COVID-19: MEPs call for measures to close the digital gap in education

- COVID-19 crisis has exposed severe inequalities in the EU in terms of access to education

- Closing the digital education gap should be a priority

- Erasmus+ budget must be tripled

MEPs called for the digital gap in Europe to be closed, as the pandemic exacerbated inequalities in the EU, making it difficult for many to access school education.

The resolution was adopted on Thursday by 593 votes in favour, 58 against and 36 abstentions.

Digital education must be reality for all

MEPs deplore the "severe discrepancies" in learning across the EU during the lockdown, with 32% of pupils in some member states not having had any access to education for several months. They fear that this will decrease future income levels for a whole generation and negatively impact labour productivity and competitiveness for the European Union as a whole.

Therefore, closing the digital divide must be an immediate concern, with the Commission prioritising investments in connectivity and equipment, particularly in remote and rural areas, as well as instructing and assisting teachers and trainers in how to use the new technology.

Beef up investment to prepare for the second wave

"Many countries are still unprepared in the face of the second wave that is now hitting Europe. More should be done to guarantee access to quality education and training for all, and for that we need to invest in education. We deeply regret that the Council is proposing cuts to programmes that support education and training. We reiterate the call for the Erasmus+ budget to be tripled. We encourage Member States to significantly increase public spending on education. The Commission must prioritise investments in education in the Recovery plan", said Victor Negrescu (S&D,RO), speaking on behalf of the EP's Committee on Culture and Education in the plenary debate ahead of the vote.

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A bold vision for European Education Area

MEPs also criticise the lack of coordination and the exchange of best education practices during the crisis, and say that the EU should be more active in coordinating between states. They proposed that a platform should be provided for member states to share practices and called for the European Education Area to progress "from a loose vision based on broad principles into a concrete work programme".

"We welcome the education package put forward by the Commission at the end of September; however, it is only the first step. It is now time for the vision for a European Education Area and a revamped Digital Education Action Plan to be backed up by concrete measures and with the funding to deliver them", said the rapporteur Sabine Verheyen (EPP,DE) after the vote.

Note to editors

According to UNESCO, even in the world's most developed countries, during the first COVID-19 crisis, access to digital education was around 90 %, with 10 % of school pupils still being left behind. Fewer than 25 % of low-income countries have provided some form of remote learning.

Further information

Committee on Culture and Education
The adopted text will be available here (22.10.2020)

Plenary debate before the vote

Digital gap between the Member States: DESI index (Commission)

"Equity in school education in Europe" - a report by the European Commission (19.10.2020)

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