



European
Commission

3rd EUROPEAN EDUCATION SUMMIT

DIGITAL EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION:
EVENT REPORT – 10 DECEMBER 2020



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INTRODUCTION

Making the European Education Area a reality by 2025 was a commitment made by President Ursula von der Leyen in her Political Guidelines in 2019. At the end of September 2020, the European Commission adopted the European Education Area Communication and the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027), building a comprehensive policy framework for cooperating with the Member States to modernize education systems, providing inclusive and quality education from early childhood education and care to informal adult learning, promoting new investment in education all over Europe.

The two flagship initiatives were adopted against the background of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, which caused widespread disruption to education and training provision by schools, higher education institutions, early childhood education and care (ECEC), vocational and non-formal education centres, across Europe. There is a widespread common understanding that we need to strengthen our education systems, make them more resilient and inclusive, stepping up to the challenges of the digital and green transitions.

The Third European Education Summit provided the opportunity for stakeholders, including national education ministers, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), Committee of the Regions and representatives of the education and training ecosystem, to gather online, in order to:

- Provide feedback on the Commission's vision to create a European Education Area by 2025 and to implement the Digital Education Action Plan.
- Discuss the digital transformation of Europe's education systems in the context of the Covid-19 recovery.
- Exchange experiences and best practices in mitigating the effects of Covid-19 on education and training provision.

This report explores these topics, among others, providing a brief summary of the inspirational speeches and lively debates that took place throughout the Summit.

We would like to thank all speakers and participants for bringing their energy and ideas to the event as well as anyone else who helped making this event a success!



OPENING SPEECHES

Speech from Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission



In her opening, President Ursula von der Leyen highlighted the importance of education at societal and individual level, mentioning its role in teaching green and digital skills. The Commission President underlined that, while education policies are national and regional, action at the European level is essential.

She applauded the teachers for having embraced the challenges brought on by Covid-19, which forced schools and universities to use digital technologies to provide education. While this led to a steep learning curve for all it also exposed shortcomings to be tackled, such as the successful integration of digital technologies into the education system, the lack of access, equipment, connectivity and digital skills.

President von der Leyen assured that the Commission does everything possible to support schools, teachers and pupils in particular through the following initiatives:

- Commission **Communication on the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027)** to boost the digital competence of pupils and teachers and to develop the necessary infrastructure.
- Commission **Communication on Achieving the European Education Area**, setting out ambitious education milestones to be achieved by 2030.
- **Next Generation EU**, the € 750 billion recovery plan proposed by the Commission to counter economic fallout due to Covid-19, build a better and greener future and make the EU more resilient. It kick-starts a green renovation wave for buildings across the continent, including schools and universities and offers the chance to bring broadband Internet to schools.

The Commission President also announced the launch of the **Education for Climate Coalition** later in the morning by Vice-President Schinas and Commissioner Gabriel. This Coalition, inspired by the pupils' and students' 'Friday for Future' movement, aims at mobilizing the education community to support the goals of climate neutrality and sustainable development.

A special platform will bring together successful projects, such as eco schools and environmental centres at universities with a view to connecting, exchanging ideas and stimulating innovation.

The President closed by stressing that despite the digital development, teachers remain essential as do personal interaction and learning and working together of people from different backgrounds.

OPENING SPEECHES

Opening statement

Margaritis Schinas, Vice-President of the European Commission,
Promoting our European Way of Life



Vice-President Margaritis Schinas highlighted the urgency of addressing education and training in digital skills in view of the current pandemic, and how **inclusive, high-quality education is key to Europe's recovery**. However, **two key challenges** stand in the way: lack of infrastructure and digital equipment but also disparities in the access to education and training resources.

These challenges have been addressed through two flagship communications:

- The **Communication on achieving the European Education Area**, which lays out a shared vision for education in Europe, contributes to strengthening the resilience of the European education and training systems and prevents the health crisis from becoming a structural obstacle to learning, skills development and youth unemployment.
- The **Communication on the Digital Education Action Plan** presents a comprehensive European effort for the 7 years to give everyone access to the digital tools and the necessary infrastructure and equip everyone in the EU with the necessary digital skills and competences to live and work in the digital era.

Both Communications ensure that young people come first and strive in life, find fulfilling jobs and become engaged citizens. Both are fundamental to Europe's recovery and key to future growth. Strategic dialogue, strengthened cooperation and mutual learning with the Member States in a new enabling framework will help achieve ambitious education goals, such as access to high-quality education for all.

OPENING SPEECHES

**‘Setting the stage for the future of education’
Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner,
Innovation, Research, Culture, Education
and Youth**



Commissioner Gabriel took stock of important **lessons learned from the pandemic**:

1. The digital infrastructure gap must be bridged across and within Member States.
2. Pupils and teachers must be equipped with the digital skills needed.
3. Together, we are stronger, and cooperation is key.

She noted **four initiatives where digital transformation combined with cooperation at European level are opening up real opportunities**, namely European University Alliances, the launch of 25 Erasmus teacher academies, the Digital Education Hub and the Education for Climate Coalition. She encouraged participants to share their views and ideas.

**Welcome from the German Presidency
of the Council of the EU
Anja Karliczek, Minister of Education
and Research, Germany**



Minister Karliczek began by emphasising that the **German Council Presidency has made digital education a priority** and that certain elements must be in place to make it work, such as technology, the know-how to use technology and the initial and continuous education for teachers and pedagogical staff. Moreover, the Presidency strengthened vocational education and training through the Osnabrück Declaration. In addition, the Council has supported freedom of expression and condemned attacks on teachers.

OPENING SPEECHES

Statement by Sabine Verheyen, Member of the European Parliament, Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education (CULT)

Member of the European Parliament Sabine Verheyen spoke about **Covid-19's disproportionate effects on already disadvantaged communities** and stated the importance of not allowing these gaps to widen. Therefore, the European Parliament, especially the Committee on Culture and Education, has focused their policy efforts on **enhancing the inclusiveness of education policies**. She states that this is an important moment to reinvent the education system and bring it into the 21st century.

In addition, the European Parliament adopted a resolution, 'The Future of European Education in the Context of Covid-19', which emphasises the need for **education policy to involve a variety of stakeholders**, from parents to teachers to civil societies, **in both design and delivery**.



KEYNOTE SPEECHES

'Designing sustainable digital transformation of learning: BC/AC' Professor Butler, Dublin City University (DCU)



Prof. Butler focused her intervention on how to leverage Covid-19 to help understand digital education transformation. She argues that we must consider what was happening Before Covid-19 ('BC') to understand what has been happening During Covid-19 ('DC') in order to prepare for After Covid-19 ('AC'), the learnings of which would hopefully lead to digital education transformation.

Prof. Butler highlighted the **increasing need for critical thinking and complex communication skills**, as automation continues to reshape the job market. The digital transformation spurred by Covid-19 alone, is predicted to create 149 million jobs in technology-oriented fields. For children to flourish, she argues that they must be equipped with the ability to think critically and leverage digital technology if they are to embrace this constant change.

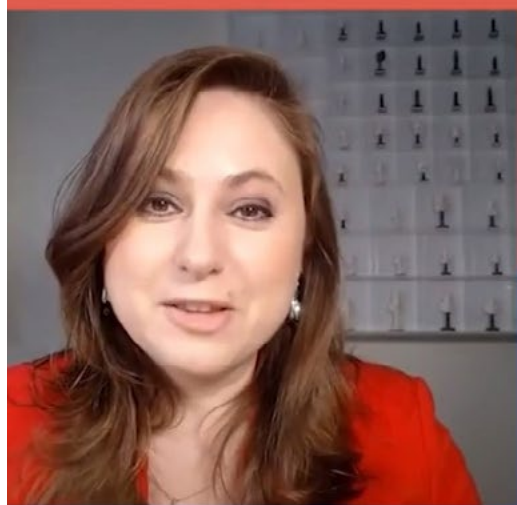
According to Prof. Butler, the central question is how to translate policies into action. In the context of digital learning, there are two key elements to consider:

1. **Challenges of system-wide alignment**, which includes the complexities of aligning across policy initiatives and implementing them in a consistent, coherent way.
2. **Key role of the Agentic Teacher**, which recognises teachers as the agents in ensuring children become digital learners and provides them with the appropriate professional learning opportunities to advance their skills.

In the end, she concluded that **"digital technologies cannot be separated from our values"**. They embody a set of cultural values and beliefs. We need to think how digital technologies shape the world and how we can shape the world with them." She challenged participants to be courageous and enable the transformation of their education systems so that all can live and thrive in our digital, connected and complex societies.

KEYNOTE SPEECHES

'The power of chess in education' Ms Polgár, Chess Grandmaster



| The Power of Chess in Education



JUDIT POLGÁR
THE GREATEST FEMALE
CHESS PLAYER OF ALL TIME

WWW.ABTPOLGAR.COM

| Third European Education Summit | Online 2020

Ms Polgár spoke of **the power of chess in education**. She recounted her beginnings in chess, starting at the age of five and playing against the top players in the world by the age of sixteen. Both as a chess player and as a young woman in a very male-dominated arena, she learned the virtues of self confidence, patience, and how to handle loss and victory.

In 2012, a European Parliament declaration supported implementing chess in schools, with several Member States integrating it in their curricula. She pointed out that children gain different skills depending on who teaches them chess. When teachers introduce the game into to their classrooms, children **build social and emotional skills**, as well as increase their **motivation to learn**. When introduced as an afterschool programme, by a chess coach, students work on their **logical thinking skills, pattern recognition and problem solving**.

The Judit Polgár Foundation has introduced its award-winning Chess Palace education programme to 500 schools across Hungary. In parallel with its efforts to engage children in chess, it has carried out valuable research about the merits of teaching chess. For example, they found that **students in the Chess Palace programme performed better than their peers in almost all areas of cognitive development**. Ms Polgár closed by challenging participants to think about how chess can be implemented in schools to help children develop healthy minds.

HIGH-LEVEL PANELS

'How to face the Covid-19 education challenge and master the digital transition in education'

- Mariya Gabriel, *European Commissioner, Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth*
- Antoine Kasel, *Head of Cabinet of European Commissioner Nicolas Schmit, Jobs and Social Rights*
- Dr Simona Kustec, *Minister of Education, Science and Sport, Slovenia*
- Lina Gálvez Muñoz, *MEP, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE)*
- Stefanie Schlunk, *Chair of Executive Board, Science on Stage Europe*

The panel took stock of where the European Union stands in dealing with the Covid-19 crisis' impact on the education system. The panellists agreed that the resilience of the current system needs to be strengthened to overcome vulnerability and shortcomings revealed by the crisis and that education and digitalisation need to be kept high on the European agenda in view of jobs, growth and a prosperous future.

European cooperation is key in the recovery process. The panel began with a plea from **Commissioner Gabriel**, for Member States to put education at the heart of their Recovery and Resilience plans. **Ms Gálvez Muñoz** warned of the risks of oversimplifying the Covid-19 crisis, as regional differences remain strong and a one-size-fits all approach will be insufficient in implementing educational and digital reforms. Panellists agreed that this **collective project requires a collective ambition** to execute on its goals. **Mr Kasel** stated that a 'European mindset' must be built, with a common sense of 'what Europe does for you', to increase social resilience and spark leadership. Panellists agreed on the need to create **synergies** and were optimistic about the **key role that the European Education Area will play** in creating ways to cooperate and share best practices.

Teachers are the 'captains' of reshaping the education system and bringing digitalisation to the forefront, as said by **Dr Simona Kustec** but, as the panellists unanimously agreed, they must be given the training and tools to do so. **Ms Schlunk** emphasised the **high pressure that has been put on teachers**. Most of them did not have the experience needed to teach online and had to adapt quickly to the situation. She urged countries to **systematically integrate online learning in the training of teachers** to overcome



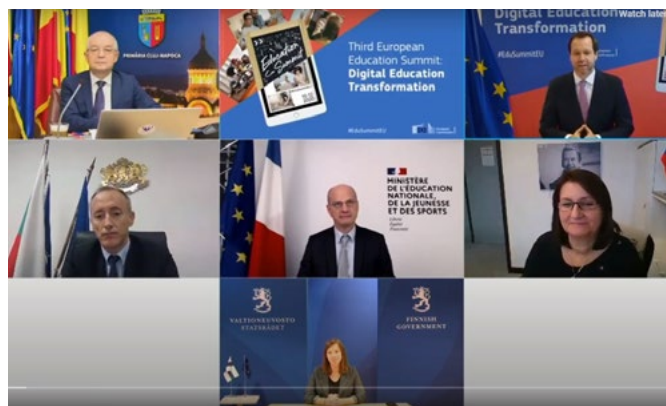
this deficiency. **Commissioner Gabriel** emphasised three necessary elements to equip and support teachers: **Erasmus+ and the new teaching academies, teacher recognition and visibility, and a common European platform for content-sharing and communication** between teachers. She mentioned the launch of a feasibility survey to build this secure online platform and welcomed the input of **Ms Schlunk**, whose organisation runs a cross-border STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) learning platform in 34 countries. In the end, digitalisation is not everything: **Dr Simona Kustec** said that distance learning cannot fully **replace classroom and physical teaching**, a point of view shared by **Commissioner Gabriel**.

The digital transition in education must give equal access to learning and leave no one behind. The panellists explored the meaning of 'equal access' in several contexts. **Mr Kasel** insisted on keeping **access to continuous learning for Europeans of all ages**, as a priority to keep people in jobs and prepare them for the job market's digital transition. To do so, he mentioned that **half of the workforce must be reskilled and upskilled**. In fact, 43% of Europeans aged 16-74 lack basic digital skills. Whether in the workforce or in the classroom, panellists agreed that inclusion must be at the core of any future policy. **Dr Simona Kustec** stated that different types of knowhow need to be considered: pedagogical, psychological and health expertise. **Commissioner Gabriel** addressed the **need for access to technology for disadvantaged populations**, citing the Digital Education Action Plan's goal to bring high speed internet to rural areas. Looking ahead, **Ms Gálvez Muñoz** predicts a more holistic, interactive future in education with less silos, but warns that the policies need to get it right and ensure that all genders and walks of life are included to avoid exacerbating the already glaring inequalities.

HIGH-LEVEL PANELS

‘Beating the odds: New opportunities to step up investment in education’

- Jean-Michel Blanquer, *Minister of Education, Youth and Sport, France*
- Li Andersson, *Minister of Education, Finland*
- Krasimir Valchev, *Minister of Education and Science, Bulgaria*
- Michaela Šojdrová, *MEP, Committee on Culture and Education (CULT)*
- Emil Boc, *Member of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC) and Mayor of Cluj-Napoca*



Investing in people’s competences is a vital and strategic priority for a resilient and competitive Europe and by far the best investment with the highest possible revenue in economic, social and political terms. The five panellists led a lively debate on the best ways to invest in education and training and offered insights into the particular national and regional investment strategies. All agreed that more and a better-targeted investment policy is needed to facilitate the digital and green transition in Europe.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to investment in education. The European Education Area was understood by all panellists as the appropriate framework to deepen the cooperation but also to commonly develop new strategies. The future expert group on quality investment in education will allow for such a cooperation. Minister Blanquer called on the Member States to actively contribute to the discussions about the macro-economic effects of education and training, pointing out the importance of investing in early years education to reduce inequalities. Minister Andersson discussed the necessity of equipping people with the required skills to meet the demands of the green and digital transition, investing in a way that allows for flexible opportunities for continuous learning. Mayor Boc provided the panel with concrete examples of how education helps addressing societal challenges and how regional and local authorities can make best use of EU funding, especially with regards to tackling brain-drain.

Education is a failsafe investment in times of crisis.

MEP Šojdrová in her statement wished for investments in the fight against disinformation and a recognition of how funding in research provides essential breakthroughs for society. Minister Valchev underlined the importance of installing quality STEM centres, digitally equipping and improving learning environments and supporting teachers’ (digital) skills and competences development. Investment in education, all panellists agreed finally, is essential to prevent the current health crisis from becoming a structural barrier to learning and competence development, affecting young people’s employment prospects and earnings as well as the cohesion in society.

HIGH-LEVEL PANELS

‘Education and training fit for a digital and green 21st century’

- Mariya Gabriel, *European Commissioner, Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth*
- Professor Radovan Fuchs, *PhD, Minister of Science and Education, Croatia*
- María Isabel Celaá Diéguez, *Minister of Education and Vocational Training, Spain*
- Dr Václav Velčovský, *Deputy Minister for Education, Youth and Sports, Czech Republic*
- Victor Negrescu, *MEP, Vice-Chair, Committee on Culture and Education (CULT)*
- Gillian Coughlan, *Member of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC)*
- Pierre Dubuc, *CEO and Co-founder, Open Classrooms*

The high-level panel ‘Education and training fit for a digital and green 21st century’ was an opportunity to reflect and discuss what is needed to prepare European education for the digital and green transition. Referring to Vice President Schinas’ and her announcement of the Education for Climate Coalition in the morning, Commissioner Gabriel proposed stimulating the sharing of knowledge, experience and innovation, connecting stakeholders and supporting an EU-wide mobilisation of the education and training community towards climate neutrality. The Commission would create a dedicated online platform in 2021 to help boost individual or collective pledges, covering five priorities: green skills development, teacher training, behaviour change, education-research interaction and collective awareness raising.

The appropriate infrastructure and equipment must be provided to support the transition.

Commissioner Gabriel encouraged Member States to utilise the resources made available at the EU level through the Connecting Europe Facility, Recovery and Resilience Facility, Digital Education Action Plan and the upcoming proposal on distance learning. With the **European Green Deal**, the EU plans to leverage €3 billion in green education infrastructure. At a national level, Ms Celaá Diéguez spoke of Spain’s concrete actions to ensure equal access in equipment and technology with the provision of 500,000 digital devices to disadvantaged communities.



Digital skills and competencies must be increased.

Commissioner Gabriel highlighted the Digital Education Action Plan’s focus on **inclusion in educating for the green and digital transition**. For example, the Commission proposes STEM and digital training for 40,000 students with 45% of participants being women. Ms Celaá Diéguez spoke of Spain’s new legislation focused on **vocational training for students and workers**, as well as the approval of 60 **new diploma areas** in the area of green and digital education. Ms Coughlan expressed her support of professional development, as it applies to teachers, through pan-European training and best practice hubs, specifically the **EU’s Digital Education Hub to connect teacher networks and provide training and resources**. In the private sector, Mr Dubuc suggested that **educational budgets be tied to competencies and employability** instead of attendance, to further encourage a skills-based educational approach.

All stakeholders have a place in co-creating the education system of the future.

Panellists agreed that long-term systemic change requires a coordinated effort at the European level, employing a **multi-stakeholder approach** – including teachers, pupils, parents and the private sector – to make the green and digital transition successful for everyone. Dr Václav Velčovský and Professor Radovan Fuchs agreed that this co-creation is a **values-based process** that must reflect compassion for others and the common values that Europe holds dear. Commissioner Gabriel underlined the need to mobilise stakeholders and create partnerships, as for the Education for Climate Coalition with the aim of encouraging setting up national or regional coalitions to drive the process at their level.

HIGH-LEVEL PANELS

'European Universities: Paving the way for higher education transformation post-Covid-19'

- Mariya Gabriel, *European Commissioner, Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth*
- Manuel Castells Oliván, *Minister of Universities, Spain*
- Frédérique Vidal, *Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, France*
- Simon Harris, *Minister of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Ireland*
- Vasileios Digalakis, *Deputy Minister of Education and Religious Affairs, Greece*
- Professor Antony Galabov, *Associate Professor, New Bulgarian University, ERUA European University*
- Professor Michael Murphy, *President, European University Association*



This panel focused on the potential of European universities to contribute to the Higher Education Transformation Agenda. Speakers expressed support for the Commissioner's commitment to reshape higher education through the European Universities Initiative. They agreed that the higher education sector had shown great commitment in managing the immediate impact of Covid-19, but needs to focus on ensuring inclusion, leveraging synergies and creating a European mentality and digital skillset fit for the job market.

Lifelong learning is at the heart of inclusion, as said by Mr Harris of Ireland. **Learning opportunities must be available to everyone regardless of one's socioeconomic background, gender and age**. As emphasised by Commissioner Gabriel, the Higher Education Transformation Agenda focuses on providing flexible and accessible learning opportunities throughout life, including **micro-credentials**. As Professor Michael Murphy mentioned, the system must offer the flexibility to **upskill for jobs that we haven't even imagined yet**. To this point, Mr Harris commented that upskilling should be guided by the needs of industry, and provided the example of Ireland's forum between industry and education to address the needs of the current and future job market.

Cooperation and synergies must guide the transformation of the higher education sector. Panellists spoke of harnessing synergies and close collaboration in several scenarios. Firstly, Mr Digalakis of Greece suggested that

synergies must be pursued amongst European instruments such as Horizon Europe, Erasmus+ and Structural Funds. Secondly, Ms Vidal shared her vision for a **forum between the 41 university alliances**, Member States and the Commission to take stock of administrative and legal aspects within the sector. Thirdly, Professor Antony Galabov called for more action in the area of connecting existing clusters and networks. Lastly, **student input** is important, which is too often left out the decisionmaking process, according to Ms Platteuw.

Higher education should focus on developing student mindsets. Ms Vidal said that a **'European mindset'** must be fostered by encouraging students to learn new languages and study abroad. Further to this, Mr Castells Oliván proposed establishing diplomas that are recognised across Europe, doing away with the bureaucracy that hinders mobility. Mr Harris also suggested that all higher education programmes be designed to **develop an 'entrepreneurial mindset', regardless of the discipline being studied**. He mentioned how Ireland offered summer camps for students to design and develop marketable products, to show that this mindset is not exclusive to business students.

HIGH-LEVEL PANELS

'Blended learning: The new normal for teachers'

- Dr Zoltán Maruzsa, *Minister of State for Public Education, Hungary*
- Jānis Volberts, *State Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Science, Republic of Latvia*
- Irina Elisabeta Kovacs, *Secretary of State, Ministry of Education and Research, Romania*
- Larry Flanagan, *President, European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE)*
- Daniel Wisniewski, *General Secretary, European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE)*
- Lucija Karmelutti, *Student representative, Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU)*



Due to Covid-19 school closures, schools across the EU are now working under new conditions, blending face-to-face with distance learning pedagogies. Panellists shared their views on blended learning and, whilst it was considered a useful tool during the pandemic, the panel discussed the outstanding needs of the educational community and how the digital transition should be met with a mindful balance of digitalisation and in-person resources.

Students need the emotional and technological support to thrive in a blended learning environment. As a student representative, *Ms Karmelutti* plead with the political and learning community to consider challenges from a student's perspective. For example, **mental health issues and mentoring**, whether online or in the classroom, should be addressed by **creating safe spaces for students to socialise**. She also called for investments in accessibility in terms of digital skills and **providing funding for the devices needed for students to connect** to online learning platforms. *Ms Kovacs* cited a success story from a Romanian school, with a majority of Roma pupils, where private partnerships were leveraged to provide digital tools to all children, thereby reducing the dropout rate from 70% to 50%.

Teachers need the tools and the knowhow to make the most of the ever-evolving digital learning environment. Panellists acknowledged that although online learning is not without its challenges, it can provide teachers the chance to take learning to the next level. *Mr Wisniewski* said that digitalising the learning environment can remove administrative

burden, enable teachers to better monitor performance and make their lessons more dynamic. On the other hand, he outlined the need for teacher education to include digital skills as well as the **competences to nurture transversal skills and media literacy among learners**. *Dr Zoltán Maruzsa* highlighted that in Hungary's case, IT development has been made a priority in order to design education platforms that **provide the pedagogical tools needed by teachers**, such as smart textbooks. Panellists also spoke of the need for **cross-border dialogue and exchanging best practices** to support teachers. More specifically, *Mr Flanagan* suggested that teachers' unions could be a way of facilitating dialogue between politicians and teachers.

Implementing blended learning in schools requires balance and an open mind. Panellists warned that despite the rapid digitalisation of learning during Covid-19, blended learning is about balance. *Mr Flanagan* reminded participants that **remote learning will never be a substitute** on its own and that the pandemic has highlighted how important physical schools are. *Mr Volberts* cautioned against putting all our eggs in one basket: "let's not go crazy with digitalisation but find diversification". He commented that **"we don't know what the future will expect of kids"**, thus a competency-based approach is the best way forward.

HIGH-LEVEL PANELS

‘Europe’s hallmark: Towards a more inclusive, digital and green new Erasmus programme’

- Prodromos Prodromou, *Minister of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth, Cyprus*
- Dr Justyne Caruana, *Minister for Education, Malta*
- Monika Filipová, *State Secretary, Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, Slovak Republic*
- Arja Krauchenberg, *President, Lifelong Learning Platform*
- Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck, *Founder and CEO, Lie Detectors*



With over 10 million Europeans having participated in the Erasmus programme, this panel discussed how the new Erasmus+ programme can continue its success, building on the past while taking it one step further by achieving a more inclusive, digital and green programme. In particular, panellists urged policymakers to pay attention to three key considerations: accessibility, the limits of digitalisation and cross-border dialogue.

The Erasmus+ programme should be accessible to all, with special consideration given to disadvantaged communities. The panel raised three important points in ensuring access and inclusion. Firstly, *Dr Justyne Caruana* said that the pandemic is the ideal time to take stock of where improvements can be made in the programme’s inclusiveness. She suggested that there be a focus on **creativity in projects to make the programme more accessible to the disadvantaged**, citing examples of concrete actions taken in Malta (i.e. one tablet per child and free internet initiatives). Secondly, *Mr Prodromou* stressed the importance of accessible vocational training and **validation of not only formal, but also informal learning opportunities**. Thirdly, *Ms Krauchenberg* mentioned that there is a fiscal balance to be struck between programme quality and the quantity of participants when it comes to ensuring inclusion in the programme.

The programme must be fit for a more digital world but should be mindful of digitalisation’s limitations.

As the founder of a media literacy initiative, *Ms von Reppert-Bismarck* believes that the programme **must equip students with the critical thinking skills necessary to navigate the digital world**. One of these skills is to recognise disinformation. She sees the opportunity to equip teachers with fun, easy, politically-neutral materials to

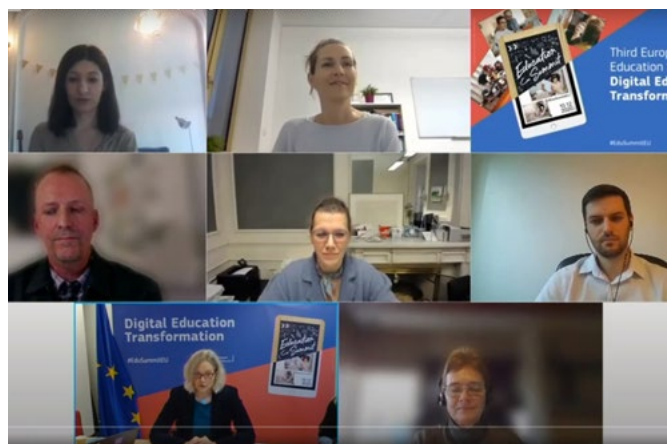
combat disinformation, acquire media literacy skills and build students’ critical thinking muscles in teasing out fact from fiction in the context of issues like Covid-19. In the end, **digitalisation is a tool but not an end in itself**, said *Ms Krauchenberg*, and face-to-face interaction is still important in the achievement of Erasmus goals.

A coordinated approach is needed to achieve a greener Erasmus. *Ms Filipova* commented on the **need for cooperation on a European level** to raise awareness on climate change. She acknowledged that the green transition requires that partnerships be built, and **synergies be made with other programmes**. *Mr Prodromou* emphasised that the three priorities of **inclusion, digitalisation and sustainability are interlinked** and, thus, digitalisation and inclusion must be seen as tools to deliver the green agenda.

HIGH-LEVEL PANELS

‘Gender and education: Levelling the playing field for women and men’

- Dr Iris Rauskala, *Director-General for Administrative Issues, Digitalisation, Gender Equality and Diversity Management, Austria*
- Barbora Buhnova, *Associate Professor and Vice-Dean, Masaryk University, Faculty of Informatics (FI MU) and Co-founder, Czechitas*
- Saskia Van Uffelen, *Corporate Vice President Benelux Inetum, Digital Champion Belgium, EU Governing Board Digital Skills and Jobs*
- Kostis Giannidis, *President, Erasmus Student Network (ESN)*
- Gohar Hovhannisyan, *President, European Students' Union (ESU)*
- Klas Hyllander, *Independent consultant, expert in gender and education*



Gender stereotypes have negative impacts and limit participation in education as well as career progression, especially for girls and women. Boys face their own set of challenges due to stereotypes, often resulting in school underperformance, dropping out and unemployment. The panel brought together a wide range of expertise and offered insights on how best to achieve gender equality in education and training as well as how to ensure that gender stereotypes do not hamper the ambitions and opportunities of all learners.

The way young people learn must evolve to address gender equality. Mr Hyllander spoke on the gender stereotypes that lead to boys' underdevelopment in school, especially as **school success is more associated with femininity**. He suggested that school systems counteract this by intervening as early as preschool to offset stereotypes, combat bullying, and **develop an effort-based school culture**. Dr Iris Rauskala added that **personality education** and self-reflection should be hard-wired into the system, instead of focusing solely on skills development. Mr Giannidis also suggested that emphasis must be placed on **studying and living abroad** as it broadens pupils' and teachers' horizons and breaks gender stereotypes.

Women need to be encouraged to pursue ICT careers so that they are not left behind in the digital transition. Ms Van Uffelen commented on the importance of re-designing the curriculum to make these fields more attractive to girls, making female ICT role models more visible and ensuring

that **women in the workforce are upskilled and reskilled immediately** to meet labour market demands. Ms Buhnova encouraged the **development of safe spaces where women and girls can explore ICT** and learn to trust their own abilities.

More research and collaboration is needed to further our understanding of gender stereotypes and their effects on learning and career success. Ms Hovhannisyan questioned whether enough is invested in researching the root causes of stereotypes and key questions like 'why is women's enthusiasm and academic success not translating into the attainment of leadership roles in their careers?' These **key questions and their solutions need to be shared at the European level**, says Dr Iris Rauskala. She added that the **European Education Area will could facilitate this dialogue**.

MESSAGES ON BUILDING RESILIENCE IN THE EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA

Statement from the future Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU

Tiago Brandão Rodrigues,
Minister of Education, Portugal



Minister Brandão Rodrigues stressed the vital role of education and training when discussing European society and economy, especially in the wake of the pandemic crisis. He also stated Portugal's support of the Digital Education Action Plan and European Education Area. He highlighted the **Portuguese Presidency's commitment to the following priorities in education:**

1. The establishment of the next strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, allowing for real progress towards the European Education Area.
2. The European Universities Initiative and launch of the EU Higher Education Transformation Agenda.
3. Equity, access, quality and inclusive education and educational success for all.

The Minister said that Portugal looks forward to hosting the launch of Erasmus+, as well as the upcoming Social Summit. Portugal hopes that the education sector will work for a strong, fair, social, sustainable, digital, resilient and knowledge-based Europe, in which lifelong learning, qualifications, competences and skills, mobility and transnational cooperation will contribute decisively to make the European Education Area a reality by 2025.

Manuel Heitor, Minister of Science, Technology
and Higher Education, Portugal



On behalf of the Portuguese Presidency, Minister Heitor **highlighted four main objectives for higher education:**

1. Increasing the percentage of Europeans participating in higher education.
2. Diversifying the educational offering (i.e. technical schools, universities, etc.), with an emphasis on specialised expertise.
3. Acknowledging the importance of research and innovation in higher education and job creation.
4. Emphasising the Erasmus mentality of educational mobility.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner, Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth

Commissioner Gabriel thanked participants for the fruitful day and their energy and enthusiasm. She encouraged continued cooperation through various European initiatives, including the **Digital Education Hub**, **Erasmus Teaching Academies** and the **Education for Climate Coalition**, to name a few. She also reiterated her intention to launch a feasibility study on the creation of a European exchange platform that would be free for everyone.

Commissioner Gabriel recalled the **strengths and weaknesses revealed by Covid-19** and encouraged participants to use this as a starting point for positive change. She restated her commitment to ensuring that the European Education Area is built with key priorities in mind, such as inclusion and professional development opportunities. She emphasised the **importance of Member States incorporating digital infrastructure and skills into their Recovery and Resilience plans**.

Commissioner Gabriel closed off the conference by saying that she looks forward to close cooperation with all participants in making the European Education Area a reality.



