



ETUCE position paper

The European Commission's mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy

The Commission's mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy submitted to the Spring Council on 22-23 March 2005, presents the clear message that the progress made towards reaching the Lisbon goals five years on is simply not satisfactory.¹ The mid-term review sets out to refocus the Lisbon agenda and establish clear priorities of areas where urgent action is needed. The focus is on growth and jobs; the renewed agenda's aim is three-fold as it sets out to ensure that:

- Europe is a more attractive place to invest and work
- knowledge and innovation are the beating heart of European growth
- policies are shaped to allow businesses to create more and better jobs

Since the launching of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, education and training have been included as key elements in achieving the full potential of the knowledge-based society. ETUCE has welcomed the emphasis placed at EU level on the vital role of education in bringing about improvements in society at large. However, the unbalanced focus of the Commission's mid-term review, where economic growth takes center stage at the expense of social concerns, consequently risks conveying the message that education is merely a tool to enhance the competitiveness of the EU economy. Education plays an important role in this specific regard, but it is also an accomplishment serving broader personal and social functions, vital to social cohesion, equality, active citizenship, personal fulfilment amongst others. The Lisbon Strategy was from the outset centred on promoting social Europe, as well as on boosting the economy. To meet this twin objective, and to set the balance right, a broader perspective on the role of education and training in the Commission's mid-term review would have proved more adequate.

With regard to the five EU Benchmarks in the area of education and training specifically, the mid-term review reports on little progress made. The average percentage of early school leavers is still much too high (18% in 2003) compared to the goal of decreasing this to 10% by 2010, although significant progress has been made in some countries.² The average percentage of 22 year-olds having completed upper secondary-level education climbed slightly from 76.4% in 2000 to 76.7% in 2003, but is still well under the target of a completion rate of 85% set for 2010. In the area of lifelong learning, participation rates have increased from 7.9% in 2001 to 9.3% in 2003, but the Commission concludes that the aim of reaching a participation rate of 12.5% in 2010 will be difficult to achieve. The percentage of BNP spent on research and development reached only 1.99% in 2002, and is still far from the target of 3% by 2010. The Commission's expert group related to the benchmark on increasing by 15% the number of graduates in maths, science and technology by 2010 reports that this goal also remains a challenge.³

¹ Communication to the Spring European Council: "Working together for growth and jobs. A new start for the Lisbon Strategy". COM(2005)24. 2 February 2005.

² Commission Staff Working Document in support of the report from the Commission to the Spring European Council, 22-23 March 2005, on the Lisbon Strategy of economic, social and environmental renewal, p. 25. SEC(2005)160. 28.1.2005.

³ Progress Report from The Commission's Working Group on "Increasing Participation in Math, Sciences and Technology". December 2004. See page 3 and 17. Statistics on the benchmark concerning reading literacy of 15-year-olds, which is monitored by data from the OECD's PISA survey, most recently published in December 2004, has not been incorporated into the Commission's mid-term review.

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However, governments' public spending on education and training has only slightly increased during 2000-2002 and, according to the Commission's statistics, has in fact stalled since 2002.⁴ The Commission has repeatedly emphasised the need to increase investments in human resources if the Lisbon goals are to be met, and ETUCE also reminds governments that an ambition to improve the education and training systems must go hand in hand with a willingness to confer an adequate increase in funding. Moreover, ETUCE stresses that increasing the number of young persons completing upper secondary level education, improving reading literacy, and ensuring access to lifelong learning for a greater number of adults require a variety of policy approaches that incorporate the social and employment fields as well as the education area. Lifelong learning for teachers is crucial in this context, an area which still lacks resources in order to make entitlement to continuous professional development a reality for all teachers. Moreover, the area of lifelong learning in general is marred by inequality: those having the highest level of education are also those most likely to have access to lifelong learning. The Commission's focus on economic growth in its mid-term review will not in itself bring about the desired changes; equal importance must be given to strengthening social Europe.

In relation to this, ETUCE underlines that the Commission's policy agenda on expanding the internal market for services risks seriously jeopardising the possibility of promoting equal access to all levels of education and training if the expansion of the internal market leads to a larger part of services of general interest, including the area of lifelong learning, being subjected to the rules of the market instead of being governed by sound political regulation by national governments. There is a real danger that the present proposal for a Directive on services in the internal market⁵ will facilitate trade in educational services among EU Member States, and the area of lifelong learning is likely to be one of the first educational areas affected by this, due to the relatively large share of private providers of professional development courses for teachers and others. Competition and market rules are certainly not the means by which equal access to lifelong learning is ensured. ETUCE has thus welcomed the Commission's plans to clarify which services sectors are covered by the Directive in a revised proposal, and calls for a clear exemption of education services from the scope of the Directive.

One of the central remedies in the Commission's revival of the Lisbon Strategy is to strengthen the sense of ownership of the Lisbon objectives among Member States. Too little effort is presently put into the implementation of the Strategy. As a member of four of the Commission's Lisbon working groups since 2002, ETUCE has been actively involved in the follow-up of the educational objectives within the Lisbon Strategy and agrees that there is a need to strengthen and review the follow-up structure. ETUCE has for some time now been calling upon the Commission to establish a coordination group, with the inclusion of stakeholders, in charge of the overall coordination of the work in the Lisbon working groups within education and training. In addition, more should be done to solve the current problem of lack of consultation of social partners at national level in the work carried out as part of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). However, the mid-term review's proposed change of the follow-up structure does not adequately address this problem. The

⁴ Commission Staff Working Document in support of the report from the Commission to the Spring European Council, 22-23 March 2005, on the Lisbon Strategy of economic, social and environmental renewal, p. 25. SEC(2005)160. 28.1.2005.

⁵ COM(2004)2final/3. 13.1.2004.

Commission proposes to shift from the present multi-lateral discussions on individual policy themes as part of the OMC to bilateral discussions between the Commission and individual Member States, as each Member State is to submit a national action programme. There is a risk of lack of transparency and democratic influence if the Commission shifts from multilateral to bilateral discussions in the national follow-up structures. However much the Commission's mid-term review may encourage Member States to involve stakeholders at national level, it has to be taken into account that the consultation of stakeholders by governments is not always a reality. It is thus crucial to maintain the direct involvement of social partners at EU level, as well as to continuously work towards strengthening the social dialogue at national level.