

The Education Package

Striving for a more inclusive European education system

Introduction

The Commission has adopted on the 30th May a package on education including 1) a proposal for Council Recommendation on tracking graduates; 2) a Communication on a renewed EU agenda for higher education; and 3) a Communication on School development and excellent teaching for a great start in life. This initiative is developed within the broader implementation of the EU Communication on a New Skills Agenda for Europe, which has put education and training at the centre of political debate in the European Union.

The EU has only limited competences to work in the field of education and culture and has thus for a long time limited itself to a passive role when it comes to education through the funding of projects, such as through the Erasmus+ programme, and focusing on developing skills for the labour market. EASPD welcomes the shift of approach of the Commission to look at education as a tool for social inclusion and a vital part in the development of European societies, with Vice-President Katainen stating, *“High quality education accessible to all is essential for the future of Europe, and the backbone of open and thriving societies”*.

Regardless of its competence, the EU has an important role to play in coordinating efforts in Member States, supporting reforms and promoting good practices. This Education Package is a welcomed step in that direction, as is the adoption of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The Commission will hopefully continue in this direction and use the tools at its disposal – open coordination, structural funds and the European Semester for example – to support efforts of national, regional and local authorities to develop more inclusive, modern education systems that can welcome our wide diversity of learners and foster the active participation of young people in society.

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on tracking graduates

The Recommendation on tracking graduates will provide more and better data on what happens to young people after their studies. The aim is to give decision makers the information necessary to understand the high unemployment rate of young people and identify successful education paths and employment programmes.

For this objective to be possible, it is however paramount that the policy makers receive data that reflect the reality and complexity both of the labour market and of the graduates. Effective education, training and employment strategies can only be formulated if the target groups are correctly identified.

EASPD is thus worried that Art. 2 (a) of the proposal on quantitative data to be collected will not provide data sufficiently disaggregated to develop a comprehensive understanding of the situation. Socio-biographical and socio-economic background doesn't represent the full picture, and some people are faced with a structural disadvantage that hamper their education and professional development. On the other hand, key sector such as the social sector should be identified in order to assess the impact of employment strategies on different sectors. As one of the sectors with the largest job creation potential, the health and social services sector must be promoted and valorised to encourage young people to opt in this career path.



Recommendation

- Include as Art. 2 (a) (i) bis
Identification of more disadvantaged groups including but not limited to women; people with disabilities; roma; and third country nationals.
- Include as Art. 2 (a) (xi) bis
Sector of activity

Communication on a renewed EU agenda for higher education

This renewed agenda has for objective to support the development, promotion and collaboration of higher education institutions, with a focus on, among others, matching better the skills developed to the needs needed in Europe and mending the social divisions in higher education. It does so through the development of 20 priorities for action, such as

- 3. Encourage the integration of work placements, recognised through ECTS points, into higher education programmes
- 6. Direct Erasmus+ support to help HEIs in developing and implementing integrated institutional strategies for inclusion, gender equality and study success from admission to graduation, including through cooperation with schools and VET providers
- 7. Promote development and testing of flexible and modular course design to support access to higher learning through specific priorities for Erasmus+ strategic partnerships

EASPD welcomes this initiative, in particular the highlighted priorities, and the objective of developing ‘civic universities’, and is happy to see it fits its recommendations during the consultation process.

Flexible curricula allow education providers to deliver flexible certifications adapted to the skills acquired. By not focusing on the needs and challenges but rather on the abilities of the individual, this methodology facilitates the promotion of the skills and competences of each individual and the transition to the labour market.

We would however recommend that specific support services be included in the design to support access to higher learning, to ensure the unique expertise and knowledge they have developed facilitates the inclusion of disadvantaged young people such as persons with disabilities. Furthermore, teachers, staff and HEI themselves need quality support from such specialised services to manage the development of more inclusive learning environments.

Communication on School development and excellent teaching for a great start in life

This Communication proposes a range of reforms of the education systems to improve the quality of education and address the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education. In line with [EASPD's Declaration on more inclusive learning environments in Europe](#), the Commission identifies three key areas where action is needed: developing more inclusive schools, training staff, and developing a more supportive governance framework. Some of the key and most welcomed features of the Communication include

- Recognition that ‘there is no one-size-fit-all solution’ when it comes to education, and it is crucial to develop strategies and methodologies to teach in diverse classrooms, with a specific mention of the needs of persons with disabilities. ‘Schools need to support all learners and respond to their specific needs’.



- In the same logic, schools and teachers need more flexibility in their practice and organisation to adapt to the specific needs of their pupils and the local context. Flexible curricula, teaching and assessment methods lead to a greater engagement of learners and better learning outcomes.
- Digital technologies can be important tools to support learning and the participation of children and their families
- A ‘whole school approach’ is promoted according to which schools should work in close collaboration with their community, such as local services, businesses and universities, to improve the quality of education and the inclusion of participation of children in society.
- The importance of available, accessible and affordable services of early childhood education and care is highlighted to support inclusion and participation from the youngest age. ‘Investing in early childhood education and care reduces the need for higher levels of spending at later stages of education’.
- The education provided can only be as good as the staff that is delivering it, and staff and teacher education and training should be reinforced. ‘Student teachers need to be prepared [...] for dealing with diversity in the classrooms’.

EASPD fully supports this Commission initiative and the ambitious innovations it underpins. The main issue with this Communication is its inherent limitations due to the EU’s limited competence in the field. The document feels more like suggestions to Member States who are fully independent to choose what they would like to do.

Recommendation

As the Communication itself states, ‘Reforming their school education systems is a task for Members States. The Commission stands ready to support them’. In this light, EASPD

- urges national, regional and local authorities to implement the recommendations of this Communication;
- and invites the European institutions to give more political weight to this document, such as through a Council Recommendation.

Conclusions

EASPD is very happy to see the Commission continues its important work on promoting more inclusive education systems in Europe. Our modern societies are increasingly complex and diverse, and high quality, inclusive education is key to face future challenges in Europe.

Gathering accurate and relevant data, developing adapted education and employment strategies and reforming the education systems to become more flexible, inclusive and preparing young people to become active European citizens requires a coordinated involvement of all stakeholders. Support from the European Union is important, but the Member States remain the most important actors in this field, and should take the importance of investing in education at heart. Social partners, businesses, universities and civil society must also be involved, contribute and support actively this process. EASPD and its members stand ready to support the work of both European institutions and Member States to implement the recommendations of these three documents, and will be happy to discuss future collaboration with all stakeholders.



Who we are

EASPD is the European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities. We are a European not-for-profit organisation and represent over 15,000 social service provider organisations across Europe and disability. The main objective of EASPD is to promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities through effective and high-quality service systems.

EASPD is registered at the Transparency Register under the following number: 120906010805-50

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