

# The European Employment Strategy at 21: Performance, Perspectives, and Prospects post-COVID

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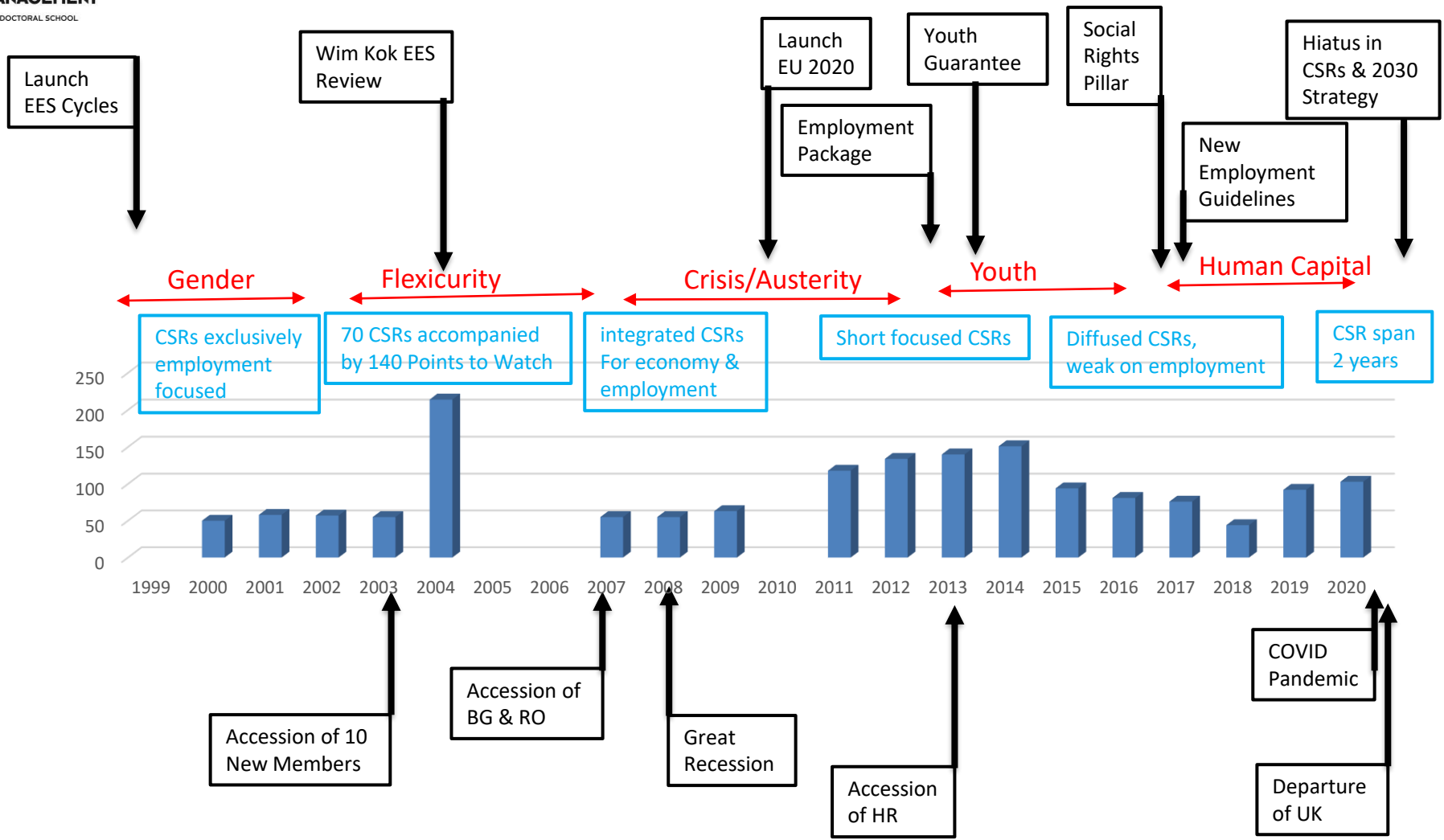
# European Employment Policy Overview

- Employment policy coordination (since 1997)
  - Influence on shaping member state policy thinking
    - ideas & sharing “best” practice
    - member state labour market reforms and policies
    - How? Open Method Coordination (OMC)
  - Supply-side approach shaping all policy prescriptions
    - Employment guidelines (GLs),
    - Member State Reporting,
    - Monitoring by Council & Commission,
    - Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs)
  - Initial goal: increasing the employment rate in order to address demographic challenges. More and better jobs
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# Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs)

- Key disciplinary mechanism of the CSRs
    - proposed by Commission (and agreed by Council)
    - inconsistent treatment of member states
    - but avoidance of direct criticism and ‘naming and shaming’
  - Over 1000 CSRs between 2000 and 2020
  - Changing structure & style over time, yet a means to chart shifting ideas and focus
  - Idealised versions of the employment relationship and good labour market performance
  - No systematic analysis of the CSRs in the literature
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## Data & Methods - CSRs

- 1067 CSRs over 21 years
  - Focus on employment and social CSRs
  - Challenges
    - shifting models and formats of CSRs
    - mixture of concepts (problems, policy tools, groups)
    - Reformulations of the number of employment Guidelines (GLs) and no CSRs in years of significant changes
  - Coding policy themes
    - Labour market participation, Job creation, ALMP, Education and skills, Flexibility, Segmentation, Wage setting mechanism, Gender equality, Poverty and social exclusion, and Miscellanea (i.e. regional disparities, social partners, etc.).
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## Shifting styles of the CSRs

- Employment GLs
    - merged with BEPGs
    - span policy themes from all the integrated guidelines).
    - complemented with Points-to-Watch (2004, 2007 and 2008)
  - Smaller number of recommendations on employment policy
    - Dropped for “programme countries”
    - Sometimes none in later 2000s
  - Style changes over time
    - Shift in focus and fads (e.g. Flexicurity, universal incomes, pensions, etc.)
    - From focused to discursive. From dedicated to blurred
    - From present to absent (no employment CSRs in some countries)
    - Shorter (avg words: >500 in 2014 => 185 in 2020)
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# Employment in the CSRs



Falling gender dimension to CSRs  
(poverty enters in 2010 and then falls away quickly)

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## CSRs 2020

- Holding position for COVID and end of Europe2020
  - Loss of focus on employment & social dimension
  - “cut and paste” across countries
    - “all necessary measures to effectively address the pandemic, sustain the economy and support the ensuing recovery”
    - “improve the resilience of the health system by strengthening public health and primary care”
    - “focus investment on the green and digital transition, in particular on innovation, sustainable transport, clean and efficient production and use of energy”
  - Poverty entirely absent
  - Gender equality entirely absent
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## CSRs 2020: Covid-19 crisis vs fiscal policies

All Member States are recommended to:

- address the pandemic, sustain the economy
- support the ensuing recovery
- debt sustainability

“In line with the general escape clause, take all necessary measures to effectively address the pandemic, sustain the economy and support the ensuing recovery. When economic conditions allow, pursue fiscal policies aimed at achieving prudent medium-term fiscal positions and ensuring debt sustainability, while enhancing investment.”

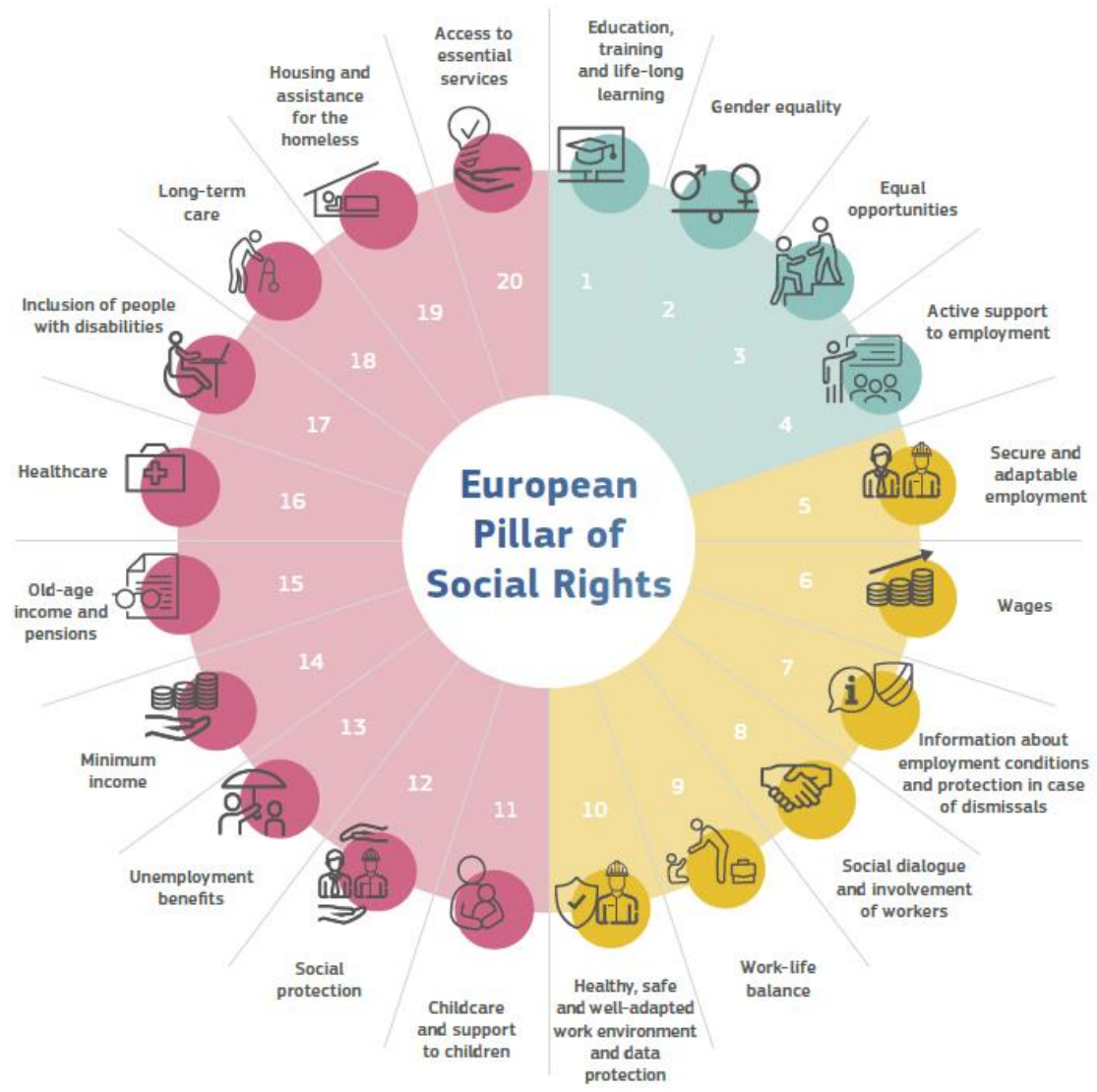
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## Next Generation EU (NGEU)

- Drawing upon the principles of 2017 Pillar of Social Rights
    - 1. equal opportunities and access to the labour market,
    - 2. fair working conditions,
    - 3. social protection and inclusion
  - New Targets...
    - At least 78% of people in employment (20-64) .
    - At least 60% of all adults should participate in training annually.
    - Reduce by at least 15 million people at risk of poverty or social exclusion
  - Innovation
    - Commission has more power & resources in effect of the CSRs on the content of National Reform & Resilience Plan
    - Scope of policy influence
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# Europe 2030



## Concluding Remarks

- Analysis of over 1000 Country Specific Recommendations (CSR) underlines shifting focus of employment and social policies
  - change in style and formulation
  - message and guidance for member states has shifted in focus
  - a decline in coherence and clarity
  - women as a key labour supply group replaced by older workers and then youth (sometimes migrants)
- Shifting priorities
  - Policies
  - Focus (“trends”)
- “Add Ons” to supplement the overall “strategy”

## Concluding Remarks

- Dilution of focus and goals. Loss of “strategy”
- Limits of impact
  - supply side focus
  - influence rather than obligation over member states
  - lost way (events, leadership)
- Inevitable shock of 2020 ... but already weakened
- 2030 Strategy
  - Déjà vu or new ambitions?
  - New gendered risks of green and digital