

Brussels 2021, February: Investing in Education and Training for the Recovery of Europe

The current pandemic has disrupted education and training systems across the continent but while doing so, it has raised many questions for its future, too. It has highlighted the dire need for young people and adults to gain greater competences, knowledge and skills as the sole opportunity for a fair, just and sustainable recovery of Europe, as well as for re-orienting the economy toward a green, digital and inclusive kind. What we have witnessed due to the Covid-19 crisis has been a shift to the “virtual world” becoming central if not essential; learners and teaching staff forced to switch to emergency distance learning overnight; parents who have had to support their children in learning from home and most jobs, if not lost, mandatorily carried out remotely. This is obviously the best case scenario for the luckiest among us who could afford to take care of each other and have had access to the right infrastructure, not to mention competences and resilience. Consequently, *mental health has also become a serious issue, especially for young people*, and a key focus as people have been isolated for long periods of time and, in too many cases, made feel redundant.

The EU’s long-term budget, coupled with the NextGenerationEU initiative, which is a temporary instrument designed to boost the recovery, will be the largest stimulus package ever financed through the EU budget. A total of €1.8 trillion will help rebuild a post-COVID-19 Europe aiming to create a greener, more digital, more sustainable, resilient and inclusive Europe. The Lifelong Learning Platform welcomes the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), presented in late 2020. The Recovery and Resilience Facility will provide a total of €672.5 billion to counter the social impact of the pandemic and prepare European societies for the Twin Transitions. The loans and grants are envisaged to support investment and reforms in seven flagship areas, amongst which is the *‘Reskill and Upskill: Education and Training to Support Digital Skills’* Flagship. To ensure a whole generation of Europeans is not permanently affected by the impact of the Coronavirus crisis, we urge Member States to invest in their citizens - as also highlighted in the sixth pillar of the scope of the Facility¹ - to equip them to deal with today’s challenges and support their learning for tomorrow’s challenges. The Recovery and Resilience Facility is indeed an opportunity to create reforms and invest in education and training with tangible benefits for the economy and citizens across the EU, also in terms of wellbeing. Additionally, it is an opportunity to deliver on the knowledge economy we all strive for, as well as to achieve the European Skills Agenda and the European Education Area by 2025 and its targets². The other flagships of the Facility³ highlight digitalisation and the climate transition – both of which will need to be embedded in the knowledge of the people in Europe.

To bounce back and recover from the perpetuated crisis, it will be crucial to focus on competences, knowledge, and skills development for individual, economic and social benefit - to navigate today’s complex world, to be prepared for the fast-changing work environment, to innovate and to fully and meaningfully be able to participate in society and create cohesion. Just as reskilling, upskilling and Skills for Life are needed

¹ “Policies for the next generation, children and youth, including education and skills”, European Parliament, Briefing recovery and Resilience Facility, 2021

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/679088/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)679088_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/679088/EPRS_BRI(2021)679088_EN.pdf)

² European Education Area targets, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/document_travail_service_part1_v2_en.pdf

³ European Commission, Recovery and Resilience Facility Press Release 17 September 2020
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1658

to build back our societies, so are Life Skills. They should be embedded in all areas of education and training and not understood solely in the context of labour market needs. Life Skills support individuals' development which can lead to empowerment and resilience - especially where wellbeing is made a central focus, and they are equally important to boost innovation.

With this statement, we wish to call for European Institutions and Member States to ensure that the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs) seriously commit to robust investment and public expenditure in public services such as education and training. We invite the European Institutions and Member States to consider the following:

- **Member States should make use of the available funds accordingly.** The RRF should offer the opportunity to improve systems and provisions, so that stronger and up-to-date learning initiatives can be developed in all sectors of education (formal, non-formal and informal learning included), also taking into account the need to finance civil society organisations engaged in education and training, with the aim of capacity building and operational support. This represents an opportunity for Member States to establish a Lifelong Learning Guarantee that best fits both their regional, national and common European challenges.
- **Member States must ensure the involvement of the key stakeholders, education and training providers, civil society organisations in designing and implementing the NRRPs** together with the social partners. Only through co-design can such plans be truly successful and best respond to people's needs.
- **Member States, regional and local authorities, businesses and social partners, must invest in adult learning and education (ALE) as well as initial and continuing vocational education and training (IVET and CVET)** through other funds, too, so that Europe and its people can become more resilient to change and are able to recover from crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **The European Commission must give Member States the relevant instructions and advice for their plans, monitor carefully and evaluate their compliance with the set pre-conditions** and when monitoring evaluating the applications. We ask the EC to insist on the 7th flagship and to boost the budgets for ALE, IVET and CVET in the plans that are to be submitted.
- **The European Parliament must continue to exert their pressure on Member States to commit to at least 10% of their GDP in education and training** on a long-term basis and on measures [to close the digital gap in education](#).

These investments will pay off in the short- but also the long-term: Europe needs more and better skills and competences so that a sustainable, green and socially responsible future can be assured. This will require important commitment to social wellbeing that goes beyond up-skilling and reskilling instruments. Europe will need to invest in life competences that best address existing and rising inequalities.

LLLp together with its members and partners is currently developing a more technical proposal on ways to use the RRF for education and training purposes. We wish to reach out to Member States in the coming weeks. The current statement reflects the concerns and thoughts shared during a few member's consultations and an exchange of views with partners from EESC, European Parliament Members, ETUC/ETUCE, European Youth Forum, Social Platform, LIID and LEAP 2040 (authors of "[Open-Letter for a European Marshall Plan for Training and Education](#)", in euractiv.com, May 15th 2020).

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