Education in the digital era: challenges, opportunities and lessons for EU policy design

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The European Parliament adopted by 535 votes to 58, with 13 abstentions, a resolution on education in the digital era: challenges, opportunities and lessons for EU policy design.

The resolution noted that currently 44 % of the EU population aged between 16 and 74 lack basic digital skills and 19 % have no digital skills at all, with **substantial disparities** across the Member States, a situation that risks creating a new social divide.

Need for a comprehensive strategy for e-skills: Members considered that the importance of digital skills, the skills gap, which is particularly significant between men and women, generations and different social groups, and disparities in digital skills across the Member States demand a joined-up policy response.

They stated that the Digital Education Action Plan should be viewed as the first step towards a **fully-fledged EU strategy on digital education and skills** based on a lifelong-learning approach, which can provide both a more coordinated policy framework and simultaneously be adaptable to changing realities.

The role of educational institutions: Parliament considered it essential that educational institutions prepare pupils and students to confront the social and economic challenges brought about by rapid technological and social developments, by equipping them with the appropriate skills to adapt to the challenges of the digital world. It underlined that digital skills acquisition requires a coherent, lifelong-learning approach anchored in formal, non-formal and informal education settings, with a policy response and targeted interventions appropriate to the needs of different age groups and learners. They underlined the potential of digital technologies to support a shift towards more learner-centred pedagogical approaches if incorporated into the learning process in a planned and purposeful way.

Better evaluation of digital technologies: while recognising the need for more digital skills, Parliament stressed that it is vital to take into account **neurological research** into the effects of digital technology on brain development. It called, therefore, for investment in unbiased and interdisciplinary research into the various impacts of digital technologies on education, linking education sciences, pedagogy, psychology, sociology, neuroscience and computer science so as to achieve as deep an understanding as possible of how the minds of children and adults are responding to the digital environment, with a view to maximising the benefits of the use of digital technology in education and minimising its risks.

Members called on the Member States, the Commission and educational institutions to **improve children' s safety online** and address the issues of cyberbullying, exposure to harmful and disturbing content, and other cybersecurity threats by developing and implementing prevention programmes and awareness-raising campaigns; encourages the Member States to further promote the #SafeInternet4EU campaign.

Gender gap: given that the share of men working in the digital sector is 3.1 times greater than the share of women, the resolution called for a gender-balanced approach to the promotion of ICT and digital careers to be promoted, and that more female students and women should be supported in pursuing a career in the digital field.

Connectivity in schools: the goal of ensuring that by 2025 all schools in the EU have access to internet connections with download/upload speeds of 1 gigabit of data per second has yet to be reached. Member

States are called on to make **substantial public investments** to provide all schools with high-capacity broadband and to make use of existing EU programmes for this purpose, notably the Connecting Europe Facility, which can support the physical infrastructure of high-capacity broadband networks, and the WiFi4EU voucher scheme.

Teachers and trainers: they should be at the core of the digital transformation and therefore require adequate initial preparation and continuous training, which must include modules on age- and development-oriented teaching practices. The report stressed that this training requires time and should not come as an extra task on top of their daily activities.

Financial support: Parliament called on the Member States to make responsible and effective use of Union financial support and to promote **funding opportunities among the wider public and educational institutions**, with a view to making access to digital learning content, tools and solutions a reality for all. It welcomed, in this context, the new pilot project introducing Digital Opportunity Traineeships under Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 and called for a renewed impetus in this direction under the new multiannual financial framework (MFF) programmes.

The resolution also stressed the need to set aside funding under these programmes and the European Structural and Investment Funds for the digitalisation of libraries, archives and museums to increase and improve their use in education and culture.

The Commission was invited to carry out a critical evaluation of the eleven actions of the Digital Education Action Plan, including their social inclusiveness, in order to prepare for the 2020 Mid-Term Review. Members pointed out in this context that one of the major shortcomings of the Action Plan was the lack of action to strengthen digital skills among the adult population.