

Press release – COVID-19: MEPs call for measures to close the digital gap in education



The resolution was adopted by 26 votes in favour, none against and 4 abstentions.

“The last six months have seen our education and training turned upside down. The pandemic has shown both creativity and ingenuity and at the same time exposed deeply worrying gaps in terms of access to and quality of education. The digital divide is making existing inequalities worse and leaving behind those who are already at a disadvantage,” said the rapporteur Sabine Verheyen (EPP, DE).

Digital education must be reality for all

In the resolution, MEPs deplore the “severe discrepancies” in learning across the EU during the lockdown, with 32% of pupils in some Member States not having had any access to education for several months. They fear that this will decrease future income levels for a whole generation and negatively impact labour productivity and competitiveness for the Union as a whole.

Therefore, closing the digital divide must be an “immediate priority”, with the Commission prioritising investments in digital infrastructure and equipment, particularly in remote and rural areas. “The primary lesson from the crisis” is that inclusion and equal opportunities must be at the heart of the EU’ s future education and training policies.

“A bold vision for the European Education Area”

MEPs also criticise the missing coordination and exchange of best practices during the crisis, and say that the EU should play a more active coordinating role.

“We want to see a bold vision for the European Education Area across education and training sectors that is backed up by concrete measures. And we want to see a Digital Education Action Plan that evolves from a collection of small-scale actions to a fully-fledged digital skills and education strategy. Grand ideas without the money to fund them cannot work though”, said Ms Verheyen.

The expected “education package” proposals should transform the European Education Area “from a loose vision of principles into a concrete work programme” that also ensures automatic mutual recognition of qualifications, diplomas and learning periods abroad by 2025 at the latest, MEPs say. The foreseen Digital Education Action Plan must set out a fully-fledged digital skills and education strategy.

Plans need a funding to match

MEPs also underline that high-quality education systems are the foundation of the EU’s global competitiveness and criticize the proposed cuts in the long-term budget. in programmes such as Erasmus+, Horizon Europe and the European Social Fund Plus. They therefore reiterate their call for the Erasmus+ budget to be tripled compared to the 2014-2020 MFF.

Further steps

The resolution is set to be put to plenary vote during the second plenary session of October .

The European Commission has promised to come up with a new “education package” – Communication on the European Education Area and a revised Digital Education Action Plan – by the end of this month.