

**Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — Building a stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies**

(2018/C 461/09)

**Rapporteur-General:** Gillian FORD (UK/EA), Member of London Borough of Havering

**Reference documents:** Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — Building a stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies,

COM(2018) 268 final

and

Proposals for Council recommendations on

Promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas and the outcomes of learning periods abroad,

COM(2018) 270 final;

High quality early childhood education and care systems,

COM(2018) 271 final;

Comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages,

COM(2018) 272 final

**I. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AMENDMENTS**

**Amendment 1**

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas and the outcomes of learning periods abroad

*Article 5*

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
	<b>(d) <i>developing quality assurance instruments in online education and training.</i></b>

**Reason**

In some areas, particularly more remote or sparsely populated regions, education, learning and qualifications are increasingly accessed digitally; it is essential that these qualifications are quality assured to enable automatic mutual recognition.

**Amendment 2**

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas and the outcomes of learning periods abroad

## Article 6

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
6. Facilitate mobility and recognition of the outcomes of learning periods abroad during secondary education and training by:	6. Facilitate mobility <b>of all students — regardless of the country where they live —</b> and recognition of the outcomes of learning periods abroad during secondary education and training by:
[...]	[...]
(c) promoting the benefits of mobility among secondary education and training institutions and learners and their families and promoting the benefits of hosting mobility among employers.	(c) promoting the benefits of mobility among secondary education and training institutions, learners and their families and promoting the benefits of hosting mobility among employers.

**Reason**

Self-explanatory.

**Amendment 3**

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas and the outcomes of learning periods abroad

## Article 8

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
8. Explore good practice with regard to the recognition of prior learning and permeability between education and training sectors, in particular between vocational education and training and higher education.	8. Explore <b>and promote</b> good practice with regard to the recognition of prior learning and permeability between: (a) education and training sectors, in particular between vocational education and training and higher education; <b>and</b> (b) <b>education and training sectors and the labour market.</b>

**Reason**

Qualifications and learning periods abroad should be recognised by employers to improve labour mobility and life chances and opportunities.

**Amendment 4**

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas and the outcomes of learning periods abroad

## Article 9

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
Improve the evidence base by collecting and disseminating data on the number <b>and</b> type of recognition cases.	Improve the evidence base by collecting and disseminating data on the number, type, <b>and outcomes</b> of recognition cases.

**Reason**

Outcome learning can enhance and improve the recognition process.

**Amendment 5**

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on high quality early childhood education and care systems

## Recital (8)

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
(8) The availability, accessibility and affordability of high quality childcare facilities are furthermore key factors that allow women, and also men, with care responsibilities to participate in the labour market, as recognised by the 2002 Barcelona European Council, the European Pact for Gender Equality and the Commission's Work-Life Balance Communication adopted on 26 April 2017. Women's employment is directly contributing to improving the socioeconomic situation of the household and to economic growth.	(8) The availability, accessibility and affordability of high quality childcare facilities are furthermore key factors that allow women, and also men, with care responsibilities to participate in the labour market, as recognised by the 2002 Barcelona European Council, the European Pact for Gender Equality and the Commission's Work-Life Balance Communication adopted on 26 April 2017, <b>and should be promoted in line with principle 2 of the European Pillar of Social Rights</b> . Women's employment is directly contributing to improving the socioeconomic situation of the household and to economic growth.

**Reason**

Self-explanatory.

**Amendment 6**

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on high quality early childhood education and care systems

Recital (23)

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
(23) This Recommendation seeks to establish a shared understanding of what quality means in the early childhood education and care system. It sets out possible actions for <b>governments</b> to consider, according to their specific circumstances. This Recommendation also addresses parents, institutions and organisations, including social partners and civil society organisations seeking to enhance the sector.	(23) This Recommendation seeks to establish a shared understanding of what quality means in the early childhood education and care system. It sets out possible actions for <b>all the relevant levels of governance, including local and regional</b> , to consider, according to their specific circumstances. This Recommendation also addresses parents, institutions and organisations, including social partners and civil society organisations seeking to enhance the sector.

**Reason**

Self-explanatory.

**Amendment 7**

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on high quality early childhood education and care systems

Article 2

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
2. <b>Work towards ensuring</b> that early childhood education and care services are accessible, affordable and inclusive. Consideration could be given to:	2. <b>Ensure</b> that early childhood education and care services are accessible, affordable, <b>sufficient</b> and inclusive. Consideration could be given, <b>at all levels of governance including regional and local</b> , to:

**Reason**

Strengthening the recommendation and emphasising the key role played here by local and regional governments.

**Amendment 8**

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on high quality early childhood education and care systems

Article 3

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
3. Support the professionalisation of early childhood education and care staff. Depending on the existing level of professional qualification and working conditions, successful efforts can include:	3. Support the professionalisation of early childhood education and care staff. Depending on the existing level of professional qualification and working conditions, successful efforts can include:

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
<p>[...]</p> <p>(d) <b>aiming at</b> equipping staff with the competences to respond to the individual needs of children from difference background and with a special educational need or disability, preparing staff to manage diverse groups.</p>	<p>[...]</p> <p>(d) equipping staff with the competences to respond to the individual needs of children from difference background and with a special educational need or disability, preparing staff to manage diverse groups.</p>

**Reason**

Strengthening the recommendation.

**Amendment 9**

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on high quality early childhood education and care systems

Article 4

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
<p>4. Enhance the development of early years' curricula in order to meet the wellbeing and educational needs of children. Approaches supporting curriculum development and social, emotional, learning and linguistic competences of children could include:</p> <p>(a) ensuring a balance in the provision of social-emotional, wellbeing and learning, acknowledging the importance of play, contact with nature, the role of music, arts and physical activity;</p> <p>(b) fostering empathy, compassion and awareness in relation to equality and diversity;</p> <p>(c) offering opportunities for early language exposition and learning through playful activities; and considering bilingual early childhood programmes;</p> <p>(d) offering guidance for providers on the age-appropriate use of digital tools and emerging new technologies;</p>	<p>4. Enhance the development of early years' curricula in order to meet the <b>health</b>, wellbeing and educational needs of <b>all</b> children. Approaches supporting curriculum development and social, emotional, learning and linguistic competences of children could include:</p> <p>(a) ensuring a balance in the provision of social-emotional, wellbeing and learning, acknowledging the importance of play, contact with nature, the role of music, arts and physical activity;</p> <p>(b) fostering empathy, compassion and awareness in relation to equality and diversity;</p> <p>(c) offering opportunities for early language exposition and learning through playful activities; and considering bilingual early childhood programmes;</p> <p>(d) offering guidance for providers on the age-appropriate use of digital tools and emerging new technologies;</p>

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
<p>(e) promoting further integration of early childhood education and care in the education continuum and supporting collaboration of early childhood education and care and primary school staff and smooth transition for children to primary school.</p>	<p>(e) promoting further integration of early childhood education and care in the education continuum and supporting collaboration of early childhood education and care and primary school staff and smooth transition for children to primary school;</p> <p><b>(f) providing dedicated support and learning opportunities to those children with special educational needs and disabilities;</b></p> <p><b>(g) providing dedicated support and learning opportunities to migrant children, including the situation whereby large numbers of Europeans are returning due to political and humanitarian crises;</b></p> <p><b>(h) providing dedicated support and learning opportunities to children in Member State care systems;</b></p> <p><b>(i) promoting the early care model for children of 0-6 years.</b></p>

### Reason

Children with special educational needs and disabilities, as well as migrant children, may need dedicated support to access the full range of opportunities provided by the early years curricula and Member States should be encouraged to ensure this is provided.

### Amendment 10

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on high quality early childhood education and care systems

#### Article 6

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
<p>6. Aim at ensuring adequate funding and a legal framework for the provision of early childhood education and care services. Consideration could be given to:</p> <p>(a) scaling up investment in early childhood education and care with a focus on availability, quality and affordability, including making use of the funding opportunities offered by the European structural and investment funds;</p>	<p>6. Aim at ensuring adequate funding and a legal framework for the provision of early childhood education and care services. Consideration could be given to:</p> <p>(a) scaling up investment in early childhood education and care with a focus on availability, <b>accessibility</b>, quality and affordability, including making use of the funding opportunities offered by the European structural and investment funds;</p>

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
<p>(b) creating and maintaining tailored national or regional Quality Frameworks;</p> <p>(c) promoting further integration of services for families and children, most importantly with social and health services;</p> <p>(d) embedding robust child protection/safeguarding policies within the early childhood education and care system to help protect children from all forms of violence.</p>	<p>(b) creating and maintaining tailored national or regional Quality Frameworks;</p> <p>(c) promoting further integration of services for families and children <b>at a local and regional level</b>, most importantly with social and health <b>and wellbeing</b> services;</p> <p>(d) embedding robust child protection/safeguarding policies within the early childhood education and care system to help protect children from all forms of <b>abuse and</b> violence.</p>

**Reason**

Self-explanatory.

**Amendment 11**

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on high quality early childhood education and care systems

Article 8

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
<p>8. Facilitate the exchange or experiences and good practices among Member States in the context of the Strategic Framework of cooperation in education and training and successor schemes, as well as in the Social Protection Committee.</p>	<p>8. Facilitate the exchange or experiences and good practices among Member States, <b>at all levels of governance</b>, in the context of the Strategic Framework of cooperation in education and training and successor schemes, as well as in the Social Protection Committee.</p>

**Reason**

Self-explanatory.

**Amendment 12**

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on high quality early childhood education and care systems

Article 9

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
<p>9. Support the cooperation of Member States, based on their demand, by organising peer learning and peer counselling.</p>	<p>9. Support the cooperation of Member States <b>at all levels of governance</b>, based on their demand, by organising peer learning and peer counselling.</p>

**Reason**

Self-explanatory.

**Amendment 13**

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages

Recital (1)

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
(1) In the Communication ‘Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture’ the European Commission sets out the vision of a European Education Area in which high-quality, inclusive education, training and research are not hampered by borders; spending time in another Member State to study, learn or work has become the standard; speaking two languages in addition to one’s mother tongue is far more widespread; and people have a strong sense of their identity as Europeans, as well as an awareness of Europe’s cultural heritage and its diversity.	(1) In the Communication ‘Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture’ the European Commission sets out the vision of a European Education Area in which high-quality, inclusive education, training and research are not hampered by borders; spending time in another Member State to study, learn or work has become the standard; speaking two languages in addition to one’s mother tongue is far more widespread; and people have a strong sense of their identity as Europeans, as well as an awareness of Europe’s cultural heritage <b>and its diversity and opportunities.</b>

**Reason**

Important to highlight here that the value of the European Education Area includes its ability to pave the way for more opportunities.

**Amendment 14**

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages

Article (1)

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
(1) Explore ways to help all young people to acquire — in addition to the language of schooling — proficient user level in at least one other European language before the end of upper secondary education and training and encourage the acquisition of an additional (third) language to the level of independent user.	(1) Explore ways to help all young people to acquire — in addition to the language of schooling — proficient user level in at least one other European language before the end of upper secondary education and training and encourage the acquisition of an additional (third) language to the level of independent user, <b>including particular emphasis on oral language practice and experience, and ensuring adequate access to quality tuition for all learners.</b>

**Reason**

Stakeholders emphasised the importance of speaking additional languages in addition to reading and writing, with this being key to unlocking mobility and opportunities. It was also noted that, where quality language tuition is not available, those with more resources may turn to private language lessons which is not possible for those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, reinforcing the opportunity gap between different social groups.

**Amendment 15**

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages

## Article (4)

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
<p>(4) As part of such comprehensive strategies, support the development of language awareness in schools and training centres by:</p> <p>(a) actively supporting the mobility of learners, including by making use of opportunities provided by the relevant EU funding programmes;</p> <p>(b) enabling teachers to address the use of specific language in his or her respective subject area;</p> <p>(c) strengthening the competence in the language of schooling as the basis for further learning and educational achievement in school for all learners, and especially those from migrant or disadvantaged backgrounds;</p> <p>(d) valuing linguistic diversity of learners and using it as a learning resource including involving parents and the wider local community in language education;</p> <p>(e) offering opportunities to assess and validate languages competences that are not part of the curriculum, but have been acquired by learners elsewhere, including through expanding the range of languages that can be added to learners' school leaving qualifications.</p>	<p>(4) As part of such comprehensive strategies, support the development of language awareness in schools and training centres by:</p> <p>(a) actively supporting the mobility of learners, including by making use of opportunities provided by the relevant EU funding programmes;</p> <p>(b) enabling teachers to address the use of specific language in his or her respective subject area;</p> <p>(c) strengthening the competence in the language of schooling as the basis for further learning and educational achievement in school for all learners, and especially those from migrant <b>backgrounds, including the situation whereby large numbers of Europeans are returning due to political and humanitarian crises</b>, or disadvantaged backgrounds <b>or those with special educational needs and disabilities</b>;</p> <p>(d) valuing linguistic diversity of learners and using it as a learning resource including involving parents and the wider local community in language education;</p> <p>(e) offering opportunities to assess and validate languages competences that are not part of the curriculum, but have been acquired by learners elsewhere, including through expanding the range of languages that can be added to learners' school leaving qualifications.</p>

**Reason**

Self-explanatory.

**Amendment 16**

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages

## Article (5)

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
<p>(5) Support teachers, trainers and school leaders in the development of language awareness by:</p>	<p>(5) Support teachers, trainers and school leaders in the development of language awareness by:</p>

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
<p>(a) investing in the initial and continuing education of language teachers to maintain a broad language offer in compulsory education and training;</p> <p>(b) including preparation for linguistic diversity in the classroom in initial education and continuous professional development of teachers and school leaders;</p>	<p>(a) investing in the initial and continuing education of language teachers to <b>attract and retain staff in order to</b> maintain a broad language offer in compulsory education and training;</p> <p>(b) including preparation for linguistic diversity in the classroom in initial education and continuous professional development, <b>including informal and non-formal learning</b>, of teachers and school leaders;</p>

**Reason**

Local communities provide a wealth of opportunity for improving language awareness amongst teachers, for example through parents and carers, faith groups and community organisations.

**Amendment 17**

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages

Article (6)

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
<p>6) Encourage research in and use of innovative, inclusive and multilingual pedagogies, including the use of digital tools and Content and Language Integrated Learning.</p>	<p>(6) Encourage research in and use of innovative, inclusive and multilingual pedagogies, including the use of digital tools, <b>audiovisual, cinematographic and musical works</b> and Content and Language Integrated Learning.</p>

**Reason**

Europe has a rich cultural body of audiovisual, cinematographic and musical works which can help people learn another language and also, even more importantly, to understand other cultures and common values.

**Amendment 18**

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages

Article (8)

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
	<p>(8) <b>Improve access to high quality digital teaching programmes for both teachers and citizens, in particular for those in more remote or more sparsely populated areas and in the outermost regions.</b></p>

**Reason**

Higher quality digital language programmes can be more expensive to access than more basic programmes, while broadband connectivity is neither fast enough nor reliable enough in some areas to facilitate online language learning where there is a lack of teachers.

**Amendment 19**

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages

Intention (1)

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
(1) Support the follow-up of this Recommendation by facilitating mutual learning among Member States and developing in cooperation with Member States:	(1) Support the follow-up of this Recommendation by facilitating mutual learning among Member States and developing in cooperation with Member States <b>and drawing on the experience of relevant cross-border and territorial cooperation projects implemented by local and regional authorities, where appropriate:</b>

**Reason**

Self-explanatory.

**II. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

## THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

**General comments**

1. Reiterates its calls for an encompassing and forward-looking approach to the future of education across the EU, including strengthened cooperation of public and private sectors, to support citizens in adapting to an increasingly complex and diverse society, developing a 'European identity' that should complement national, regional, local and individual identity, gaining the skills needed in a society that is mobile and increasingly digital;
2. Supports the intention of the European Commission to coordinate progress towards the European Education Area by 2025 around key challenges including improving early years provision, facilitating the mutual recognition of higher education and school leaving diplomas, improving language learning, promoting life-long learning, student mobility and investing in digitalisation opportunities;
3. Believes that education policy strategies in Member States and regions should prioritise cooperation at all levels of governance, including local and regional authorities, with a view to aligning high quality learner-centred education, featuring strong teaching, innovation and digitalisation, with the needs of the dynamically evolving labour market, in the context of principle 1 of the European Pillar of Social Rights;
4. Stresses that more work needs to be done at all levels of governance to anticipate labour market skills needs and deliver appropriate education, general knowledge, vocational training and life-long learning in order to stimulate the creation of jobs and find solutions for unemployment;
5. Requires the consistency of lifelong learning and endorses the principles set out in the 2017 Unesco Global Network of Learning Cities; Cork Call to Action for Learning Cities, recognising that lifelong learning is at the heart of Sustainable Development Goals <sup>(1)</sup>;

<sup>(1)</sup> <http://uil.unesco.org/lifelong-learning/learning-cities/cork-call-action-learning-cities>

6. Requires that the EU institutions and Member States, with the support of local and regional authorities in consultation with stakeholders, implement the current proposals within the context of broader EU policies for economic development, employment and social protection by making strategic use of the Multi-Annual Financial Framework after 2020, where specific education policies should be more clearly and more ambitiously articulated, and emphasises the importance of upholding the proportionality principle to ensure that no new financial or administrative burdens are generated for Member States;

7. Similarly, welcomes the introduction of the European Student Card and the opportunities this will provide to facilitate student mobility and promote automatic recognition of qualifications, and calls upon the Commission to consider the extension of this to all learners, not only those in higher education, to expand opportunities for lifelong learning;

8. Acknowledges the fact that primary responsibility for education policy lies with the Member States who have involved their regional and local authorities to different extents in accordance with their respective constitutional systems, and that EU action in line with Article 6 of the TFEU should only complement, support or coordinate the action of Member States; any EU action in this area must be fully justified from a subsidiarity and proportionality standpoint and should align with existing frameworks, tools and procedures;

### **Mutual recognition**

9. Notes with regret the persistent obstacles to mobility in the area of education and joins its voice with the call of the European Commission for a Europe in which learning, studying and research are not hampered by borders but where spending time in another Member State to study, learn or work is the norm;

10. Emphasises the need to give additional support to regions where the mobility of learners may be hindered by additional obstacles such as population deficit, rurality or poverty;

11. Welcomes the European Commission's support for the exchange of best practice among Member States, and encourages the involvement of local and regional level representatives in this in recognition of the value of regional knowledge and experience;

12. Welcomes the proposal of the European Commission on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas and the outcomes of learning periods abroad, and invites the Commission to take into account in its future work the links with territorial development, notably where local and regional projects involve mobility of skilled workers and staff;

### **Early childhood**

13. Recalls that the meaning of the term 'early childhood education and care' goes beyond what some refer to as pre-school education, having the purpose of preparing children not only for school, but also for life in the same way that all other parts of the education system contribute to this process;

14. Reiterates the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and suggests that the EU and national decision-makers pay particular attention to the potential, in this context, of partnerships that could be developed between national, regional and local authorities, companies, employees and employee associations, as well as civil society players, to take such skills and qualifications into account;

15. In this context, notes its disappointment that the recommendation makes only limited reference to family life or local-level interventions that can have a significant impact on a child's early development, and emphasises the vital importance of a holistic, integrated approach;

16. Believes that well-educated professionals are a prerequisite for high quality early childhood education, and consequently all levels of government, including local and regional, should be encouraged to invest adequately not only in initial teacher education, but also in continuous professional development;

17. Stresses the need to work towards continuous improvement of the 'care' component of early childhood education and care, including the role of early childhood teachers in nurturing positive relations with children, parents and one another; ensuring the affordability of early childhood services for low-income families in accordance with principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights; and recognising the principle in the Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children;

18. Highlights the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities, who should receive a good education with access to the general education system where appropriate and be provided with individual support as necessary;
19. Notes the multiple benefits arising from the promotion of measures to facilitate a positive dialogue between teachers and parents/carers to strengthen the connections between the school and home environments and support learners' successful integration into the school environment and their overall socialisation and development opportunities;
20. Welcomes the Commission's recognition of the role of local and regional partners in the improvement of teaching and learning, however notes a lack of acknowledgement that some communities will experience greater challenges than others, for example more remote communities or those with a greater number of mother tongue languages, which will require greater resources and funding to improve teaching and learning for all;
21. Stresses that the Commission must take into consideration related Committee opinions and Council conclusions, including the Council conclusions on integrated early childhood development policies as a tool for reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion <sup>(2)</sup>.

### **Language learning and teaching**

22. Expresses disappointment that poor language skills are considered one of the major obstacles to the free movement of people and the creation of a workforce relevant to the needs of the European economy, and therefore emphasises its support for a stronger role for language learning;
23. Notes that funding for Cohesion Policy is expected to reduce in the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework, and consequently expresses its concerns over the available funding through the European Social Fund for delivery of the ambitions within the Recommendation;
24. In this context, is disappointed to see a focus in the Recommendation on learning within statutory education rather than recognising languages as an important part of lifelong learning, including early years, to promote integration and mobility, and in which local community partners and businesses can engage;
25. Emphasises the importance of actively promoting opportunities provided by relevant EU funding programmes, and simplifying application processes, so that schools and training centres across the Member States are able to take advantage of these.

Brussels, 10 October 2018.

*The President*  
*of the European Committee of the Regions*  
Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ

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<sup>(2)</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1530526890119&uri=CELEX:52018DC0270>