

Newsletter

Committee meetings
24 and 25 February 2021

Exchange of views on the state of play of the European Social Fund Plus Programme

The CULT Committee heard from the EMPL Rapporteur, Mr David Casa, on the state of play of the ESF+ Programme, who noted the success of the EP negotiation team in securing a high level of funding. He underlined that this money would be available to support all levels of education and that Member States would also be expected to engage in the co-financing of initiatives conducted through ESF+ funding. The interconnection between the EMPL and CULT remits was underlined by both the EMPL Rapporteur and CULT Members, who highlighted the potential of education, culture and sports to help break cycles of poverty and increase opportunities for citizens.

The high-quality cooperation between CULT and EMPL was also acknowledged. CULT Members expressed satisfaction that many of the requests they had made were included in the final text, including a definition of lifelong learning in line with the one seen in Erasmus+, the inclusion of VET and higher education, and a greater recognition of non-formal learning. The potential of the ESF+ to promote European solidarity was also noted, as was the need to ensure synergies between other programmes, including Erasmus+. Some groups advanced the idea that a specific percentage of the fund should be spent on ensuring child access to education and addressing child poverty.



Throughout the exchange of views over the ESF+, CULT Members emphasised the need to ensure that the fund is used to tackle poverty and exclusion, promoting digital literacy, protecting the most vulnerable in society and offering lifelong learning opportunities – utilising the areas of culture and education to do this, jointly working with Member States. It was noted that the importance of these issues had become even more visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Commission emphasised their aim to utilise the ESF+ to help close the digital divide, increase access to education and training for all – including lifelong learning – and to tackle social exclusion. The Commission also noted the need to position the ESF+ as a tool that helps all disadvantaged groups.

Exchange of views on the state of play of the Rights and Values Programme

In this exchange of views, and starting with a short presentation from the CULT Rapporteur for opinion, Mr Łukasz Kohut, CULT Members discussed the agreement reached by the co-legislators and reiterated that the Rights and Values Programme represents a highly important initiative.

They noted, however, their continuing disappointment that the EP's desired level of funding for the Programme has not been attained. The level of funding secured, almost 1.6 bn€, was nevertheless acknowledged as a great success. Emphasis was placed again on the need to ensure a bottom-up approach with regard to the implementation and operation of the programme. The desire for a greater clarification over the specifics of the budget for different aspects of the programme and the exact timeline for the implementation were also raised. While some Members expressed doubt over the programme's objective, there was large agreement that this programme was apt to increase citizen engagement and reach out to the European public.



Further emphasis was placed on developing proactive policies that draw from the lessons learnt through recent non-EU initiatives, such as the #MeToo movement, utilising the Rights and Values Programme to work towards a society with greater equality and less violence. The Commission expressed its satisfaction about the Rights and Values Programme, stating their desire to 'hit the ground running' and to catch up on the delay caused by moving between the two MFF periods. The Committee was informed that the Regulation for the Rights and Values Programme is currently undergoing linguistic and legal checks and should be ready for formal adoption in the near future.

Multimedia actions

Exchange of views with the Commission



The Committee held an exchange of views with the European Commission on the EU's Multimedia Actions, a long-standing topic of contention between Parliament and the Commission.

Mr Abbamonte, Director in DG CNECT, informed the Committee about the Commission's recent decision to gradually open up funding to competition in this field, with a view to reaching out to more European citizens, particularly the younger generations, and fostering digital transformation. Regarding TV broadcasting, the Commission envisages entering into a renewed three-year partnership agreement with

Euronews, albeit with a reduced budget. According to Mr Abbamonte, a 2020 independent audit was reassuring as regards Euronews' performance, cost effectiveness and editorial independence. It also confirmed the Commission's views of its unique production model, which relies on co-creation among journalists from different nationalities and a single, independent editorial board, and is not easily replicable.

According to the Commission, this justifies phasing out gradually financial support to the broadcaster. After a three-year transition period, the activity would be fully open to competition, allowing potential contenders enough time to come up with credible proposals.

Regarding radio broadcasting, the Commission has decided to provide support through an open call for proposals to be published already in 2021, i.e. to discontinue direct grants to Euranet+, a network of 15 radio stations that has so far been 100% EU-funded. The Commission reached the conclusion that there may be alternatives to Euranet+, which does not have a joint production system and has limited editorial oversight. For the Commission, also the 2020 performance audit cast doubts over the editorial practices of some of its members. The Commission believes that increasing competition will spur innovation in the sector and help reaching out to younger audiences.

In the ensuing discussion, Members across the political spectrum raised serious concerns about the Commission's proposals, which they found to lack transparency, and contested the treatment of Euronews and Euranet+ as unbalanced and insufficiently tailored to their respective nature. Members discarded the Commission's decision

to go against the Committee's express wish to provide Euranet+ at least sufficient time to prepare for a competitive market. Some Members strongly argued for keeping the current funding approach without open calls for Euranet+ while questioning the three-year prolongation of the contract for Euronews. Many Members furthermore called on the Commission to take such highly strategic decisions only in close partnership with Parliament and keep it fully informed of the implementation of any calls for proposals.

On a different note, Members raised the issue of support for film festivals and cinemas under the Media strand of the Creative Europe Programme. Several Members expressed concern over the fact that support could allegedly no longer be given to individual entities, but only to networks. They underlined that the EU should continue to support cultural diversity, especially in times when smaller festivals and cinemas were at risk of extinction as a result of the pandemic. Mr Abbamonte explained that in his view there was a misunderstanding: from 2021 onwards, individual support for film festivals will be combined with, and not replaced by, network support.

According to the Commission, this approach will increase the reach from the current 124 to 180 supported festivals and reduce the administrative burden on smaller festivals, replicating the approach successfully applied in the Culture strand of the programme. Members insisted on the need for the Commission to make sure that no festivals are excluded from funding under the new approach and to communicate more clearly about it.

Cultural and Creative Sectors in post-COVID-19 Europe: Crisis effects and policy recommendations

Presentation by Policy Department B

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit Europe in spring 2020, the cultural and creative sectors (CCS) have been among the most negatively affected sectors. The stringent public health measures have led to a chain of effects, severely impacting the economic and social situation in these sectors, revealing the creative industries' pre-existing volatility. The study provides a mapping and an aggregated analysis of COVID-19 medium and long-term effects on the CCS and proposes adequate policy recommendations for a sustainable recovery of the sectors.

A presentation of the study, organized by the EP's Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, was held on 25 February 2021 and focused on the following issues:

-) Pre-COVID-19 situation in the CCS;
-) Effects of COVID-19 on CCS, together with a sub-sector impact heatmap;
-) Analysis of emergency and relaunch policy support for CCS on European and national level;
-) Perspectives beyond the COVID-19 crisis;
-) Policy recommendations for a long-lasting and sustainable recovery of the sectors.

The debate that followed the expert's presentation referred to, among others:

-) role of the European Parliament in setting up post-COVID-19 recovery strategy;
-) social rights and fair income opportunities enforcement for the CCS operators;
-) working conditions of artists and cultural operators;
-) role of the CCS as an integral part of innovative and cohesive societies;
-) role of public funding;
-) earmarking of national Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) budgets for the CCS;
-) European digital frameworks;
-) need for constant monitoring of the COVID-19 impact on the CCS.



European Citizens' Initiative "Minority SafePack"

Exchange of views with the Commission

The Commission, represented by the Deputy Director General of DG EAC, Ms Viviane Hoffmann, was invited to the CULT Committee to explain the reasons for not taking any legislative follow-up in respect to the European Citizens Initiative on the Minority SafePack, as decided in the Commission Communication adopted on 14 January 2021. In her introduction, the Chair clearly expressed her surprise and disappointment with the Commission's approach, considering that this initiative has won the support of more than 1 million EU citizens.

Although this exchange of views was focusing on CULT competences, it generated also interest among Members from other committees, who had been invited by CULT and appreciated the opportunity to speak during the catch-the-eye session. Despite the controversial nature of this initiative, most Members across the board were very critical of the Commission for its attitude towards citizens who had supported the initiative, and for the lack of any action.

Exchange of views with the European Schools

On 25 January, CULT held an exchange of views on the European Schools system, the promotion of which is among the Committee's core competences. Intended to provide CULT Members with an overview of the state of affairs and especially the problems the European Schools are currently confronted with, the exchange of views started with presentations from the Deputy Secretary General of the European Schools, Mr Andreas Beckmann, and the parents' organisations, represented by the President of INTERPARENTS, Mr Pere Moles Palleja, and Mr Anastassios Papadopoulos. These two presentations – outlining the assessment of the overall state of the European Schools system from the Secretariat-General's and the parents' perspective – were followed by a question-and-answer session with CULT Members. In this context, a series of issues related to the European Schools were discussed, including:

-)] the innovative character of the European Schools system in their representing the vision of a genuine "European education" and how it could be further developed;
-)] the chronic under-financing of the European Schools and the reluctance of Member States to fulfil their obligations in terms of secondments;
-)] the particularly difficult situation of the Brussels-based European Schools, which have long reached their maximum capacity while demand continues to be increasing;
-)] the legal framework of the European Schools that has largely remained untouched since its establishment in the 1950s, and which may benefit from a revision;
-)] the precarious working conditions especially of locally hired teachers; and
-)] possible improvements with regard to child protection policies and the inclusion of pupils with special needs.

In result – and with a view to ensure a sustainable follow-up to this exchange of views –, a more regular encounter of the CULT Committee with the Secretariat-General of the European Schools and the parents' representatives was envisaged, as was a more in-depth dealing of the Committee with the European Schools system, potentially in form of an own-initiative report following in the wake of the EP's 2011 resolution on the European Schools.

Votes

Shaping Digital Education Policy

Adoption of draft report

(Victor NEGRESCU, S&D)

The sanitary crisis that has now been going on for a year has demonstrated that digital education is more than a tool: it is a necessity and a solution to face the lockdown and provide education to as many learners as possible. The adopted report underlines the need for a European approach to digital education. At the same time, it stresses the importance to work with global institutions and actors – like the United Nations, the World Bank and the Council of Europe – in order to identify tailored solutions for the new challenges.

The pandemic has brought to the fore many of the other gaps in the digital education ecosystem. As emphasised in the report, digital tools are useful for teaching and learning. However, education requires more than having access to digital devices; the report therefore calls for an integrated approach, taking into consideration the psychological, social, pedagogical and practical requirements of teaching and learning in a digital context. The report was adopted by a large majority: 26 in favour, 2 against and 0 abstentions.



[Procedure file](#)

Guidelines for the 2022 Budget-Section III

Consideration of draft opinion

(Romeo FRANZ, Verts/ALE)



With a very large majority, the CULT Committee adopted a draft opinion on the “Guidelines for the 2022 Budget - Section III”. The opinion underlines the need for funding for EU activities to alleviate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education and the cultural and creative industries. At the same time, the opinion underlines that it is essential to ensure that the transition to digital education and distance learning does not deteriorate accessibility, create obstacles for learners and researchers, or increase the education gap. Members further support the targets of allocating at least 10% of national recovery and resilience plans to investments in education, 2% to the cultural and creative sectors and 20% to the digital transition, of which a part should be allocated to the culture, education, youth, media and sports sectors. The Committee also calls on the Commission to finance educational and cultural activities as part of the European Green Deal. Finally, it warns against using Creative Europe funding for the New European Bauhaus initiative.

[Procedure file](#)

Policy Department Research

Recently finished projects

Concomitant expertise for CULT reports:

- J INI report on Shaping Digital Education policy:
 - In-depth analysis on Shaping Digital Education policy.

- J INI report on Artificial intelligence in education, culture and the audiovisual sector:
 - Introductory briefing on The use of artificial intelligence in the cultural and creative sectors;
 - In-depth analysis on The use of artificial intelligence in the audiovisual sector;
 - Introductory briefing on The use of artificial intelligence in education.

- J INI report on Effective measures to ‘green’ the Erasmus+, Creative Europe and European Solidarity Corps programmes:
 - Introductory briefing on Effective measures to ‘green’ Erasmus+, Creative Europe and European Solidarity Corps programmes;
 - Briefing on Virtual formats versus physical mobility.

Other studies:

Cultural and Creative Sectors in post-COVID-19 Europe – Crisis effects and policy recommendations.

Selection of forthcoming projects

Concomitant expertise for CULT reports:

- J INI report on The European Education Area: a shared holistic approach to education, skills and competences:
 - Study on Making the European Education Area a reality: state of affairs, challenges and prospects (expected early March 2021);
 - Study on Towards a European Education – Critical Perspectives on Challenges Ahead (expected early March 2021).

- J INI report on The situation of artists and the cultural recovery in the EU:
 - Introductory briefing on the situation of artists and the cultural recovery in the EU (expected March 2021);
 - Policy Recommendations Briefing on The situation of artists and the cultural recovery in the EU (expected March 2021).

) INI report on Europe's Media in the Digital Decade: An Action Plan to Support Recovery and Transformation:

- Introductory briefing on Europe's Media in the Digital Decade: An Action Plan to Support Recovery and Transformation (news media sector) (expected April 2021);
- Thematic briefing on Europe's Media in the Digital Decade: An Action Plan to Support Recovery and Transformation (news media sector): Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (expected May 2021);
- Policy Recommendations Briefing on Europe's Media in the Digital Decade: An

- Action Plan to Support Recovery and Transformation (news media sector) (expected May 2021).

Other studies:

-) EU sports policy: assessment and possible ways forward (expected March 2021);
-) Education and Youth in post-COVID-19 Europe – Crisis effects and policy recommendations (expected March 2021).

) **Useful links and contacts:**

- [Research for CULT Committee](#)
- [Supporting analysis for CULT Committee](#)
- <https://twitter.com/PolicyCULT>
- poldep-cohesion@europarl.europa.eu

The next committee meeting: 15-16 March 2021

Useful links

-) [CULT Committee website](#)
-) [Meeting documents](#)
-) [Calendar of meetings](#)
-) [Policy Department Publications in the EP](#)
-) [European Parliament - Think Thank](#)

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