

Improving and Modernising Education: Weaving principles of inclusiveness throughout education systems

On 7th December 2016, the European Commission adopted a '[Communication on improving and modernising education](#)', unveiling its ambition to **modernise education systems** and **strategically mobilise education systems** for "our societies and economic development", focusing on the investment in education, modernising and reforming different stages of education and accessibility of education. The content of the Communication will be discussed at the **Maltese Presidency Conference on "School Leadership, Equity and Inclusivity"** on 16 and 17 January during the **Education Week** and hereby the Lifelong Learning Platform would like to express its views to feed into the debate on the upcoming EU Council conclusions on inclusive education.

The Platform generally **welcomes the Communication** addressing the need to ensure the **quality education for all**, which reflects the Platform's position overall, as expressed in the 2015 [Manifesto on Building the Future of Learning](#). As the Communication rightly addresses, quality education "can be one of the **most effective ways to address socio-economic inequalities and promote social inclusion**". However, the Communication shows a **degree of scepticism towards the public funding of education**, implying disproportion between the learning outcomes based on the PISA results and level of public funding. A lack of public investment **presents a tremendous danger to the inclusion of the socio-economically disadvantaged** and translates into fulfilling the financing needs of education through commercialisation which directly results in **larger gaps** in our societies.

Furthermore, the **performance of education systems itself seems to be determined by a single survey representing** 80 per cent of the world's economy (and not citizens) and assessing 15 year olds in mathematics, science and reading - only three subjects, more linked to economic outcomes of education. PISA results are often used selectively to justify policy-making, as they in fact **do not claim to explain causes and effects** of phenomena in education. Like M. Sadler, one of the most influential comparativists of education warned already in 1900 that educational policies cannot be treated as "pick a flower from one bush and leaves from another, and then expect if we plant it at home we shall have a living plant." Obviously, the **outcomes of education cannot be properly assessed outside of the cultural context and local circumstances**, differences between societies and their education systems, including curricula, teaching and learning practices etc.

Although the focus of the Communication is on schools and higher education, **links between formal, non-formal and informal learning, as well as cooperation of schools and higher education institutions**

with other sectors of education, have not been sufficiently addressed. Last but not least, it is worth reminding that education cannot tackle socio-economic disparities on its own, as **synergies with complementary social and employment policies** are a prerequisite for a more sustainable solution. Indeed, synergies are the right way to increase relevance and efficiency of our education systems, which need to be built on the **“humanistic vision of education and development based on human rights and dignity, social justice, inclusion, protection, cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity and shared responsibility and accountability”**, as set in the Incheon Declaration and the Sustainable Development Goal 4!

Additionally, the Platform would like to stress that the following aspects need more attention in the communication and the upcoming school package of the EC:

- **All actors**, including children, teachers, school heads, parents and others, **need to be involved** in the process of modernisation of school education as true school leadership and in order to ensure the relevance of reforms taking place .
- Professional and non-professional educators need to be provided **quality lifelong training and working conditions** to be able to more effectively play their role of preparing future generations for life!
- The accessibility of early childhood and care needs to be a priority, as nurseries and kindergartens often present a **substantial financial burden for many**, and in particular for the disadvantaged, which puts children across Europe on an unequal footing from the very start.
- Despite the need for “high skills”, **economics cannot dictate the direction of (higher) education**. Namely, initiatives such as a **system-level graduate tracking can be problematic** as they can result in higher education programmes and curricula being based on instrumentalised educational outcomes, like wages or employment levels of graduates.
- Entrepreneurship education is perceived in a quite narrow way, as social projects represent a great opportunity for the youth to acquire entrepreneurial competences. **Social entrepreneurship better matches values taught in school**, such as solidarity and team-work, as well as creativity, problem solving and planning, and presenting and defending a project. Therefore, it also better fosters understanding between the education and labour market world.

The Lifelong Learning Platform strongly encourages the EU Member States to take these recommendations on board to ensure commitments to inclusive and quality education become a reality!



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The [Lifelong Learning Platform](http://www.lllplatform.eu) (LLL-P) is an umbrella organisation that gathers 40 European networks active in the field of education and training, coming from all EU Member States and beyond. Currently these organisations represent more than 50 000 educational institutions covering all sectors of formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Established in 2005, LLL-P promotes a vision of lifelong learning based on equity, social cohesion, active citizenship and personal development. The platform works as a space for knowledge exchange between its member networks and uses their expertise to discuss and feed in EU policy-making, making sure that European citizens have their voice heard. In that sense LLL-P contributes to a better understanding and dialogue between the grassroots level and European institutions.