

Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on Inclusion in Diversity to achieve a High Quality Education For All

(2017/C 62/02)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES

RECALLING the political background to this issue as set out in the Annex and in particular UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 ⁽¹⁾, the ET 2020 Joint Report on education and training ⁽²⁾, and the Paris Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education ⁽³⁾;

TAKING NOTE of the Commission Communication on improving and modernising education ⁽⁴⁾;

RECOGNISING THAT:

- The European Union is based on common values and general principles of law, stipulated in Articles 1 to 3 of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU), which marks a new stage in the process of creating an ever closer union amongst the peoples of Europe;
- Education policy has a prime role to play in fostering inclusion and respect for diversity in the European Union (EU);
- Inclusive education addresses and responds to different needs of all learners in formal, non-formal and informal settings with the objective of encouraging participation of all in high quality education;
- The diversity of the European societies poses both opportunities and challenges to education and training systems calling for greater emphasis to be placed on promoting inclusion and common values in order to facilitate the coexistence of different cultural identities in a peaceful and democratic Europe;
- The diversity in Europe will continue to increase in the future and that there is a real need to combat all forms of intolerance and social exclusion affecting both European citizens and migrants, in particular those newly arrived;
- The importance of encouraging unity in diversity in education and training policies, also in the perspective of the 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome of 1957, is key to the building of an inclusive society;

UNDERLINE:

- the need for education and training to foster inclusion in diversity to achieve a high quality education for all, while equipping all learners with social, civic and intercultural competences to strengthen, reaffirm and foster the EU's democratic values, fundamental rights, social inclusion and non-discrimination, as well as active citizenship;
- that ensuring inclusive high quality education should be seen in a life-long perspective covering all aspects of education. It should be available and accessible to all learners of all ages, including those facing challenges, such as those with special needs or who have a disability, those originating from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, migrant backgrounds or geographically depressed areas or war-torn zones, regardless of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation;

ACKNOWLEDGE THAT:

- as stipulated in the UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, a high quality education and training should ensure that all learners acquire the competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes) required to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development;

⁽¹⁾ Unesco (2015), 'Education 2030: Framework for Action — Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all', p. 2.

⁽²⁾ The ET2020 Joint Report on education and training of November 2015 (14440/1/15 REV 1).

⁽³⁾ Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education, Paris, 17 March 2015.

⁽⁴⁾ Doc. 15418/16.

- a high quality education and training for all based on inclusivity, equality, equity, appropriate competences and values also contributes to foster employability, entrepreneurship, innovative thinking, digital skills and competences and a learner's holistic development for active citizenship;
- equality and equity are not identical and that education systems must move away from the traditional 'one-size-fits all' mentality. Equal opportunities for all are crucial, but not sufficient: there is a need to pursue 'equity' in the aims, content, teaching methods and forms of learning being provided for by education and training systems to achieve a high quality education for all;

EMPHASISE THAT:

- education and training systems should cater for the diverse needs, abilities and capacities of all learners and offer learning opportunities to all in formal, non-formal and informal educational settings;
- there is a need for more support to teachers, educators and other teaching staff to operate successfully in training systems that allow for flexible learning pathways and that respond to the different needs, abilities and capacities of learners. Where appropriate, these learning pathways need to be tailor-made, bottom-up and collaborative;
- education and training cannot be seen in isolation from social, political, historical, environmental and economic aspects. The primary role of education and training policy should be cooperatively complemented and supported by other policy spheres in order to achieve a high quality education for all;

INVITE THE MEMBER STATES IN ACCORDANCE WITH NATIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES TO:

1. consider a whole school approach encouraging the engagement both with the whole school community⁽¹⁾ and with a wider range of stakeholders⁽²⁾ alongside the community at large to deal with issues on which schools do not and cannot possess the relevant expertise. This will help to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education for all;
2. promote a democratic and inclusive school culture and ethos that values diversity, encourages media and information literacy for a critical and reflective assessment of information and raises awareness of manipulation and propaganda, allows space for dialogue and discussion on controversial issues, and provides a stimulating and nurturing environment allowing all learners to realise their full potential;
3. promote the development and adoption of measures that allow the early identification and prevention of social exclusion, bullying, early school leaving and early signs of radicalisation, which could lead to violent extremism;
4. encourage the provision of opportunities for all learners to engage in flexible pathways, including the development of vocational skills and qualifications, combining formal programmes, in-company training, digital and distance learning, validation of non-formal and informal learning, based on strong partnerships between vocational institutions, business, social partners and other relevant stakeholders;
5. encourage high-quality early childhood education and care as an important early measure, including supporting measures for children with special needs, taking into account, where appropriate, the Key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care⁽³⁾. Evidence shows that high-quality early childhood education and care stands out as a policy measure that can reduce inequalities throughout one's life-long learning path;
6. encourage approaches that support learners in education and training, including through gathering student feedback on their learning experiences, together with inclusivity and equity provisions that try to compensate for different starting positions, i.e. provisions that go beyond equality of opportunity, to ensure inclusion in diversity and progress towards equity;

⁽¹⁾ School leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff, learners, parents and families.

⁽²⁾ Such as social services, youth services, outreach care workers, psychologists, nurses, speech and language therapists, guidance specialists, local authorities, NGOs, business, unions, volunteers.

⁽³⁾ Proposal for Key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care, Report of the Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care under the auspices of the European Commission, October 2014.

7. encourage the awareness of digital education in education and training programmes to enhance quality, equity and inclusion, aware that a successful implementation requires a combined approach including adequate content, infrastructure ⁽¹⁾, support ⁽²⁾, and culture ⁽³⁾;
8. where necessary, develop different educational routes leading to certification and promote flexible learning pathways. This will support all types of learners with the possibility to achieve recognised qualifications to find meaningful employability and fulfil personal development;
9. support teachers, educators and other teaching staff and foster their motivation and competences, including for example emotional intelligence and social skills, to deal with diversity through initial teacher education programmes and continuous professional development, including digital education, practical tools, ongoing support and guidance, while also encouraging a more diverse teacher force;
10. encourage cooperation and innovative approaches between education and training institutions, local communities, local and regional administrations, parents, the wider family, youth field actors, volunteers, social partners, employers and civil society to enhance inclusion, strengthen a sense of belonging and positive identity, thus contributing to the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism ⁽⁴⁾ as well as to ensure that educational content, pedagogies and tools are up-to-date and of relevance to the local context;
11. encourage closer cooperation and innovative approaches between education and other relevant areas, such as culture, youth, sports, employment, welfare, security and other channels of work on social inclusion; and, where necessary, develop mutual support between social, cultural, youth, economic and educational policies to ensure inclusion in diversity ⁽⁵⁾;
12. encourage various forms of evaluation and assessment to ensure that different forms of learning are accounted for;
13. consider the use of curricula and pedagogical approaches that reflect social, cultural and other diversities of learners;
14. support higher education institutions in their efforts to increase participation and completion by under-represented groups, and promote the involvement by staff and students in civic engagement activities;
15. foster the integration of third country nationals, including recently arrived beneficiaries of international protection, in education, including through language learning;

CALL ON THE COMMISSION TO:

1. continue to promote the exchange of good practices and innovative approaches on how to achieve inclusive and equitable high quality education for all, such as through the ET 2020 Working Groups, in particular the Working Group on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education and the development of an online compendium of good practices;
2. promote adequate and efficient investments in order to achieve inclusive and equitable high quality education for all, for instance through European Structural and Investment Funds;
3. support peer counselling in the area of 'inclusion in diversity' in education by bringing together peers from national administrations, in order to provide both external advice to a country requesting support and allow exchange of experience and knowledge among peers. It could be explored whether peer counselling could be reinforced further, including with short-term study visits between education administrations.
4. deepen mutual learning on inclusion in diversity, in particular through Erasmus+ mobility professional development programmes for teachers as well as further develop eTwinning, the School Education Gateway and the European Toolkit for Schools;

⁽¹⁾ Equipment (broadband, 4G, support of subsidised technology and of BYOD), software infrastructure especially portals and resource repositories, and networks.

⁽²⁾ Systematic incentives and training to allow teachers to experiment with digital pedagogies including those around group learning pedagogies, distillation and distribution of best practices both at teacher and national policy levels.

⁽³⁾ Educational vision, policies and strategies need to move from a promotion of technology to the promotion of an open and connected culture supported by technology.

⁽⁴⁾ Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism, doc. 14276/16, p. 6.

⁽⁵⁾ Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education, Paris, 17 March 2015, p. 5.

5. build on the work of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights in promoting mutual respect, non-discrimination, fundamental freedoms and solidarity throughout the EU;
 6. build on the work of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education to provide evidence-based information and guidance on implementing inclusive education;
 7. organise awareness raising activities, such as a conference on Inclusion in diversity to achieve a high quality education for all, taking account of other similar initiatives provided by other international organisations;
 8. take account of these conclusions when preparing and implementing actions in the area of inclusive and quality education.
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ANNEX

- Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET2020') (12 May 2009).
 - Council Conclusions on the education of children with a migrant background (26 November 2009).
 - Council Conclusions on education for sustainable development (18 and 19 November 2010).
 - Council Conclusions on the social dimension of education and training (11 May 2010).
 - Council Conclusions on the employability of graduates from education and training (10 and 11 May 2012).
 - Council Conclusions on the social dimension of higher education (16 May 2013).
 - Council Conclusions on effective leadership in education (25-26 November 2013).
 - Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education, Paris, 17 March 2015.
 - Council Conclusions on the role of early childhood education and primary education in fostering creativity, innovation and digital competence (18 and 19 May 2015).
 - Unesco (2015), 'Education 2030: Framework for Action — Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all'.
 - 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) — New priorities for European cooperation in education and training (23 and 24 November 2015).
 - Council Conclusions on reducing early school leaving and promoting success in school (23-24 November 2015).
 - Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on promoting social economic development and inclusiveness in the EU through education: the contribution of education and training to the European Semester 2016 (24 February 2016).
 - Council Conclusions on developing media literacy and critical thinking through education and training (30 and 31 May 2016).
 - Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on an Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals (7 June 2016).
 - Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism (21 and 22 November 2016).
 - 2016 Education and Training Monitor (November 2016).
 - Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on improving and modernising education (December 2016).
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