**Follow up to the European Parliament non-legislative resolution** **on the future of European education in the context of COVID-19**

1. **Resolution tabled pursuant to Rule 136(5) of the European Parliament's Rules of Procedure**
2. **Reference numbers:** 2020/2760 (RSP) / B9-0338/2020 / P9\_TA-PROV(2020)0282
3. **Date of adoption of the resolution:** 22 October 2020
4. **Competent Parliamentary Committee:** Committee on Culture and Education (CULT)
5. **Brief analysis/assessment of the resolution and requests made in it:**

The resolution addresses the COVID-19 pandemic and the future of education in Europe, referring to the importance of distance and online learning during the crisis as a way to ensure continuity of the teaching and learning process. It points out gaps in digital education and digital divides, related to infrastructure, digital equipment, online teaching, digital skills and competences. In view of that, it calls for reinforced investments in addressing the digital divide. The resolution also underlines that the pandemic is an opportunity to rethink education and to modernise it, in line with the approach taken in the new Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027.

The Commission welcomes the resolution and confirms its strong commitment to support education and training systems, to address the implications of the COVID-19 crisis and to help implement effective and high-quality digital education, while acknowledging that digital education does not represent by itself the total future of education, which lies instead into an optimal blending of physical and distance learning.

1. **Response to the requests in the resolution and overview of the action taken, or intended to be taken, by the Commission:**

In relation to the call on the Commission to provide a platform for Member States to share good practices and explore possibilities for new initiatives, such as the creation of a European Online University (**paragraph 1**), the Commission fully recognises the importance of ensuring better coordination at EU level. The COVID-19 crisis has indeed brought to the fore a number of good practices that deserve being promoted and scaled up. To this effect, the Commission launched an online platform (Distance Learning Network) for secondary and tertiary education, where representatives from Member States could share their experience and exchange their views on all topics related to online and distance learning during the pandemic and beyond. Member States participated very actively in this platform. Furthermore, the Commission created a webpage collecting all available EU-level online learning materials[[1]](#footnote-1). Finally, within the context of the Digital Education Action Plan[[2]](#footnote-2), the Commission will launch a European Digital Education Hub, which will increase exchanges of good practices and cooperation at regional, national and EU level. The Hub will have a key role in linking policy, practice and research and monitor digital education across the EU. Regarding the creation of a European Online University, in line with the competences of the EU in the field of education and training, this is a prerogative of the Member States and the Commission has no competence to act.

Regarding the call on the Commission to support activities, which invest in the upskilling and the professional development of teachers and trainers across Europe (**paragraph 4**), developing teachers’ digital skills is a guiding principle and a horizontal priority of the Digital Education Action Plan. Teachers and educators should have the opportunity to develop their digital skills and learn about innovative pedagogies throughout their careers. In particular, teachers will benefit from the launch of the SELFIE tool for teachers[[3]](#footnote-3), which will allow them to self-assess their level of digital competence. The Digital Opportunity Traineeships[[4]](#footnote-4) scheme will also contribute to these aims. They are open to teachers, trainers and educators and allow them to develop advanced digital skills. Furthermore, the Commission underlines the importance of improving the ability to deal with overload of information, having critical engagement with information and content online and ensuring safe and secure online environments. In this regard and as part of the Digital Education Action Plan, the Commission will put forward common guidelines for teachers and educational staff to foster digital literacy and tackle disinformation through education and training. The guidelines will be based on the input of a multi-stakeholder group - education and training stakeholders, but also parents, media, technology companies and others - reflecting the complexity of the domain.

Additionally, the Commission will launch initiatives to better support the motivation, the competence development and career paths of teachers, trainers and school education leaders, and to support the attractiveness of the education profession. The Commission plans to launch Erasmus Teacher Academies within the new Erasmus+ Programme to create networks of teacher education institutions and teacher associations. In tune with this, the Commission will work together with the Member States and stakeholders to establish a policy framework, which aims at increasing the number and quality of learning mobility of teachers. Moreover, the Commission will develop a European guidance for the development of national career frameworks during 2021-2022 and will establish a European Innovative Teaching Award to recognise the work of teachers (and their schools) who make an exceptional contribution to the profession. The Commission will also encourage the Member States to include support to the development of digital skills of teachers and trainers as part of their Recovery and Resilience Plans, contributing to the flagship area ‘Upskill and Reskill’ of the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

As for the impact of distance and online learning and teaching on different educational sectors, learners’ participation in distance education and teachers’ digital skills (**paragraphs 5 and 6**) and drawing lessons from the crisis, the Commission plans to propose a Council Recommendation on online and distance learning for primary and secondary education by the end of 2021. This would be based on consultations and data gathering and help develop a shared understanding at EU level of the approaches needed for distance, online and blended learning, approaches that are effective, inclusive and engaging.

Concerning the call on the Commission and the Member States to work together in order to minimise the health risks for staff and learners and to maximise the chances that in-person education can continue (**paragraph 9**), the collaboration with Member States on this matter has started in spring, through the online platform (Distance Learning Network). The platform allowed representatives of ministries to exchange information and share practices on the organisation of in-school teaching after the lockdown, while keeping staff and learners safe. Members continue these exchanges in the existing working groups under the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)[[5]](#footnote-5). One outcome of this work was a brochure published by the Commission services on [‘Blended learning in school education – guidelines for the start of the academic year 2020/21’](https://www.arlindovsky.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Blended-learning-in-school-education_European-Commission_June-2020.pdf)[[6]](#footnote-6).

In relation to the call on the Commission to propose a bold policy framework for future European education policy, transforming the European Education Area into a concrete work programme with a set of measurable objectives, including making the automatic mutual recognition of qualifications, diplomas and learning periods abroad a reality (**paragraph 18**), the Commission recalls its latest Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025[[7]](#footnote-7). The Commission agrees that it is important to have measurable objectives and will therefore set out the means and milestones to achieve the European Education Area by 2025. This will be supported by the Europe’s Recovery Plan and the future Erasmus+ Programme. The Commission will establish an enabling framework for cooperation with Member States and education stakeholders, including a reporting and analysis structure as well as EU targets to track and encourage reforms. In order to achieve the European Education Area by 2025, the Commission remains committed to establish a framework that enables cooperation with Member States and engagement with stakeholders and to work towards a fully-fledged governance framework for the EEA with Member States. To this end, and to ensure timely delivery of the initiatives, the Commission has proposed to work with the Member States to set up a Steering Board of the European Education Area by June 2021.

The Commission would also like to recall the “Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications of learning periods abroad”[[8]](#footnote-8). The Commission provides support to the Member States in putting in place the conditions and necessary steps that will make automatic mutual recognition possible by 2025. In this context, the Commission works closely with the network of National Academic Recognition Centres (NARIC)[[9]](#footnote-9) and supports their work with capacity building, training and sharing of best practices. The 2019 call for proposal targeted activities to further boost the implementation of automatic recognition. To map the implementation of the Council Recommendation, the Commission is preparing a study on the relevant implementation policies and practices in the Member States. The study will start in early 2021.

Regarding the call on the Commission to take a bold approach to the upgraded Digital Education Action Plan (**paragraph 18**), the Commission agrees with it. The new Digital Education Action Plan outlines a comprehensive and ambitious vision for education and training in the digital age, based on the values of high quality and inclusion. It is based on extensive stakeholder consultations and an open public consultation, which received more than 2700 responses. It supports Member States and education and training institutions to draw the lessons from the COVID-19 crisis. The Action Plan has two strategic priorities, which reflect a holistic approach to digital education: fostering a high-performing digital education ecosystem and enhancing digital skills and competences for the digital age. Its seven-year duration allows better synergies with EU funding programmes and offers a coordinated approach in reaching its objectives. The active involvement of the European Parliament will be important to achieve the ambitious goals of the Action Plan.

As for the call on the Commission to actively involve Parliament at all stages of policymaking (**paragraph 18**), the Commission is fully committed to do so. It believes in a multi-stakeholder co-creation approach to education policy involving all European institutions, Member States, the education and training community and other relevant stakeholders.

Concerning the call on the Commission to focus greater efforts on early childhood education, school education, adult education, and vocational education and training, through a lifelong learning approach (**paragraph 20**), the European Skills Agenda[[10]](#footnote-10) and the European Education Area Communication have put forward a series of concrete actions to support the acquisition of skills by all within a lifelong leaning perspective. For example, the Pathways to School Success initiative will help all pupils reach a baseline level of proficiency in basic skills[[11]](#footnote-11). The initiative will have a special focus on groups that are more at risk of underachievement and early school leaving. The Commission will work with the Member States to co-develop policy guidance on decoupling educational attainments from socio-economic background, reducing low achievement and increasing secondary education attainment. As social and educational inequalities are often rooted in early childhood, participation in early childhood education and care is an important determinant in this respect. The Commission will support Member States in the implementation of the European quality framework for high-quality early childhood education and care systems. To better prepare children to succeed in educational contexts throughout life, in 2021, the Commission will make available a tool-kit, drawing on best practices and the input of experts and stakeholders. This work will be further supported by the new Child guarantee initiative[[12]](#footnote-12).

In addition, to help lift quality of education (**paragraph 38**), the Commission will support Member States in the identification of effective policy reforms that support better achievement in basic skills. This will specifically concern curriculum and assessment, as well as the capacity of institutions and staff to be innovative and develop their learning approaches and environments.

Furthermore, the “Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience” strengthens the European VET systems. It equips young people and adults with the knowledge, skills and competences to thrive in the evolving labour market and society, fostering inclusiveness and equal opportunities and providing strong foundations for resilience, lifelong learning, lifelong employability, social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development. The Osnabrück Declaration 2020 on vocational education and training as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies complements and operationalises the vision and strategic objectives of the VET Recommendation. The Commission is also working on a “Skills for Life” initiative, as announced in the European Skills Agenda, to support the development of quality and inclusive adult learning systems.

In relation to the concerns expressed by the Parliament about the Erasmus+ programme budget (**paragraph 22**), the Commission welcomes the political agreement reached between the co-legislators. The new, innovative and reinforced programme will be able to provide a rapid response to the current challenges. A more inclusive, more digitally ready and greener Erasmus+ programme will contribute to better quality of life, and support Europe’s recovery and future growth. With an increased budget, the programme will be more inclusive and accessible and help pave the way towards the green and digital transitions.

Regarding the call on the Commission to prioritise targeted investments in digital infrastructure and equipment for educational establishments and learners in order to enable distance and online learning, especially in remote and rural areas (**paragraph 23**), the Commission agrees that digital divides must be closed and that reinforcedinvestments in digital infrastructure and equipment are needed. In view of that, the Digital Education Action Plan outlines a dedicated action to support connectivity and digital equipment in education and training institutions. As part of this action, the Commission will support Gigabit connectivity of schools under the Connecting Europe Facility[[13]](#footnote-13). Additionally, the Commission, together with Member States, will continue supporting the use of different funding opportunities, such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)[[14]](#footnote-14), the European Social Fund (ESF)[[15]](#footnote-15) and the future European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). They can help bridge the digital divides related to accessible infrastructure, equipment and digital skills, especially for disadvantaged groups, including learners with disabilities and located in remote or rural areas.

Concerning the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the Commission has proposed in the 2021 Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy[[16]](#footnote-16) that 20% of expenditure should be related to digital. The Commission encourages Member States to include broadband and digital equipment for education and training institutions and learners in their Recovery and Resilience Plans, contributing to the flagship areas ‘Connect’ and ‘Upskill and Reskill’, with particular consideration for disadvantaged groups and remote and rural areas.

1. <https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/coronavirus-online-learning-resources> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan_en> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://ec.europa.eu/education/schools-go-digital/about-selfie_en> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/digital-opportunity-traineeships-boosting-digital-skills-job> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/et2020-framework_en> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [https://www.arlindovsky.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Blended-learning-in-school-education\_
 European-Commission\_June-2020.pdf](https://www.arlindovsky.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Blended-learning-in-school-education_%09European-Commission_June-2020.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/document-library/eea-communication-sept2020_en> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/proposal-for-a-council-recommendation-on-the-automatic-mutual-recognition-of-diplomas-and-learning-periods-abroad_en> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/national-academic-recognition-information-centres_en> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Baseline level of proficiency refers to Level 2 in the OECD’s PISA survey, which defines proficiency bands on a 6-point scale. Level 2 proficiency in reading corresponds to a level at which ‘readers begin to demonstrate the competencies that will enable them to participate effectively and productively in life as continuing students, workers and citizens’. Underachievers in PISA are those pupils who fail to reach Level 2, which is the minimum proficiency level necessary to participate successfully in society. The relation between the concepts of baseline level and underachievement informs the EU targets on underachievement in basic skills and on underachievement in digital competence. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1428&langId=en> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/connecting-europe-facility-telecom> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. <https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/erdf/> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=325&langId=en> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?qid=1600708827568&uri=CELEX:52020DC0575> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)