Towards an EU strategy to promote education for children in the world: mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

2021/2209(INI) - 22/03/2022 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by David LEGA (EPP, SE) on ‘Towards an EU strategy to promote education for children in the world: mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic’.

According to Unicef, **more than 168 million children** have lost a full year of education because of school closures due to the COVID-19 lockdowns. Education has been significantly disrupted for 800 million students worldwide, who have lost an average of two-thirds of a school year. Since March 2020, some **194 countries have been forced to close schools** across their territory due to the COVID-19 pandemic, affecting more than 1.8 billion learners worldwide and depriving them of access to education and other benefits offered by school.

Members urged the Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and Member States to **promote a child rights-based approach** in global efforts to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's access to education, and on the principles of non-discrimination, best interests of the child and child participation.

Recognising that education is a cross-cutting issue that affects all aspects of sustainable development, the report stressed the importance of ensuring **children's right to education** and giving every child the chance to return to school. In particular, it called on the Commission, the EEAS and the Member States to:

- support the authorities of third countries in **prioritising school reopening in their recovery plans**;

- support third-country authorities in ensuring that all children can enjoy their right to primary education and to take action to ensure that secondary education is available and accessible;

- support third-country authorities in developing and implementing digital teaching and learning methods and to facilitate internet access for all;

- support the authorities of third countries in financing and implementing ‘safe school’ operations, including providing hygiene supplies and sharing information on handwashing and other hygiene measures, as well as on maintaining the continuity of nutrition services for school-age children and adolescents;

- support the authorities of third countries in establishing education risk mitigation and management plans through resilience planning;

- support the authorities of third countries in proactively **issuing guidance on best practices in remote learning**, and in ensuring that appropriate and safe tools, curricula and technology are used and are made accessible to children from low-income families, rural, indigenous and migrant children, marginalised children and children with disabilities or learning difficulties;

- maintain robust funding for education through all EU financial instruments available;

- support the governments of third countries in building and further developing **stronger gender-responsive and inclusive education systems** accompanied by the eradication of all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls;

- preserve and further strengthen the achievements of the past 20 years in **education for women and girls in Afghanistan**;

- develop specific programmes to manage and mitigate the mental health and psychosocial impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on children, teachers and their communities;

- support the authorities of partner countries in addressing the challenges in their education systems with the aim of making them capable of withstanding future crises, and making systems more resilient and inclusive.

The report urged countries around the world to **consider education as an investment rather than an expense**. Members believe that adequate and effective financial assistance for education is a prerequisite to eliminate poverty and enhance well-being. They called on the Commission and Member States to substantially increase funding for education in their international development and assistance strategies.

Members stressed the role of non-formal and informal education, citizenship education and volunteering. They called for environmental education to become an essential component of the school curriculum. The report also urged the importance of accompanying investment in training and education with support for job creation to provide a better outlook for the next generation of young people in Africa and other developing regions.