address the issue of the young unemployed or NEETs through vocational education and training. This action plan focuses on increasing the number of young people following upper-secondary vocational pathways; encouraging better coordination of the different private providers to rationalise provision and costs; creating an integrated academic and vocational guidance system; ensuring better coordination between schools and businesses to facilitate the dissemination of job offers and student/trainee capacities.

In **Romania**, the 2013 National Plan for Youth Employment supports the integration of young people into the labour market. A National Plan Jobs is currently under preparation for the 2013-2020 period. This plan entails specific measures targeted at young people.

In **Sweden**, the Government has given a task to a special investigator to propose measures how to decrease the number of young people aged between 16 and 25 who are not in employment, education and training (NEET). The final report was submitted in October 2013.

### 3.2. Increasing work experience opportunities

#### 3.2.1. Dual system, apprenticeships and work-based learning in VET

In the **German-speaking Community of Belgium**, the Regional Development Project 'Ostbelgien Leben 2025' includes a project which began in 2011 and focuses on 'harmonisation and systematisation of vocational-technical education and *Mittelständischen Ausbildung* (the dual system of training). The objective is to promote collaboration between these two types of VET, with respect to infrastructure, teaching materials, teachers and companies. In addition, the institutions providing dual system of training programmes (IAWM and ZAWM) and the public employment service have reinforced their collaboration in order to encourage the transition from unemployment to work experience opportunities, especially in occupations with identified skills shortage.

In **Germany**, the National Pact for Career Training and Skilled Manpower Development in Germany, the Federal Government and *Länder* work with business and social partners to take measures needed to further strengthen and consolidate the training culture in the dual system. In addition, some regional training pacts have also been adopted in the *Länder*. For instance, in Nordrhein-Westfalen, the Land government, industry associations, trade unions, employment agencies and local authorities cooperate within the framework of the *Ausbildungskonsens* (Vocational Education and Training Consensus). Their joint objective is to provide training places for all the young people in Nordrhein-Westfalen who are willing and able to undergo vocational education and training.

In **Spain**, the reform of vocational education and training envisages the promotion of student mobility leading to an annual increase of 3 % in the number of students who complete their work placement module which is designed to round off the skills acquired in the training institutions.

In **Greece**, the Manpower Organisation in its effort to support the institution of apprenticeship cooperates with social partners as well as local and regional authorities. Within this framework, in all the Organisation's vocational schools, a consultation takes place on an annual basis with the social partners in order to create regional specialisation charters that are effectively linked with the labour market.

Furthermore, as part of the National Action Plan for Youth Employment, the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs supports, *inter alia*, the provision of internships and traineeships in universities and technological education institutions, as well as apprenticeship programmes for graduates of technical education.

**Cyprus** implemented the 2012/15 New Modern Apprenticeship (NMA) system which is an alternative form of training for young people aged between 14 and 25 years old. The NMA system also aims at

responding to the needs of the labour market. Financial support is given to companies providing on-the-job training.

In **Malta**, a reform of the existing apprenticeships schemes is under preparation. The aim is to create a single national apprenticeships scheme covering more qualification levels. It is envisaged that once the new legal notice of this reform comes into force, the number of apprentices will increase significantly.

In **Sweden**, since 2011, there has been a further differentiation of pathways between general and vocational education at upper secondary. Apprenticeships were introduced as an alternative route for students to attain the vocational diploma. In addition, since August 2011 the Government has provided special incentive funds for school heads to further develop workplace-based learning. The organisers receive a subsidy to provide upper secondary apprenticeship programmes. In January 2013, the portion directed at the employers has been raised by SEK 15 000 to a total of SEK 30 000 per student per year to encourage additional workplaces to offer apprenticeships.

### **3.2.2. Work placements, traineeships and internships**

In **Belgium** (Wallonia-Region), since 2012, a grant has been available for young unemployed graduates or young early school leavers to join a scheme involving internships/language courses abroad in selected countries.

In **Bulgaria**, the 2011-2015 National Programme for Youth features paid internships in the private sector and in public administration for young unemployed people under the age of 29.

In the **Czech Republic**, since 2012, the Fund for Further Education has launched two nation-wide programmes: the 'Internships for Youth' aimed at students from upper secondary and tertiary education and the 'Internships in Companies – Education through Practice' also opened to graduates and unemployed people under the age of 30.

In **Spain**, a programme still in the preparation stages will provide placements in companies for young people aged 18-25 who are professionally qualified but do not have work experience; this will include a grant which will cover 80 % of the monthly wage. The Royal Decree-Law 4/2013 of February 2013 has translated the 2013-2016 Entrepreneurship and Youth employment strategy into national legislation. This Act has made possible that young people under 30 are eligible for the work experience contract for the first job although five years or more have passed after graduation. This entails a reduction of 50 % in social security contributions as an incentive and support.

In **France**, the portal '*Mon stage en ligne*' (my traineeship online) launched in 2011 for both companies and students from upper secondary to university level, provides access to offers of and requests for work placements.

In **Italy**, the 2011 Action Plan on Cohesion, coming from the agreement between the Government and some southern regions, includes actions for the employability of young people. For instance, in Sicily there is a special programme devoted to training and guidance for youngsters that includes financial incentives for paid traineeships and training in foreign languages.

In **Slovakia**, the loan fund for university students studying or having work experience abroad has been expanded since the beginning of 2013, both in terms of places and amount of funds

### 3.3. Addressing skills mismatches

#### 3.3.1. Skills monitoring and forecasting systems

In the **Czech Republic**, an analysis and projection study was published on labour market skills needs by the National Institute for Education within the project *VIP Kariéra II*. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports has also supported the 2013 Research Project Reflex by the Education Policy Centre at Charles university in Prague which seeks to monitor the transition of higher education graduates to the labour market and evaluate the qualifications gained by graduates.

In **Ireland**, FÁS offers a diverse range of training programmes that provide industry/occupational specific training for unemployed individuals. The alignment of many FÁS training programmes in 2012 and 2013 with evolving labour market needs has been evidence-based. This is facilitated by a FÁS' internal resource, the Skills and Labour Market research Unit and its National Skills Database (NSD), as well as research by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN). SOLAS, a new further education and training will assume this role in the future.

In **Latvia**, the Ministry of Economics implemented a project 'Development of the medium-term and long-term labour-market demands forecast system' in August 2010 and will be finalised in December 2013.

In **Austria**, the Standing Committee on New Skills, established in 2009, carried out a research project in autumn 2011, which identified the future qualifications needed by collecting the views of employees.

In **Poland**, a 2011 amendment to the Law on Higher Education requires higher education institutions to follow the professional careers of graduates. The results of such follow up are to be used to adjust study programmes to the labour market needs. The monitoring concerns the professional situation of graduates three and five years after their graduation.

In **Romania**, a project to develop monitoring tools was been developed between December 2009 and November 2012 for tracking Bachelor-level graduates from the 2005/09 and 2006/10 cohorts.

In **Finland**, the National Board of Education published a report in 2012 that attempts to predict the demand for labour by industry in 2025. It also carried out a project (VOSE) on predicting future competences and skills between 2008 and 2012.

#### 3.3.2. Labour market relevance of vocational education and training

In the **Czech Republic**, the 2012-2015 project *Podpora spolupráce škol a firem se zaměřením na odborné vzdělávání v praxi – Pospolu* (Supporting Cooperation between Schools and Companies – Project Aimed at Vocational Education in Practice) aims to increase the collaboration between vocational schools and companies and thus enhance the quality of vocational education. This project is being carried out by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in cooperation with the National Institute for Education.

In **Lithuania**, VET teachers have been given the opportunity for professional competence development in companies. These training periods allow teachers to get a better view of the industry, technical innovations and the labour market situation.

In the **Netherlands**, the government wants educational institutions to focus on providing effective vocational training at regional level. At present, competition between them is causing fragmentation, with an adverse effect on quality. Educational institutions need to work better with regional businesses

to develop a portfolio of training courses. A pilot project is being set up to assist them, and arbitration by the Education-Business Alliance is being introduced.

In **Romania**, the project 'Matching vocational education and training provision with the demands of the labour market' was conducted in 2010-2012. Its main objective was increasing the relevance of initial vocational training provision in schools with the needs of the labour market and the requirements of social and economic development. In order to achieve this objective, as part of the strategic planning process for initial vocational education and training provision, the project worked with the consultative partner organisations at county level: the Local Committees for the Development of Social Partnership in Vocational Training.

In **Slovakia**, a 2012 amendment to the Act on Vocational Schools has reinforced the coordination of vocational education and training to better match the needs of the labour market.

### **3.3.3. Career guidance and employment services**

In **Greece**, the EOPPEP (national organisation for the accreditation of qualifications and vocational guidance) is developing awareness- raising material for career management skills in order to be distributed both to career guidance professionals and young people.

In **Cyprus**, a guidance and/or work placement scheme for young unemployed was launched in June 2013.

In **Lithuania**, 10 additional youth labour centres will be established in 2013 to help young people to be better guided in labour market.

In **Poland**, in 2012 and 2013 the abovementioned Voluntary Labour Corps (VLC) intensified its activities as a provider of labour market services for tackling youth unemployment. As a result, the VLC has created 100 establishments providing services on occupational consultancy, job placement and training. Seventy already exist in the whole country.

In **Portugal**, the newly created Centres for Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training offer information and guidance services for young people seeking a job or gaining new skills and qualifications.

In **Slovenia**, lifelong career guidance has been reinforced with the entry into force of the Labour Market Regulation Act in 2012. One of the priority target groups are young people, namely the young unemployed, first-time job-seekers, students from basic and upper secondary schools and higher education.

In the **United Kingdom (England)**, the new National Careers Service provides extra support to 18-24 year-olds as part of the Youth Contract. In Scotland, there is the online service 'My World of Work' launched in 2011 that aims to help people to plan, build and direct their career throughout their working lives. Young people are a specific target group in this career guidance and employment service.

## **3.4. Upgrading skills**

### **3.4.1. Re-skilling and up-skilling training**

In **Ireland**, the Labour Market Education and Training Fund (LMETF) is responsible for meeting the needs of unemployed people under 25 years of age by supporting three different occupational clusters where there are vacancies in the labour market. The aim is to enhance collaboration and engagement

between businesses and education and training providers in the design and delivery of relevant and responsive projects for the unemployed in support of the Government's Action Plan for Jobs and the National Skills Strategy.

In **Greece**, under the voucher system launched in 2013, young people are also entitled to 80 skills training hours together with guidance and counselling and an allowance.

In **Malta**, the Employment Aid programme provides financial assistance as well as upgrading skills training for unemployed people, and in particular, young job seekers under the age of 25 who have completed full-time education in the last two years and have not yet obtained a first regular paid job.

In **Slovenia**, the new programme 'Youth Mentorship Schemes in Business Enterprises' aims at providing young people with the skills needed in the real work environment.

In the **United Kingdom (England)**, the Traineeships programme was introduced from August 2013 for 16- to 19-year-olds and will be extended to up to 24-year-olds in due course. Traineeships are designed for young people not yet ready for apprenticeships or employment and include support to improve English and maths alongside work skills and workplace experience.

### **3.4.2. Entrepreneurial skills training**

In **Spain**, the University Entrepreneur Programme in Spanish universities was launched in February 2013 by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport and the Ministry of Industry, Energy and Tourism. This programme aims to encourage the creation of new businesses and to foster entrepreneurial mind sets, providing students with the necessary tools to develop a business plan for a business project. This project has been implemented in 47 universities.

In **Lithuania**, since 2012, first-year 'business baskets' are offered to newly-established companies specifically targeting young people. This entails training for start-ups in strategic management, accounting, business processes, fund raising as well as management consulting services and virtual office services.

In **Hungary**, a scheme supporting young people in becoming entrepreneurs was launched within the framework of the Social Renewal Operational Programme at the beginning of 2013.

In **Portugal**, one of the 2013 national priorities for youth employability under the Youth in Action Programme envisages actions for promoting non-formal education related to the acquisition of entrepreneurship skills.

In **Slovenia**, a two-year project supported by the ESF started in 2013; to support 'innovative teaching through the implementation of programmes for introducing practical and flexible forms of employment and economic cooperation'. This project is geared to upper secondary and short-cycle higher education students. The objective is to improve their integration into the labour market.

In the **United Kingdom (Wales)**, the 2010-2015 action plan of the Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy (YES) (originally launched in 2004) includes, for example, the development and accreditation of entrepreneurial learning opportunities. The Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan 2011-2015 (see Section 3.1) includes delivering targeted activities aimed at stimulating interest in entrepreneurship amongst unemployed young people.



## Chapter 4: Increasing Adult Participation in Lifelong Learning

### 4.1. Reforms to increase adult participation in lifelong learning

#### 4.1.1. Improving career guidance and awareness raising activities for adults

In **Estonia**, in vocational and adult education, a public round of applications was carried out to support the 2010 projects: Development of Student-Centred and Innovative Vocational Education and Expansion of Lifelong Learning Opportunities. The purpose of the open application round was to support development activities originating from the applicants and based on their initiatives in the field of vocational and adult education. The activities supported included, among other things, increasing the provision of counselling and support services for students in order to reduce the number of those dropping out and supporting the employment of graduates in the labour market.

In **Cyprus**, in March 2012, a proposal for the establishment of a National Board of Lifelong Guidance was forwarded to the Council of Ministers for approval.

In **Luxembourg**, in November 2012, the government approved the white paper on a lifelong learning strategy. An action plan will be set up for the implementation of the eight measures proposed where the professionalising of the staff for lifelong guidance is one of the measures.

In **Portugal**, the restructuring and strengthening of educational and vocational guidance services in 2013/2014 will contribute to allowing students to make a more independent, informed and realistic choice between education and training offers. The Centres for Qualification and Vocational Education (*Centros de Qualificação e Ensino Profissional – CQEP*) have a dual mission to provide counselling and vocational guidance to both young people and adults.

In **Romania**, the Law of National Education (1/2011) pays particular attention to career guidance. A provision of the legislation is an obligation on local authorities to establish Community Lifelong Learning Centres in partnership with education and training providers. The responsibilities of these centres include career guidance and preparation for finding a job.

#### Awareness raising activities

In **Luxembourg**, a survey of adult education has been carried out for the first time. It was led by STATEC and involved more than 3 300 residents aged between 25 and 64. Respondents were asked which types of education/learning they had taken part in over previous 12 months – formal, non-formal or informal.

In **Finland**, measures will be taken in cooperation with business and industry to find and motivate adults to participate in training.

#### 4.1.2. More flexible study opportunities and pathways in lifelong learning

In **Belgium (Flemish Community)** all linear programs in adult education have been replaced by modular learning in 2013.

In **Germany**, within the framework of the lifelong learning concept, the Federation and *Länder* are implementing measures in the following areas related to adults:

- facilitating transition from school to higher education and access to higher education without the *Abitur* for vocationally qualified applicants;
- making learning paths more flexible;
- admitting up to 327 000 extra first-year students until 2015 within the framework of the Higher Education Pact 2020 (*Hochschulpakt 2020*);
- increasing interest in mathematics and the natural sciences;



- improving opportunities for women;
- improving opportunities for people with a migrant background;
- taking account of the interests of people with disabilities in participating in lifelong learning;
- structural improvements in education provision for all stages of life at local level.

In **Estonia**, flexible study opportunities have been created for adult learners both in vocational education and training and in higher education: e-learning tools, distance learning and evening courses and part-time studies.

In the **United Kingdom (Wales)**, a new policy statement for higher education published in June 2013 encourages higher education providers to provide an appropriate offer to people at all stages of life through a variety of programmes, and through a flexible and dynamic delivery system that meets students' expectations and needs. The aim should be to widen access to all, including those living in rural areas of Wales, rather than opening up access only to a few..

#### 4.1.4. Financial support for participating in lifelong learning

In **Austria**, since 2011, the initiative for Adult Education enables adults who lack basic skills or never graduated from lower secondary school to continue and finish their education free of charge.

In **Slovenia**, training and education which include informal and formal education programmes are among the first measures of the Active Employment Policy (AEP) 2012-2015. Persons participating in the AEP measures are entitled to certain allowances (activity allowance, allowance for transport and training costs and others).

In **Spain**, in accordance with the Statute of Workers' Rights, workers have the right to amongst other things: paid leave to sit examinations, an adaptation to the working day to allow workers to attend professional training courses; job-secured training or leave for professional development. The time devoted to training is regarded as working time. Workers with at least one year of seniority are entitled to 20 hours' paid leave each year to participate in vocational training for employment, linked to company activities, which may be accumulated for a period of up to 5 years.

### 4.2. Reforms to improve the quality and transparency of adult education

#### 4.2.1. Development of qualifications frameworks and validation of non-formal and informal learning

In **Luxembourg**, a procedure for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VAE – *validation des acquis de l'expérience*) has been introduced. Since its entry into force in spring 2010, 518 eligible areas of experience have been introduced and 97 persons have received a full or a partial qualification through validation of their non-formal and informal learning.

In **Malta**, following the enactment of legislation in 2012, the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) has been designated as the competent authority for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and for classifying the courses validated at a level of Malta's National Qualifications Framework. The NCFHE is currently developing a system of assessment, recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning. It is setting the standards and principles to be followed; regulating the bodies responsible for validating learning outcomes and occupational standards; ensuring that quality assurance systems are put in place; and is monitoring the validation process.

In **Poland**, the lifelong learning strategy which was adopted in September 2013 is (among many other things) introducing a process and creation of a system of validation/ confirmation of qualifications acquired outside the formal education system.

In **Slovakia**, the 2012-2014 Action Plan for the implementation of the lifelong strategy includes specific measures to facilitate progress in the area of adult learning, including launching a process for the validation of non-formal education. Moreover, an amendment to the Act on Lifelong Learning, approved in September 2012, should facilitate access of adults to new qualifications based on their previous professional experience or participation in continuing education and training programmes. In order to ensure higher expertise of programme guarantors and lecturers, conditions and procedures of their selection have been adjusted. Another important step was to expand the scope of eligible institutions to include professional organisations and associations that will be entitled to organise tests and examinations for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

#### **4.2.2. Development of qualifications standards and quality assurance in VET**

In **Greece**, Law 4115/2013 concluded the process of establishing the National Organisation for the Accreditation of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP) which is responsible for the accreditation of inputs and outputs in the field of non-formal education and informal learning; it also operates as the national organisation of the European networks managing qualifications issues and tools for transparency and mobility.

In **Poland**, the reference report relating the levels identified in the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF) to the European Qualifications Framework has been finalised. In May 2013 the report was presented to the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group. Also the work on the National Register of Qualifications is in progress. These measures will lead to the development of the final content-related and institutional framework which is necessary to implement the PQF.

In **Portugal**, in order to provide the necessary preconditions for the active population to boost their qualifications and have them recognised, and to achieve a better use of public resources, within the framework of the on-going modernisation and optimisation of the Public Sector, there has been public discussion of a ministerial directive to establish Centres for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (*Centros para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional* – CQEP). It is envisaged that the CQEP will operate in an integrated and coordinated manner across the country, and form an interface with other initiatives currently available under the National Qualifications System, to respond to the real qualification needs of young people and adults.

## **Annex 4. Examples of recent and forthcoming measures in line with the Europe 2020 strategy in Norway and Turkey**

The information in this Annex is organised according to the policy areas covered in each chapter.

### **NORWAY**

#### **Chapter 1: Tackling early school leaving**

The initiative 'Ny G/V – New possibilities' (2010-2013) includes the following measures:

**Early intervention:** Enhanced instruction in basic skills; increased number of lessons in Norwegian, Mathematics and English; homework assistance (free of charge for all pupils in levels 1-4).

**Follow-up of 8th grade national tests:** Competence and guidance personnel will target schools and school providers with poor learning outcomes.

**Working life skills:** (*Arbeidslivsfag*) Tested from the academic year 2009/10. The purpose is to give pupils, who want it, greater opportunities to work in practical ways and try out vocational training. All schools can now participate in this project until 2013, after which there will be another evaluation.

**More flexibility:** Guidance material has been issued on how to redistribute a maximum of 25 per cent of lessons in different subjects. The objective is to secure flexibility and better adapt education and training to the needs of pupils.

**More follow-up of individual pupils and apprentices:** The county municipalities are being given extra grants in order to follow up pupils who are struggling with basic skills and have poor results in screening tests.

**More relevant and practice-oriented vocational education and training** is being provided through the Path of Practice (*Praksisveien*) which is an education path towards complete vocational education and training and through further development of the Certificate of Practice.

**A common set of indicators** has been developed so that completion rates are calculated in the same way in each county municipality.

**Follow-up project on young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET):** The 'follow-up service' in the county municipalities contacts every young person aged 16-21 not applying for a place in upper secondary education or dropping out from school.

## Chapter 2: Improving attainment levels and the quality and relevance of higher education

The White Paper on research (2013) proposes the launch of a national plan for research and higher education in 2014. This plan will set out the political priorities for research and higher education for the next ten years and the priorities will serve as signposts for investment. The plan will be updated every four years.

In addition, the White Paper proposes that priority is given to the following issues:

- the development of an overall system for analysing and conveying industry's needs to allow the creation of more targeted educational programmes and more informed educational choices;
- greater attention to linking research and education, in part through student involvement in research;
- assessing whether the overall funding of universities and university colleges is suitable for fostering high quality in research and education.

As a follow-up to the White paper, an evaluation of the quality of higher education will be carried out, and a White paper on the quality of higher education will be published.

The Ministry of Education and Research established 'Centres of Excellence in Higher Education' (SFU) in 2010. In December 2011, ProTed (Centre for Professional Learning in Teacher Education) was designated Norway's first centre of excellence. Three new centres will be designated in 2013.

## Chapter 3: Improving skills and VET for youth employment

Measures on VET proposed under the White Paper on primary and secondary education:

- Review of the structure of available choices within education programmes to increase their relevance to labour market demand.
- Intensification of cooperation with social partners to increase the supply of apprenticeships.
- Establishment of a pilot project of alternative educational opportunities for pupils without an apprenticeship contract.

## **Chapter 4: Increasing adult participation in lifelong learning**

Measures to maintain and increase the participation in adult learning include further development of the tripartite cooperation and the cooperation between the public and the private stakeholders in this field. For instance, upper secondary education and training for adults is most often offered by the county authority, but can also be organised at work or by a study association in cooperation with the county authority.

### **TURKEY**

#### **Chapter 1: Tackling early school leaving**

The government and UNICEF have embarked on a project concerning school leaving which was launched on 1 January 2011 and planned to be completed by the end of 2015. This project involves children aged between 14 and 18. The aim is to integrate this group of children into the schooling process, to reduce the school dropout rate and help improve life skills, and to encourage access to further education or suitable employment.

#### **Chapter 2: Improving attainment levels and the quality and relevance of higher education**

The Council of Higher Education in Turkey has designed projects to improve the quality of education in tertiary institutions. For instance, YOKDIL is an online English language learning programme that is open to students and staff. The programme offers English language learning tasks and activities from A1 to C2 (According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), including both academic and non-academic English.

In 2012, the Council of Higher Education started a series of conferences, workshops and discussions on new legislation for higher education. The draft legislation, which is still in preparation, proposes major changes in the higher education system, in the types of research and educational institutions and in the selection of administrative and academic units.

#### **Chapter 4: Increasing adult participation in lifelong learning**

The General Directorate of Lifelong Learning offers courses to adults in five different fields. More than 30 different subjects will be offered from 2013. These courses run throughout the year and are available in all cities in Turkey.

The Directorate also offers a distance programme, called Open Education programme, which offers primary, secondary, and vocational secondary education programmes. People who do not have access to formal schooling or are too old to participate in regular programmes in primary and secondary schools can follow this open education programme to obtain a primary and/or secondary school diploma, or specific qualifications.

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