



the 2026 – 2029

RECLAIMING EDUCATION toolkit

A guide for

Learners

Teachers

Schools

Communities

advocating for
democratic, just, and
regenerative pedagogies
at local and EU level



Co-funded by
the European Union



Introduction

Why this toolkit ?

Around the world, schools, educators, and learners are proving that education can be democratic, just, and profoundly connected to the environment and the community. However, these grassroots innovations often remain isolated, restricted by rigid national frameworks or a lack of institutional support.

This toolkit wants to demystify EU advocacy and help you navigate local and European decision-making, so that your school / organisation can raise their concerns and visions for education at different levels.

You will find out the levers of power able to influence education policies at EU level, while translating your everyday practices into structured “asks” to share with decision makers.



There are so many different, creative ways to advocate for a cause! While some sections of this toolkit focus more on institutional advocacy (meaning how we interact with, navigate, and influence the formal organisations and systems that hold systemic power), **we celebrate all expressions of activism.**

Whether it looks like direct action, community organising, or the more quiet, deep pedagogical work within a school that slowly shifts consciousness and paradigms, all of these paths are vital and feed into one another.

Crucially, we must also remember that advocacy is not a task reserved solely for adults or citizens. **A truly democratic educational movement must protect and actively hold spaces for children and youth to design and lead their own advocacy** actions in the issues that matter most to them.

We designed this toolkit for teachers, learners, and local communities to lead change on the ground. By uniting these voices and collective demands through networks like QUEST around shared values and fundamental rights, we can build the movements needed for true educational transformation!



Table of contents

INTRODUCTION	1
PART I – Our compass : Transformative pedagogies rooted in children's rights	5
PART II – Understanding the EU : How decisions on education are made (& how you can play a role)	8
European institutions and the institutional triangle	9
1) The European Commission	10
2) The European Parliament	14
3) The Council of the European Union	18
4) EU Consultative Bodies	20
a) The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)	21
b) The European Committee of the Regions (CoR)	22
c) The Court of Justice (CJEU)	23
Part III – The Advocacy Target : Who decides what in your country?	24
1) Mapping your local levers of power	26
A) The POLICY-MAKERS : Who writes the rules and holds the budget	26
B) The IMPLEMENTERS and INFLUENCERS : Who delivers or shapes the rules?	27
C) The LOGICAL ALLIES : Who shares our vision?	28
Part IV – Our asks : Turning our pillars and ideas into structured change and policy proposals	29
1) Three Frameworks to reflect on your mode of action	30
a) Joanna Macy's 3 pillars of the "Great Turning"	30
b) The Theory of Change (ToC) (for schools)	31
c) The "Seasons of Involvement"	32
2) Your toolbelt for education advocacy – Shared frameworks and policy hooks	33
3) Your toolbelt for education advocacy – The Ask Cards	35
Ask card 1 – Democracy and Agency	36



Advocacy Toolkit

Ask card 2 – Critical (Un)learning and Social Justice	37
Ask card 3 – Ending segregation of special needs	38
Ask card 4 – The importance of eco-pedagogies	39
4) Speaking in Advocacy : Some tips	40
5) European funding pathways	41
PART V – From vision to reality	42
Phase 0 : Ground and build (your narrative)	43
Phase 1 : Prepare and map	43
Phase 2 : Engage locally and connect to Europe	44
Phase 3 : Sustain and adapt	45
PART VI – Resources	46
Template 1 – Meeting request to a local decision-maker	47
Template 2 – Email to your Member of European Parliament (MEP)	48
Template 3 – The “Elevator Pitch” format and tips	49
Glossary	51
Stronger together : How can QUEST support your advocacy ?	52



‘Good to know’s

Who is the current president of the European Commission ?	10
Where to find the DGs organigrams ?	12
How can people / organisations engage with the Commission ?	14
How to engage with the European Parliament ?	16
The most right-wing Parliament ever	17
Council of the European Union v.s. European Council v.s. Council of Europe	18
Advocacy at the Council level starts at home!	20
Own-Initiative Opinions and “Rapporteurs”	21
Leveraging the Subsidiarity principle	22
The European Semester	25
The EU’s role in education is strictly supportive, BUT... ..	35
Advocating in a competitiveness and defense mandate	35



PART 1

Our compass – Transformative pedagogies rooted in children's rights



Our advocacy starts with promises already made by governments worldwide under the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**, including :

- **Article 12 (Respect for the child's views)** : Children have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, and to have those views given due weight.
- **Article 29 (Goals of education)** : Education must develop every child's personality, talents, and abilities to their fullest potential, fostering respect for human rights, their own culture, and the natural environment.

To turn these rights into a lived reality, QUEST organises its advocacy around **3 deeply interconnected pillars** :

PILLAR	OUR VISION AND CORE PRINCIPLES	HOW IT LOOKS IN PRACTICE
Education through living democracy and agency	Learning that fosters self-determination and shifts power so that children have the right to express their views on matters that affect them, including their education.	• Students co-creating school curricula (or working with no curricula at all!) • Functioning democratic student councils and assemblies • Participatory school decision-making and budgeting • Implementing <u>sociocratic governance in schools</u>
Education for social justice through critical (un)learning	Breaking down barriers and breaking away from educational systems that perpetuate oppression. Addressing discrimination to advance education as a place of liberation,	• Integrating <u>decolonial perspectives in education</u> to challenge traditional power hierarchies and biases • Promoting equity and restorative pedagogies as lived practices in the school • Multi-perspective, accessible learning resources, and UDL to make room for plural ways of knowing.



	emancipation, and relationships, responsive to the interests of children in non-dominant groups.	
Education with and about the environment for building healthier relationships	Moving beyond passive learning to actively engage with dynamic, alive learning environments. Championing pedagogies where students learn to see themselves as part of a larger ecosystem, in a world undergoing a major socio-ecological transition.	• Place, belonging and interdependence → How children develop a relationship with land, place, ecosystems and communities, seeing themselves as part of the living world • Ecological justice, responsibility, participation, and agency → How ecological issues are understood politically and socially: who causes harm, who suffers, whose voice counts, and how action is taken. • Learning beyond the classroom → Rethinking the pedagogical and physical architecture of schooling, through outdoor, open, and place-based learning, as well as connection to local communities.

These pillars come alive more easily when schools don't act as closed islands, but as community hubs that continuously exchange with families, local experts, artists, scientists, local authorities, small businesses... to address real-world challenges together ; what we call Open Schooling.



Take a moment to reflect on : Which of these three pillars is strongest in your school right now? Which one requires the most urgent advocacy to become a reality ?

What if your advocacy goals extend beyond these three pillars ?

That is completely fine! The advocacy strategies in this guide apply to any systemic change you want to achieve. Moreover, practical needs usually connect back to fundamental values → Eg: equal computer access relates directly to social justice and equity...



PART 2

Understanding
the EU –

How decisions on
education are
made & how **you**
can play a role



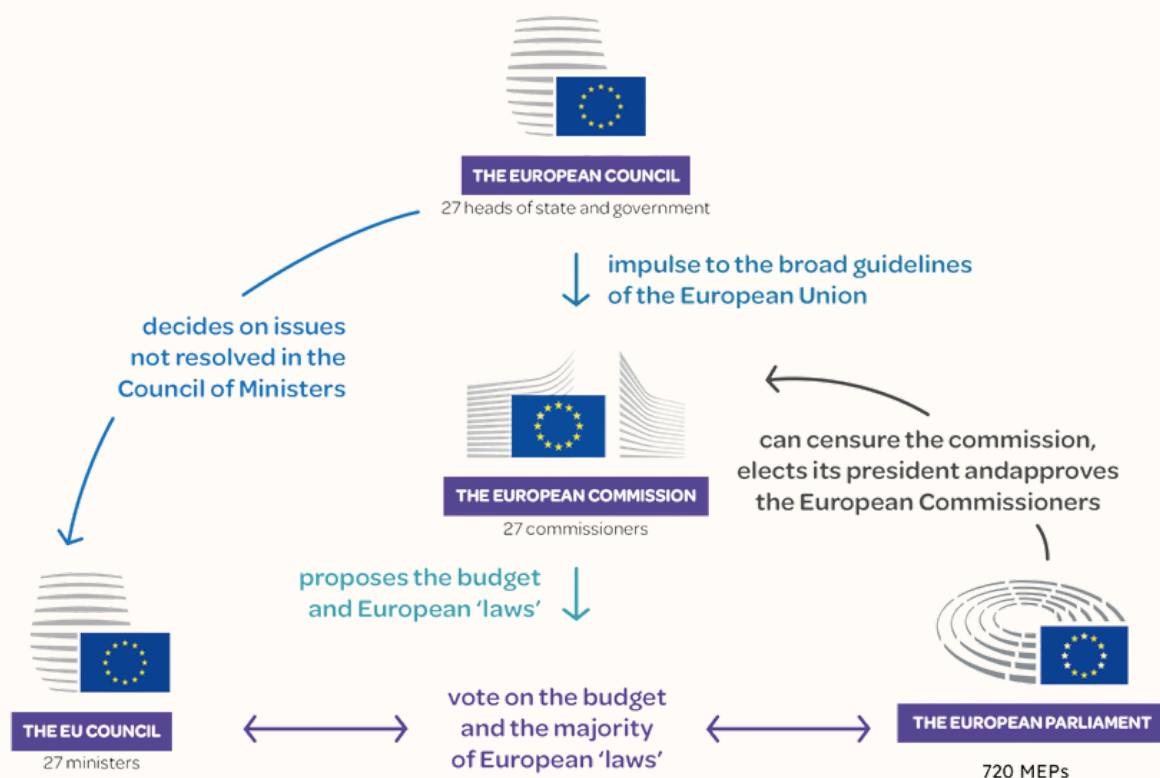
The European Union (EU) can only act within the limits set by its founding TFEU (**Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union**). In particular, Articles 165 and 166 deal with education. The EU's authority is divided into 3 levels of competence : exclusive, shared, and supporting competences. In education, the EU holds a "supporting competence," meaning its role is not to impose laws, but to assist, fund, and coordinate national efforts.

In other words, the EU offers guidelines and recommendations (like the European Education Area or the Union of Skills), as well as funding. However, the Member States are the ones who actually run school systems and hold the exclusive right to design national curricula.

European institutions and the institutional triangle

Who's who ?

To advocate effectively, you must understand the **3 main EU institutions** and how they interact to shape educational policy.





1 The European Commission



General role within the EU :

The Commission acts as the politically independent executive branch of the European Union. It is the only EU institution with the power to propose new laws (known as the sole right of legislative initiative). It also acts as the "guardian of the treaties," ensuring that all Member States implement and respect EU agreements, as well as apply EU laws (together with the CJEU). It also manages the Union's annual budget and funding programs, and it represents the EU internationally, speaking on behalf of all EU countries in particular in areas of trade, policy, and humanitarian aid.

Education in the current Commission : Portfolios, key players and departments to know :



Who is the current president of the European Commission ?

The selection of the Commission President is directly tied to the democratic results of the European Parliament elections. Following the 2024 elections, in which the European People's Party (EPP) secured the largest number of seats, the European Parliament elected **Ursula von der Leyen** to serve a second term.



Once the president of the Commission is elected, the process of building the "College of Commissioners" begins :

- Each EU Member State proposes their respective candidates for the role of Commissioner.
- **Portfolio assignment** : The President defines the specific portfolios and assigns them to the Commissioners-designate.

- Before taking office, nominees undergo strict conflict-of-interest checks. They must then face public evaluation hearings conducted by the relevant European Parliament committees to assess their knowledge and capability.
- **Final approval** : Following these hearings, the European Parliament votes on whether to approve the proposed College of Commissioners as a whole.



In the current EU Commission, the management of education and skills has been reshaped : **Executive Vice-President Roxana Mînzatu** holds primary responsibility for the education agenda under her portfolio "**Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs and Preparedness**", while learning and training are also featured in **Commissioner Glenn Micallef's** portfolio ("**Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport**").

Their portfolios are assigned via **Mission Letters**, which are essential reading : [Mission Letter of Roxana Mînzatu](#) and [Mission Letter of Glenn Micallef](#).



Now, the European Commission is organised into 56 departments, comprising Directorates-General (DGs) and Executive Agencies (EAs), each specialised in one specific area. Each DG is headed by a Director-General (who is a technical, non-political figure reporting to one or more Commissioners or EVPs) and is split into directorates, which are further divided into smaller units. Underpinning this entire network is the Secretariat-General, led by a Secretary-General reporting directly to the Commission President.



While education is a cross-cutting issue that touches almost every department at some point, the main DGs to know are :

- **DG EAC** (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture)
→ The administrative heart of EU education policy. It works to modernise learning and training frameworks, promote cross-border mobility, and represent the EU internationally in these areas. It drives programmes like **Erasmus+** and **Creative Europe**.
 - For this 2024–2029 term, DG EAC is politically led by an Executive Vice-President (**Roxana Mînzatu**) and two Commissioners (**Glenn Micallef** and **Ekaterina Zaharieva**), who report directly to the European Parliament.
- **DG EAC is divided into 5 directorates**
 1. *Directorate A* : Policy Strategy and Evaluation (focuses on broad policy and system evaluation)
 2. *Directorate B* : Youth, Education, and Erasmus+ (focuses on mobility programmes and youth strategy)
 3. *Directorate C* : Performance Management, Supervision, and Resources (manages internal framework and operational support)
 4. *Directorate D* : Innovation, Digital Education and International Cooperation (drives digital transitions and global partnerships)
 5. *Directorate E* : Culture, Creativity and Sport (oversees artistic and physical activity files)



The DGs organigrams can be found in their respective websites

If you are interested in meeting the European Commission, the best is to look for specific staff working in the specific Unit who deal with your sector of activity. **A detailed list of contacts of DG EAC can be found here.**



- **DG EMPL** (Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion) → Focuses on labor market readiness, employment creation, and social protection. In education, its role is tied to vocational education and training (VET), adult lifelong learning, upskilling the workforce, and managing the ESF+ (European Social Fund Plus) among other programs.
- **Other DGs with education in their agenda include** : DG HOME (Migration and Home Affairs) ; DG REGIO (Regional and Urban Policy) ; DG DIGIT (Digital Services) ; and DG CONNECT (Communications Networks, Content and Technology).

» **The European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)** : While DG EAC shapes policy, EACEA serves as its operational engine. It manages the actual life-cycle of projects in education, youth training, culture, and active citizenship. EACEA is supervised directly by 6 DGs : **DG EAC, DG EMPL, DG JUST, DG CONNECT, DG NEAR, and DG INTPA.**

The European Commission and Education :

The Commission develops European-wide policy frameworks, manages funding programs like Erasmus+ and ESF+ (European Social Fund Plus), and monitors national education reforms. It sets the (funding) priorities. These priorities are set out by the president of the Commission at the beginning of each new term of office in the [political guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029](#), and during the [State of the Union](#) speeches.

For its 2024-2029 mandate, the European Commission determined the following priorities :



- A new plan for Europe's sustainable prosperity and competitiveness
- A new era for European Defence and Security
- Supporting people, strengthening our societies and our social model
- Sustaining our quality of life: Food security, water and nature
- Protecting our democracy, upholding our values
- A global Europe: Leveraging our power and partnerships
- Delivering together and preparing our Union for the future



How can people / organisations engage with the Commission ?

- **"Have Your Say"** online portal : The Commission is legally required to ask for feedback when drafting new initiatives. Keep track of the open consultations to provide your input.
- **EU Citizens' Initiative (ECI)** : a powerful democratic tool that allows citizens to bypass traditional lobbying and propose legislation directly to the European Commission. To be successful, an initiative must gather at least 1 million signatures from citizens residing in at least 7 different EU Member States within a 12-month period.
- And **(transparent) lobbying?** It is any activity carried out to influence the formulation or implementation of policy, legislation, and funding decisions. To track the process and keep it transparent, the EU created the EU Transparency Register (that we recommend you register on to formalise your advocacy). Lobbying in the EU however can feel like a highly unequal playground. While multinational corporations and industrial lobbies use massive budgets to secure privileged access to lawmakers, educational NGOs, schools, and civic networks must rely on collective coordination and real-world evidence to make their voices heard.

2 The European Parliament



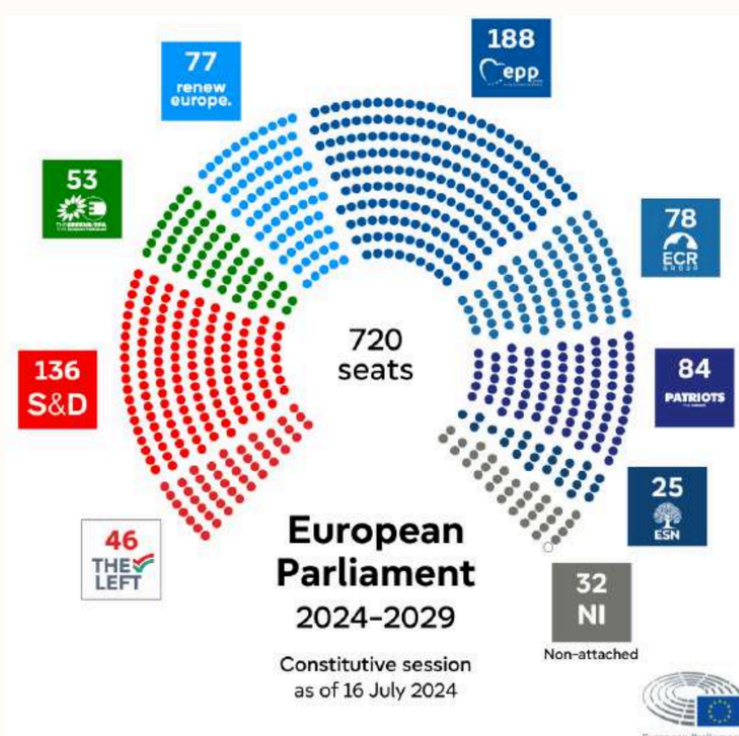
General role within the EU :

The Parliament is the EU's directly elected legislative assembly, representing over 450 million European citizens. It shares legislative and budgetary authority with the Council of the EU. It also exercises democratic oversight and political control over all EU institutions, including approving the appointment of the European Commission (*see above*).



Education in the current Parliament : Key players and Committees to know

Currently, the Parliament is made up of **720** Members (**MEPs**) elected by universal suffrage in the 27 Member States. The number of MEPs is determined proportionally to the country's population.



Although it cannot pass binding educational laws, it co-decides the budgets for **Erasmus+** and **ESF+**. It also writes "Own-Initiative Reports" that press the Commission and national governments to act on specific issues (for instance they could raise attention to mental health in schools).

Plenary sessions are usually held each month in Strasbourg. Smaller groups of MEPs called **Committees** are formed to tackle specific areas of EU policy and prepare the work ahead of debates and votes during plenary. At the moment, there are 22 Standing Committees. The **Culture and Education Committee (CULT)** (60 members, responsible for the "Erasmus+" programme, "Creative Europe", and the European Solidarity Corps), and the **Employment and Social Affairs Committee (EMPL)**, have education and training as part of their portfolio.



Nela Riehl
Chair of the CULT
Committee



Li Andersson
Chair of the EMPL
Committee

While Committees are formal groupings, **Intergroups** are informal groupings of MEPs from different political parties (and different committees) who share a common interest in a specific thematic issue. They do not have legislative power and cannot pass laws, but they are very important for advocacy. The most relevant intergroups for education work are :

- The recently created [Intergroup on the Future of Education and Skills](#)
- The [Intergroup on Children's Rights](#)
- The [Intergroup on Anti-Racism and Diversity](#)
- The [MEP group on Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development](#), one of the oldest intergroups in the Parliament



How to engage with the European Parliament ?

- Find the MEPs from your country/region who sit on the CULT or EMPL committees, or in the Intergroup on the Future of Education and Skills. Send them a short, impact-oriented email sharing your school's success or challenges, and ask them to champion these models during parliamentary debates. You can do so **in your language!**
- MEPs rely heavily on real-life stories from their local constituencies to build arguments. Take opportunities to share with them stories of your schools! And keep yourself updated with the latest discussions taking place inside the Committees like CULT, which are **public** and **livestreamed** on the EP website.

The most right-wing Parliament ever



The 2024 elections marked a turning-point in the EU Parliament's composition, fundamentally changing how majorities are built.

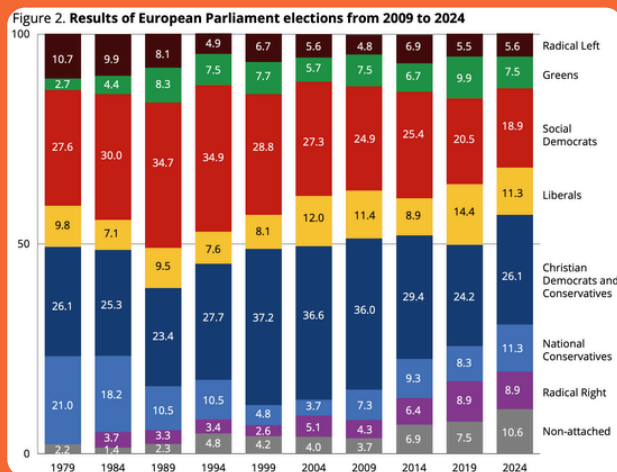
Historically, the Parliament relied on a stable "grand coalition" of the center-right (EPP), center-left (S&D), and liberals (Renew). Today, this majority is deeply weakened, and to pass any resolution, the EPP holds the balance of power : they can look left (to Liberals/S&D/Greens...) or look right and, increasingly, extreme-right (to conservative/nationalist/radical right blocs...).

Historically, civil society and educational claims have found more support among left-leaning and progressive political groups – though this doesn't mean civil society is inherently "leftist". This historical alignment, however, matters for what today's new configuration changes.

In other words, civil society can no longer rely on S&D, Greens, Renew, or The Left to automatically pass progressive texts, and the growing electoral presence of radical, typically far-right political groups within the EU (such as members of the European Parliament and, for the first time, of the European Commission) as well as in several countries poses many question, including : How far can civil society adapt its framing to build broader coalitions without changing the substance of its values or legitimising narratives that undermine them?

Critical questions that you need to continuously discuss with your teams!

Source :
Simon Hix et al. (2024)
"A new political landscape:
Europe after the elections"





3

The Council of the European Union



General role within the EU :

Often simply called "the Council" (or the Council of Ministers), this body represents the national governments of the EU Member States. Ministers from each country meet to discuss, amend, and adopt EU laws, and coordinate national policies. Alongside the European Parliament, the Council is the primary co-legislator and decision-maker of the European Union.



Do not get confused!

It is incredibly easy to confuse 3 distinct institutions with very similar names. Use this cheat-sheet to keep them clear in your advocacy documents :

1. THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (this section)

The EU institution where national ministers meet to vote on EU laws and policies. (Brussels / Luxembourg)

2. THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL

The EU institution made up of the Heads of State or Government (Presidents, Prime Ministers) alongside the Commission President. It does not pass laws, but meets at "EU Summits" to set the EU's broad political direction. (Brussels)

3. THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE (CoE)

A SEPARATE, non-EU international human rights organisation of 46 countries. It drafted the European Convention on Human Rights and created the European Court of Human Rights. (Strasbourg)



The Council and education : Key players and processes

The Council of the EU is a single legal institution, but it does not meet as one giant group. Instead, it meets in 10 different thematic "**configurations**" depending on the specific policy area being discussed (Eg. if the EU is discussing agriculture, the national Agriculture Ministers meet. If they are discussing finance, the Finance Ministers meet).

For our work, the only configuration that matters is **the EYCS Configuration (Education, Youth, Culture and Sport)**. It is attended by the national ministers responsible for education, youth, culture, or sport from all 27 EU countries, alongside the relevant European Commissioners. The EYCS configuration meets formally twice a year in Brussels or Luxembourg to adopt policy documents and set common targets.

While the national Ministers get the media spotlight when they sign off on a decision, they are actually the final step of a long, technical, and diplomatic process. To target your advocacy, you need to know who is doing the work behind the scenes :

- **THE EDUCATION ATTACHÉS** → Non-elected national civil servants stationed at each country's Permanent Representation (embassy) in Brussels. They meet weekly as the "Education Committee" to negotiate the line-by-line wording of every proposal. Usually it is at this stage that $\simeq 90\%$ of the text is decided
- **COREPER** → These are the Member States' Ambassadors (Permanent Representatives) and Deputy Ambassadors to the EU. They filter the work of the attachés. If the attachés cannot agree on a sensitive political point, Coreper steps in to negotiate a diplomatic compromise.
- **THE NATIONAL MINISTERS** → Your country's Minister of Education. They sit in the EYCS Council meetings. If a draft has been agreed upon by Attachés and Coreper, the Ministers approve it without debate (an "A Item"). If there is still a disagreement, they debate and vote on it live (a "B Item"). They have high lobbying value but are harder to access directly



- **THE ROTATING PRESIDENCY** → A single Member State that leads the Council for a 6-month period. They host and chair all Council meetings, draft compromise texts, and set the specific priorities for their term, which may include educational priorities.



Good to know

At the time of publication of this toolkit, **Ireland** holds the presidency (July-December 2026), and will be followed by Lithuania (January-June 2027) and Greece (July-December 2027).

→ Decisions made under the EYCS configuration represent a consensus of national governments. So, for instance, if the Council adopts a Recommendation on "learning for the green transition," your local ministry of education is politically bound to support it.



Advocacy at the Council level starts at home!

You can lobby your national Ministry of Education officials before they travel to Brussels. If they know that local schools are demanding systematic support for participatory pedagogies, they are more likely to push for those terms during Council negotiations.

4 EU Consultative Bodies

Before a policy is finalised, the EU is required to consult its two advisory bodies. These can also be valuable allies for local-level school networks.



1. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

The EESC is a consultative assembly representing "organised civil society." It acts as a bridge between the European institutions and the economic, social, civic, and professional organisations operating in the Member States.

- Governed by Articles 301 to 304 of the TFEU, the EESC is composed of **329 members**, nominated by national governments and appointed by the Council for a renewable 5-year term.
- EESC members do not sit by political party, but rather by their societal sector:
 - **Group I – Employers** : Representatives from private industry, retail, transport, and banking.
 - **Group II – Workers** : Representatives from national trade unions and labor federations.
 - **Group III – Civil Society Organisations** (formerly 'Various Interests') : Representatives from NGOs, parent associations, farmers, consumers, academic bodies, and youth groups, i.e. you!
- The EESC's technical work is split into six specialised sections. All education, vocational training, youth, and citizenship files are routed to the Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC).



Own-Initiative Opinions and "Rapporteurs"

The EESC does not have to wait for a request ; it can issue **Own-Initiative Opinions** to highlight critical issues (including related to education) and force them onto the legislative agenda.

When a file is referred to a section, a specific EESC member is appointed as "Rapporteur" to draft the committee's official opinion. Therefore, it is normally better to identify who this appointed Rapporteur is for your target file, rather than targeting the whole EESC. Send them brief, localised data. They frequently seek grassroots case studies to justify their policy recommendations.



2. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR)

The CoR is the political assembly that gives a voice to local and regional government authorities. Because local regions and municipalities are usually the entities that physically build, fund, and manage schools, the CoR is sensitive to educational infrastructure.

- Governed by **Articles 305 to 307 of the TFEU**, it also comprises **329 members** appointed for a renewable 5-year term.
- Crucially, CoR members **must** either hold an electoral mandate in a regional or local authority (local mayor, regional president, municipal councillor...) or be politically accountable to an elected assembly back home.
- The CoR's technical work is organised into 6 thematic commissions. The main body for education is the **Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC)**. SEDEC is responsible for formulating opinions on the European Education Area, Erasmus+, youth participation, and local school infrastructure.
- The CoR acts as the official guardian of the **Subsidiarity Principle** (the legal rule that decisions must be made at the closest possible level to the citizens, and that Brussels should only intervene if action cannot be achieved locally).



Leveraging the Subsidiarity principle

For instance, if the EU tries to propose a top-down educational benchmark that places an unfair administrative burden on local schools without providing funding, the CoR can issue a hostile opinion.

So, if you connect with local mayors or regional representatives in your country who sit on the CoR's SEDEC commission, you can, for instance, bring the case of how national rigidities block local ecological and democratic school initiatives. Amendments may then be implemented in the SEDEC commission to protect local-level pedagogical experimentation.



3. The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)

Established in 1952, the CJEU is the EU's judicial authority. Its role is to make sure EU law is applied consistently across all member states : It reviews whether EU institutions' actions are lawful, checks that member states are meeting their Treaty obligations, and rules on questions of EU law referred to it by national courts. Working alongside national courts and tribunals, it ensures uniform interpretation of EU law and its rulings can shape how that law evolves over time through legal precedent.

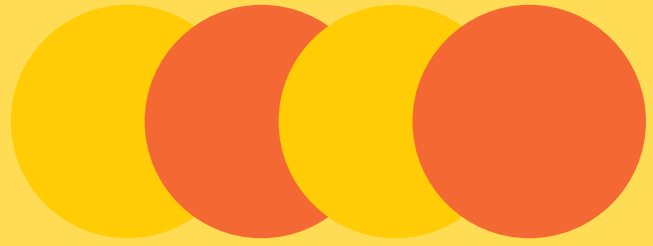
Therefore, it is less of a direct lobbying target, but its rulings can set precedents relevant to education rights and can be cited to strengthen a legal argument.

4. The European Ombudswoman

An independent body that investigates complaints of maladministration against EU institutions and bodies. For example, lack of transparency, unfair procedures, or failure to respond to citizens. It doesn't issue binding rulings, but it pushes for fair outcomes, greater transparency, and higher standards of conduct across EU institutions, and works to build trust between citizens and the EU through dialogue.

Created by the Maastricht Treaty (1992), the office is held for a five-year term tied to the European Parliament's electoral cycle ; the current Ombudsman is **Teresa Anjinho** (since December 2024).





PART 3

The advocacy
target –

Who decides
what in your
country?



As we explored in Part 2, the power to run national education policies belongs to your national, regional, or municipal governments.

However, national decision-makers do not operate in a vacuum. They are constantly looking at European benchmarks, funding guidelines, and peer-pressure cycles. Your job is to find the intersection between European promises and national decision-makers.



The European Semester

The European Semester provides unique opportunities for civil society organisations to gain access to decision-makers and engage with policy processes.

It provides annual guidance for Member States on how to address key challenges specific to each country. It therefore influences budgetary, social and economic policy decisions of Member States. It is published every year in Spring by the Commission and adopted by the Council. If you know the calendar, you can intervene right when decisions are being drafted :

- **THE SPRING PACKAGE :**

- **COUNTRY REPORTS (≈February/March)**

- The Commission publishes an in-dept report on your country's social / economical / educational gaps

- You can contact the national Semester Officer inside the local Commission Representation in your capital city, presenting your grassroots data and evidence on good practices to palliate the gaps identified, for instance.

- **COUNTRY-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS (≈May/June)**

- The Commission issues recommendations to address the challenges outlined in the country reports. Adopted by the ECOFIN and endorsed by the EU Council.

- Read your country's CSR. If it says "improve social inclusion in schools," use this exact line in letters to or meetings with local officials, to prove your model solves a problem they have been ordered to fix.



- **THE AUTUMN PACKAGE** (“Chapeau Communication”, $\simeq$ **November**) :
 - The Commission sets out the policy agenda for the cycle, based on the competitive compass (**see page 34**)

→ Check the new European Semester contact database and prepare targeted advocacy on the Spring Package by sending emails to your country teams. The country teams can be composed of officials in DG EMPL and the European Commission, or Economic Counsellors (previously ESOs) in EC representations in capitals. They speak your language and are often country nationals!

1. Mapping your local levers of power

A) THE POLICY-MAKERS : Who writes the rules and holds the budget?

These are the actors who have the legislative and executive power to, for instance, change curricula, testing frameworks, and/or allocate national or regional education funds.

The National Ministry of Education

Which specific department or unit handles school curriculum?

Identify: _____

Who is the Minister’s direct advisor on school innovation or inclusion?

Identify: _____

The National/Regional Parliament

Who chairs the Parliament’s Education Committee or equivalent? (They can host hearings!)

Identify: _____

Who is our specific local representative on this committee?

Identify: _____



The EU funding managers

What is the name of the National Agency managing Erasmus+ in our country?

Identify: _____

Which national ministry manages the ESF+ (European Social Fund Plus) allocations?

Identify: _____

Who is the Economic Counsellor (previously the European Semester Officer) in the local European Commission Representation in your capital city?

Identify: _____

B) THE IMPLEMENTERS & INFLUENCERS : Who delivers or shapes the rules?

These are the actors who manage schools day-to-day, represent the educational workforce, or have the power to block or accelerate your reforms.

Regional and municipal education authorities

Who is the local councillor or municipal officer in charge of school budgets/buildings?

Identify: _____

The educational workforce

Which major Teachers' Unions operate in our school district?

Identify: _____

School leadership and community

Who runs the local School Board or Governing Body?

Identify: _____



Is there an active, independent Parent-Teacher Association we can engage?

Identify: _____

C) The ALLIES : Who shares our vision?

“Alone, we go fast. Together, we go further!”

Identify the people, organisations, institutions, and networks in your region that are already working on progressive, ecological, or democratic causes in education.

Teachers Unions and Teachers in your school!

Any colleague(s) you can share your vision with?

Identify: _____

Higher Education

Which local universities or teacher training colleges share our pedagogical vision?

Identify: _____

Civil society and NGOs

Which local environmental, social justice, or youth NGOs can we partner with?

Identify: _____

The media

Which local journalists, community radio stations, or education bloggers/influencers might be interested in a grassroots story about educational transformation?

Identify: _____



PART 4

Your asks –

Turning your
pillars and ideas
into structured
change and
policy proposals



The goal of this section is to translate your grassroots vision into a structured policy message/proposal. After mapping who holds the power (Part 3), this section gives you theoretical and practical tools to design a message for decision-makers (**in your language!**)

3 frameworks for reflecting on your mode of action

A powerful advocacy message is never just a list of complaints, but truly a strategic intervention. To change a rigid educational system, we can structure our advocacy using three (or more!) frameworks for social change :

1. [Joanna Macy's 3 pillars of the "Great Turning"](#)

Environmentalism and systems theorist Joanna Macy describes the transition to a life-sustaining society as "The Great Turning." It happens on three interconnected levels simultaneously :

- **Pillar 1 : Holding actions (= resisting and defending to slow the damage)**
 - *What it is* : Direct actions, civil disobedience, calling out violations of rights, blocking harmful policies, and defending existing rights
 - *In school advocacy*: Writing petitions against budget cuts, students' and working union's protests, calling out institutions that are ignoring education stakeholders' demands...
- **Pillar 2 : Life-sustaining structures (= analyzing and transforming the foundations of our common life)**
 - *What it is*: Reflecting on the workings of the status quo and building its alternatives
 - *In school advocacy* : Launching a democratic school or a democratic school within a school (like [Suvemäe](#), in Estonia), practicing [restorative justice](#) to replace punishment in schools, caring for a school garden, implementing a democratic student-led assembly = Living proofs that a different way is possible.



- **Pillar 3 : A shift in values and consciousness (= changing the worldview, cognitive revolution)**

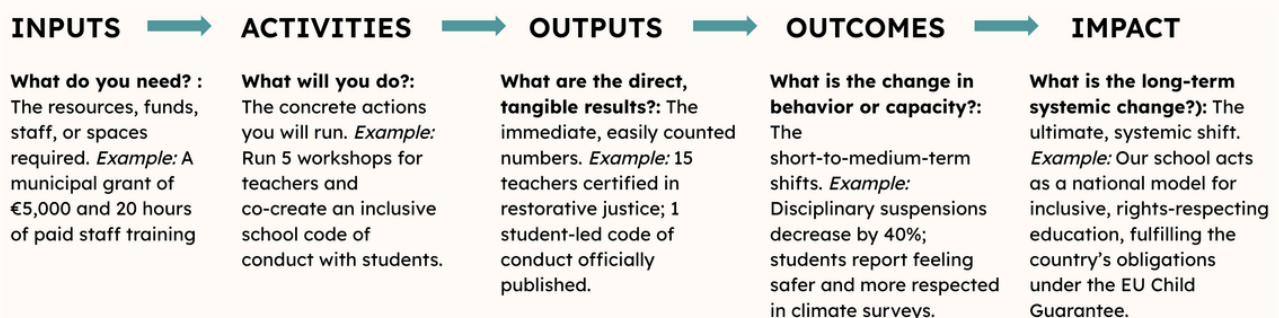
- *What it is* : Transforming how we perceive our relationship to each other and the living world.
- *In school advocacy*: Shifting from teacher-centric obedience to collective child agency, transitioning from treating nature as a commodity to treating it as a co-teacher, and unlearning systemic stereotypes, centering the **arts** (music, visual, poetry and visionary novels, dance, theatre...)

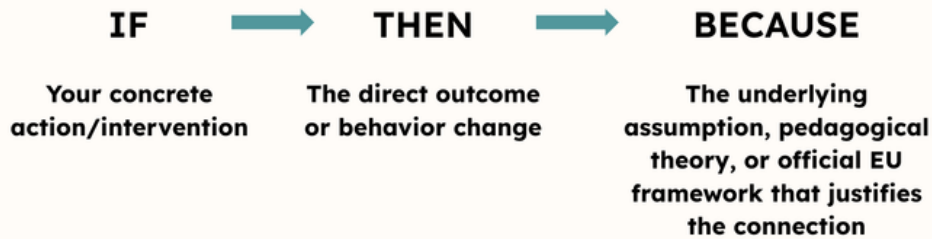
→ The overall idea is that successful advocacy usually balances all three pillars, and protects advocates from burnout. Indeed, if we only hold actions, the risk of burnout from constant protest is high ; if we only build alternatives, we risk isolation ; and if we only work on consciousness, our ideas risk remaining abstract theories with more little real world impact.

2. The Theory of Change (ToC) for schools

to convince those in power to carry out the changes you advocate, you must prove that your proposal has a logical, realistic pathway to success. A **Theory of Change** is a step-by-step roadmap that shows how your resources will lead to (systemic) change. Or, in other words, **a way of conceptualising where we are, and where we want to get.**

You can use one of these **2 logical chains to draft your message / proposal** :





3. "The Seasons of Involvement" (Credits : Écotopie).

FALL : "to change one's habits, lifestyle, daily routine, and familiar behaviors and actions"



WINTER : "to question and transform our perceptions and views of the world, humanity, and nature"



SUMMER : "the creation of networks based on solidarity, conviviality, and support for various forms of socio-environmental change"



SPRING : "a transformation of all the structures and institutions that shape our shared way of life "

This tool, "**Les saisons de l'engagement**", is an educational framework designed by [Écotopie](#) that helps us reflect on complementary modes of action needed for an ecological transition (or any type of transformation!). It breaks down different approaches to social change so as to help us explore diverse ways of contributing, reflect on our own style of involvement, and appreciate how different forms of advocacy support one another.



Your toolbelt for education advocacy – Shared frameworks and policy hooks

Your demands can be connected to established international and European frameworks and ongoing or forward-looking initiatives, so that they can be heard more clearly by those who can bring about change.

Here below a list of some of these initiatives :

- **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** : In particular, **Article 12** (Right to be heard) and **Article 29** (Aims of education) mandate that children's views be given due weight and education develop every child's unique personality and talents.
- **The European Pillar of Social Rights** : In particular Pillar 1, about Education, training, and lifelong learning, but all pillars under the 3 main categories (equal opportunities and access to the labor market, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion) are relevant!
- **The European Education Area (EEA)** : It tasks Member States with removing structural barriers to learning, modernising school environments, and prioritising educational equity among others. You can check-out and refer to the "[Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond \(2021-2030\)](#)", as well as the more recent [2023 midterm review](#), and [2024 interim evaluation of the EEA](#).
- **The EU Child Guarantee**: This framework legally mandates Member States to provide free and effective access to ECEC, education and extracurricular activities and at least one healthy meal each school day, for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, children from minorities, experiencing homelessness, and with disabilities (on this, you can check [the Alliance for Investing in Children's reaction to the European Commission's 2026 Social Package](#))
- **Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success** (2022) : An important instrument that talks about what success in education can look like and how to measure it. It includes mentions on wellbeing and the "whole-school" approach, and describes good practices for educators' professional development.



- The 2019 [Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care \(ECEC\) Systems](#) : About providing quality and inclusive opportunities from the very start of a child's educational path.
- [Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture \(RFCDC\)](#) : presents a set of learning competences for "to equip young people with all of the competences that are needed to take action to defend and promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law, to act as active citizens, to participate effectively in a culture of democracy, and to live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse societies."
- The [Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027](#) (2020)
- **Blended learning** approaches and the [Council Recommendation on Blended Learning Approaches for High-Quality and Inclusive Primary and Secondary Education](#) : Included in Priority 1, Action 2 of the Digital Education Action Plan (see point above), it proposes, after COVID, to integrate other physical and digital environments and tools, besides school-based settings.
- **Key competences for lifelong learning** : Revised in 2018, it identifies crucial learning competencies in different areas. In particular, you can check the [GreenComp](#) (for sustainability skills), the [LifeComp](#) (for the personal, social and learning to learn competences), the [DigiComp](#) (digital skills), and the [EntreComp](#) (for entrepreneurship skill).
- The [EU action plan on basic skills](#) and the [EU STEM Education Strategic Agenda](#).

In the pipeline but not yet fully implemented :

- **The Competitiveness Compass** : It can be considered as the EU's main strategic agenda during this mandate, aiming to align policy areas toward competitiveness, preparedness, and security.
- [The Union of Skills](#) (2024) : Driven by the Competitiveness Compass, the Union of Skills aims at being the primary European initiative shaping future education and training reforms. It already launched the two initiatives above (EU action plan on basic skills and the EU STEM education strategic agenda), and plans to launch other initiatives related to the green and digital transition to address the skills gap and labour shortage in Europe.



The EU's role in education is strictly supportive, BUT...

...its non-binding policy instruments still carry political and moral weight. From strategic **Communications** (the Commission's action plans) and consultative **Green or White Papers** (which pitch and propose future policy directions) to **Council Conclusions and Resolutions** (which establish shared political guidelines) and **Recommendations or Opinions** (which outline official stances and suggest specific paths of action), the EU can pressure national governments to align with European benchmarks.

Your toolbelt for education advocacy – The Ask Cards

These 4 cards contain possible formulations you can use to match your campaign goals. You can make adjustments so that they fit your context better, and you can reference the international and EU policy frameworks in the previous section to back up your pitch.



Advocating in a competitiveness and defense mandate

As you probably saw from the previous section, the 2024–2029 EU Commission mandate marks a big political pivot toward (economic) competitiveness, as well as industrial bottlenecks, and defense (in implementation of the political guidelines for the next European Commission 2024–2029 ([see page 13](#))). Together with a stronger focus on "hard skills" this makes it more challenging to pitch values like children's rights, environmental justice, and student/teacher well-being as priorities.

This does not mean advocacy is impossible! It is on the contrary very important. But we must be far more creative and closely monitor how the official discourse around these priorities evolves over time, while coming together to discuss how they may go against our vision for quality education and human rights and what we can propose instead.



A choice also usually arises between standing firm in your authentic terms, or strategically translating your vocabulary to open doors with more economy-focused officials for instance.

ASK CARD 1: Democracy and Agency.

The vision : Every child holds the fundamental right to educational self-determination. Meaningful choice and participation in decision-making strengthen intrinsic motivation, curiosity, and well-being. Learners are co-designers of their education, and teachers are celebrated as facilitators of democratic and self-directed learning processes, rather than top-down purveyors of knowledge and enforcers of discipline.

Some concrete asks for national and local leaders :

1. **Mandated self-directed learning time :** Allocate a minimum of **20%** of the standard school week (equivalent to one full day) **to dedicated Self-Directed Learning Time**, reserved for student-led inquiry and project-based work supported by tea.
2. **Weekly student councils or assemblies :** Legally mandate democratically or sociocratically elected, mixed-age democratic assemblies holding binding co-decision powers over school life (including student/teacher well-being, teaching methods, at least 20% of curricular/extracurricular activities, conflict resolution, and budget priorities.) → This in order to allow children to live democracy instead of just learning about it.



3. **Legal presumption of capacity** : Introduce a legal presumption of capacity in national education laws, ensuring students are considered legally competent to co-design their learning paths in line with their evolving capacities.
4. **Personalised assessment reform**: Reform national assessment regulations to recognise, validate, and document skills and knowledge acquired through self-directed projects, transitioning away from punitive standardised grading toward holistic formative assessments.
5. **CPD on democratic education** : Mandate and fund continuous professional development (CPD) modules (including micro-credentials) covering restorative justice, conflict mediation, and co-designing personalised learning pathways, among others.
6. **Full Per-Student Public Funding** : Require Member States to provide full, per-student public funding equivalent to the public school rate to independent schools that operate as non-profit, democratic entities, conditioned on the complete abolition of tuition fees and open admissions, ensuring that a child's access to quality alternative learning environments is not determined by family wealth.

ASK CARD 2 : Critical (Un)learning and Social Justice

The vision : Classrooms are active, self-reflective environments where systemic discrimination is explicitly named and dismantled. Curricula value diverse, decolonised, and historical realities, and education is a space of emancipation rather than a space that reproduces inequalities and oppressions.

Some concrete asks for national and local leaders :



1. **Adopt a Council Recommendation on Curriculum Equity** : Call on the Council to adopt a Recommendation on Curriculum Equity, requiring Member States to conduct and publish independent, regular audits of national curricula for discriminatory bias, and to integrate mandatory content on decolonial history, anti-racism, and LGBTQIA+ inclusion.
2. **National action plans for curriculum reform** : Require Member States to publish and fully fund National Action Plans to replace biased materials, backed by prioritised Erasmus+ funding to co-create inclusive teaching resources.
3. **Holistic curriculum integration** : Integrate social and emotional education, bullying prevention, and mental/physical health resources into curricula, from Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) to upper-secondary levels, in line with the Pathways to School Success guidelines.

ASK CARD 3 : Ending segregation of special needs

The vision : Segregated school systems are phased out. Mainstream schools are transformed into genuinely inclusive learning communities where all children regardless of disability or background learn together.

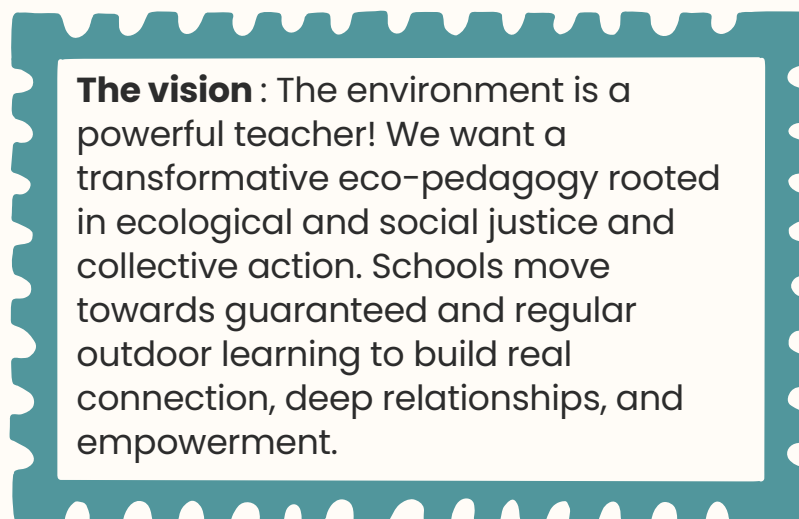
Some concrete asks for national and local leaders :

1. **Establish an EU Inclusion in Education Fund** : We call on the European Commission to establish a dedicated EU Inclusion in Education Fund with the explicit objective of catalysing the phase-out of segregated special schools and financing the transformation of mainstream schools into genuinely inclusive learning communities.



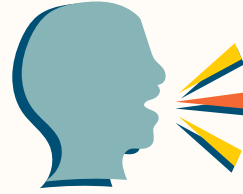
2. **Semester tracking of inclusivity** : Implement robust, standardized social indicators within the European Semester to measure, monitor, and report on school inclusivity annually.
3. **Training in inclusive pedagogies** : Fund mandatory training for all pre-service and in-service teaching staff in inclusive, non-discriminatory, UDL, and differentiated learning methodologies.

ASK CARD 4 : The importance of eco-pedagogies



Some concrete asks for national and local leaders :

1. **A European Right to Outdoor Learning** : Propose a Council Recommendation establishing a European Right to Outdoor and Experiential Learning, mandating a minimum of 1-2 days a week for learning in outdoor or community settings (open schooling).
2. **Local outdoor learning maps and funding** : Allocate municipal funds to develop local municipal "Outdoor Learning Maps" to ensure equitable access to public green/blue spaces and urban gardens for all schools.
3. **Adopt a Council Recommendation on Eco-Social Competences** : Propose an EU-wide Recommendation mandating Member States to revise core curricula to integrate eco-social core concepts (like interdependence, justice, regeneration) as horizontal competencies in all subjects.



Speaking in advocacy : Some tips

→ The ask cards can be used as written support (for emails, formal briefs, “leave-behind” documents at the end of meetings. Now, **in oral conversations, it is important to use other communication principles to win the room or your interlocutor.**

You must establish why you are in the room and package your demand so it cannot be easily dismissed.

1. Establish your legitimacy

Your power to influence does not come from a corporate lobbying budget, but from your unique legitimacy. Make this clear early on in your meeting : i.e. You bring ground-level pedagogical knowledge and you represent real human beings (active students, parents, teachers, and community members who live this reality daily).

2. Structure your message : Problem → Solution → Action

A key advocacy pitch must be **concise**. Try to combine these 3 elements into a single flow : The **problem** – What systemic barrier or educational challenge is occurring right now? / The **solution** – What positive, realistic, and tested alternative are we proposing? / The **action** – What exact, concrete step do we want this specific decision-maker to take today?

3. Deliver with the TEA method (within 2-3 minutes!)

The main idea is to move your interlocutor from passive listening to more active support

T – **Touch** : Grab them emotionally. Start with a real story or a shared community value..

E – **Enthuse** : Show them your working alternative to prove change is possible and in the move

A – **Act** : Give them a clear directive. Hand them the specific, actionable policy request that they can fund or support.



European funding pathways

The EU does not fund schools directly. Instead, it places baskets of money in the hands of national and regional authorities through different programmes. The funding for each programme is allocated within the framework of the long-term EU budget or the **EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)** which runs in a seven year cycle. The current MFF covers the period 2021–2027, and the next one will cover the period 2027–2034.

Below is a brief overview of the key programs supporting education, social inclusion, rights, culture, and research.

1. Erasmus+

The European Union's flagship initiative dedicated to supporting education, training, youth development, and sport across Europe. It primarily finances cross-border learning mobility (KA1), institutional cooperation partnerships (KA2), and policy innovation (KA3) to foster skills, educational equity, and active civic participation.

2. ESF+ (European Social Fund Plus) (2021–2027)

The EU's principal financial instrument for "people" in areas such as : the green and digital transitions, youth employment, support for vulnerable groups, social innovation, food and material assistance, and capacity building.

3. CERV (Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values)

A dedicated EU program designed to sustain democratic governance, uphold the rule of law, and protect fundamental rights. It finances projects that champion civic engagement, historical memory, anti-discrimination, gender equality, and child rights.

4. Creative Europe

The Union's flagship framework program for research and innovation. While highly scientific/academic, its dedicated funding for the social sciences can support research in different areas of education.



Advocacy Toolkit



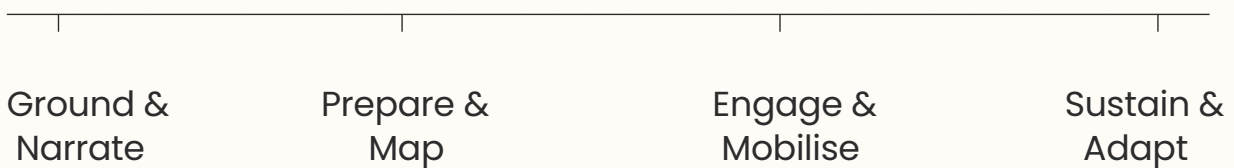
PART 5

From vision to
reality



This section takes from the previous ones to summarise some main steps your advocacy plan can follow.

THE CAMPAIGN JOURNEY



Phase 0 : Ground and build (your narrative)

(See also Section 4)

- **Step 1** : Ground your facts (research) → Gather field data. What do school surveys, student drop-out rates, or local environmental conditions say about your municipality?
- **Step 2** : Define your long-term vision → What is the ultimately just, beautiful, and sustainable future you are fighting for? ([see page 6](#))
- **Step 3** : Choose your main story → "In our municipality, parents and teachers noticed that young people spend less than an hour a day outdoors, leaving them feeling disconnected and anxious (the hook/problem)" "Our current school curriculum fails students on sustainability: it teaches about climate change in closed classrooms but fails to build relationship-building and real ecological empowerment (the systemic gap)." "We are advocating for a school ecosystem where children have real agency to shape their learning, where every child feels they belong in the land where they learn and grow, and where the natural world is valued as a co-teacher (the solution)."

Phase 1 : Prepare and map



Do not show up to a meeting as an isolated voice or with empty hands. Use this phase to outline your specific demands and map your network.

- **Step 4** : (with your team) Select your specific advocacy goal → It is hard to fight many battles at once. Identify the web of changes needed (funding, curriculum rules, teacher training...) and select one highly strategic, concrete win to secure first (for example : "Securing a municipal budget for outdoor classrooms").
- **Step 5** : Map the external context (**the "P"s**) → Assess the terrain you are stepping into : **People** (Who is affected? Who are your potential allies?) ; **Power** (Who has the actual authority to grant your demand?) ; **Policies** (What rules or laws currently exist?) ; **Politics** (What is the political mood (such as the focus on competitiveness and skills)? **Places** (Where is the problem located, what is the scale of the change?)
- **Step 6** : Assess your internal capacity → What unique expertise, storytelling power, or (volunteer) hours does your network hold? Where do you need to build alliances to cover your gaps?
- **Step 7** : Build your support → Gather real-world proofs of concept (photos, student testimonials, brief stats on your existing local programs, art pieces) and reach out to local partners (universities, parent associations, NGOs) to co-sign a joint letter of support.

Phase 2 : Engage locally and connect to Europe

True systemic change is a "double-ended" game : you lobby your local authorities while strategically using European channels to add pressure from above.

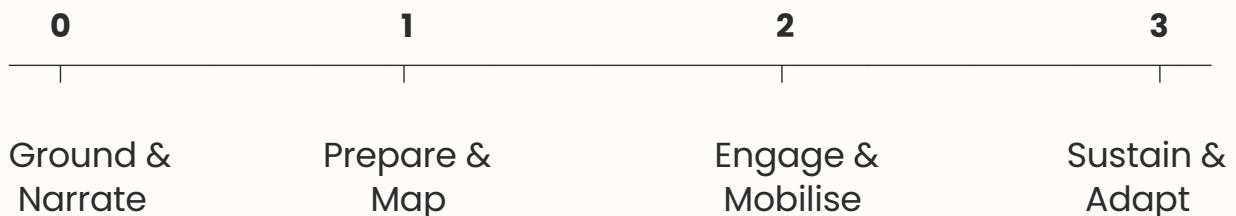
1. Action locally → Meeting with Officials : Use the TEA Method ([see page 40](#))
2. Connecting to Europe → Let your local MEP know how your local project is actively bringing European Education Area goals to life ([see email template page 48](#)). Respond to EU Public Consultations ([see page 14](#)), submit grassroots data or project results to DG EAC, connect with European Networks to strengthen your advocacy (like the [Lifelong Learning Platform](#) (LLLPP))



Phase 3 : Sustain and adapt

Keep the momentum alive after your initial meetings and stay agile as the political landscape changes.

- **Step 8** : Set progress indicators and roadmaps → Map out your sequence of milestones. Set simple, qualitative indicators (such as an endorsement from a teachers' union or a municipal resolution..) to measure your progress on the way to your final goal.
- **Step 9** : Monitor, reflect, and adapt → The political landscape is dynamic. Regularly check in with your team to review how the context is shifting, and be ready to creatively adjust your strategy, tactics, or language as new opportunities or barriers arise.
- **Step 10** : Sustain! → Organise community encounters or send press releases to local media to show neighbors, business owners, and politicians your pillars in action. You can also join Erasmus+ projects to bring your local realities into European network.





Advocacy Toolkit

PART 6

Resources



TEMPLATE 1 – Meeting request to a local decision-maker

Subject: Meeting request: Advancing democratic and sustainable education options in [town/city]

Dear [Name of official/councilor],

I am writing to you on behalf of [Name of your School/Organisation]. We are currently working alongside local teachers, parents, and learners to advance educational transformation in our area, rooted in EU's best practices.

We would appreciate a brief, 20-minute meeting with you to present our latest community initiatives regarding [...] and to discuss how we can support your office in aligning our local school framework with the objectives of the [EU policy framework].

We have attached a one-page brief outlining our core proposals and look forward to hearing your availability.

Warm regards,

[Your name]
[Your title / organisation]



TEMPLATE 2 – Email to your Member of European Parliament (MEP)

Subject: Implementing [policy framework(s)] in [region/country]

Dear MEP [last name],

As an organisation/school active in your constituency, we are tracking your valuable contributions to European social and educational policy.

We want to share a practical blueprint for bringing the [EU policy framework] to life right here in [region/city]. Our community has developed an "Open Schooling" model that empowers young people to tackle localised social and environmental challenges while developing core citizenship competencies.

We urge you to champion these democratic education methods during upcoming committee sessions and budget consultations regarding Erasmus+ and ESF+. We would be delighted to send you a brief portfolio of our students' work or host you for a short visit to our project site.

Kind regards,

[Your name]

[Your organisation]



TEMPLATE 3 – Elevator speech (for decision-makers, funders, or new contacts)

An elevator speech is your 30–60 second answer to "So, what do you do?" Use it at conferences, in hallway conversations before/after meetings, or as an opener before you hand someone your one-pager.

Structure (4 parts)

1. Hook (1 sentence) → Name the problem or gap in a way your listener can already recognise.
2. Who you are (1 sentence) → Your organisation/school and what you actually do, in plain language (as little jargon as possible!).
3. What you're asking for (1 sentence) → A concrete, specific ask, where you name the action your interlocutor can support you with.
4. Bridge to next step (1 sentence) → Invite a follow-up : a meeting, a card exchange, a one-pager...

Example (to adapt to your context!)

"Right now, most schools in [region] are still measured by standardised test scores, even though the EU's own [policy framework] calls for competence-based, learner-centred education. [Your Organisation] works with local schools and teachers to build "Open Schooling" models where students tackle real social and environmental challenges as part of their curriculum. We're looking for [who?]'s support to champion this approach in [upcoming committee session, budget consultation...]. Would you be open to a 15-minute call so we can share what this looks like in practice?"



Tips

- Time your speech. Practice out loud with a timer. 30 seconds should be the target, and 60 seconds is the ceiling.
- The focus should be the problem and the action, not your organisation. It is way easier to remember stories than acronyms!
- Save the jargon for the written email or one-pager. When in conversation, translate these more complicated expressions/terms into **what they mean for the listener** (for instance, "the EU can't force this, but it can fund and coordinate it, which is the kind of push we need from your office...").
- Just 1 ask! A decision-maker who hears one clear, specific request is more likely to act than one who hears a list.
- Always have a bridge, rather than ending on the ask alone. In other words, end on the next concrete step (a meeting, an email, a document to send...).
- Adapt to your audience. The version for an MEP (policy angle, committee sessions) will differ slightly from the version for a local funder (impact angle, numbers) or a parent (student experience angle). Consider keeping 2-3 variants ready.



Short glossary (to refresh your memory!)

Council Recommendation : A "soft law" instrument issued by EU ministers suggesting a shared path of action. Although not legally enforceable, they carry immense political weight and can be used as advocacy hooks.

European Education Area (EEA) ([see page 33](#)): The EU's flagship strategic framework aiming to remove barriers to learning, study, and research across Europe by setting common goals for quality, inclusion, and the green transition.

European Semester ([see page 25](#)) : The annual cycle of economic, fiscal, and social policy coordination. It is a powerful tool because the Commission issues specific recommendations (CSRs) to national governments regarding education spending and reforms.

Open Method of Coordination (OMC) : A voluntary framework where EU member states agree on shared goals, share best practices, and use peer pressure to evaluate each other's progress in areas which fall within the competence of EU countries, like education. It was defined as an instrument of the Lisbon Strategy (2000) during the Lisbon Summit.

Rapporteur : An appointed member of an EU body (such as the European Parliament, EESC, or CoR) responsible for writing, negotiating, and presenting the official report or opinion on a specific legislative file.

Supporting Competence ([see page 9](#)) : The legal status of education in the EU. Brussels has 0 power to pass binding school laws or force changes to national curricula. It can only support, coordinate, and fund.

Subsidiarity Principle ([see page 22](#)): The legal rule that decisions must be made at the closest possible level to the citizen. In education, it ensures that local, regional, and national authorities retain primary control over school systems rather than Brussels.

Union of Skills ([see page 34](#)) : A major EU-wide initiative under the Competitiveness Compass that coordinates educational, training, and capacity-building reforms across member states.



Stronger together : How can QUEST support your advocacy ?

QUEST is a collaborative movement! We bridge the gap between your local reality and European decision-makers, ensuring your community's voice has national and international weight.

1. Amplifying

- We can present your case directly to MEPs, Commission officials, and European networks like the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLLP).
- When you launch a petition, a proposal, or a campaign, QUEST can co-sign and back your asks.
- We can spotlight your initiatives across our communications channels.

2. QUEST membership and Members Forums

- We can test your campaign ideas, pitch scripts, and messaging with fellow educators and advocates across Europe before meeting local officials.
- You can exchange templates and campaign blueprints with other members.
- You can connect with like-minded schools and NGOs to build joint Erasmus+ (KA2) project proposals or arrange cross-border student exchanges.

3. Strategy and policy translation

- You can send us your draft meeting briefs or letters to decision-makers, so that we help you refine your arguments.
- We can help you translate dense EU policy documents into more clear and actionable "policy hooks" for your (local) meetings.

4. Project development and network solidarity

- We can help small organisations join forces to apply for European grants (Erasmus+, CERV) that might seem too complex to navigate alone.
- If your school or organisation faces local administrative pushback or political hostility for advancing progressive education, QUEST can stand with you through joint open letters and international support statements.



*Thank you for being part of this movement ,
for the advocacy you're already doing,*

*in whatever form it takes,
and for carrying all this forward !*

*Don't hesitate to contact us if you have
questions, if you want to introduce your
organisation and/or share your current
campaign priorities*



QUEST policy officer
Mathilda Diaz (she/her)
mathilda@quest-eu.org