

Shaping digital education policy

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The Committee on Culture and Education adopted an own-initiative report by Victor NEGRESCU (S&D, RO) on shaping digital education policy.

The Covid-19 pandemic has underscored the need to deliver full-scale quality education for all in order to prepare for potential future crises, enhance longer-term resilience in education systems and lay the foundations for a successful digital transition.

The sudden shift to online and distance learning also revealed a lack of readiness within education systems in most parts of Europe and gaps in the digital skills of teachers, educators, parents and learners and in their ability to use digital technologies effectively and safely.

The revised digital education action plan

Members highlighted that a rights-based approach to digital education, in accordance with the European Pillar of Social Rights, must be guiding principle in digital education policy to ensure that the right to inclusive and quality education for all becomes a reality. They welcomed, in this regard, the updated digital education action plan and its extended scope and ambition, with specific targets addressing notably persistent gaps in digital skills, the promotion of quality computer and IT education, or better connectivity in schools, as a further step towards a more comprehensive digital skills and education strategy.

The resolution commended the decision to align the plan with the seven-year multi-annual financial framework (MFF) since this enables a longer-term perspective and ties it in with the relevant funding instruments.

European digital hub

Members welcomed the Commission's commitment to establish a European digital education hub as a first step towards a co-creation process and ongoing monitoring system that links national and regional digital education strategies and involves key stakeholders and experts, including civil society organisations, representing different approaches from inside and outside mainstream education. Parliament should be fully involved in increasing European and national hubs and advisory services and in nominating relevant stakeholders.

Fostering a high-performing digital education ecosystem

Members stressed that fast and reliable internet and quality digital equipment in educational establishments, non-formal settings and the home are prerequisites for effective digital education. Broadband should be considered a public good and its infrastructure adequately funded to ensure that it is universally accessible and affordable as a critical step in closing the digital divide.

The resolution stressed the importance of the EU taking the lead in digital education by facilitating access to innovations and technologies for teachers, learners and parents. The Commission and the Member States are encouraged to provide schools (teachers and students) not only with technical support and Internet connection, but also a necessary support on safe and reliable software and to promote flexible models of education and support for distance learners using such means as e-resources, e-materials, videos, e-mentorship and free online training.

Enhancing digital skills

The committee considered that embracing and maximising the potential of digital technologies should go hand-in-hand with modernising existing curricula and learning and teaching methods. In this regard, Members stressed the importance of providing financial support for training courses designed for teachers.

Members also underlined the challenge of harmful and illegal content and activities in the digital environment, including in terms of mental health and well-being, such as online harassment including cyberthreats and cyberbullying, child pornography and grooming, data and privacy breaches, dangerous online games, disinformation.

Lastly, Members underscored the need for gender mainstreaming across education, skills and digitalisation policies and specifically within the action plan. They emphasised the need to focus on better inclusion of girls in digital education from a very young age. A positive and inclusive environment that promotes female role models to motivate girls to choose STEM, STEAM and ICT subjects should be created.