



**2020/2244(INI)**

26.1.2021

# **OPINION**

of the Committee on Culture and Education

for the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

on the European Semester for economic policy coordination: Employment and Social Aspects in the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2021  
(2020/2244(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion: Sabine Verheyen (\*) Associated committee – Rule 57 of the Rules of Procedure

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## SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Culture and Education calls on the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Recalls that education is an investment in our common future: it has a positive impact on social cohesion, which is a pre-condition for economic growth, job creation and employment; emphasises the role of education and culture in the personal development and critical thinking of citizens, in social mobility, in the promotion of creativity and innovation, and in raising awareness of major collective challenges such as climate change, the digital transformation and paradigm-shifting technologies; recalls the objective to continuously improve the EU's and the Member States' education, training and skills policies in order to deliver inclusive, accessible and high-quality education and comprehensive lifelong learning, and training for all, and the upgrading of skills and reskilling, notably of people with lower levels of education or employability and young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) and the long-term unemployed; upholds the need to prepare for the future impact that technological progress will have on the labour market and public, including automation, artificial intelligence and robotics, as well as on everyday life and on our personal and collective relationship with knowledge, learning and information; recalls, in this respect, the relevance of acquiring media literacy skills in order to combat disinformation and build an active digital citizenship;
2. Stresses the need to deliver on the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR); calls for the timely adoption of the Child Guarantee and a vigorous implementation by the Member States of the Youth Guarantee, and for the Sustainable Development Goals on quality education to be achieved, so that everyone can afford quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to be able to participate fully in society and join the labour market; urges the Commission to swiftly present an action plan for the implementation of the EPSR and to further refine the indicators of its social scoreboard, as well as their monitoring;
3. Stresses the need for the Member States to increase the mutual recognition and portability of skills, diplomas and personal qualifications in the internal labour market, thereby contributing to the building of a European Education Area that will improve labour mobility and enhance the international competitiveness of the EU's economy;
4. Is of the opinion that the unprecedented EU financial support for a post-COVID-19 recovery should strive to recover lost jobs and economic growth in a way that is inclusive and benefits everyone equally, and should address structural socio-economic disadvantages, including early school leaving and school failure; recalls that continued schooling is closely linked to access to the social protection systems that provide for the basic needs of children and their families, including quality nutrition and healthcare; emphasises that the European green and digital transition cannot be effectively achieved without a gradual and comprehensive transformation of the education and training systems, which would require major investment and a particular focus on the fact that nobody is to be left behind; emphasises the need to learn from the COVID-19 crisis by applying the good practices used in some countries, such as peer learning and using

digital tools in education;

5. Is concerned about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, as severe discrepancies in digital education exist between the Member States, with 32 % of pupils in some Member States not having had any access to education for several months due to a variety of reasons, both structural and material in nature; is worried about the impossibility for students at university and in vocational and educational training (VET) to follow their normal curricula, which will affect their already hindered access to the labour market, whereas according to Eurostat, in 2018 26.3 % of young people aged between 16 and 29 were already at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU<sup>1</sup>; underlines that a green and digital transition in the EU should be based on fairness in society and should address areas such as employment, skills and education and provide support and immediate help for accessing basic needs to those people who have been hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as younger generations, women, people with disabilities, single parents, the elderly and other vulnerable groups; stresses the role of teaching health education and basic medical prevention in schools in mitigating the effects of pandemic outbreaks and in the prevention of and preparedness for future public health emergencies;
6. Calls on the Member States to increase their gross domestic product allocations for education and to include in their national recovery and resilience plans (NRRPs) ambitious investments for all levels of education, including for VET, upskilling and reskilling, as a condition for an economic recovery that fosters social cohesion and tackles inequalities;
7. Welcomes the inclusion within the European Semester of the components referring to the specific activities in the education, culture, sport and media sectors of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF); calls on the Commission to closely monitor the Member States' progress reports on the implementation of the NRRPs within the European Semester exercise in order to verify to what extent the objectives of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) have been met;
8. Calls on the Commission to better integrate education into the European Semester framework and to expand its current focus to include social objectives, digital education and the quality of the education provided, in order to assess the evolutions and reforms of the educational systems and consistently check the implementation of the EU action plans, agendas and recovery targets across the Union;
9. Urges the Member States to develop NRRPs with at least 25 % earmarked for social investment, and to prioritise, especially in their country-specific recommendations, targeted investments in digital infrastructure and equipment for educational establishments and learners in order to enable equal access to distance and online learning for children, students and young people with disabilities, people with fewer opportunities and people from disadvantaged groups, remote and rural areas and those with special educational needs, as every child and young person should get an opportunity to access education;
10. Notes the heavy toll the COVID-19 pandemic has taken on the creative and cultural

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Young\\_people\\_-\\_social\\_inclusion](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Young_people_-_social_inclusion)

sectors and industries, including events and performances, cultural tourism, intangible cultural heritage practices, and the existential threat it represents to many artists and creative businesses; deplores the fact that the impact on culture was not reflected in the Commission communication of 17 September 2020 on the EU's annual sustainable growth strategy 2021 (COM(2020)0575) and asks the Commission and the Member States to identify and adopt specific initiatives to protect this sector; calls, more specifically, on the Member States to include a strong focus on culture with at least 2 % of their national RRF budgets allocated to the cultural and creative sectors, as the whole sector is among the hardest hit, and will continue to be among the hardest hit in the medium term, and is potentially the most severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; encourages the Member States to accelerate efforts to improve their social protection systems and the working conditions for the workforce in this sector;

11. Calls on the Member States to integrate the recommendation made by Parliament to prioritise investments in education and training by allocating at least 10 % of their national RRF budgets to the sector in order to enable their adaptation to the new challenges generated by the pandemic and to a fair digital and green transition;
12. Urges the Commission and the Member States to use the RRF to establish the conditions needed to ensure access to digital and blended education throughout the European Union, so that it can act as a complementary tool for in-person education and make education systems more inclusive, with a particular focus on equal access to high-quality education and training for disadvantaged groups to compensate for the fact that an individual's socio-economic background is currently one of the factors will determine children and young people's educational outcomes; is worried that the share of NEET young people has risen sharply and calls for targeted funding to allow for new opportunities for this vulnerable group; recalls the aim of the EU Skills Agenda to drastically reduce the digital skills gap, while taking into account the fact that 42 % of Europeans still lack basic digital skills, thus allowing for active digital citizen participation; urges the Commission to better integrate digital education into the European Semester; stresses, further, the need to address the significant gender gap in digital skills and tech sector jobs;
13. Calls on the Member States to take the measures needed to reinforce their digital infrastructure, their connectivity and the educational methods used in their schools, universities and learning centres and to accelerate reforms implementing the digital transformation, thus ensuring that all Europeans can benefit, and to make a particular effort to ensure that online education is accessible to all; recalls, in this context, the need to adequately train teachers, trainers and parents, who all play a crucial role in the digital transformation, especially with regard to new formats such as distance and blended learning; points out the need to thoroughly assess the impact of overexposure to the digital world and calls for measures that promote better understanding of the risks posed by digital technologies, which may affect children and young people in particular; stresses that, in the long term, accessibility to digital and online education is not to be intended to act as a replacement, but rather a complement to the direct interaction between teachers and learners, as only in-person learning can effectively ensure the acquisition of interpersonal and social skills;
14. Urges the Commission to support those Member States that are further behind in establishing their digital infrastructure and connectivity, by making available additional

expert consultations;

15. Welcomes the fact that the Recovery and Resilience Facility supports the digital transition with a minimum level of 20 % of expenditure related to digital, and in this regard stresses the need to ensure that a maximum number of EU citizens can benefit from gigabit society connectivity, including those living in rural and remote areas; stresses that broadband should be considered a public good and its infrastructure should be adequately funded in order to be universally accessible as a critical step in closing the digital divide and to ensure fair and just access to the digital economy;
16. Notes the need to provide specific support for the media sector, which plays a key role in our democracies, in a way that respects and promotes media freedom and pluralism at a time when the online environment is increasingly dominated by a few large players, with increasing market power and mobile tax bases, sometimes hampering many smaller European companies from starting-up and scaling up across the single market, as highlighted in the Commission communication on the EU annual sustainable growth strategy 2021; draws the attention of the Member States to the specific measures set out in the Commission Media Action Plan unveiled on 3 December 2020 to help the broadcasting, news publishing and cinema sectors to recover from a big loss in advertising revenues due to the lockdown imposed by the pandemic and to boost their production and distribution of digital content; considers that such measures should be part of the minimum 20 % of expenditure of every NRRP to be earmarked for the digital sector;
17. Calls on the Member States to strengthen the recovery and the crisis resilience of the sport sector in general, and of grassroots sport in particular, and to ensure that the sports sector has full access to the RRF; emphasises that sport fulfils important societal functions, by promoting inclusion, integration and values such as mutual respect, solidarity, diversity and equality, including gender equality, and stresses that it is beneficial for addressing and preventing the physical and mental health impact of extended home confinement and closure of schools; calls, in this regard, on the Commission to strengthen inclusion through sport and to explore new avenues to maximise its impact and reach;

## INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

<b>Date adopted</b>	26.1.2021
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+ : 24 - : 0 0 : 4
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Asim Ademov, Isabella Adinolfi, Andrea Bocskor, Gilbert Collard, Laurence Farreng, Tomasz Frankowski, Alexis Georgoulis, Hannes Heide, Irena Joveva, Petra Kammerevert, Niyazi Kizilyürek, Victor Negrescu, Marcos Ros Sempere, Domènec Ruiz Devesa, Massimiliano Smeriglio, Michaela Šojdrová, Sabine Verheyen, Salima Yenbou, Theodoros Zagorakis, Milan Zver
<b>Substitutes present for the final vote</b>	Ibán García Del Blanco, Marcel Kolaja, Radka Maxová, Diana Riba i Giner

## FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

24	+
ID	Gilbert Collard
NI	Isabella Adinolfi
PPE	Asim Ademov, Andrea Bocskor, Tomasz Frankowski, Michaela Šojdrová, Sabine Verheyen, Theodoros Zagorakis, Milan Zver
Renew	Laurence Farreng, Irena Joveva, Radka Maxová
S&D	Ibán García Del Blanco, Hannes Heide, Petra Kammerevert, Victor Negrescu, Marcos Ros Sempere, Domènec Ruiz Devesa, Massimiliano Smeriglio
The Left	Alexis Georgoulis, Niyazi Kizilyürek
Vers/ALE	Marcel Kolaja, Diana Riba i Giner, Salima Yenbou

4	0
ECR	Elżbieta Kruk, Dace Melbārde, Andrey Slabakov
ID	Gianantonio Da Re