

QUEST ANSWER TO THE EUROPEAN EDUCATION INTERIM EVALUATION

THE EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA TODAY

While we welcome the holistic perspective of education the EU has adopted throughout the European Education Area, as well as the spaces created for good practices exchanges at the EU level, we believe more should be done towards the national implementation of the European Education Area. Indeed, **Education remains threatened by budget cuts**, depending on EU political agendas and the ongoing geopolitical context. More should be done to promote education as the backbone of all EU objectives, in the long-term and across sectors. Additionally, **children's concrete participation in the implementation of the EEA remains scarce**, both at EU and national levels, with children retaining the position of beneficiaries (of EU policies, actions, projects, research and activities) rather than contributors. This represents a lost learning opportunity for children and may cause incoherences in EU policies, falling from asking children's perceptions and needs to the concerned population.

QUEST believes the EU should support cooperation around the following thematic areas :

- **Democratic participation of children in school and in the wider society.** Schools in the EU remain singled-out units, cut from the broader society, which is a missed opportunity for children's learning experiences ([see position paper](#)), soft and technical skills' development. Additionally, children remain majoritarily passive learners in altogether, their learning pathways, their schools and their wider community. A fact that deprives them from strengthening civic and transversal skills such as the ability to lead choices and embody the responsibility around them, voicing their opinion, collaborating, expressing their critical thinking and empathy, developing their flexibility and resilience. To do so, schools must first become more **democratic**, which means involving children's meaningful participation in the life and governance of their school. Secondly, schools need to be more **open to society** and engage directly learners in learning through their active contribution to greater societal purposes, as well as from experts working beyond the school context.
- **Concrete national implementation of the EEA.** While through the EEA, the EU portrays an holistic approach to education - based on innovative, lifelong and learner-centred learning - the EEA's vision's implementation remains limited at

The national level. More needs to be done in terms of monitoring and evaluating the EEA's national implementation, starting from the EU studying profoundly all education systems and sending clear structural recommendations to member states on how to implement the EEA. The EU should also set stronger national evaluations (including within the Education & Training Monitor), to rank the national implementation of the EEA, and involve more strongly civil society within the EEA's governance system as a means to hold member states accountable.

- **Self directed learning.** Self-directed learning, as a pedagogical approach, has never yet been considered in EU policies, despite its crucial importance in shaping the long-term skills needed for learners to adapt and grow within an ever more changing world. More work should be done within the EEA to define the integration of self-directed learning within national education systems, promote action-research and peer learning around it.
- **Soft skills.** We still notice a hierarchisation of skills, with the predominance of cognitive skills being monitored (notably in the Education & Training Monitor) while soft skills - essential for the 21rst century - remain a second priority. More attention should be brought onto the importance of soft skills within national education systems, their link to promoting an inclusive and sustainable learning environment. The EU should additionally engage in monitoring and evaluating the deployment of soft skills learning as an holistic approach within national education systems.
- **Bringing education back to nature.** While we have seen recognisable progress in the way environmental sustainability and climate science have now entered the school curricula, much efforts remain to be done regarding the decreasing accessibility of children to nature, essential for their well-being and long-term development. School has a major role to play, yet most schools remain closed units - disconnected from natural spaces (see position paper). The EU should support stronger cooperation around the reduction of barriers children face towards accessing nature, especially at school (lack of training, funding, curriculum flexibility) and the promotion of good practices.
- **Ethical reflections around children's rights.** The European Education Area should go beyond the education sector to spread awareness within the rest of the European Union around the importance of children's rights in education, education starting from parenthood to lifelong learning. The European Education Area should, therefore, increase its efforts to spread research-based quality information to european citizens, promote individual deconstruction around the idea of education, denounce adultism, multiply the adoption of pro-social pedagogical practices such as non-violent communication and democratic participation of children within their families, at school, and their

wider communities. Additionally, children's rights should be considered in every action taken at the EU and national levels, but also at local levels. New reflections, for instance, should be started around the relevance of the use of digital technologies in education. Digital technologies should only be used when fitting children's rights, including their right to a safe and healthy learning space and to having a say in all matters affecting their lives, which implies the need for children's consent to use technologies that are respecting the natural ecosystems they, and other children worldwide, live in.

To improve the effectiveness of European cooperation in Education and Training, we believe more should be done in regards to :

- **Leading EU-level monitoring and evaluation of member states' implementation** of the EEA, to then shape clear concrete recommendations, specific to national education systems, on how to implement the EEA in their respective contexts;
- **Setting-up concrete mechanisms** incentivising Member States to implement the European Education Area. While the initiative should come from the EU commission, consultations with civil society and expert networks should be organised to set-up comprehensive and effective encouraging mechanisms at EU and national levels.
- Granting a greater **involvement of civil society within the governance framework** of the EEA towards sharing research and holding accountable Member states on the national implementation of the EEA;
- Enacting concrete recommendations to national governments on how **to adapt their national legislations surrounding education**, to support the national anchorage of innovative educational practices and pedagogies such as self-directed learning, education in nature and open-schooling. This notably includes spreading awareness within national governments about the importance and benefits of curriculum flexibility;
- Within the EEA, every EU-funded project should include a minimum percentage of **25% of activities being learner-led, with a dedicated percentage of activities being reserved for children's participation**. This means allowing children to set their own learning objectives, project idea, implementation and evaluation.

We believe policy coherence should be improved in the following areas :

- **Children's active participation and right to have a say in every matter affecting their lives should reflect transversally every EU action on education.** EEA key stakeholder events should not remain a closed opportunity for children and schools seeking to participate and their voices should be represented in panel discussions (ex: European Education Summit) and activities. This can itself serve as a learning opportunity for classrooms presenting their innovative projects. EU Policies on education should always start from children's rights and be based on research investigating children's perceptions of their own needs. Today we witness a remaining tendency for adults to speak on behalf of children, without having first asked their perceptions, including in education. This bias to adultism should not be reflected in EU policies, especially regarding the EEA. When lacking, action-research (including children-led research) should be funded to identify the voices of children around the EU and shape EU policies accordingly. Additionally, the EEA should promote a new vision of children in the EU, as capable actors seeking to reach their full potential.
- **The linkages between sustainability and mobility/digitalisation in education.** Promoting learning mobility and the digital transition should not come at the expense of our climate objectives, protecting children's right to a safe and healthy learning environment. Initiating ethical and scientific reflections with children within the EEA framework around the right means of transportation they seek to take or whether they wish to use digital tools for learning and/or green projects for instance can trigger knowledge and transversal skills essential for children's choice making in the long-term. However, for these reflections to take place, the need for a mobility or digitalisation should not be imposed as a norm (in EU funded projects, EEA events, policy implementations), but constantly considered as an option.

To strengthen the European Education Area's and its work towards a greater inclusive and sustainable quality education in the EU, we believe the following actions should be undertaken :

- Shaping an EU-level recommendation on how to integrate transversally **self-directed learning** to promote an inclusive and sustainable quality education;
- Providing an EU-level recommendation, as well as concrete recommendations and case examples for national governments on how to **open school systems to society and engage children actively** in learning through project-based learning serving wider communities and environmental spaces;

- Spreading awareness on the benefits and means to **include children in collaborative democratic education and decision-making systems** at all levels of society (from the school to the national level) through an EU recommendation, guidance & support to national governments, dedicated spaces for exchanges of good practices, research;
- **Spreading funding and training to bring back the school to nature**, through teacher training on education in nature, green learning projects, promoting the deblocking of national funds for education as an investment for the green transition.

Quest keeps its expertise at the disposal of the EU Commission, and any other institutional actor, to promote the rights of children in education.

For further information please contact our Policy Officer :

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