

**Press release - Education and Finance Ministers meet in a first-ever joint meeting to discuss investment in education: will funding match the high expectations for education and training?**

*Brussels, 8 November 2019* - Upon the initiative of the current Finnish Presidency, and for the first time, the Council of education ministers (EYCS) and the Council of finance ministers (ECOFIN) convened together in a joint meeting. A symbolic merging of two spheres, the event was titled '**A strong economic base for Europe: pursuing effectiveness, efficiency and quality of education and training**'. The Lifelong Learning Platform welcomes such a meeting, an invaluable opportunity to raise awareness on the importance of investing in education in its holistic definition and as a public good. The Council on ECYS also approved resolutions on [further developing the European Education Area](#) and on the [key role of lifelong learning policies in support of inclusive and sustainable growth](#).

The aim of the meeting was to exchange views on the role of education and training and their contribution to long-term sustainable growth. The positive contribution of (all forms of) education and training to society is not breaking news and has long been acknowledged by both academia and decision-makers at all levels. The Council itself has recognised it in its [new Strategic Agenda for 2019-2024](#), admitting that "we must step up investment in people's skills and education". This joint event comes very timely.

During the debate several ministers stressed the role of education as a strategic priority for the future of Europe, including its importance in addressing societal challenges from the effects of digitalisation to climate change. They stressed that investing now in education means having a great return on investment in the long-term. The Lifelong Learning Platform shares this vision, since "an investment in education always pays the highest returns" (B. Franklin). As Slovenia aptly pointed out during the debate, if we take a moment to consider what the severe costs of "non-investment" in education look like, then the picture suddenly becomes clearer.

LLLW welcomes this unique opportunity to finally discuss an often-skewed topic. We hope that this will be the first of many meetings involving both ministries because strong and resilient education systems cannot exist without strategic and consistent investments in learning at all levels and of all types. Although investment in vocational education and training and adult learning were mentioned by a few Member States, we wish to further stress the importance of investing in the diverse scope of lifelong learning beyond general school education only, including non-formal and informal provisions

for people of all ages<sup>1</sup>. The role of education in this holistic scope for fostering democratic values is also fundamental and requires further attention, as already agreed during the Paris Declaration in 2015. This requires considerable investment to empower all citizens, regardless of age or despite their social-economic background, to avoid a two-speed Europe.

Therefore, we encourage Member States to keep investments for social inclusion high on the agenda, as well as for harnessing the valuable potential of European cooperation. This was stressed in particular by Italy and Greece during the debate who lamented the omission of education from the title of the new Commissioner-designate for “Youth and Innovation”<sup>2</sup>. After all, education in its broad scope is linked to achieving priorities in many other social and economic domains and this cross-sectoral importance must be matched by adequate visibility and investment, including at the European level. Delivering on a tripling of the budget for the future Erasmus+ programme, as stated by President-elect von der Leyen herself, would be a step in the right direction.

This first meeting was a commendable milestone, and other steps in similar paths are necessary to guarantee that lifelong learning systems in Europe realise their full potential in creating sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies.

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<sup>1</sup>[LLL Statement on the 2019 European Semester Country Specific Recommendations](#)

<sup>2</sup>[LLL Platform Reaction – Ursula, where did you hide education?](#)