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FUNDING EDUCATION FOR WELLBEING

REPORT

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Initiated by the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) and by the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLLP) 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. These topics represent an even greater transformative point, on the account of the digital and green transitions of the von der Leyen Commission.

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.

WELLBEING IN ADULT LEARNING

The meeting of the Lifelong Learning Stakeholder Group on 1 December 2021, taking place online and chaired by MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen, was held under the theme "Funding Education for Wellbeing".

A high-level panel consisting of Ema Perme, representative of the Slovenian Presidency, Dr Borhene Chakroun, UNESCO Director for Lifelong Learning Policies, and Dorota Sienkiewicz, Senior Policy Coordinator at Euro Health Net, introduced the discussion. Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills at the OECD, then presented new data on Funding for Wellbeing. MEP Radka Maxová closed the debate.

Brikena Xhomaqi Director of LLLPlatform, welcomed participants and opens the event which looks at the topic of funding for wellbeing in education. Increasingly, there is a loss of state funding, and with Covid-19 the issue is worsened. Ema Perme highlighted the adoption of the New European Agenda for Adult Learning on 30 November as one of the most important achievements of the Slovenian Presidency. "Well-being will be one of the cornerstones in the work on adult education in the next decade." She stressed that adult education in Europe is still very fragmented, but that it nevertheless has a central role in addressing megatrends such as demographic change, digitalisation and climate change. "We need to focus on the quality of adult education, raising awareness among all stakeholders and promoting inclusion and equal opportunities," said Ms Perme.

WHOLE-GOVERNMENT APPROACH

Dr Borhene Chakroun said that citizens are facing a number of major transitions and uncertainties related to societal aspects. These include not only the green and digital transitions, but also demographic and economic changes, some of which are related to the current COVID-19 pandemic. "If we look at how education systems around the world are responding, we find that the **resources allocated to education are less than 3% of GDP**. We need a 'whole of government approach'. The stimulus packages offer an opportunity to invest in education. Funding education brings a return on investment".

Dr Chakroun highlighted the importance of the Paris Declaration, adopted on 10 November 2021 by governments, multilateral organisations, civil society and other stakeholders. The Declaration on "A Global Call for Investing in the Futures of Education" aims to sustainably strengthen the financing of education systems to meet the challenges of the present and the future. "For well-being in and through education, we need to focus on three things: mobilisation of resources, equitable use of resources, and efficiency of use," pointed out Dr Chakroun. Learning for well-being promotes public health Dorota Sienkiewicz looked at the debate from a public



DR BORHENE CHAKROUN

health perspective. She said that Euro Health Net had analysed the national recovery and resilience plans and found that while biomedical research and disease management had taken centre stage in these funds, they did not pay sufficient attention to resilience aspects, such as using community care, primary care, etc. “Disease prevention still plays a minor role in public funding. There would be

a lot of potential here, for example in digital health literacy, mental health literacy and social skills,” she stressed, adding that “This requires working across sectors.”

MEP Sirpa Pietikainen said: “We need to focus on digital accessibility, language and technology. We put too much emphasis on the individual and not enough on society. We should really focus on people when we think about what causes health inequalities.” She believes that focusing on technology and pharmaceutical solutions in the current crisis does not meet people’s needs. “We need lifelong learning that promotes equity, sustainability and social well-being.”

Andreas Schleicher presented the results of the latest Survey on Social and Emotional Skills. **“The mindset we develop is the best predictor of learning success,”** he said. “Learning is not a transactional enterprise, but primarily a social-relational one. The decline in social and emotional skills between 10- and 15-year-olds found in the survey is a sign that education systems are robbing students of their motivation to learn, creativity and curiosity. This gap widens with age,” pointed out Mr Schleicher.



**MEP SIRPA PIETIKAINEN,
CHAIR OF THE LIFELONG
LEARNING INTEREST GROUP**

LEARNING AS A SOCIAL ENTREPRISE

“It is also clear from the survey that art activities can enhance students’ curiosity and creativity, as well as their well-being,” he said. “Positive interactions lead to better outcomes. Interestingly, the pressure placed on students by learning environments, teachers or parents is not the only predictor of student well-being. On the contrary, we can find high levels of well-being among students in highly competitive learning environments. It is the quality of relationships within the school that determines well-being,” said Mr Schleicher.

“The distinction between curricular and extra-curricular activities is a thing of the past,” stressed Mr Schleicher. “We need to integrate different learning spaces, especially in a situation where we see a trend towards commodification of education. In recent years, we have increasingly narrowed teaching and taken away many tasks from teachers that actually make teaching fulfilling. We need to return to a ‘whole of society approach’ to education.”

The speakers agreed that several factors are needed to promote well-being in lifelong learning. Dr Borhene Chakroun, UNESCO, emphasised the need for more people-centred lifelong learning. Closely related to this, he said, is the quality of programmes, i.e. whether the learning offered is of quality and how we define quality. He also urged consideration of other stakeholders in education besides governments. However, the involvement of the private sector is not easy to

address. Even though education and lifelong learning are a public good and a right, we should still ask what contribution individual stakeholders can make. “Equity must be at the heart of every policy action,” he stressed.

Dorota Sienkiewicz said that we need to **target vulnerable groups** and that we may also need to rethink the definition of vulnerability that we use. In her opinion, the pandemic is changing the way we look at what puts someone at risk. She called for co-creation to be considered in the development of learning programmes to promote well-being in and through learning.

Ema Perme said that she believes stable funding is needed, especially when it comes to education for vulnerable groups and non-formal adult learning in particular. Many countries rely on European funding. As members of the European Union, they pay into European funding pots and then try to get the money back out of that pot. Public funds need to be focused on those most in need of developing their skills and abilities.

Elisa Gambardella, Vice-President of the Lifelong Learning Platform, asked in an intervention from the audience whether the European Pillar of Social Rights and its principle number one on the right to lifelong learning should also mean a political guarantee for funding. “How can we ensure that when private companies invest in transversal skills, it is in the public interest?” she asked. She said that public funding of education should be expanded, also to limit dependence on private funding of education.

LEARNING INCREASES WELLBEING

Russell Hogarth, University of Central Lancashire and CEO of a health company, said in his intervention that many people are not aware of their health. One of the aims of his organisation is to organise “health events” that inform people about health issues and direct them to prevention programmes. Through this programme, he has seen people from marginalised groups whom they had helped become teachers themselves. From his personal and professional experience, “adults don’t enjoy adult education until they try it. If you introduce lifelong learning to people in a different way, they will see the benefits of it. Lifelong learning has been perceived in such a way that people think that lifelong learning is only related to work, but in fact it is related to life and managing one’s life.”

On this topic, Ema Perme said: “The idea of bringing lifelong learning to where people are is important. Participation in lifelong learning needs to be increased.” Non-formal learning brings people – including youth – closer to learning. She said that the whole ‘rainbow of lifelong learning’ needs to be drawn, and by funding education and well-being, skills are developed



ANDREAS SCHLEICHER, OECD

that can contribute to civic education. “If we don’t learn, we don’t exist.”

INCLUSION IN LIFELONG LEARNING



MEP RADKA MAXOVA

MEP Radka Maxová closed the debate with a plea for **better access to education**, but also for stronger exchange and networking at European level on good practices. “Everyone regardless of socioeconomic background should be provided with good quality education. For this, we need collaboration and open dialogue at the EU level. The EU should foster the exchange of good practices as well as promote investment in technologies.”

Susana Oliveira, Vice-President of the Lifelong Learning Platform, concluded the session: “Learners should be seen as agents of change. We need to address the fragmentation of lifelong learning in Europe while embracing the diversity of the lifelong learning landscape. Let’s use the momentum created by the launch of the New European Agenda for Adult Learning and make sense of the tools we already have.”



LIFELONG LEARNING INTEREST GROUP

MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT WHO SUPPORT THE INTEREST GROUP

- Sirpa Pietikainen, EPP, Finland
- Dace Melbarde, ECR, Latvia
- Roberta Metsola, EPP, Malta
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