

Shaping digital education policy

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The European Parliament adopted by 639 votes 24, with 25 abstentions, a resolution on shaping digital education policy.

Members pointed out that 42% of Europeans still lack basic digital skills and that there are wide disparities between and within Member States, depending on socio-economic status, age, gender, income, education and employment. The need for digital skills (coding, logistics and robotics) will increase in the future. The Commission estimates that in a number of job categories, up to 90% of jobs are likely to require digital skills.

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

The resolution 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. It 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.

Parliament 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.

Members drew attention to the contribution of the European Structural and Investment Funds, the Connecting Europe Facility, Horizon Europe, the European Solidarity Fund, the Creative Europe programme and Erasmus + to the financing of various aspects of the plan. They encouraged Member States to devote at least 10% of the Recovery and Resilience Facility funding to education. They welcomed the Commission's commitment to set up a European Digital Education Hub, which will enable Member States to promote cooperation between education and training institutions to improve digital education provision.

The Commission is invited to increase the role and visibility of education, including digital education, in the European Semester.

Fostering an effective digital education ecosystem

Parliament stressed that fast and reliable internet and quality digital equipment in educational institutions, non-formal settings and at home are prerequisites for effective digital education.

Broadband should be seen as a public good and its infrastructure should be financed to ensure that it is accessible and affordable for all, which is crucial for bridging the digital divide. Members called for specific measures and funding programmes to improve connectivity for all schools, especially those in remote, rural and mountainous areas.

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 Member States are encouraged to provide schools (teachers and pupils) not only with technical assistance and Internet connection, but also with the necessary support for secure and reliable software, and to promote flexible models of distance education and learner support using means such as online resources, electronic material, videos, online tutoring and free e-learning.

Enhancing digital skills

Parliament 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 and the need to support parents and families in using digital tools.

The resolution also underlined the importance of developing digital literacy to address the challenge of harmful and illegal content in the digital environment, including in terms of mental health and well-being, such as online harassment, including cyber threats and cyber bullying, child pornography, data and privacy breaches, dangerous online games, disinformation.

The Commission is invited to work with national, regional and local authorities to put in place further measures to encourage digital literacy for adults and older people.

Lastly, Members stressed the need to focus on better integrating girls into digital education from an early age, highlighting the need for a joint effort to motivate more girls to study science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM).