



Position Paper

S&D position paper European Education Area: our reality for 2025

June 2020

This paper provides a snapshot of the necessary demands from a Socialist perspective to make the completion of a European Education Area by 2025 a success that will bring tangible benefit to all EU citizens.

European Education Area: Our reality by 2025

In line with article 14 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, **education is a fundamental right** and everyone has to have access to vocational and continuing training. Everyone has the right to quality, accessible, affordable and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in view of their integral personal development and in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to develop to their fullest potential personally and professionally, to participate fully in society and successfully manage the transition into the labour market. For many years, we, as Socialists and Democrats, have campaigned for a European Pillar of Social Rights and insisted on recognising education, training and life-long learning as its first key principle.

It is time to deliver on the promises and outline clear measures, funding instruments and tools. It is only through access to education inspired to our shared values that form the basis of our common European identity that we can develop both critical thinking and openness as well as social well-being, inclusion and cohesion. Education systems of all Members States must offer equal educational opportunities everywhere in order to ensure equal living conditions.

Without prejudice to the principle of subsidiarity regarding education policy in the European Union, **education and training should be mainstreamed across all the various EU policy fields.** Subsidiarity should be understood as a positively, constructive federal collaboration in which Europeans learn from each other and advance together in giving answers to common problems. Education, as the key channel for achieving the social and economic progress we aspire to, must be put at the very heart of the European political project. The consideration of education in the European Semester is a first step in the right direction. Nevertheless, much more has to be done

with Member States commitment in order to identify opportunities and challenges in the education sector in a coordinated, cross-sectional and holistic approach at European level.

We, as Socialists and Democrats, stand for all measures aimed at developing each person's skills and knowledge to the fullest, as well as for comprehensive educational investment in people from an early age and in national education systems with a particular focus on people with fewer opportunities, both key to boosting knowledge-intensive, sustainable and inclusive growth, social cohesion and diminishing inequalities which derive from unequal access to education. There should also be a focus on the effect that education has in contributing to equity across all dimensions, with a specific reference to gender equality as well as the influence of early childhood education to the social, professional and economic position later in life. We reaffirm our commitment to a holistic education and reject an overly instrumental approach only limited to the labour market's needs. Education should contribute to personal development and community cohesion, endowing citizens with the capacities, knowledge and skills needed to act proactively and responsibly in a technologically advanced, complex and globalised world.

The EU should also promote a long-term effective approach in which an educated worker is at the centre of the digital revolution and an education system which enables and further develops protection for all workers in a new, digital labour market.

Nowadays many children and young people, all too often from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, do not have access to quality education¹.

Quality early childhood education and care lay the foundations for later success in life in terms of education, well-being, and social integration. The EU benchmark of 95% of children above 4 years old attending early childhood education has globally been reached but there are still wide differences across countries, regions and areas. The 2002 Barcelona targets aim to give access to high quality and affordable childcare to at least 33% of children below 3 years. While the average target has been met and 32,9% of children below 3 have access to childcare facilities, huge imbalances persist, with 16 Member States below the target².

Early childhood education in 0 to 3 is the next frontier of educational reforms. All evidences confirm that having access to quality education during the first three years has the greatest impact in terms of educational achievements for children³, particularly children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Thus, investment is fundamental to ensure greater social equality. This implies a paradigm shift from an assistentialist perspective and the goal to facilitate access to the labour market to parents, to an active pedagogical approach for the earlier years.

¹ COM (2020) 14 final: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0014>

² "Barcelona objectives" Report on the development of childcare facilities for young children with a view to increase female labour participation, strike a work-life balance for working parents and bring about sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe, 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/bcn_objectives-report2018_web_en.pdf

³ Investing in high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC). <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/48980282.pdf>

Furthermore approximately 20% of 15 years old pupils across Europe remain at risk of educational poverty, as they do not possess basic competences in literacy and mathematics or sufficient knowledge of science subjects.⁴

In 2017, the average attainment of basic digital skills for people in the EU aged 15-74 was 57%⁵. Moreover there is a wide discrepancy between regions within the European Union in digitalisation and digital skills acquisition⁶.

Digital skills are necessary for citizens to participate in society. To be able to fully participate in democratic societies, all citizens need to understand the impact of digital developments in society and their lives. Citizens will also require new skills to fully embrace the opportunities of the digital revolution. To this end and to prevent a digital divide in society, **education systems must be modernised across our Union, using the EU budget to support specific national initiatives on digital education, training, upskilling and reskilling of workers, with particular attention to the most vulnerable, especially ensuring necessary infrastructure.**

The EU should promote a "digital culture", **through knowledge, skills and competences, including media literacy and critical thinking, that foster an ethical understanding of and contribution of digital developments** in areas such as cybersecurity, digital footprint, digital citizenship, artificial intelligence or robotics in everyday life of all citizens.

Equally, the European Education Area should contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and be consistent with the European Green Deal. Sustainable development must be integrated as a cross-cutting component into all levels and aspects of education systems. Green education and training must be promoted through existing EU programmes such as Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps.

Although most of the benchmarks identified in the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) have been achieved, **the four overarching strategic objectives remain a challenge that needs to be further improved: making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship, and enhancing creativity and innovation.**

Today with the pandemic, Europe goes through one of the most difficult moments since the last world war. Inequalities in the education systems have been exacerbated. The political response to the COVID-19 crisis must be effective and education must be a priority.

Education must remain a public responsibility, offering a high quality public provision for everyone. This is the only way to restore, maintain and secure the faith in the democratic state that enables all citizens equality of opportunities through a high quality education. For this reason,

⁴ Education and Training Monitor 2019: <https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/volume-1-2019-education-and-training-monitor.pdf>

⁵ Eurostat. Individuals' level of digital skills

⁶ European Commission. Communication on a Strong Social Europe for Just Transitions, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/fs_20_49

we demand that the downward investment in education⁷ is halted and reversed, while Member States should aim to invest at least 10% of their respective gross domestic product (GDP) in education. To facilitate the achievement of this target, we call for the exclusion of investment in education from the deficit calculation and from the Economic governance review. We, the Socialists and Democrats, stand committed to tripling the budget for Erasmus+ in the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework. By committing to education as a key pillar for the society of the future, we are investing in democracy, social and economic progress for all and emphasise our commitment to the principle of leaving no one behind.

We, as S&D Group, propose 16 actions on European Education Area guaranteeing education as a real social elevator for all:

1. We fight for ensuring affordable, accessible and inclusive quality early childhood education and care as well as primary and lower secondary education

Quality and accessible early childhood education and care create a foundation for more equitable and effective education systems as well as ensuring individual personal development, wellbeing and greater achievements of latter educational stages. Every child must have a guaranteed access to affordable, high quality care and education, irrespectively of geographical, financial, structural, socio-economic and physical barriers. Across the European Union, around 15 million children have special educational needs and most of them are currently left behind with negative impact on their progress due to inadequate support, inadequate educational formation and inflexible curricula system. As Socialists & Democrats, we strongly believe that inclusive education is not an option but is a basic necessity.

More investment has to be allocated to modernise early childhood education with a strong pedagogical focus, train educators and ensure quality transitions from early childhood education to primary education based on a child-centeredness logic⁸. We demand to act quickly to address imbalances in access and quality, including through the development of minimum criteria to ensure quality in line with the quality framework for early childhood education and care⁹. We are committed to introduce EU wide childcare free of charge starting from 0 year prioritising additional funds to support access for disadvantaged groups and the middle classes still recovering from the financial crisis while stressing that the decision to educate children at home or in childcare is always up to the parents.

We call for giving priority to and increasing significantly the quality of primary and lower secondary education. Equity and the provision of basic skills throughout the European Union have

⁷ Lifelong Learning Platform, Europe's share of GDP for education has never been this low. A comparative analysis, 2020, <http://llplatform.eu/news/europes-share-of-gdp-for-education-and-training-has-never-been-this-low-a-comparative-analysis-investment-education-eurostat/>

⁸ OECD Starting Strong <http://www.oecd.org/education/school/startingstrong.htm>; Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems (2019/C 189/02) [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605(01)&from=EN);

⁹ 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 https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework_en.pdf

to be improved, giving specific attention to schools with fewer resources and/or located in disadvantaged areas. In line with Sustainable Development Goals 2030, **our objective is to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education, in particular, lower secondary education.** Beyond 2030 the Member States should strive for tuition free and publically funded education systems at all levels. This includes professional training and reskilling, which will be especially necessary in light of climate change and digitalisation. The European Commission should encourage and support such efforts.

The problem of poor basic skills in reading, writing, mathematics and STEAM is not solved by a high school diploma for all. We demand a strategy to raise significantly the permeability of education and training systems.

2. We stand for the recognition of vocational education and training (VET)

We call for promoting decisively vocational education and training (VET) and therefore to invest much more in this area. The successful completion of initial VET education (I-VET) must be recognised and valorised in the same way as the completion of upper secondary school, allowing the learner to continue developing themselves by e.g. enrolling in higher education if they wish so. The attractiveness and the visibility of VET must be promoted and supported as a first choice. Provisions for continuing vocational education and training (C-VET) should also be enhanced in order to support reskilling and upskilling for adult learners. We demand putting in place a strategy that really makes transitions between education levels feasible.

In cooperation with schools, key partners active on the ground and business, early school leavers should receive guidance and support to consider a vocational education and training pathway with the possibility to continue studying afterwards. Universities and training centres should provide basic and further training for vocational education teachers, with contributions from experts in the work areas corresponding to the specialist fields covered by vocational courses.

Young workers including apprentices and interns are also entitled to a fair wage. Apprentices and VET-learners in work-based learning shall earn enough for living independently. Exceptions to the minimum wage because one is young hinder social equality and thus, should be prohibited. Apprentices and VET Learners in work-based-learning should be provided with the work and social protections enjoyed by other workers.

Furthermore specific measures must be developed to support young women in accessing VET enabling them to fully enjoy their right to education. The efficiency of these measures must be reflected by monitoring participation of youth and adults in VET by gender as well.

3. We call for further commitment against early leaving from education and training

Despite the share of early school leavers in Europe was 10,6% in 2018, considerable differences still exist between countries, regions, cities, districts and demographics¹⁰. In cooperation with

¹⁰ Assessment of the implementation of the 2011 Council recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving, 2019, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/72f0303e-cf8e-11e9-b4bf-01aa75ed71a1>

schools, key partners active on the ground and business, early school leavers must be identified and receive the guidance from all school actors - including peer-to-peer learner support - and institutions. This includes support to integrate vocational education and training with the possibility to continue studying afterwards.

We call for removing imbalances between EU regions on early school leaving. To this end, we call to **strengthen the implementation of specific national policies tackling early school leaving** with adequate resources, giving priority to improve the quality of teachers and teaching to detect early signs of risk of dropping out and a tailored pedagogical support for the individual pupil, particularly, but not limited to, children from disadvantaged backgrounds and newcomers. We reiterate that specific national educational policies to combat early leaving from education and training must include cross-sectoral partnerships and a coordinated approach with education, particularly in early childhood education and VET, youth, social inclusion, and labour market areas.

4. We call for a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages

Mobility of students and teachers, including future teachers during pre-service education at institutions of higher education, is of paramount importance to practice and deepen language knowledge. Therefore mobility and international experience need to be fully embedded in language teacher's education curricula.

Multilingualism is pivotal to the European project and language skills must be at the very heart of the ambitious project of turning the European Education Area into reality by 2025.

Foreign languages are paramount in enhancing employability and mobility. Therefore, we call for setting the improvement of language teaching and learning as a priority. We need to modernise language teaching in order to make it more efficient and introduce the teaching of at least 2 foreign languages since early childhood education. In parallel we call for action to address the growing gap between the public and private provision of quality language learning opportunities. Indeed language learning provision in the formal education system often lacks investment and resources. Learners with more resources turn to private language lessons which is not a feasible option for those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.

5. We call for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and for equipping young people with soft skills

Qualifications, skills and competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning must be recognised and validated across Europe. Member States should improve or introduce procedures in this respect. The use of the EU Key-Competences Framework for Lifelong Learning must support also non-formal and informal learning including through implementation guidance for different sectors and free training opportunities such as online courses in order to maximise its potential as a crucial tool for lifelong learning. ICT and pedagogical software which is used in the learning process and in the classroom must be flexible and comprehensive, enabling as many forms of

teaching as possible. A central visualisation with multi touch technology is indispensable, so that learners can collaborate and solve problems simultaneously. This has to be achieved without media discontinuity.

Key competences such as multilingualism, personal, social, environmental and learning to learn competence, citizenship, sustainable development, entrepreneurship and cultural awareness and expression will be increasingly crucial to live and work in a European context. We call for advancing the implementation of the EU Key-Competences Framework by promoting learning in different environments and collaboration with a variety of partners such as civil society organisations, formal educational institutions, youth as well as supporting educators in how to teach, assess and validate these key competences traditionally not included in the formal curriculum.

From early childhood, individuals must learn to learn.

We must show young people in educational institutions inclusive and innovative ways of independent and self-determined learning. This also includes the teaching of new methodology in group and partner work, as well as formal requirements for lectures or presentations. For this purpose, certain behaviour during lectures as well as the rules of conversation, which are important for discussions but also for a beneficial cooperation, should be taught. The most important thing is to teach the competence for constructive self-criticism and the ability to communicate in an assertive and respectful way.

6. We call on Member States to put in place mechanisms for the automatic mutual recognition of diplomas at all levels of education and of learning periods abroad

The European Qualification Framework must be promoted and its use has to be facilitated across European Union in order to become a widely accepted tool for recognition to increase substantially mobility in the Education Area. In this sense, the European Student Card must be further developed in order to include all learners.

In view of increasing use of digital/online education, in particular in higher education, quality assurance of digital education offers and recognition of learning outcomes needs to be further developed across the EU Member States.

7. We call for an effective integration of migrants through education

We need to improve systems for the recognition and validation of skills and qualifications, including those obtained outside the EU. Those processes of recognition and validation must be simplified and accelerated as to ensure the fastest possible transition into further education or the labour market for migrants, with a specific focus on persons who might be facing multiple discrimination, such as migrant women or persons with disabilities.

Language learning is essential for an effective integration of migrants into education and the labour market and must be provided in Member States in order to facilitate that integration and contribute to the overall benefit of our societies. Newcomers might require specific support at initial stages due to linguistic barriers or interruptions in their schooling. We call to provide sufficient resources for targeted support for migrants and refugees to ensure they do not fall behind in their education, including further teacher training; targeted investment in additional support for schools to manage pupils from a migrant background and help close the academic performance gap¹¹; supporting partnerships between formal education providers and civil society organisations in providing activities and using a lifelong and life-wide learning approach to education; strengthening cooperation with non-formal and informal learning providers; including international elements in initial teacher education.

8. We fight for including culture and arts in education curricula

It is increasingly recognised that current and future jobs and societal challenges will demand transferable skills, such as teamwork, intercultural competences, empathy, creativity, innovation, problem solving and independent non-linear thinking. Cultural and arts education is particularly conducive to developing such skills. We are committed to shift the educational paradigm from STEM to STEAM, including Arts among Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, as well as encourage the participation of women and girls in those disciplines and the relevant professions.

In addition, culture and arts have a value in themselves and learners should have access to cultural activities inside and outside schools from an early age. We have to raise awareness, through culture, about shared and differentiated European heritage. We must make full use of the great potential inherent in culture to create a more inclusive Union.

It is now well established that cultural and artistic education is indispensable to engage at later stages in cultural life. Without it, we would lose our ability to appreciate arts and culture. We demand that cultural and artistic education as well as sports remain compulsory elements of learning curricula up to the end of upper secondary education.

9. We call for strengthening European citizenship

Being able to live and work in a global and European context must be an option for all. The sustainability of the European project, beyond its market dimension, requires that citizens know more of how they can participate actively in building the Europe they want, as well as the opportunities, rights and democratic structures that govern our shared Europe.

We insist on the importance of key competences such as volunteering, solidarity, critical thinking, mobility, ecological responsibility and intercultural dialogue that enable us to work and live in diversity. In addition, school curricula must cover the teaching of European history and European citizenship education in order to better understand the European project, including its political

¹¹ Education and Training Monitor 2019

architecture and how to actively participate in it, acquire knowledge of regional, national and European culture and cultural heritage, promote tolerance, solidarity, gender equality and sexual diversity as key European values as well as to combat hate speech and hate crimes, as well as the spread of fake news and deliberative misinformation. In this sense, Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes have to be sufficiently funded and well recognised especially in the current difficult times due to the pandemic of COVID-19 where physical mobility has been drastically decreased.

We commit to advance in the development of the promotion of common values and the promotion of a European dimension of teaching¹² and call for the development of common guidelines to advance the teaching of European citizenship starting in primary education. Volunteering must be systematically promoted and fully recognised by formal education institutions.

10. We call for increasing the attractiveness of the teaching profession and of a career in education

Most European countries face teacher shortages and an ageing teacher workforce. The fact that 18% of lower secondary school teachers in Europe feel that their profession is valued¹³ clearly shows that the expectations placed on teachers are unfair.

Teachers and educators are instrumental for the success of national education systems. We stress the need to attract greater number of motivated candidates with sound academic or professional backgrounds and pedagogical competences to the teaching profession in order to guarantee quality education. We support teachers and therefore teacher status must be improved, lifelong training professional opportunities must be accessible, and working conditions including remuneration must be valorised.

We put teachers and educators in the core of the digital transformation. Nevertheless teachers do not receive sufficient training to meet students' needs. 16% of teachers report a high need for professional development in ICT use for the classroom. Moreover, in many European countries, fewer than 40% of teachers receive 'ICT in the classroom' training in initial teacher education or report feeling confident in using ICT in the classroom¹⁴. If we want to face challenges arising from technological and digital evolutions, teachers need to be properly assisted and trained from the beginning and it is a lifelong training for them. Their role in classrooms is already rapidly changing and will continue to do so and appropriate measures from Member States must follow that in a coordinated digitalisation and modernization of the teaching environment.

¹² [Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching](#)

¹³ Education and Training Monitor 2019

¹⁴ Education and Training Monitor 2019

Basic and advanced digital teaching skills in a constantly evolving digital environment requires teachers to update their knowledge and skills on a continuous basis. As teachers are already under considerable work pressure, training should not come as an extra task that will increase the pressure even more. Training has to be implemented as a training culture in the school organisation itself and access to the relevant technologies has to be ensured.

Teachers need suitable, flexible and high-quality continuous professional development that corresponds to their needs. They also need better teacher training on work in multicultural and multilingual settings. The proportion of teachers working in schools where at least 10% of students are non-native speakers has increased in six countries since 2013¹⁵. This reveals an increased need to mediate interactions between native pupils and their peers from migrant background, fostering intercultural dialogue. Therefore it is essential to prepare the workforce while 23.5% of school heads in the European Union report shortages of teachers prepared to work in such environments¹⁶ and only 19.7% of teachers report it being in continuous professional development in their country¹⁷.

11. We call for enshrining media and digital literacy on all educational levels for all generations and for putting in place a progressive Skills Agenda

Media and digital competences are essential to ensure that people and especially young people are able to distinguish facts from opinions and be able to research and critically assessing sources of information throughout the internet. They should understand the opportunities and risks of the digital revolution, including the impact of digitalisation on health, especially mental health, which may affect all generations in particular children and young people.

Re-skilling of the adult population deserves special attention. Digital skills, which are constantly evolving, are now increasingly necessary for citizens to participate in society and benefit from accessible digital services and progress in their career. Therefore, we need solutions for the provision of digital literacy and skills for adults on a continuous basis, taking into account existing best practices across the EU.

We must put in place a progressive Skills Agenda as a holistic strategy for all sectors of education, which would guarantee affordable, accessible and comprehensive life-long learning and training opportunities for everyone.

We need a European-wide strategy to improve the training and upskilling of all workers, including ICT professionals, in order to close the digital skills gap. In this context, we call for a more targeted use of the European structural funds as relevant tools to strengthen digital innovation within education system. We also call for coordinating actions under the existing EU instruments in particular the European Digital Action Plan and the New Skills Agenda.

¹⁵ Education and Training Monitor 2019

¹⁶ Education and Training Monitor 2019

¹⁷ Education and Training Monitor 2019

12. We call for optimising learning methods through digitalisation while respecting data protection especially for young people

Despite the potential of digitalisation for enhancing and fostering different and personalised learning methods, the impact of digital technologies on education itself has been limited, due to lack of adequate teacher training and access to digital technology in the classroom.

Investments in ICT in schools and training centres have not yet resulted in the transformation of educational practices hoped for. We encourage Member States to seek for a similar level of technology equipment in education and institutionalised teacher training.

Schools and other learning environments need to support all students and learners and respond to their specific needs by developing appropriate and effective measures to foster digital skills. Such support can be facilitated through the use of new technologies under the supervision of teachers. A broad variety of digital means and new learning formats should be used, such as distance and blended learning, as an accompanying tool on all educational levels. However, as is seen in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, the provision of online learning is unequal and depends on the resources that educational institutions have, that learners have at home, that the facilitators of online learning have – in terms of both digital infrastructure and skills to use digital tools. It is unacceptable that many learners are left behind. This leads to inequality in academic achievement and social exclusion. The digitalisation of learning methods must not in any way deprive of opportunities those whose needs differ and who may be considered vulnerable groups within the educational system. Therefore, we call for a collaboration between all education stakeholders in order to ensure the digital preparedness of educational systems by reviewing education curricula and targeting investments at the integration of digital tools in education with a particular attention to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Furthermore we demand that technology implemented in the classroom meets high ecological standards both in use of conflict free materials and energy consumption. Attention must be paid to the lowest possible energy consumption in the respective technology segment.

As Socialists and Democrats, we strongly reject digitisation of classroom environments with the sole purpose of minimising costs, particularly for the most disadvantaged demographics, or substitute teachers support to students. All digital means and new learning methods should also be appropriately adjusted for all persons, especially children and young people, with physical limitations such as hearing impairment or with specific learning needs such as dyslexia or the need to be accompanied by a learning in-class assistant. Technology implemented in the classroom needs to respond to those needs being noiseless, high resolution and suitable for use in daylight in order to maintain the ability to concentrate.

We strongly opposed the sharing and tracking of pupil's data with technological providers and stress that children's data should remain within the public remit, limited to educational purposes and under no circumstances derive in commercial use. Technology and especially browser based software in the classroom must comply with the requirements of EU-data protection regulations.

13. We call for actions fighting gender stereotypes and discrimination

Education of young generations to gender equality is a priority at every level. It is a fundamental tool in avoiding and eliminating forms of harassment, discrimination and violence misconducts, changing mindsets and reducing cultural tolerance of sexism and sexual harassment. We need to introduce educational programmes, materials including textbooks and debates on this topic in schools. Technology and especially browser based software in the classroom must meet the requirements of EU-youth protection regulations.

Such education will be the very basis for the birth of a new generation of citizens, aware of the right of everyone to be respected and to be defended.

14. We call for actions fighting bullying, cyber-bullying and raising awareness of the risks online

Emotional wellbeing and development in the early stages of life is a shared societal responsibility. We call for the sharing of good practices at EU level and the development of guidelines to tackle effectively bullying in schools, including cyber-bullying. We stress the need to raise public awareness of the potential risks of being online and to develop skills to act in safe and responsible ways.

We demand to assign an appropriate role to basic cyber hygiene in school curricula, and to promote cyber hygiene among parents, careers and teachers.

We insist on the necessity to improve children's safety online and to address the issues of cyberbullying, exposure to harmful and disturbing content, disinformation and other cybersecurity threats by developing and implementing prevention programmes and awareness-raising campaigns.

15. We call for internet access for all, and a guarantee of a faster and higher Internet connectivity for every school and home in the EU

Internet is a common good.

Lack of digital equipment and connectivity in schools across Member States has a detrimental effect on the digital skills education of students and the availability of digital teaching tools. Furthermore young people from disadvantaged background often face difficulties to acquire good quality digital equipment and access to internet with good connectivity outside of school. This has been especially visible during the COVID-19 epidemic.

We demand substantial public investments and swift implementation of the actions already proposed in the European Digital Action Plan in order to provide all schools with high-capacity broadband. To this end, use should be made also of existing EU programmes, notably the Connecting Europe Facility, which can support the physical infrastructure of high-capacity broadband networks, and the WiFi4EU voucher scheme.

16. We call for education systems to become democratic, transparent and equitable

We stress that learners, teachers, staff, parents and non-formal education providers should be at the heart of the education systems. Their voices should be present in the decision-making of schools and institutions. Democratic education systems are key to encouraging civically minded learners and ensuring robust institutions. The fight against corruption and strengthening of the rule of law starts in schools, we insist that Member States adopt a model of transparent and accountable schools and institutions. Academic freedom is also a key aspect of democratic education systems and is under threat in several Member States. A European Education Area without academic freedom is unacceptable.

The #metoo movement has highlighted that our schools and education institutions are not as safe as they should be. Facing the reality of harassment in schools and institutions as a common problem is necessary to ensure equitable education systems. We insist that any strategies or overarching policies aiming to modernise education systems include eliminating harassment as a target.

We demand that the European Commission should support best practice learning and projects that strengthen democracy, improve transparency and encourage equitable practices to achieve social inclusion.