

## **Policy Recommendations on Strengthening the capacity of education employers in the European Semester**

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In the phase of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Union finds itself at one of its most decisive crossroads of its history. Actions taken to mitigate socio-economic impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic to build a more resilient and sustainable Europe will significantly define the future lives of millions of European citizens in a long-term perspective, among them learners of all age groups across all education levels. With the almost overnight closure of education and training institutions, the COVID 19 pandemic has put unprecedented challenges on education systems, which sooner or later will have a great impact on the economic sector.

Consequently, the question of who to best involve in this process of decision making becomes of tremendous importance.

As a recognized European Social Partner, the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) has contributed to finding an answer to this question with its first own led project “Strengthening the capacity of education employers in the European Semester project”. In the course of its activities such as case study visits, the one-year project led voice to education employers reporting of common already pre-existing educational challenges in their national settings, being fortified in the course of the pandemic. These included, for instance, the lack of digital skills, competences and infrastructure and the resulting lack of access to qualitative education for especially learners from disadvantaged backgrounds as well as high dropout rates due to closures of education and training institutions.

Given the hands-on practical knowledge and experience of education employers in the phase of recovery, the project aimed to provide answers and guidance to European education employers across all levels of how to get involved in the European Semester process, being closely linked to the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). Adequate investment in education beyond the COVID 19 pandemic is the key to an efficient and sustainable European recovery in a long-term perspective.

However, in order to be able to provide such adequate investment, an extensive and profound set of data is needed in order to direct investment where it is actually needed. Currently, a base of such data is still missing. However, the good news is that it is available to be picked up in the form of experience education employers have accumulated on challenges during the pandemic across all levels of education. These challenges encompass, for instance, the lack of digital skills and competences among teachers and students, the thereby bound limited access to qualitative education, especially for vulnerable groups, and high drop-out rates of learners in many European countries. Therewith bound

Therewith, the project and its thereout gained results in the form of recommendations will contribute to an European inclusive and resilient recovery, supporting the EU’s digital and green agenda, such as the European Skills Agenda. Further, the project and its recommendations strengthen the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. This applies in particular to pillar I and VIII.

Against this background and in light of the upcoming adaptations of the 2021 European Semester cycle in accordance to the RRF, as a European Social Partner in Education, the European Federation of Education Employers calls on EU institutions, the EU Member States, national, regional, and local decision-makers to:

1. To include education employers as early and as much as possible in the (new) European Semester cycle in order to guarantee a realistic mapping of the state of play of circumstances from the very start. Hereby, the involvement of education employers with regards to the Country Reports as well as the Country Specific Recommendations is of particular importance.
2. To continue raising awareness on the potential the European Semester bears for education employers and to widely distribute information on entry points existing on both national and European level for education employers.
3. To foster a close collaboration between EFEE, being the representation of European education employers in all levels of education, from pre-school to higher education and research, and EU institutions as well as other education stakeholders being closely involved in the European Semester represents a quintessence. Against this backdrop, we also deem it crucial to be consistently involved in the process the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) to being able to successfully contribute to the shaping of a more inclusive and sustainable future for Europe's education systems.