Executive Summary

Research for CULT Committee – Towards a European Education – Critical Perspectives on Challenges Ahead

Key Findings

- Based on the corpus of key competencies that are at the core of educational policies in Europe, including knowledge, values, attitudes and skills, the report is in line with, in its current development and potentialities, the declared aspiration of Europe to promote inclusive and open societies, through education and lifelong training.

- Two interlinked challenges for the development of the Union – the green and digital transformations – need sustained reflection and action, at all levels, on how Europe can respond properly to the risks and challenges ahead. This requires renewed efforts for education and training and calls for greater attention to social and territorial disparities in the area of accessibility regarding education, mobility and employment. These disparities indeed cover de facto inequalities which fuel an inexhaustible sense of social discontent.

- To promote the ambition of enlightened critical thinking and an eco-citizenship concerned with sustainable development, there is a need to prepare and empower a new education workforce, at all levels of the system, and in particular at the school and classroom levels, in which teachers and leaders are to be equipped and supported in these major transitions.

- Physical mobility provides a wealth of benefits, including the development of personal and professional skills and competencies: increased adaptability to changing environments, development of a sense of European citizenship, employability and labour market opportunities. Complementary, virtual and hybrid mobility can serve as an effective option to address challenges related to cultural awareness, intercultural collaboration, and transversal or soft skills.

- Incorporating a combination of physical, hybrid and virtual forms of mobility into the curriculum will enable students to gain greater opportunities to develop a sense of European belonging, acquire intercultural and linguistic skills, integrate an international learning experience into their portfolio and have more opportunities to develop intercultural competencies, an open mindset and critical thinking.
Strengthening the EEA: Continuity, transitions and renewal

In its contribution entitled *Strengthening the European identity through education and culture* (European Commission, 2017a), the European Commission outlines the contours of a European Education Area (EEA) in which the role played by education is recognised as decisive, from early childhood to adulthood, for establishing a solid foundation for lifelong learning.

The European Union promotes ‘active, interactive, relevant, critical, collaborative and participatory learning’ (Eurydice 2017b). Acting democratically and exercising critical thinking are at the heart of education in Europe; to promote dialogue and deliberation through the development of an open learning climate (Geboers et al. 2013) stands among the founding principles of European democratic citizenship.

For decades, the European Union has been promoting an educational policy based on social, civic and critical skills (Keating 2014; Rifkin 2004). This explicitly aims to promote education for democratic citizenship and human rights. An ambitious competency model for a culture of democracy has been devised by the Council of Europe (2016). The model comprises:

- **Knowledge** – critical understanding of oneself, language and communication and the world, in various domains such as law, politics, religion, history, media, economy, environment and sustainable development;
- **Values** – human dignity and human rights, cultural diversity, democracy, justice, equity, equality and the rule of law;
- **Attitudes** – openness to cultural otherness and convictions, different worldviews and practices, respect, civic spirit, responsibility, feeling of personal efficacy and tolerance of ambiguity;
- **Skills** – independent learning, capacity for critical analysis and reflection, listening and observation, empathy, flexibility and adaptability, linguistic, communicative and multilingual skills, cooperation and conflict resolution.

On the basis of this corpus of key competencies that are at the core of educational policies in Europe, the objectives of the report are to comprehend, in its current development and potentialities, the declared aspiration of Europe to promote democratic, inclusive and open societies, through education and lifelong training. It aims to make a preliminary diagnosis of the resources and constraints, in order to confirm realistic and yet ambitious objectives, and to recommend working methods relating to the deepening of current dynamics and desirable developments for the promotion of a European education model.

The report will focus on issues related to the promotion of European citizenship through education, with particular emphasis on five interlinked and decisive topics, orienting subsequent policy options and recommendations, which will define the following parts of the report:

**I. Intensifying the promotion of equity in physical mobility** within the European area

**II. Promoting a well-balanced virtual mobility**, in particular through the development of European hybrid campuses and European school programmes

**III. Educating for entrepreneurship and employability**

**IV. Educating for an enlightened and responsible citizenship**
V. Educating and empowering educators and leaders for facing the challenges ahead.

The European Union is now fully engaged in green and digital transformation, which are two inseparable challenges for the development of the Union. These challenges require more sustainable solutions that are to be circular, climate-neutral and efficient in the use of environmental resources. These challenges call for sustained reflection and action, at all levels, on how Europe can respond properly to these risks and challenges ahead. This requires renewed efforts for education and training.

These challenges also call for greater attention to social and territorial disparities in the area of accessibility regarding education, mobility and work. These disparities indeed cover de facto inequalities which fuel an inexhaustible sense of social discontent (Brack and Startin 2015, Wessels 2007). This undermines our European societies and, in the long run, exposes them to an implosion of the European structure. Education policies have a central role to play in meeting these challenges, which are linked to those of promoting enlightened and critical thinking and an eco-citizenship concerned with sustainable development. To promote this ambition, it is essential to prepare and empower a new education workforce, at all levels of the system, in particular at the school and classroom level, where teachers and leaders are to be educated and supported in these major transitions.

In this context, physical mobility still provides a wide range of benefits, including the development of personal and professional skills and competencies, including increased adaptability to new and changing environments, development of a sense of European citizenship, and increasing employability and labour market opportunities. However, it is also virtual and hybrid mobility that will be reinforced, as well as cooperation between educational institutions at the higher education level, in particular where the resources and tools can be mobilised for these changes. Other aspects include digital formats of education and learning, which reduce travelling and thereby save on travel costs, emissions and time. These efforts can serve as an effective option to address current challenges related to cultural awareness, intercultural collaboration, and transversal or soft skills. Of course, digital education formats cannot provide the same kind of learning experience when compared to actual mobility, including physical immersion in another culture. Yet, in addition to physical mobility, various forms of education and learning may offer students the opportunity to gain international competencies and skills.

Incorporating a combination of physical, hybrid and virtual forms of mobility into a curriculum allows students to gain greater opportunities to develop a sense of European belonging and intercultural and linguistic skills, to integrate an international learning experience into their portfolio, and to have more opportunities to develop competencies such as critical thinking, openness, online collaboration, media and digital skills, online teamwork and networking.
Further information

This executive summary is available in the following languages: English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. The study, which is available in English, and the summaries can be downloaded at: https://bit.ly/2HTo87F

More information on Policy Department research for CULT: https://research4committees.blog/cult/