



15 September 2020

Report

EDUCATION FOR
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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WHAT IS IT ABOUT?	3
FOREWORD.....	4
VIEWS FROM THE INSTITUTIONS	5
THE STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVE	6
CONCLUDING REMARKS	9



Initiated by EAEA and Lifelong Learning Platform together with a number of MEPs, the European Parliament's Interest Group on Lifelong Learning brings together civil society representatives and MEPs to discuss key issues connected to lifelong learning with strong emphasis on adult education.

An important reason to form the Interest Group on Lifelong Learning was the new Juncker's European Commission and its priorities. We stand for a comprehensive and trans-sectorial lifelong learning approach, and want to stress that education is not only about employment, but is linked to personal development, social inclusion, active citizenship, and much more.

The interest group works as a "watchdog" to what the European Union is doing on lifelong learning, and builds on its transversal composition to foster lifelong learning policies in Europe.

FOREWORD BY THE HOST



MEP DACE MELBARDE
VICE CHAIR OF THE CULT
COMMITTEE

On the account of the COVID pandemic, the first meeting of the Lifelong Learning Interest Group in 2020 took place online. The LLL-IG held an informal conversation among experts to address the many ways in which education contributes to sustainable development. MEP Melbarde, Vice Chair of the CULT Committee and host of the meeting, expressed her passion for promoting lifelong learning in all contexts and praised its transversal applications.

Lifelong learning is going to define our future and the current generations as well. Having one job for life is part of the past: as a matter of fact, currently, educational attainment corresponds to employment and life prospects. The new European Skills Agenda sets ambitious goals for upskilling and reskilling, and it is clear that the sustainability dimension is engrained in its actions, implementation, and ways forward. The European Commission has correctly identified as the main underlying problems for education in Europe: in the EU less than 1 out of 5 have been engaged in learning in the last 12 months. Just over half of adults in the EU have basic digital skills. The Skills Agenda aims to improve these figures. The pandemic will only accelerate the challenges ahead, as those with the lowest level of education will be impacted most. It is imperative to take action now.

Education and learning make humanity more intelligent but we have to clearly seek not only academic knowledge but emotional intelligence and value. We have to work

towards a sustainable future by finding cutting-edge solutions. At the individual level this leads us to actions we take every day which is why **integrating values into education is important for achieving sustainable societies**. Europe needs more innovation and so there should be stronger links between education and culture on one side, and employers on the other. The Centres for vocational excellence are aiming to do this through new partnership schemes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made life more difficult. **The transition to online and distance learning has not been smooth, revealing further the lack of digital skills and lack of infrastructure:** ICT skills will be crucial to overcome this situation. Inequalities have been exacerbated. The hybrid model is likely to stay and it should stay. **Innovation in education has been lagging behind.** There needs to be more flexibility and we need more moocs, podcasts, etc. Education needs to enter households and workplaces and be distributed through new digital tools. The whole credential system needs to be expanded and the Microcredentials approach is a welcome development.

VIEWS FROM THE INSTITUTIONS

Michael Teutsch, Representative of European Commission (DG EAC) took the floor to declare that the whole issue of green transition is important for the new Commission. **The Green Deal communication makes a clear reference to education and related skills development** and the need to get people on board: it's not only a technical issue, but a prescriptive feature as to the ways to work with all citizens. In terms of policy developments, the Green Deal called for a competence framework and it is also mentioned in Skills Agenda. In the biodiversity strategy there is an announcement for recommendation on education for environmental sustainability. The European Commission, and especially DG EAC, wants to follow up on this by **focusing on the broader role of education in the SDGs and what education can do to promote environmental sustainability**. In Erasmus+ programme there are also several thousand projects focusing on the topic of sustainability and this will certainly continue in the future. On the one hand, to continue cooperation projects and on the other hand thinking with the NAs how to make mobility programmes more environmentally friendly.



MICHAEL TEUTSCH
EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Looking back, we have key documents including Communication on SDGs from 2016 and the Key Competences Recommendation with a number of specific references to education for sustainable development. There is an agreement on the Resilience and Recovery Facility which will support a shift to green and digital transition and we hope education will also have a focus there.

We are preparing a Council recommendation on education for environmental sustainability as announced in the biodiversity strategy and this will be taken up in the Communication on the EEA at the end of September. We are also starting work and consultations on developing a new competence framework on green competence. **The Commission is very keen on seeking specific guidelines regarding good practice at EU level so that we have guidance for developing national strategies.** That is what we are going to do in the next months and to have a proposal ready in a year's time.

Tatjana Babrauskienė, Member of the European Economic and Social Committee, argued that we are missing an EU-level comprehensive strategy on green skills for all ages and all learners that should be eventually translated into national strategies developed with social partners and other stakeholders. We welcome the updated Skills Agenda and its focus on digital and green skills, but at the same time it should be highlighted the Agenda does not provide a target on participation in quality adult training aiming to develop green skills.

Climate policies naturally impact all sectors of learning and we cannot make progress only focusing on formal education, we have to give equal importance to all sectors. Green competences are needed equally for society and for economy. According to the OECD only a minority of schools

have classes dedicated to environmental education in their curricula. We call on the European Commission to conduct further research on green skills to help have a clearer picture on how things stand in all sectors.

Denise Chircop, European Parliamentary Research Service, said that sustainability is not only about the environment. In the Eurobarometer, citizens have expressed concern about climate change and the environment. In education we can aim to implement target 4.7 on education for sustainable development and also make use of funding programmes Erasmus+, Creative Europe and European Solidarity Corps.

A study for the CULT Committee showed that **a relevant share of projects and budget of programmes are already addressing environmental issues** but the budget share is still under the share of 25%. The author points out that Commission and project leaders can do more to improve awareness of environmental impact and role of participants as agents of change. The National Agency of the Netherlands decided to measure their CO2 emissions, of the agency and its staff, and compensated for this over the last years. This led to increased awareness among Erasmus+ staff and encouraged them to work in more environmental-friendly ways.



TATJANA BABRAUSKIENE
EESC MEMBER

THE STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVE



MAY EAST
GAIA EDUCATION

May East, GAIA Education, began the round of intervention from the educational stakeholders' perspective. She explained that **learners themselves have become agents of change and started shifting their communities towards more sustainable patterns of production and consumption:** GAIA brings in systemic thinking. Learners are not only empty buckets ready to receive information from education institutions.

In our work, we also draw on principles of Paulo Freire and talk about place-based pedagogy which is more about imagination than information. Based on our approach, we start to make changes in our local communities rather than focusing only on overarching strategies and policies only. I propose a new epistemology that embraces this transformative learning and a shift from intended learning to emerging learning and understanding lifelong learning as nested with others in communities and ecosystems that empowers people.

Rilli Lappalainen, Bridge 47, added that **our reference framework is already there:** we have target 4.7 and we should use its full potential which does not focus on environment, human rights and peace education but on all of these aspects at the same time. The rest of the world is looking at what the EU is doing: although not perfect we are a role model. The Envision 4.7 roadmap is thinking about all aspects of 4.7 and how we can make it happen. We need to jump a little higher and have a more holistic vision on what is the role of learning and the skills required across all policy areas. This is the main message. We need to look at all policies holistically, including funding.



RILLI LAPPALAINEN
BRIDGE 47

Jeremy Apert, E-Graine, offered another point of view. When we talk about Education for Sustainable Development, it's not always clear what the aim is: are we trying to change people's behaviour or are we trying to achieve through formal education to bring new skills for people to become scientists and innovators? We need to figure out whether we want skills and education to give us more expertise or whether it's about changing everyone's behaviour. How can we educate properly if we don't have the overall picture of changing societies? We often focus on university science departments but when it comes to sustainable development if a school is not trying to change its practice (e.g. meat, recycling bins) then there is going to be an opposition between the lessons and what happens every day. We see this as the biggest hurdle on the grassroots level. ESD is asking people to change radically how they live and to transform into more responsible societies. **We need to take into consideration the importance of non-formal approaches.** Learners need to learn by experience.

A round of audience interaction then took place. Elisa Gambardella (SOLIDAR Foundation), asked how formal education institutions can reach out to other actors such as civil society and adopt a more whole-school approach. Michael Teutsch replied that everyone who has looked into the topic will know that it's not about substance but about how learning takes place. The challenge is to make sure formal education providers work together with other groups and institutions. We have been trying to promote this for many years, he said he was convinced that it's part of quality education nowadays to help learners understand and have an interest in broader education as well as helping integration into the labour market. We are using our programmes to help cooperation between formal providers and civil society.

Etelberto Costa, EPAL Ambassador and former LLLP, pointed out that until now we have heard little about the **role of teachers and heads of schools** and centres for tech usage and linked with the EU digital plan for education. Large corporations are invading the education field with their content, tools, platforms, AI and machines for learning and we have to prepare to take positions on that as it threatens public education systems in Europe.

Michael Teutsch replied that the delivery of good quality education for what is needed in today's societies, it's about modernizing education and is not only technology driven - these tools shall be used for the benefit of education and not the other way around.

On this matter, Denise Chircop added that the European tools can help on this such as eTwinning and School Gateway and the projects themselves and the volunteering under ESC. These offer points of contact between schools. There is room for action and some concerns about AI. **If we allow big business to occupy a place in education, this will come at a cost.** Open source is an important area that we need to give room for.

Marguerite Potard, WOSM, highlighted that in scouting such an approach has been there for ages and it is called **experiential learning**. This is an essential part of learning and to have connection with the natural environment. Scouts value the partnerships element of the formal part but there is an important need to invest in outside school programmes. We need to tackle this learning dimension from all different sources.

Georg Jurgens built on former comments to point out that, at the moment, the main emphasis is on the cognitive side and about understanding things, but **when it comes to sustainability it is the experiential learning that matters the most.** In Steiner Waldorf schools kids have a nature garden so that they can see the consequences and grow their own plants, etc. this type of experience is very important at an early age.

Arja Krauchenberg, LLLP Steering Committee, said that parents also need training to understand the development of their children. We would like this to have more emphasis in programmes, as only focusing on what happens in schools is not enough. The crisis has brought to the forefront the need to encourage collaboration between sectors, between educators and between generations.

Noelia Cantero, EARLALL, offered the perspective of regional and local stakeholders. She said that on the regional level, **many institutional stakeholders have integrated the 2030 Agenda into their policies** and this is translated into courses and programmes currently being developed. We need an ambitious strategy at EU level, we know the EU institutions are doing things but we need to raise the visibility of this issue. Education for environmental sustainability should be more strongly highlighted in the European Education Area. Member states are not doing enough and one way to encourage them is through the European Semester: we need specific funding programmes to support this, Erasmus+ is not enough. We cannot forget teachers, trainers and mentors and we need to support them in this process.

Alice Modena, EuroClio, said that after the arrival of the coronavirus, in EuroClio they started to develop a new project on environmental history to support history teachers and show how climate change is a reality linked to civic engagement. By implementing this, they are using transfer of practice from non-formal education. **Mobility in itself is something that can help us reflect on environmental sustainability.**

CONCLUDING REMARKS

MEP Dace Melbarde thanked the interesting speakers. It is true we need all kinds of elements brought together but when we talk about sustainable development and ESD we quite often limit it to climate change. While this is crucial for building a sustainable future, we in fact deal with the need to build a new mindset at individual level and in society at large which is based on values and which unlocks the potential of everyone.

Since **Education for Sustainable Development is about building active citizenship**, mobility should be emphasised at a maximum. It is about building integrated communities. ESD should be deeply rooted in the local community. We need to develop responsible attitudes towards the local community with a global view and sense of interconnection. There is no lack of policy documents but we are lacking strategies for implementation.

The Lifelong Learning Platform is an excellent actor to go on with discussion and exchange of good practices. **NGOs and their role should not be underestimated.** Parents have an important role as educators and as learners themselves. If they engage in lifelong learning it will promote a positive attitude to learning among their children. For school principals we should promote discussion on how to promote a sustainable school environment, this has a lasting effect on young learners. I agree that Europe is setting an example and the world is watching: the EU is setting standards for others to follow but it also means we have responsibility.

Gina Ebner, Secretary General of the European Association for the Education of Adults, thanked MEP Melbarde as part of the organising team and added that today we have tools like technology, we have frameworks that we can already rely on. In Europe, we have the added advantage of the European Union and its programmes, and we have education as a topic for opportunity to exchange. We see here the possibility for the future, through civil dialogue we can bring transformative change. As civil society we need to build on that for transformation and I think by using those different parts that come together. It should be practice and activism and policy that work together.



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An important reason to form the Interest Group on Lifelong Learning is the European Commission and its priorities. We stand for a comprehensive and trans-sectorial lifelong learning approach, and want to stress that education is not only about employment, but is linked to personal development, social inclusion, active citizenship, and much more. The interest group works as a «watchdog» to what the European Union is doing.

The group aims to fight inequalities and discrimination in education in order to reach the Europe 2020 and Education and Training 2020 headline targets and contribute to the EU growth strategy this way.

Visit our website
<http://www.lll-interestgroup.eu/>

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An initiative coordinated by the European Association for Adult Education (EAEA) and the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLLP)



and the financial support of the European Union



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union