

## Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions on Pathways to School Success

(2022/C 498/10)

<b>Rapporteur:</b>	Inga BĒRZIŅA (LV/Renew E.), Member of the Municipal Council Kuldīga
<b>Reference document:</b>	Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success COM(2022) 316

### I. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AMENDMENTS

#### Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on Pathways to School Success

COM(2022) 316

#### Amendment 1

Recital 2

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
<p>(2) On 30 September 2020, the European Commission adopted a Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025, considering inclusiveness as one of its six dimensions <sup>(1)</sup>. On 18 February 2021, the Council adopted the Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021 — 2030) <sup>(2)</sup>.</p> <p><sup>(1)</sup> COM(2020) 625 final <sup>(2)</sup> OJ C 66, 26.2.2021, p. 1.</p>	<p>(2) On 30 September 2020, the European Commission adopted a Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025, considering inclusiveness as one of its six dimensions <sup>(1)</sup>. On 18 February 2021, the Council adopted the Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021 — 2030) <sup>(2)</sup>. <b>On 19 March 2021, the European Committee of the Regions adopted an opinion on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025 <sup>(3)</sup>.</b></p> <p><sup>(1)</sup> COM(2020) 625 final <sup>(2)</sup> OJ C 66, 26.2.2021, p. 1. <sup>(3)</sup> <b>OJ C 175, 7.6.2021, p. 6.</b></p>

#### Reason

It is proposed to add a reference to the CoR opinion adopted in relation to the European Commission Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025.

**Amendment 2**

Recital 5

(New recital)

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
	<p><i>In the final report of the Conference on the Future of Europe, citizens also call on the EU to ensure that all European citizens can benefit from digitalisation, by empowering them with the necessary digital skills and opportunities <sup>(1)</sup>. The European Commission intends to present proposals for a recommendation on improving digital skills provision in education and training and for European Digital Skills Certification <sup>(2)</sup>.</i></p> <p><sup>(1)</sup> <i>Conference on the Future of Europe — Report on the Final Outcome, May 2022, Proposal 32 (p. 74).</i></p> <p><sup>(2)</sup> <i>COM (2022) 404 final</i></p>

**Reason**

Proposal to highlight the importance of reaping the benefits of digitalisation by providing all citizens with the necessary digital skills and opportunities.

**Amendment 3**

Recital 25

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
<p>(25) The objective of reducing underachievement and early leaving from education and training and promoting school success need to be systematically addressed by education and training across the EU. At system level, consistency of policy measures, coordination with other relevant policy areas (such as health, social services, employment, housing, justice, migration and integration), and effective cooperation between different actors at all levels (national, regional, local, school) is needed for a coordinated support to children, young people and their families. In parallel, at school level whole-school approaches should be promoted, incorporating all areas of activity (teaching and learning; planning and governance; etc.) and engaging all key actors: learners, school leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents and families, and local and wider communities <sup>(1)</sup>.</p> <p><sup>(1)</sup> See definition in the accompanying Staff Working Document</p>	<p>(25) The objective of reducing underachievement and early leaving from education and training and promoting school success need to be systematically addressed by education and training across the EU. At system level, consistency of policy measures, coordination with other relevant policy areas (such as health, social services, employment, housing, justice, migration and integration), and effective cooperation between different actors at all levels (<b>European</b>, national, regional, local, school) is needed <b>in accordance with the principles of multi-level governance</b> for a coordinated support to children, young people and their families. In parallel, at school level whole-school approaches should be promoted, incorporating all areas of activity (teaching and learning; planning and governance; etc.) and engaging all key actors: learners, school leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents and families, and local and wider communities <sup>(1)</sup>.</p> <p><sup>(1)</sup> See definition in the accompanying Staff Working Document</p>

**Reason**

Education and training would be improved if the principles and processes underpinning multilevel governance were applied, as described in the CoR Resolution on the Charter for Multilevel Governance in Europe <sup>(1)</sup>.

**Amendment 4**

## Point 1

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
<p>1. Develop or further strengthen by 2025 an integrated and comprehensive strategy towards school success, at the appropriate level, in accordance with the structure of their education and training system, with a view to decoupling education outcomes from socioeconomic status, promoting inclusion in education (including through addressing segregation in education) and further reducing early leaving from education and training and underachievement in basic skills, as proposed in the policy framework in the Annex. Special attention should be paid to well-being at school as a key component of school success. Such a strategy should include prevention, intervention and compensation measures (including measures offered as part of the Youth Guarantee), be evidence-based and combine universal measures with targeted and/or individualised provisions for learners requiring additional attention and support in inclusive settings (such as learners with a socioeconomic disadvantaged, migrant — including refugee — or Roma background, learners with visible and non-visible disabilities, those with special educational needs or mental health issues). Such a strategy should also be based on structured cooperation between actors representing different policy areas, levels of governance and educational levels, benefit from adequate funding and be accompanied by a clear implementation <b>and</b> evaluation <b>plan</b>.</p>	<p>1. Develop or further strengthen by 2025 an integrated and comprehensive strategy towards school success, at the appropriate level, in accordance with the structure of their education and training system <b>and also taking into account the relevant decentralisation systems</b>, with a view to decoupling education outcomes from socioeconomic status, promoting inclusion in education (including through addressing segregation in education) and further reducing early leaving from education and training and underachievement in basic skills, as proposed in the policy framework in the Annex. Special attention should be paid to well-being <b>and to environmental and health conditions</b> at school <b>and in surrounding areas</b> as a key component of school success. Such a strategy should include <b>planning</b>, prevention, intervention and compensation measures (including measures offered as part of the Youth Guarantee), be evidence-based and combine universal measures with targeted and/or individualised provisions for learners requiring additional attention and support in inclusive settings (such as learners with a socioeconomic disadvantaged, migrant — including refugee — or Roma background, learners with visible and non-visible disabilities, those with special educational needs or mental health issues). Such a strategy should also be based on structured cooperation between actors representing different policy areas, levels of governance and educational levels, benefit from adequate funding and be accompanied by a clear <b>plan for its</b> implementation, evaluation <b>and review</b>.</p>

**Reason**

The role of local and regional authorities is vital for making the European education area a reality, due to the direct and substantial links they have with the communities where educational policies defined at European level need to be implemented, and where they have a direct impact <sup>(2)</sup>.

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ C 174, 7.6.2014, p. 1

<sup>(2)</sup> Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — Achieving the European Education Area by 2025 (OJ C 175, 7.5.2021, p. 6).

**Amendment 5**

## Point 3

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
3. In the context of an integrated and comprehensive strategy, combine prevention, intervention and compensation measures as those set out in the policy framework in the Annex to support:	3. In the context of an integrated, <b>inclusive</b> and comprehensive strategy, combine prevention, intervention and compensation measures as those set out in the policy framework in the Annex to support:

**Reason**

Self-explanatory.

**Amendment 6**

## Point 3.3

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
3.3. schools in developing a 'whole school approach' to school success, in which all members of the school community (school leaders, teachers, trainers and other educational staff, learners, parents and families and the local community) as well as external stakeholders engage actively and in a collaborative way to promote educational success for all learners.	3.3. schools in developing a 'whole school approach' to school success, in which all members of the school community (school leaders, teachers, trainers and other educational staff, learners, parents and families and the local community, <b>including local and regional authorities</b> ) as well as external stakeholders engage actively and in a collaborative way to promote educational success for all learners.

**Reason**

Local and regional authorities have responsibilities at school level and contribute to the development of a 'whole school approach', including through the application of the 'quadruple helix approach', a model of cooperation in which, together with stakeholders from the public, private and academic sectors, a strong emphasis is placed on citizens and their needs.

**Amendment 7**

## Point 4

Text proposed by the European Commission	CoR amendment
4. Optimise use of national and EU resources for investment in infrastructure, training, tools and resources to increase inclusion, equality and well-being in education, including EU funds and expertise for reforms and investment in infrastructure, tools, pedagogy and the creation of healthy learning environments, in particular Erasmus+, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, European Social Fund+, European Regional Development Fund, Digital Europe Programme, Horizon Europe, the Technical Support Instrument, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, etc., and make sure that the use of the funds is aligned with the overall strategy.	4. Optimise use of <b>local, regional</b> , national and EU resources for investment in infrastructure, training, tools and resources to increase inclusion, equality and well-being in education, including EU funds and expertise for reforms and investment in infrastructure, tools, pedagogy and the creation of healthy learning environments, in particular Erasmus+, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, European Social Fund+, European Regional Development Fund, Digital Europe Programme, Horizon Europe, the Technical Support Instrument, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, etc., and make sure that the use of the funds is aligned with the overall strategy.

**Reason**

Proposal to also include the local and regional level.

**II. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (CoR),

**The specific role of local and regional authorities**

1. believes that education and training systems that are high-quality, inclusive and equally accessible to all, regardless of the learners' personal characteristics, family, cultural and socioeconomic situation, create not only paths to school success, but also our common path to social cohesion and a more sustainable economy in the European Union;
2. highly appreciates the 'whole school approach' encouraged by the European Commission and including local and regional authorities, which is an important prerequisite for reforming education and training policy and achieving such key targets of European cooperation in education and training as reducing the share of low-achievers in basic skills and countering early leaving from education and training;
3. points out that measures targeting early leaving of education and training <sup>(3)</sup> are often implemented at local and regional level, thus enabling contextual problems to be addressed;
4. considers it important to reduce the educational gap between remote, rural and urban areas, and also between different educational institutions, in order to promote the well-being of pupils and staff at school. Adequate funding to promote social and territorial cohesion and the possibility to take data-based decisions are important for this purpose; in any case, the quality of the decentralised education system can only be improved through a broad (and not purely budgetary) approach;
5. stresses the importance of collecting and analysing data at local, regional and national level to deduce common trends affecting early school leaving, and accordingly propose solutions able to address challenges on the basis of a place-based approach. For example, in Latvia an interactive tool has been developed at national level to collect information on pupils from the moment the teacher identifies a risk of their dropping out, and offers a wide range of statistics at local and regional authority level on the causes and trends of school dropouts;
6. calls for the wider uptake of local and regional good practices to develop a high-performance digital education ecosystem and to facilitate a sustainable digital transition, while promoting quality and inclusive education for all and enhancing digital cohesion to reduce territorial disparities. For example, in adapting to the circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Île-de-France region in France has developed the QIOZ free language learning platform;

**Impact of crises on education systems**

7. draws attention to the fact that the number of young people leaving education early has steadily decreased over the last decade, but that the pandemic threatens to reverse this positive trend <sup>(4)</sup>. This is demonstrated by the conclusions on the results of the 2021-2022 school year and their correlation with COVID-19-related restrictions. For example, in the Walloon and Brussels regions of Belgium the number of early school leavers increased by 28 %, particularly in years 7-12;

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<sup>(3)</sup> The EU 'early leaving from education and training' (ELET) indicator measures the proportion of 18-24 year-olds with, at most, lower secondary educational attainment who are no longer in formal or non-formal education or training.

<sup>(4)</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Education and training monitor 2021: executive summary*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/480191>.

8. calls for account to be taken of the impact of COVID-19 on pupils' mental and physical health as well as overall well-being. Furthermore, attention should be paid to the fact that the impact of this crisis has also reduced the learning motivation of groups of pupils who were not previously at risk of early school leaving and has at the same time disproportionately impacted pupils of vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds. It calls, therefore, also for innovative motivating activities for children who are successful in learning;

9. calls for socially inclusive and psychologically adapted education for all school-aged Ukrainian citizens residing in EU Member States due to the ongoing war. It calls also for tailored and smart language learning programmes (such as the one implemented in the Flemish region of Belgium<sup>(5)</sup>) for pupils who do not speak the language of the EU Member State concerned, in order to promote their integration and improve their chances of success;

### Final conclusions

10. shares the conclusion of the independent evaluation<sup>(6)</sup> of the Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving<sup>(7)</sup> that cooperation at different levels of governance (European, national, regional, local) remains limited and fragmented. This is one of the areas where further efforts are needed to address early school leaving, in particular through cooperation within the innovation ecosystem;

11. points out that local and regional authorities have a key role to play in creating and modernising educational institutions, promoting equal opportunities for all and a safe, inclusive and efficient learning environment, also paying attention to growing bullying/cyberbullying. In view of the impact on national and local budgets of Russia's war in Ukraine, the energy crisis and rapid inflation, the Committee stresses the importance of long-term support from the EU Structural Funds for municipal projects to modernise the learning environment and ensure the quality maintenance of existing educational infrastructures;

12. calls for a 'whole school approach' to respond to the current challenges, including the generational replacement of teachers, and for broader motivation programmes for teachers and school staff, as already implemented by individual local and regional authorities with measures such as scholarship programmes for final-year students, especially future STEM teachers and guidance practitioners (psychologists, social educators, etc.). At the same time, professional development, upskilling and, where appropriate, retraining programmes for teachers should continue to be promoted.

Brussels, 12 October 2022.

*The President  
of the European Committee of the Regions*

Vasco ALVES CORDEIRO

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<sup>(5)</sup> Onthaalonderwijs voor anderstalige kinderen (OKAN) ['Reception education for non-native language children'].

<sup>(6)</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2019), Donlevy, V., Day, L., Andriescu, M., Downes, P., *Assessment of the implementation of the 2011 Council recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving: final report*, Publications Office.

<sup>(7)</sup> OJ C 191, 1.7.2011, p. 1.