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Education and Training 2020

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2.1   Introduction

In 2009, the Council of the European Union agreed on the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training – Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) – through Council Conclusions (Council of the European Union, 2009), which outlined four specific objectives, five benchmarks and a list of working methods.

This is seen as an 'integrated' framework as it refers to all levels and contexts of education:

> European cooperation in education and training for the period up to 2020 should be established in the context of a strategic framework spanning

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education and training systems as a whole in a lifelong learning perspective. Indeed, lifelong learning should be regarded as a fundamental principle underpinning the entire framework, which is designed to cover learning in all contexts – whether formal, non-formal or informal – and at all levels from early childhood education and schools through to higher education, vocational education and training and adult learning. (Ibid., p. 2)

This integrated framework may be seen as a complex policy mix, as it refers to a broad range of educational policies including early childhood, schooling, vocational education and training, higher education and lifelong learning. It serves as a policy umbrella for several parallel processes, including the Bologna and the Copenhagen processes, and the development of the European qualifications framework. It builds on the work done through the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme, which was the first framework to be established following the Lisbon Council to support national education and training systems. The programme's role was to develop common European instruments promoting quality, transparency and mobility and create opportunities for mutual-learning and good practice exchange (Council of the European Union, 2009, p. 1). It is a policy framework for cooperation with member states, focused on mutual-learning, but it does not have a financial allocation attached to it. In 2008, the European Ministers for vocational education and training, the European social partners and the European Commission took on the commitment to "assess and reflect on the future of the Strategy and of the Education and Training programme" with a goal of creating a new strategic vision for European education policies (Council of the European Union, 2008). The Communiqué proposed several objectives and priority areas for future actions, which informed the four specific, strategic objectives, defined by the Council in 2009:

1. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality
2. Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training
3. Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship
4. Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training

These objectives are underpinned by goals for common, comprehensive and coherent education and training qualification frameworks, strategies for achieving relevant learning outcomes, greater openness towards non-formal and informal learning and increased transparency and recognition of learning outcomes. The progress against these objectives at national level is measured by indicators and European benchmarks.

Although the Council Conclusions is not a legal document, it establishes a political commitment of the member states and, in this case, has a coordinating function – it sets out the objectives and the processes for assessing the progress. This is done through the explicit recommendation of the suggested 'working methods' within the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), which have been listed in the Conclusions (Council of the European Union, 2009). These include three-year work cycles with a specific priority area, mutual-learning (peer-learning activities, conferences, panels, groups) and dissemination of results, progress reporting and the monitoring of the process at both national and European level.

In short, ET 2020 is a policy mix, which consists of a variety of mechanisms and instruments set up to support specific objectives emerging from the Lisbon Agenda and Europe 2020 strategy. Before analysing the mechanisms and instruments of ET 2020, it is important to illustrate the nature of education and training policy since the Lisbon Council of 2000, and its developments, which will help us understand the perceived problems that led to the adoption of the policy, and the specific components of ET 2020, and what they were designed to accomplish. This will be done by tracing the stages of the development of the education and training as a common policy in the EU.

2.2   Historical Antecedents

Although education has been seen as a national affair, the focus on convergence of policies, approaches and initiatives in the area of vocational skills have permeated the European Community since its inception (Bonnafous, 2014; Pepin, 2006). In general, three stages of the development and consolidation of cooperation in education and training can be

distinguished in Europe. The first stage – from the 1970s to 1990s – was the time when the first initiatives at the community level had been established. The second stage – 1992 to 2000 – saw an acceleration of cooperation with the approval of the Maastricht Treaty, characterised by a "logic of programmes" (Nóvoa & deJong-Lambert, 2003), including mobility or exchange agreements. These two stages reinforced integration in several education policy areas and provided a groundwork for the Conclusions of the Lisbon Council in 2000. The third stage – since 2000 – initiated with the first framework established to support national education and training systems. In the next sections we concentrate attention on analysing the development of cooperation in education and training in this third stage, hence departing from the Lisbon Agenda.

2.2.1   Laying Down the Fundaments for the 'Fourth Pillar of the European Union'

The Lisbon European Council Presidency Conclusions (Council of the European Union, 2000) are perceived as a turning point in the cooperation in education and training among the member states (Ertl, 2006; Nóvoa & deJong-Lambert, 2003). The Lisbon Council introduced a new Open Method of Coordination (OMC) at all levels as a way of implementing a new strategic goal of becoming the "most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world" (Council of the European Union, 2000, §5). It is worth pointing out, following the overview by Pepin (2006), that several internal and external factors influenced the creation of the Lisbon Strategy. These included increasing globalisation, the looming Union's enlargement, technological development as well as challenges like social cohesion and unemployment. These challenges required a long-term strategic vision, a large-scale collective action and a large budget. As a consequence, education and training were perceived as the "fourth pillar of the European Union" (Nóvoa & deJong-Lambert, 2003, p. 55).

In the following year, the Commission published a draft report on *The Concrete Future Objectives of Education Systems* (European Commission, 2000), adopted by the Education Council in February (Council of the

European Union, 2001). This is the first document which outlines a comprehensive and consistent approach on education in the context of the EU for national policies. The report sets a challenge for all member states to work together at European level over the next ten years to increase the quality and effectiveness of the national education and training systems, to facilitate better access for all and to open up education and training systems to the wider world. Through the OMC, the Commission had a stronger role to play in developing policy. Interestingly, the Commission's report had not been consulted with the European Parliament (EP) before its adoption, which was met with questions from the Members of the EP.

Six months later, the EP's Committee on Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport, in its 2002 *Motion for a Resolution on the Draft Detailed Work Programme*, expressed several criticisms (European Parliament, 2002a). The first one, not surprisingly, related to improving the consultation process with the Parliament. The Parliament was also worried about the budget implications and asked for some estimates of the cost of the action from the Commission. The biggest concern, however, related to the distinction between 'education' and 'training':

> The most unsatisfactory feature of the Report, however, is the tone in which it is written. (…) But education is not coterminous with training and is not simply a matter of preparing people for employment. So it is worrying when the language of the Communication suggests that this is the case. (Ibid., 2002a)

Following this opinion, the EP Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy suggested to incorporate several additional points in its motion for a resolution, including the emphasis on the importance of the industry partners' role in education and training (European Parliament, 2002b). Two weeks later, the EP adopted a resolution that incorporated suggestions by the two committees (European Parliament, 2002c). In reference to the concerns related to the framing of the role of education systems, it reiterated that "the content of education systems should not be determined solely with reference to the economy

and the employment market" (Ibid., p. 8). The Commission followed up on financial concerns in the Communication *Investing Efficiently in Education and Training: An Imperative for Europe*, which set out the investment priorities and the efficient management and allocation of resources (European Commission, 2003a). This process illustrates how the soft methods of coordination, which circumvents the Parliament's rights of co-decision (Héritier, 2002), affected the role of the EP, which became more sceptical of the European Commission's interpretation of the meaning of education.

2.2.2 Education and Training 2010 – Setting Targets and Capacity-Building

The Commission's report *The Concrete Future Objectives of Education Systems* (European Commission, 2000) led to the creation of the work programme *Education and Training 2010* (ET 2010) that would make the achievements of the objectives for education and training possible. It reflected the commitment to "Education and Training as fundamental part of the European Knowledge Area" (Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 1). Drawing from the Commission's report (2000), it sets out quality, access and openness as three strategic objectives of the policy. The Commission suggested the following instruments of cooperation for achieving these objectives:

- *Indicators and benchmarking* from set of clear and quantified targets used to measure progress
- *Exchange of best practices* through seminars, databases, internet sites and printed brochures
- *Peer review* where each member state submits one of its policies for review
- *Periodic monitoring* through relevant quantitative and/or qualitative tools
- *Evaluation* of the progress towards the objectives (by EU institutions, external experts, peers)

We can observe that these 'instruments of cooperation' put in motion several governance mechanisms such as *standard-setting*, *capacity-building*, *interdependence* and *elite-learning* (Héritier, 2002; Martens & Jakobi, 2010). *Standard-setting* included the list of benchmarks, publication of performance for each country and monitoring. It also defined procedural norms/codes of best practice by setting out the peer review processes and encouraged exchange of best practices. Peer review may lead to socialising and exchange of beliefs and value systems and therefore build *interdependence*. ET 2010 provided a detailed roadmap for member states in terms of objectives, methods and instruments to be used to achieve progress. It underlined the importance of measuring "progress, [through] comparative tools where Europe's achievements can be compared both internally and with other world regions" (Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 1). It listed the key issues in each strategic area, their organisation and the instruments of action. For example, Objective 1.2 related to developing skills for the 'knowledge society' with listed key competences such as numeracy and literacy, foreign languages or Information and Communications Technology (ICT) skills to be monitored and validated by member states. Among the proposed indicators for measuring progress for achieving these competences are, for instance, secondary education completions and literacy attainment levels. These would also be part of peer review and good practice exchange.

In 2003, the first report prepared by the Commission on the implementation of ET 2010 was presented (European Commission, 2003b). It reported on the early stages of the implementation focusing on work carried out by eight thematic working groups, which were considered 'at the heart of the process'.

Several months later, in April 2004, a joint interim report was published from the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe (Council of the European Union, 2004). It was titled *Education and Training 2010*: *The Success of the Lisbon Strategy Hinges on Urgent Reforms*. At the eve of the enlargement, the report urged all member states to commit to ET 2010 by increasing investments and accelerating the pace of reforms of education and training through, for example, building stronger links with employers, and

increasing participation in lifelong learning. Two years later a follow-up joint interim report, for the first time, presented the progress made by member states, drawing from their national reports (Council of the European Union, 2006). It included references to specific countries as examples of good practices. It reported on national and European level progress, but more importantly, it emphasised the growing coordination arrangements that had taken place between ministries (especially education and employment) in member states with the objective to strengthen the implementation of ET 2010. In the context of European governance, an ET 2010 Coordination Group had been set up, and 'clusters' of countries replaced the working groups, focusing on specific issues according to their national priorities and interests (Council of the European Union, 2006, p. 7). These clusters were responsible for organising peer-learning activities.

The third report, released in April 2008, registered "significant progress" (Council of the European Union, 2008, p. 2) in several areas including lifelong learning strategies and national qualifications systems. Yet, the Commission's working paper on indicators and benchmarks published the same year (European Commission, 2008a) considered that the achievement of five benchmarks by 2010 (on literacy, reduction of early school-leaving, upper secondary attainment, maths, science and technology graduates, and participation in adult learning) was unrealistic. The report listed 'best performing countries' per each benchmark as an example to follow, and included comparative data for each member state and third country, which enabled monitoring progress and drawing comparisons. The issue of ineffectiveness of ET 2010 was raised in the EP when the Commission was asked by the Member of the European Parliament, David Casa, to explain "the ineffectiveness of the previous programmes, and what different measures does it intend to take over the next 10 years in an effort to reach this goal?" (European Parliament, 2012). The answer given by Ms Vassiliou, on behalf of the Commission, emphasised the member states' responsibility for the running of their education systems and pointed out several actions taken by the EU to support member states, including the ET 2020 work programme, a High-Level Group on literacy and peer-learning activities of the Thematic Working Group on Mathematics, Science and Technology (European Parliament, 2012).

The ten-year period of multi-dimensional policy development and implementation in the area of education and training resulted in a policy mix, which serves as an umbrella for a 'knowledge triangle' of education, research and innovation (Council of the European Union, 2009, p. 1) with a variety of policy areas, objectives, policy actors and policy platforms. It can be argued that it consolidated two basic modes of governance: *standard-setting* and *capacity-building* (cf. Chap. 1). It included policy mechanisms with a number of policy instruments, tools and governance structures, which later become a cornerstone for the ET 2020 strategy development. Nevertheless, the period also illustrated the weaknesses in 'voluntary' measures of these instruments, where the member states are highly engaged in *standard-setting* and policy development, but the implementation at national level lagging behind. There was also a concern about the democratic process of decision-making with the EP sidelined by the OMC process.

2.2.3 Education and Training 2020 – Events Leading to Expanding Targets, Tightening Capacity-Building and Facilitating Elite-Learning

An updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training was published in December 2008 in the Commission Communication (European Commission, 2008b). It established four main challenges that were in full endorsed and were included as the main objectives of the ET 2020 framework in the Council Conclusions (Council of the European Union, 2009), which outlined four specific objectives, five benchmarks and a list of working methods. The Council provided the Commission with a mandate to work with and support member states in cooperating within the framework, as well as to conduct work on developing possible new benchmarks in the areas of mobility, employability and language learning. Nevertheless, the impact of the global economic crisis on the state of European economy was so overwhelming that the EU had to alter its approach to shaping the future of economy and education very soon. Therefore, the Council and the Commission agreed to 'modernise' ET 2020 by "updating its

working priorities, tools and governance structure" (Council of the European Union, 2012, p. 5). It was done by increasing the emphasis on targets, benchmarks and data and at the same time by narrowing down the themes and objectives of working groups. The roles of ET 2020 in supporting the priorities set in *Europe 2020* were to "mobilise ET 2020 stakeholders, increase their ownership and harness their expertise" and to draw on "evidence and data from relevant European agencies and networks" (Ibid., p. 5). In this way governing mechanisms such as *standard-setting*, *capacity-building* and *elite-learning* have been strengthened. The Council suggested closer cooperation between the Education, Economic Policy, Employment and Social Protection Committees. Following these plans, the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, Ms Vassiliou, launched the *Rethinking Education* strategy in November 2012 (European Commission, 2012a), which was based on the data from the 2012 Education and Training Monitor, a new annual Commission survey that outlined skills supply in the member states (European Commission, 2012b). The Monitor has been seen as "a new analytical tool that provides empirical evidence to underpin our reform agenda" (European Commission, 2012c, p. 3). ET 2020, therefore, consolidated the existing governance mechanisms such as *standard-setting* (through benchmarks and indicators) and *capacity-building* (strengthening 'good practice' exchange instruments). It significantly strengthened another governance mechanism, namely, *elite-learning*. By expanding the peer review instrument through the addition of peer-learning and peer counselling, there will be stronger drivers for instigating change in the actors' beliefs and value systems. Furthermore, the new generation of working groups, which set common goals and policy objectives, coordinate activities and create stronger administrative ties with member states, strengthens *standard-setting* between the member states and the EU. The governance mechanisms identified through the analysis of the development of ET 2020 and the policy instruments assisting in policy coordination will be scrutinised in the next section.

2.3   Governance Mechanisms and Policy Instruments

The historical overview of the development of ET 2020 enables us to identify its *modus operandi*, which points at *standard-setting*, *capacity-building* and *elite-learning*, as its core governance mechanisms operating under the principles of the OMC (for detailed description of each mechanism, see Chap. 1). As noted in Chap. 1, governance mechanisms are policy processes within the education and training area aimed at reaching specific policy objectives, such as increasing school retention and improving mobility and the quality of education, which naturalise these objectives and their effects.

Furthermore, several policy instruments contribute to the working of these mechanisms. Those surfacing in the analysis include coordinated working groups/networks, mutual- and peer-learning arrangements, data generation, benchmarks and indicators (see Table 2.1 and Chap. 1 for the description of each policy instrument).

In the next section, we analyse these instruments to further explore policy coordination, its nature and practices in education policy.

2.3.1   Coordinated Working Groups

Working groups have been seen as a significant coordination instrument since the inception of ET 2020. The objectives, shape and working modes of these groups have shifted three times with three 'generations' of working groups in existence. The first-generation working groups were set up between 2011 and 2013 and included 11 thematic working groups focused on school education, higher education, adult learning, VET and key competences. With the new 'work cycle', these thematic groups were reduced to six in the years 2014–2015. The issues identified with the coordination were the lack of synchronisation of activities, shortcomings in dissemination and low national awareness of the usefulness of results (Council of the European Union, 2015, p. 25). In 2015, the Council and the

Table 2.1 Policy instruments used in the implementation of ET 2020

Policy instruments	Exemplification
Coordinated working groups/ networks	Four 'sector-focused' groups and two 'issue-focused' groups were established: • ET 2020 Working Group on Vocational Education and Training • ET 2020 Working Group on Digital Skills and Competences • ET 2020 Working Group on Modernisation of Higher Education • ET 2020 Working Group on Promoting Citizenship and the Common Values of Freedom, Tolerance and Non-discrimination Through Education • ET 2020 Working Group on Schools • ET 2020 Working Group on Adult Learning
Mutual- and peer-learning arrangements	In-depth country workshops – focus on policy development and practice in selected member states, with the aim of identifying key factors for policy success Peer-learning activities – involve national experts learning together, based on evidence and experience, and sharing both positive and negative policy experiences Peer counselling – a voluntary tool that brings together "professional peers from a small number of national administrations to provide external advice to a country in the process of a significant policy development" (European Commission, 2015b, p. 1) Others – ad hoc peer-learning activities, thematic events, peer reviews, policy learning exchanges

Data generation	Education and Training Monitor – includes quantitative comparative analyses and country-specific recommendations based on Eurostat and OECD data
	Country Reports – annual individual Country Reports identify where each country stands in relation to the ET 2020 benchmarks and other indicators.
	Studies and Reports – (e.g. *Promoting Adult Learning in the Workplace*. Final report of the ET 2020 Working Group 2016–2018 on Adult Learning; see WGAL, 2018)
	Guidelines – (e.g. 20 guiding principles for high-performance apprenticeships and work-based learning in the 2014–2015 period; see WGVET, 2017)
	Policy conclusions – (e.g. Higher Education Institutions as centres of regional development and innovation; see WGMHE, 2016)
	Others – recommendations, background papers, flash reports and
Benchmarks	• At least 95% of children should participate in early childhood education
	• Fewer than 15% of 15-year-olds should be under-skilled in reading, mathematics and science
	• The rate of early leavers from education and training aged 18–24 should be below 10%
	• At least 40% of people aged 30–34 should have completed some form of higher education
	• At least 15% of adults should participate in learning
	• At least 20% of higher education graduates and 6% of 18–34-year-olds with an initial vocational qualification should have spent some time studying or training abroad
	• The share of employed graduates (aged 20–34 with at least upper secondary education attainment and having left education 1–3 years ago) should be at least 82%

Commission jointly agreed to strengthen the ET 2020 'toolbox' by introducing 'new generation' working groups launched in 2016 (Ibid.). These are Commission Expert Groups (CEG), with four temporary and two permanent groups (European Commission, 2018a). The new generation groups are tasked to work on 'concrete issues' identified in the 2015 Joint Report. Four 'sector-focused' groups on schools, VET, lifelong learning and higher education were established together with two 'issue-focused' groups on digital skills and on citizenship (European Commission, 2015a). CEGs are consultative bodies set up by the European Commission or its departments when external specialist advice is needed 'for sound policy-making'. They advise the Commission but their inputs are not binding. Nevertheless, these are important networks, which fit into the principles of the OMC with its stress on mutual-learning, exchange of good practice and socialisation process. Appointed members may include (1) member states, candidate countries, members of the European Free Trade Association and relevant EU bodies or agencies (e.g. CEDEFOP, the Education and Training Foundation, EURYDICE) representatives; (2) education and training associations and European social partners (e.g. the European Trade Union Confederation [ETUC], BusinessEurope); and (3) independent experts. Unless there are overriding priorities or emergency conditions, all appointed members are selected through public calls for applications, with the exception of public authorities, who are appointed at their national level. Participation is on a voluntary basis. For the new generation of the ET 2020 working groups, member state representatives can take the lead on specific outputs and peer-learning events (in practice co-chair).

Selected features of the working groups/networks under consideration are presented in Table 2.2.

2.3.2   Mutual- and Peer-Learning Arrangements

The groups meet approximately four times a year to work on the assigned 'concrete issues'. However, as per the mandate (European Commission, 2015a, p. 3), there are other ET 2020 tools used to 'complement'

Table 2.2 Coordinated working groups in the ET 2020 policy domain

Acronym	Full title	Active	Main 'concrete issues' to be addressed	Members[a] by type			
				Tot	C	D	E
WGVET[c]	ET 2020 Working Group on Vocational Education and Training (VET)[e]	Since 2014	1. Governance and partnerships arrangements 2. Quality, relevance and attractiveness 3. Supporting the implementation of VET reforms	57	7	39	11
WGDSC[d]	ET 2020 Working Group on Digital Skills and Competences	Since 2016	1. Addressing the development of digital competences at all levels of learning, including non-formal and informal, in response to the digital revolution 2. Fostering transparency, quality assurance, validation and hereby recognition of skills and qualifications, including those acquired through digital, online and open learning resources, as well as non-formal and informal learning 3. Increasing synergies between education, research and innovation activities, with a sustainable growth perspective, building on developments in higher education, with a new focus on VET and schools 4. Promoting the use of ICT with a view to increasing the quality and relevance of education at all levels; boosting availability and quality of open and digital educational resources and pedagogies at all education levels, in cooperation with European open source communities	81	10	57	14

(continued)

Table 2.2 (continued)

Acronym	Full title	Active	Main 'concrete issues' to be addressed	Members[a] by type		
				Tot	C	D	E
WGMHE[d]	ET 2020 Working Group on Modernisation of Higher Education[e]	Since 2016	1. Relevance: strengthening societal and labour market relevance at all levels of higher education 2. Innovation: within a broad concept of innovation, building partnerships through inter-disciplinary and inter-sectoral approaches enhancing regional development and the knowledge triangle through closer links between higher education, research and innovation, optimising opportunities offered through open and digital education 3. Inclusion: supporting the social engagement of higher education institutions, improving the transition from secondary to higher education, promoting intercultural and civic competences of students, promoting a diverse student body by tackling gender gaps, and integrating newly arrived migrants 4. Teaching: promoting quality teaching and pedagogical training and ensuring that teaching is seen as comparable to research in academic careers 5. Internationalisation: promoting internationalisation, recognition and mobility (including through joint programmes, cross-border higher education, internationalising curricula, etc.) to enhance quality and innovation potential 6. Sustainable investment and governance: focusing on effectiveness by examining performance-based funding and system governance and leadership – ensuring higher education systems are structured, governed and funded in a sustainable, future-oriented way	58	11[b]	33[b]	14[b]

WGPC[d]	ET 2020 Working Group on Promoting Citizenship and the Common Values of Freedom, Tolerance and Non-discrimination through Education	Since 2016	1. Promoting civic, intercultural and social competences, mutual understanding and respect and ownership of democratic values and fundamental rights at all levels of education and training 2. Tackling discrimination, racism, segregation, bullying (including cyber-bullying), violence and stereotypes	65	8	40[b]	17[b]
WGS[d]	ET 2020 Working Group on Schools	Since 2014	1. Focusing on the governance of school education systems to promote higher quality through sustainable innovation and inclusion	44	5	35	4
WGAL[c]	ET 2020 Working Group on Adult Learning	Since 2014	1. Promoting and widening the availability of workplace learning of adults (adult learning taking place at the workplace or in relation to it, or preparing for a return to work or a change of work, also called continuing vocational education and training) 2. Increasing the supply and take-up of high-quality adult learning provision to respond to demands for up- and reskilling of the workforce, including provision for raising basic competences such as literacy, numeracy and digital skills	55	7	35	13

C Organisations, D Local, regional or national member states' authorities, E Other public entity

[a] When an organisation is represented by two or more departments/units, this organisation was counted only once

[b] Data provided by the Working Group coordinator in June/July 2018

[c] Led by the European Commission's Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (EMPL)

[d] Led by European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture (EAC)

[e] Has a permanent status

national action and support member states: ad hoc peer-learning activities, thematic events, peer counselling, peer reviews or other policy learning exchanges (Council of the European Union, 2015). The review of all publicly reported activities undertaken by the groups shows that the in-depth country workshops have been the most utilised tool by the working groups. These workshops focus on policy development and practice in selected member states, with the aim of identifying key factors for policy success. Selected member states prepare case study reports, which are presented and discussed at the workshops. The Working Group on Schools has utilised this form of policy exchange in a proactive way with over seven workshops organised between 2014 and 2015. Another popular tool among the groups was peer-learning activities. Only in 2017, the Working Group on Higher Education organised three of these activities. Peer-learning involves national experts learning together, based on evidence and experience, and sharing both positive and negative policy experiences. A member state is made responsible for hosting peer-learning activities, and its role also includes developing a network of contacts within the country (in other ministries, agencies and relevant organisations) in order to gather information to feed into peer-learning and to disseminate the results of peer-learning within the country (WGAL, 2016).

In 2015, peer counselling was introduced as a voluntary tool that brings together "professional peers from a small number of national administrations to provide external advice to a country in the process of a significant policy development" (Council of the European Union, 2015, p. 1). These activities are "tailored to specific needs of a member state" (European Commission, 2015b, p. 6) who is hosting such event. The role of the Commission is to coordinate the preparation of the event, help with identifying relevant countries which would provide peer advice and together with the host country publish a final report. The Commission provides detailed guidelines and a step-by-step roadmap for implementing peer counselling (European Commission, 2015b), and although peer-learning activities have been a very popular tool within the ET 2020 groups, peer counselling has not yet been utilised (as per reporting by the ET 2020 groups).

2.3.3 Data Generation

Data generation is among the instruments identified by the literature as a significant governance tool which influences the way education policy is made (Hodgson, 2011; Lawn, 2013; Ozga, 2009, 2012; Ravinet, 2008). In ET 2020 the prominent data generation instrument is the Education and Training Monitor. It was introduced in the period of expanding targets and tightening procedural norms, where evidence and data from relevant European agencies and networks are recommended by the Council to strengthen education and training governance. The Monitor includes quantitative comparative analyses, and country-specific recommendations based on data from Eurostat and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), as well as studies done by the EURYDICE network. Its objective is to "fuel the debate on priority themes for education and training and inform national education reform debates" (European Commission, 2018b). Since 2013, these annually published monitors are accompanied by individual Country Reports, which identify where each country stands in relation to the ET 2020 benchmarks and other indicators, as well as the challenges and strengths of each education system. The Monitor and the accompanying Country Reports are easily accessible online and have become a part of the European education policy space (Decuypere, 2016), where the use and distribution of data has been popularised. Decuypere (2016) argues that the Monitor through its webpage, which contains the visualisation tools, co-constructs a policy space. But, the Monitor is also an instrument of permanent monitoring of the progression of each member state against the education and training benchmarks.

Data generation in education and training also relates to the immense work being done within the working groups. Literature reviews, case studies, Country Reports are generated to assist in peer-learning and policy exchange activities. Country Reports, for example, are generated for the purpose of in-depth country workshops. These reports provide the context and describe the policy development, implementation and practices in selected member states. They also include analytical material including a range of factors affecting policy, the successful and less successful experiences.

Data generated by the work of the working groups includes recommendations, guidelines, background papers, flash reports and policy conclusions. For example, the Working Group on VET developed 20 guiding principles for high-performance apprenticeships and work-based learning in the 2014–2015 period (WGVET, 2017). Policy conclusions were developed in another group activity on higher education institutions as centres of regional development and innovation in 2016 (WGMHE, 2016). The report generated at the end of the activity included the summary of policy challenges undermining the progress in higher education institutions. It also provided the responses to those challenges provided by governments and higher education institutions. Policy conclusions were developed for governments, higher education institutions and EU institutions with country-specific examples of policies in place.

2.3.4   Benchmarks

Benchmarks have been a cornerstone of European education and training policy since the Lisbon Council in 2000, as these measures are considered essential for the implementation of the OMC (European Commission, 2004). The objectives were set by the Education Ministers in 2001 and included increasing the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems; facilitating the access of all to the education and training systems; and opening up education and training systems to the wider world, needed specific standards against which to measure the progress. To provide recommendations on how to measure the achievement of the concrete objectives, in this foundational stage of policy formulation, the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks was set up. With the support of the OECD, Eurostat, EURYDICE, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) and the European Training Foundation (ETF), 29 indicators were selected in conjunction with the 13 objectives of the work programme. The Education Council adopted five levels of benchmarks, which the Commission recommended for comparing (benchmarking) at national, regional and school level as an effective practice (European Commission, 2003b).

The Commission report on indicators (European Commission, 2004) underlines an urgent need for collecting new data, and developing indicators, which were needed following the development of these benchmarks. The Commission emphasised that the indicators are to be used to measure progress and performance but also to stimulate the exchange of good experience and new ways of thinking about policy approaches. The Commission reported annually on the progress made towards the common objectives. Following the policy consolidation, and the new objectives set within ET 2020, the Council adopted a renewed set of benchmarks to be achieved by 2020 including at least 95% of children participating in early childhood education, and fewer than 15% of 15-year-olds should be under-skilled in reading, mathematics and science. Progress on these benchmarks is reported annually in the Education and Training Monitor.

2.4 Concluding Remarks

Although education has been a sovereign responsibility of national governments, the European institutions have increasingly extended their influence over social policies in individual member states. We identified four specific governance mechanisms utilised within the ET 2020 strategy and several policy instruments that have been used to coordinate the EU policy-making. The focus on mechanisms and instruments as separate conceptual units of analysis helped unpacking the ways the EU through ET 2020 coordinates and governs the education and training space. The insight into the process of governing through a study of policy instruments may reveal how the objectives are instrumentalised and with what effects. Although these coordinating tools address specific policy objectives, the research tells us that policy instruments are not neutral devices as they assist in naturalising the objectives behind the governance mechanisms (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007). The peer-learning activities, in-depth country workshops and other working group activities therefore not only address specific thematic objectives, they also produce specific effects, independently of the objectives pursued. They bring together a variety of actors representing different interests and different beliefs and

values and create a space for socialisation and exchange of these values. At the same time, they initiate the development of national administrative adjustments, which influence the growing interdependence and future coordination of EU policies. Coordinated working groups and mutual- or peer-learning policy instruments play significant coordinating functions within ET 2020 and are examples of what Peters (2015) calls a 'collaboration approach' to policy coordination. In this approach, the coordination is strengthened through the links between individuals and programmes, and networking, which is seen as resulting in enhanced creativity in policy solutions, development of new norms and new means for achieving policy goals.

Although the development and implementation of social policies at national levels have been "notoriously resistant to the influence of Europeanization" (Héritier, 2007, p. 10), in the case of ET 2020, the use of these policy instruments influences adaptation of policies in the member states as they penetrate the national structures, policies and practices leading to the permanent interdependence between the member states and the EU.

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