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accompanying the

**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

"An updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training"

Impact Assessment Summary

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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

SUMMARY OF THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT ON AN UPDATED STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

This impact assessment will accompany the Commission Communication on an updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training. The Education Council invited the Commission to come forward with such a proposal in key messages which were endorsed by the March 2008 European Council.

Education and training is a crucial factor in the Lisbon Strategy and its open method of coordination (the "Education and Training 2010" work programme) has delivered concrete results, increasing countries participation in and benefits from European cooperation and reducing barriers to citizens' mobility and lifelong learning. However, major challenges and weaknesses in national systems still persist as illustrated in the 2008 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the work programme¹ and the insufficient progress towards meeting the five benchmarks agreed under the current OMC. These results and the feedback received from consultations of Member States and European stakeholder organisations carried out in the context of this impact assessment show that there is a need to improve national implementation and thus the impact of the OMC on national systems by ensuring a stronger focus on immediate priorities, greater political commitment and visibility, better involvement of stakeholders, more effective mutual learning and stronger lifelong learning coordination across education and training sectors.

Concerning the overall future challenges to education and training systems, the policy challenges of the knowledge economy, demographic change and globalisation highlighted by the Lisbon strategy persist. In addition, issues such as migration and sustainability have become salient. There are serious risks of mismatches between skills supply and demand, with shortages of high-skilled workers and insufficient qualification levels of low-skilled people. There is thus an urgent need to upgrade the skills of the workforce and of those at the risk of exclusion. Economic evidence confirms the considerable benefits for the economy, society and the individual of investment in education and training, in terms of employability, knowledge and innovation, social inclusion and citizenship, including the reduction of crime and improvement of health.

The result of the broad consultation of countries, social partners and stakeholders on the results of the current OMC in education and training has been largely favourable. The overall challenges and objectives which the OMC addresses remain valid. Countries however also recommend adjustments to the working methods in order to increase their focus and effectiveness.

Based on the above challenges, three objectives are defined for an updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training: raising overall skills levels (long-term), supporting countries in their education and training reforms (medium-term) and, finally, addressing specific elements to improve the effectiveness and impact of the OMC,

¹ The 2008 Joint Progress Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme "Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation" (February 2008) (OJ C 86, 5.4. 2008, p. 1).

notably through better focus, political commitment and visibility, stakeholder involvement, peer learning and horizontal coordination across education and training sectors (short-term).

Four policy options are taken into consideration: continuing work under the Lisbon strategy without a specific OMC for education and training, continuing with the status quo (i.e. the Education and Training 2010 work programme in its current form), an updated strategic framework and a wider and deeper OMC. These options each demand a different type of commitment from countries and workload in terms of co-operation activities, but all respect the principle of subsidiarity and are proportional to the major challenges facing education and training within the broader context of the Lisbon Strategy and renewed Social Agenda.

The impact of the OMC on national policy making and policy convergence is challenging to assess for all four options. It is, in particular, difficult to show robust evidence of causal linkage between the OMC and national policy outcomes in terms of quantifiable results (e.g. in relation to raising skills levels as measured by progress in relation to the benchmarks). In qualitative terms, the experience to date and the consultation however confirm that the current OMC is clearly perceived by Member States and stakeholders as contributing to national policy development, but with areas requiring improvement. Strengthening its effectiveness through either an updated strategic framework or a wider and deeper OMC (options 3 or 4) would, therefore, most likely, increase its overall impact on the reform of national systems contributing to the Lisbon and renewed Social Agendas.

While the different options all have their advantages, only the development of an updated strategic framework (option 3) meets the demands for the OMC to have a greater impact on national reforms of education and training systems and to become a more effective instrument of co-operation and policy development. It allows to define policy objectives responding to the full range of challenges identified by Member States and stakeholders and also to respond to the requests for changes in relation to the working methods used in the OMC. Finally, this option is also feasible.

The mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the impact on national policy-making, policy convergence and policy outcomes of the OMC in education and training already exist in the form of biennial joint progress reports and annual reports on indicators and benchmarks. Their effectiveness would be strengthened by a stronger emphasis on thematic priorities in the Joint Reports, the inclusion of country assessments, improved feedback from Member States on the working of the OMC and a stronger involvement of stakeholders.