


*Position Paper  
2022*



# **Investment in Education & Training**

## **A public good for all**




“Investment in Education & Training: A public good for all” December 2022

Chief editor: Brikena Xhomaqi, Director, Lifelong Learning Platform

Editors: Andrei Frank, Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, Lifelong Learning Platform, Erika María Rodríguez Somlyay, Policy and Project Officer, Lifelong Learning Platform, Jessica Fiorelli, former Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, Lifelong Learning Platform, Alex O’Cuinn, former Advocacy and Outreach Officer, Lifelong Learning Platform.

Graphic design: María Arguedas, Communications Assistant, Lifelong Learning Platform

©Lifelong Learning Platform 2022. Reproduction for non-commercial use is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.



This paper draws on the results of the Lifelong Learning Platform’s annual theme activities such as the LLLP Working Group on Policy Coherence, the meeting of the European Parliament Interest Group on Lifelong Learning on “Funding Learning Mobility” (29 November 2022) and the 12th edition of the Lifelong Learning Week (28 November to 2 December 2022).

In addition, it reflects LLLP members’ concerns throughout some months of consultations. LLLP designs its positions through different activities, but it also relies on the expertise of partner and member organisations with special knowledge on the topic. We would like to thank also Professor Sikunder Ali, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, for contributing with his views during the focus groups organised for member organisations of LLLP.



**Co-funded by  
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



# INDEX

<b>Executive Summary</b> ↗	p. 4
<b>Recommendations</b> ↗	p. 6
<b>Introduction</b> ↗	p. 9
<b>Chapter 1: Public good until what point: public financing at risk</b> ↗	p. 11
• Conceiving education as public good ↗	p. 11
• No public good without adequate public funding ↗	p. 12
• Public funding in the EU under threat ↗	p. 13
<b>Chapter 2: Commodification of learning: serving markets not learners</b> ↗	p. 16
• Conceptualising commodification ↗	p. 16
• Creeping commodification ↗	p. 18
– Commodification through investment ↗	p. 18
– Commodification through assesment ↗	p. 21
– Commodification through the twin transitions ↗	p. 23
• Re-discovering the purpose of learning ↗	p. 26
<b>Chapter 3: Where to invest? Beyond education systems that empower the already empowered</b> ↗	p. 28
• Are our education and training systems inclusive? ↗	p. 29
• Public investment for inclusive learning systems: Quantity and quality ↗	p. 32
• Where to invest to build inclusive education systems? ↗	p. 36
– Invest in learners ↗	p. 36
– Invest in educators ↗	p. 41
– Invest in learning environments: physical, digital and beyond ↗	p. 44
– Invest in communities ↗	p. 46
– Invest in evidence-based and participatory policymaking ↗	p. 48
<b>Conclusion</b> ↗	p. 49

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recent increases in funding for education and training, such as the EU directing over €70 billion in the sector and Member States increasing their funding of learning as part of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP), might, out of context, appear as a watershed moment for education and training. However, strengthening the role of public funding for education means, conversely, that education stays a public good for all. Therefore, **“who” or rather “what instruments” finance lifelong learning are not questions to be taken for granted, as they entail cascade effects on the structures, pedagogies, objectives, curricula, inclusion and representation in education and training.**

In this position paper, the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLLPL) investigates the importance of funding in education and training, its sources and its impact on access to learning and on the quality of the learning provided. The following conversations warrant a disclaimer on the terminology used in the paper. Though at times *funding* and *investment* in education and training are used interchangeably the two have different implications. LLLP sides with the concept of *funding* when it comes to learning in this Position Paper, which represents the resources that governments are responsible for providing to various sectors for different purposes. **Securing education as a human right implies a responsibility of states to fund a system in which all learners are welcomed, supported and aided to develop holistically and fully.**

**This includes making lifelong learning entitlements a reality as part of extending**

**the human right to education.** On the other hand, *investment* allows for spreading the responsibility of putting resources in education and training to various stakeholders, including for-profit ones, while tying learning to a market goal-oriented approach. **This concept does not treat the provision of learning as a public good.** Moreover, reducing the sustenance of life simply to economic gains misses out on the broader societal challenges for which learners must be prepared. At the same time, the investment narrative misses out on the importance of ensuring that the public authorities maintain responsibility over learning at all stages of life given their role in providing an aggregated response to societal challenges and their responsibility in ensuring the right to learning is accessed by all.

The LLLP Position Paper has a threefold aim. Firstly, **it accounts for the decades-long reduction in public funding for lifelong learning which has crippled the sectors and the learning opportunities, revealing how the current post-pandemic boost in investment cannot yet make up for what was lost.**

Secondly, it looks into the sources of funding in learning, advocating for learning as a public good while illuminating **the privatisation and commodification narratives which softly and in a hidden manner reduce the variety of purposes of learning to mainly contribute to the economy and labour markets.**

The narratives have been ingrained in the

way funding is allocated from national and European authorities, in the way the global challenges are described but also in the way education and training is reshaped to be more business-like and governed by competition. The insertion of competition is contradictory to the nature of the education and training sector, as it is a sector where all should equitably benefit from learning.

Thirdly, it **proposes a return to what education and training is about, towards finding once more the joy of learning but it also proposes specific funding measures which would ensure lifelong learning is an inclusive process, accessible by all, learner-centred and focused on a holistic development that would develop active participants in society rather than simple human resources.**

**Transforming the world into a learning society requires adequate resources** to make the process of learning throughout life a reality, as its promotion is not only linked to access, but also to ensuring quality education and training so that learners of all ages can adapt to the defining challenges of the current times which include, but are not limited to, the environmental crisis, digitalisation, the promotion of democratic values. To this end, community and cooperative governance models instead of top-down structures can challenge the existing narratives.

**All the learning community must participate in co-designing and co-implementing the learning process, starting from policy making until institutional level decisions.**

Democratic decision making in learning provision is crucial to empower all stakeholders to take ownership over the process and promote a lifelong and lifewide learning approach but also to account for the diversity of needs and tailored solutions that can close equity gaps in learning.

A crucial element in this transformation is ensuring the expansion of the right to education to a right to learning, making lifelong learning entitlements a reality and actively promoting a learning society that is not tied down to compulsory education but rather is broadened to ensure that, at all stages of life, the diversity of needs and tailored solutions for learning are met through public support.

Quantity, quality and sources of investment in education and training systems shape the type of learning available.

The following set of **recommendations** drawn from this position paper aim to boost investment that can deliver learning as a public good.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Yes to public funding, no to austerity, and commodification of learning!

1

**Learning as a public good and not a commodity:** Meeting demands and objectives set by overarching frameworks, such as the UN Agenda 2030, the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Education Area and the Skills Agenda, **learning must be seen as a public good and not a commodity.** Public goods have two distinguishing properties: one person's consumption does not diminish other people's consumption levels of the same good, and such goods cannot be provided exclusively to some.

2

**Dedicating at least 20% of total government expenditure on learning:** Transforming the world into a learning society requires adequate resources. As committed by UNESCO Member States in 2015, **public investment in learning should represent 20% of total government expenditure.** A downward trend has seen reductions in public investment in education and training, compensated by private funding. Public authorities must not shift the responsibility of providing learning as a human right to for-profit actors.

3

**Coordinating governance:** Structured dialogue and capacity building mechanisms with appropriate funding are needed to bridge EU and national public authorities, civil society and other stakeholders. **The entire learning community must participate in co-designing and co-implementing the learning process, from policy making to institutional-level decisions, if learner centred approaches to learning are to be meaningfully implemented.** The EU must support Member States in implementing EU policies and funding in close cooperation with the

relevant stakeholders, in particular civil society organisations who were left out of the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility, and its National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs). **Civil society in education must be a central part of monitoring, evaluating and updating NRRPs' implementation, while investment must be directed at all sectors of education and training, informal, non-formal and formal.** Funding should be used to support both soft and hard infrastructural development in the sector.

4

**All learning matters - public funding supporting all learning environments:** Investment should compel people to continue learning throughout and in different areas of their lives to understand, adapt to and, crucially, shape the surrounding world. This demands investment that places equal value to all learning environments - whether formal, non-formal, informal, combining varying degrees of (in)formality or whether run publicly or by independent non-profit organisations - and reflects on how to build cooperation and seamless transitions between them. Adequate public investment must be directed towards ensuring that Community Lifelong Learning Centres become operational across the EU.

**5**

**Focusing on cost-effectiveness and moving away from cost-benefit analysis:** Without revising the models of calculating success and investment-worthiness, the current challenges cannot be addressed. We need to **move away from relying solely on cost-benefit analyses**, and plan public investment in learning by means of cost-effectiveness analyses and/or newly developed and better suited methods which include wider benefits of learning in their calculations.

**6**

**Reforming the EU economic governance framework:** Remove education from debt sustainability. Maintaining a narrow and arbitrary set of financial indicators compiled three decades ago (The Stability and Growth Pact) comes at the expense of achieving wider societal, economic and environmental goals today. The EU economic governance framework is in dire need of reform, going further than the European Commission Communication on reform orientations, as time has come to meaningfully adapt financial indicators rather than simply make them more flexible, unshackling Member States so they can ensure adequate public funding for universal, equitable and quality education.

**7**

**Strengthening the social pillar of the European Semester:** Reform the Semester to rebalance, through investment policies, the Stability (fiscal surveillance) with economic resilience - going beyond Growth - under an overarching framework of wellbeing and sustainability, and credibly support Member States to invest in social policies and in long-term recovery planning that leaves no one behind.



## Learners and educators at the centre of public funding: leaving no one behind

**8**

**Ending the empowerment of the empowered and widened equity gaps in education and training systems:** Targeted and tailored funding to learners most in need is necessary in today's continuously challenged and rapidly changing societies. Funding from cradle to grave means policies that address **prevention, intervention and compensation measures**, which are designed **accounting for policy coherence**. Without coherence, funding policies for different types of learning prevent stakeholders from understanding available resources and interconnections for a lifelong learning funding thread.

**9**

**An early start in life - securing the foundations of learning for all:** Early intervention in learners' life is crucial to prevent issues such as lower educational attainment or early leaving from education and training. Therefore, policy makers must adopt this approach for all public policies, expanding and adequately funding early childhood education and care to ensure that those most vulnerable in society benefit from an early start to learning. Member States are **called on to speed up the elaboration and implementation of Child Guarantee National Action Plans** as well as the measures of the Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success, to ensure continuous adequate funding from one stage of learning to the next.



11

**Revalorising educators and rethinking the teaching profession:** Improve the attractiveness of the educator profession to ensure retention, well-being and adequate support for being up-to-date to pedagogical and andragogical developments, while ensuring that any funding for working conditions, development opportunities and career progression must be expanded to the wider variety of educators that operate in formal, non-formal and informal learning settings.



10

**Learning beyond graduation - a reality for all through lifelong learning entitlements:**

The EU must ensure and support Member States to establish Lifelong Learning Entitlements for all. This means ensuring proper ancillary support services required for guidance, counselling, validation, recognition, and breaking barriers for those most vulnerable to participate in learning according to their individual learning needs and capacities.



## Privatisation of learning has devastating impact on rising inequalities



**Assessment as a tool for learning - Breaking the vicious cycle of performance-based induced inequity:**

Performance-based funding according to standardised and summative assessment scores contributed to increasing inequalities; with learners with disabilities, a migrant background, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds facing the brunt of financial punishments incurred by their learning institutions. Rethink assessments to prevent negative impacts on children and young people with lifelong implications. Boost inclusiveness by tailoring assessment to become formative, competence-oriented, process-based and outcomes-based, while associating funding to those most in need rather than based on assessment-oriented funding.



12



13

**Learning beyond skills for the labour market:** Learning outcomes and aims must be re-established, shifting them back towards the original mission of personal development for individual fulfilment in life as well as the development of communities and societies in harmony with nature while benefiting each aspect of society, be it social or economical, rather than narrowly subjecting people to learning that is benefitting solely the closing of gaps in labour markets.

**Investing in digital technology to support access and quality learning not to further raise inequalities:**

Digital tools and learning must conform to learners' needs, allowing them to regulate their own learning, without being passive technology consumers. For that, synergies in public procurement vis-à-vis the providers of the learning platforms should be experimented while open protocols and interoperability should be encouraged. Digital tools and learning experiences must be quality assured and support services for learners and educators must be in place and to ensure that no one is left behind in the digitalisation process. Equally important is the critical assessment of the algorithms used and the users' capacity to retain ownership of their own data, which cannot be used for for-profit goals.



14



# INTRODUCTION

Investment and resources are central to any policy field and to making decisions on how different processes are delivered. Learning is no different, and one might presume that such resource allocation is proportional with the prioritisation afforded to learning across policymaking. It has been common to discuss the massification of higher education, with more and more learners joining tertiary education in recent decades<sup>1</sup>, especially as access to education as a right has broadened.

It would be misleading to consider that more learners entered only higher education. Beyond tertiary education, lifelong learning became a priority at European and global level, with references to it made clearly in the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), in the [UN 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals](#), but also across different policies and strategies at national level. This has also led to the announcement of 2023 as the [European Year of Skills](#), providing an increased impetus to skills development across the year.

**Transforming the world into a learning society requires adequate resources** to make the process of learning a reality, as its promotion is not only linked to access, but also to ensuring quality education and training so that learners can adapt to the defining challenges of the current times which include, but are not limited to, the environmental crisis, digitalisation, the promotion of democratic values.

Together with this prioritisation of learning and the process' massification, the Lifelong Learning Platform (henceforth LLLP) sheds light, in this position paper, on the levels of funding which have not reflected learners' requirements or the role formally given to education by policy documents in recent years. One of the paper's aims is to detail the recent investment deductions in education and training, specifically the ones fueled by the austerity period that followed the 2008 economic crisis, while insisting that **reductions in public investment for learning have been the norm** even in the years before.

However, only talking about quantity in terms of investment is a narrow perspective, as the main aim of this position paper will be to insist that, as a human right for all, learning must be treated as a public good, with adequate public investment being provided to ensure not only access to learning, but a process of education and training that is of high quality and can make learners ready to accommodate to the 21st century societies from all perspectives and not just from a labour market one. Therefore, the paper assesses how **gaps in public investment have been compensated by privatisation** but will also consider how the long-term narrative that has ushered in diminished public investment in learning has also brought forward the promotion of **commodification, privatisation and marketisation** of education and training, on the neoliberal assumption that market forces would correct failures within the

---

<sup>1</sup> S. Guri-Rosenblit, H. Sebkova & U. Teichler (2007). Massification and Diversity of Higher Education Systems: Interplay of Complex Dimensions, [here](#).

sector and deliver what is required for the current challenges.

Taking stock of this, LLLP's position paper illuminates how the misguided trust in market forces and the compensation of public investment with private investment, that was governed by profit interests rather than the public interests of the learners, delivered an education and training system that is not equitable.

When discussing private investment, the position paper is not neglecting the meaningful contribution of independent, privately run, non-profit educational providers to achieving a more equitable and diverse educational space. The focus on the simple dichotomy between public and private neglects the needs of civil society organisations that choose a private organisational model (e.g. a non-profit association) to deliver their distinct educational approach. They can be part of the public funding offer, as long as they contribute to making learning more equitable and accessible for all. However, the blind belief in the current markets rather than taking an effort into their reshaping<sup>2</sup>, contributes to putting the human right to education through a distortion that renders social cohesion impossible to be achieved, while increasing gaps between people at the time when societal polarisation is threatening the capacity to address global challenges together.

Current models of investing in education and training have changed the essence of how learning is delivered, received, perceived, valued, monitored, evaluated

and planned, creating loops that are unsustainable for ensuring that all people engage in lifelong and life-wide learning.

The LLLP Position Paper draws attention to the momentous time that the EU and its Member States find themselves in as the post-pandemic recovery requires a complete overhaul of investment in learning, ensuring that it is performed in a way that boosts equity, people's capacity to develop holistically, people's capacity to influence the learning process and make it fit their needs.

The recovery is also in need of encouraging healthy learning environments as the foundation of the education and training systems, rather than organising them based on the ever-changing goal-oriented approaches for the labour market. Short-term planning will not be sufficient to rid Europe of the existent crises while it is also inconsistent with the way learning occurs.

This Position Paper draws from LLLP and its Members' experiences to put forward recommendations and proposals on how public investment in quality education and training can be conducive towards a learning system that meaningfully delivers people's human right to education and training.

---

2 M. Mazzucato (2016): From Market Fixing to Market-Creating: A new framework for innovation policy, Science Policy Research Unit, University of Sussex, UK, [here](#).

# CHAPTER 1

## Public good until what point: public financing at risk

### ► Conceiving education as a public good

What exactly does it mean to conceive of something as a public good? At once, a public good can be interpreted as an approach to policy making, as a principle of governance or as a means for rejecting the permeation of market principles into more and more aspects of life.

While the concept has many facets, **public goods generally have two distinguishing properties: one person's consumption does not diminish other people's consumption levels of the same good (non-rivalry), and such goods cannot be provided exclusively to some (non-excludability)<sup>3</sup>.**

Goods which fulfil these two criteria are generally available to be enjoyed and benefited by all, and are not subject to market competition. Such goods generate a large quantum of externalities, known as social or public benefits and are often deemed to be a prerequisite for, and contribute to, what constitutes a decent quality of life. Their provision, as explored in this paper, necessitates public intervention on the basis of economic considerations

related to the inherent incapacity of market mechanisms in delivering equitable access to such goods.

Conventionally, education has been referred to as a public good, producing a wide array of positive externalities that benefit not only individuals but also wider society in general. The idea of education as a public good is in many respects an aspiration. It is a normative demand that sets out a framework of what education should be, and whose interests it should serve<sup>4</sup>. Positioning education as a public good, first and foremost, is to reaffirm and safeguard the interest of the public - that is, of the learners - and to ensure, as far as possible, that education is accessible to all based on need, preference and personal aspirations<sup>5</sup>.

This responsibility for its delivery to all is one side of the public good concept, with the other reflecting the commonality, education's belonging to all while all being responsible for it, and the role of education in delivering a shared vision of wheresocieties should be headed. In this sense,

<sup>3</sup> J.B.G. Tilak (2008). Higher education: a public good or a commodity for trade?. *Prospects* 38, 449-466, [here](#).

<sup>4</sup> C. Skerritt & M. Salokangas (2019). Patterns and paths towards privatisation in Ireland, *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, [here](#).

<sup>5</sup> R. Locatelli (2018). Education as a public and common good: reframing the governance of education in a changing context, UNESCO Education Research and Foresight, Working Paper [here](#)

education as a public good is the way to reject education's increased for-profit privatisation or commercialisation. Any such commercialisation would preclude learning from meeting the aforementioned function, failing to empower learners as members in their community, able to interact with it, to act upon their own rights and to preserve them, and to pursue the community's development. This is in the interest of the individual but also of the community at large. Therefore, rejection and turning around of this commercialisation trend is scrutinised throughout this paper.

As with any public goods, their provision has to be financed by public institutions, out of general revenues<sup>6</sup> - this is both a necessary

and desirable function required to reaffirm and preserve education as a public good. Indeed, the principle of education as a public good has long been a reference when advocating for adequate public funding for quality education<sup>7</sup>.

But why exactly is the public financing of education a crucial precondition for conceiving education as a public good? As we will tease apart in the following section, **“who” or rather “what instruments” finance education are not questions to be taken for granted**, as they entail cascade effects on the structures, pedagogies, objectives, curricula, inclusion and representation in education and training<sup>8</sup>.

## ► No public good without adequate public funding

As alluded to above, the principle of education as a public good has often been referenced when advocating for adequate public funding for quality education. And this is for good reason. It has been extensively documented that market mechanisms cannot provide public goods efficiently and cannot ensure optimum levels of provision<sup>9</sup>.

In brief, public funding is inimitable in order to secure education as a public good. The reason for this is fairly straightforward: the social benefits of education and training are likely to exceed private benefits that accrue to individuals. In the absence of public

investment correcting for this “market failure” there would likely be severe under-investment in education and training since individuals cannot appropriate the full returns<sup>10</sup>. If we want to achieve equity, public funding needs to be equally available to both public and private non-profit-providers, as long as the education delivered is of high quality, accessible to all and focused on learners' development.

A wealth of research has repeatedly demonstrated the impact in which adequate levels, or lack thereof, of public expenditure<sup>11</sup> have on our education systems. **Most**

---

6 General revenues stand for the sum of taxes, charges, and miscellaneous income taken in at the state and local level.

7 These include, among others, the Global Campaign for Education, the Right to Education Initiative, the Global Initiative for Economic Social and Cultural Rights, and Education International.

8 R. Locatelli (2018). Education as a public and common good: reframing the governance of education in a changing context

9 F. Rizvi (2016). Privatization in Education: Trends and Consequences, UNESCO Education Research and Foresight, Working Paper, [here](#).

10 A. Thum-Thysen, R. Cravetto & J. Varchola (2021). Investing in People's Competences: A cornerstone for growth and wellbeing in the EU, European Commission, European Economy Discussion Paper 139, [here](#).

11 Stands for the expenditure made by the state, social security administrations, local authorities and the administrations and bodies attached to them.

**recently, the annual OECD ‘Education at a glance 2021’ report highlights that where public expenditure is strong, equity, inclusiveness and the general quality of education and training are heightened<sup>12</sup>. Conversely, and as the same report indicates, public underinvestment in education and training is synonymous with reduced quality, accessibility concerns and more stark discrepancies in educational outcomes according to socio-economic background.**

Lack of public expenditure in education and training is also clearly associated with a series of wider socio-economic implications such as health and well-being disparities, lack of civic and political engagement, wider income discrepancies, longer durations of unemployment for individuals and the reinforcement of intergenerational poverty<sup>13</sup>.

## Public funding in the EU under threat

The significance of adequate public expenditure and its unmatched role in securing education and training as a public good inevitably raises the question: what is the current state of affairs in relation to public expenditure on education and training at the EU level? Answering this question requires us to consider the evolution of public spending over time.

It is widely documented that the 2007-2008 global financial crisis, associated recession and implementation of austerity policies led to a curtailment of public sector spending in all EU Member States.

Throughout the period 2008-2015 the impact of deflated public spending is clearly apparent in the education and training sector<sup>14</sup>. The available data observes that public expenditure on education and

training at the EU level throughout the period decreased both in terms of GDP<sup>15</sup> ratio and as a total share of overall public expenditure respectively: from 5.2% to 4.8% of GDP and from 11% to 10.3% of total government expenditure<sup>16</sup>. The extent of these reductions in public spending consolidated the education and training sector as one of the hardest hit public services subsequent to the financial crisis of 2008, and perhaps most significantly - educational expenditure as a percentage of both total government expenditure and as a percentage of GDP did not return to pre-crisis levels in 20 out of 28 EU countries as of 2015<sup>17</sup>.

In recent years public expenditure on education and training at the EU level has

---

<sup>12</sup> OECD (2021). Education at a Glance 2021, OECD Indicators, [here](#).

<sup>13</sup> A. Thum-Thysen, R. Cravetto & J. Varchola (2021). Investing in People’s Competences: A cornerstone for growth and wellbeing in the EU, European Commission, European Economy Discussion Paper 139, [here](#).

<sup>14</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform (2022). Public investment on education and training in the EU: Trends, challenges and future prospects, [here](#).

<sup>15</sup> Gross domestic product (GDP) is the total monetary or market value of all the finished goods and services produced within a country’s borders in a specified time period.

been marked by stagnation with many countries flatlining throughout the period. The years 2016 to 2018 saw a downward trend with expenditure falling from 4.8% to 4.6%<sup>18</sup>. In 2019 and 2020, however, the figure rose to 5% as a percentage of GDP<sup>19</sup>. While this marginal gain over the period of 2019 and 2020 marks an important upturn of events, it remains the case that overall, education expenditure has failed to recover to pre-financial crisis levels where, in 2009, it stood at 5.5% of GDP as an average across EU Member States<sup>20</sup>. In 2019, only six Member States managed to match or surpass this figure<sup>21</sup>.

Narrowly focusing on EU average level changes in public expenditure, however, fails to recognise the marked discrepancies that exist between Member States. The period of 2016-2020 was characterised by a lack of convergence with spending gaps between Member States changing relatively little<sup>22</sup>. Considerable variations continue to exist in terms of levels of expenditure, in relation to GDP, with Estonia (6.6% of GDP), Belgium (6.6% of GDP) and Sweden (7.2% of GDP) reporting the highest amounts and with the lowest share of educational expenditure reported in Ireland (3.1% of GDP) and Romania (3.7% of GDP) in 2020.

Given the inextricable link between public expenditure in education and training and wider social indicators, it goes without

saying that this lack of convergence negates the possibility of furthering social cohesion among Member States with the development of a two-stream Europe being compounded.

How can we interpret the general decrease in public expenditure on education and training that has characterised the post-2008 crisis EU up until Covid-19? As alluded to above, and as the evidence would suggest, education and training were particularly squeezed during the financial crisis and importantly, failed to make any significant gains over the ensuing decade, decreasing consecutively in many Member States across the period.

Even when public expenditure in general began to rise across the EU post-financial crisis, the relative share allocated towards education and training did not follow a similar trajectory<sup>23</sup>. This suggests that **education has been severely devalued in efforts for and attention to policy developments.** The paradox is that an appropriate level of public expenditure in education and training is a necessary employment and economic stimulus that harbours strong and wide-reaching social returns. It is indicative that the EU never fully recovered from the effects of the financial crisis with many social and economic indicators either flatlining or becoming worse between 2008 and today<sup>24</sup>.

The flatlining of public expenditure mapped

---

16 Eurostat (2017). How much do Member States spend on education (in 2015), [here](#).

17 ETUCE (2020). Thematic overview of the country reports for 2020 of the European Semester in the education and training field, [here](#).

18 The World Bank (2022). Government expenditure on education, total (% of GDP), [here](#).

19 Eurostat (2022). Government expenditure on education (in 2020), [here](#).

20 Euractiv (2017). Europe's investment in education keeps dropping, [here](#).

21 European Commission (2021). Education and training monitor 2021: Investment and quality of expenditure in education and training, [here](#).

22 Ibid

23 Social Justice Ireland (2021). From the Crash to Covid and Beyond. Review of the Social Situation in Europe and Considerations for a More Sustainable and Inclusive Future, European Research Series, [here](#).

out above is also, crucially, indicative of a wider trend that has sought to increase the marketisation and commodification of education, that is, the “process of conversion of services or products not initially for sale into ones oriented towards profit-making”<sup>25</sup>. This growing trend has been underpinned by a neoliberal ideology which assumes that the private sector provides better quality education and , when functioning

as corporate or business organisations, is also more efficient in the management of education systems.

The succeeding chapter will look to tease apart the various implications of this trend, and draw attention to how and where the marketisation and commodification of education is most prominent.

---

24 Ibid

25 C. Skerritt & M. Salokangas (2019): Patterns and paths towards privatisation in Ireland, *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, [here](#).

## CHAPTER 2

# Commodification of learning: serving markets and not learners

### ► Conceptualising commodification

As indicated in the previous chapter, the expansion of free market logic into the social arena and the provision of public goods, occurring since the 1980s, has been a key factor underpinning and justifying the increased marketisation and commodification of education across the EU. This has greatly shaped the organisation and purposes of education, but what exactly does the marketisation and commodification of education entail, and where can it be seen? In simple terms, marketisation implies creating a market in education, ingraining competition<sup>26</sup>.

Commodification is the process through which goods, services, ideas, nature, personal information, people or animals are transformed into objects of trade. In education, it occurs at an administrative and instrumental level. The former requires running an institution like an enterprise. The latter treats teaching and learning as cost-benefit driven and necessary for producing a product, re-adjusting its purposes and depersonalising it<sup>27</sup>.

**Privatisation is broadly recognised as endogenous and exogenous.** The former is a transfer of practices, ideas, techniques from the private sector to the public one, making it business-like. The latter opens public education to private sector for-profit actors that design, manage or deliver services<sup>28</sup>. Serving individual interests, these approaches occur at the expense of education as a public good, feeding unsustainable patterns of social inequality<sup>29</sup>. It is important to understand that commodification and privatisation of education can take different forms, within and without the institution itself.

Historically, private education provisions in Europe varied, with instances of school choice and private institutions existing in Europe since the 1800s, due to confessional orientations, or parents' needs to exert choice or willing to directly manage education institutions among other reasons<sup>30</sup>.

However, dangers emerge if any such type of education is planned to maximise profit considering how this approach

26 A. Lowrie & J. Hemsley-Brown (2011). This thing called marketisation, [here](#)

27 Lifelong Learning Platform (2022). ABC of Funding and Investment in Education, [here](#).

28 S. J. Ball & D. Youdell (2007). Hidden Privatisation of Public Education, Education International 5th World Congress, Preliminary Report, [here](#)

29 F. Rizvi (2016). Privatization in Education: Trends and Consequences, UNESCO Education Research and Foresight, Working Paper, [here](#).

30 A. Verger, C. Fontdevila & A. Zancajo (2016). The privatization of education : a political economy of global education reform, [here](#).



excludes the majority of learners from accessing quality education. The profit maximisation approach has had a great influence in making Europe experience significant fairness issues which have led to academic segregation and, at times, to an increased attainment rate in private institutions compared to the underfunded public education institutions<sup>31</sup>.

For example, in Malta or the UK, learners who can afford private tutoring exhibit basic skills proficiency that would place them several schooling years ahead of disadvantaged learners of comparable age<sup>32,33</sup>. The Swedish voucher system contributed to school segregation which became one of the biggest drivers for academic attainment gaps<sup>34</sup>. The competition encouraged by public administrations in Denmark and Spain through standardised benchmarking pressed **education institutions to market themselves to increase learners' intake**<sup>35</sup>.

Other commodification instances are households' out-of-pocket expenses which range from private tutoring, to investing in education institutions' infrastructure, to transport fees, to textbooks, to providing an entire digital learning environment during the pandemic. These costs have increased considerably, with 41% of EU households having difficulties covering them already in 2016<sup>36</sup>.

Public authorities must not shirk away their responsibility of ensuring that education is provided as a public good. While public-private partnerships are appealing in terms of increasing funding, without oversight they lead to asymmetric relationships making

education institutions vulnerable to large private investors' demands.

At the same time, civil society has an active role to play in learning provision, having the capacity to increase the learning options so that they are tailored to the needs of each learner.

For this reason, the debate on privatisation should also shift away from the legal form of educational providers (public/private) and scrutinise more the sources of funding and the goals behind funding. The aim ought to be to provide a political, legal and financial framework for all education and training stakeholders as long as they offer quality and accessible learning opportunities which revolve around developing learners as whole-persons rather than aiming to extract profit and treat them as customers.

---

31 T. Parveva, A. Horváth, A. Krémó & E. Sigalas (2020). Equity in school education in Europe: Structures, policies and student performance, Eurydice Brief, [here](#).

32 European Commission (2022). 2022 Country Report Malta, Commission Staff Working Document, [here](#).

33 M. Henderson, J. Anders, F. Green & G. Henseke (2019). Private schooling, subject choice, upper secondary attainment and progression to university, [here](#).

34 M. Dovemark, S. Kosunen, J. Kauko, B. Magnúsdóttir, P. Hansen & P. Rasmussen (2018). Deregulation, privatisation and marketisation of Nordic comprehensive education: social changes reflected in schooling, [here](#).

35 A. Verger, C. Fontdevila & A. Zancajo (2016). The privatization of education : a political economy of global education reform, [here](#).

36 Eurostat (2018). Can you afford to pay for education?, [here](#).

## ▶ Creeping commodification

Commodification advanced on numerous fronts, intensifying after the education sector's post-pandemic needs emerged<sup>37</sup>, propagating a language which begets more

privatisation and commodification. The following sections will evaluate this trend from different angles.

## ▶ Commodification through investment

**Funding** stands for the resources that governments are responsible for providing to various sectors for different purposes. **Securing education as a human right implies a responsibility of states to fund a system in which all learners are welcomed, supported and aided to develop holistically and fully.**

The reverse of this is the frequent conversation on **investment**, which allows for spreading the responsibility of putting resources in education and training to various stakeholders, including for-profit ones, while tying learning to a market-oriented goals approach. Investment, in the private market, generally also requires certain outputs to achieve a return on investment for the investors and shareholders.

This logic has had a very strong impact on

education and learning systems that are under increasing pressure to produce more and better outputs to secure their continued funding. So while there's a downward trend in funding, there are increasing expectations of the outputs and outcomes that education and learning systems can deliver.

The EU informs Member States' investment through the European Semester, a mechanism ensuring coordination across their economic and employment policies<sup>38</sup>. Initially, social goals were relegated below fiscal prudence due to the 2008 crisis, cloaking reduced public investment in education<sup>39</sup> through the Semester Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs), of which many focused on education in past years<sup>40</sup>. Most recommendations put pressure on governments to reduce spending, prioritise public-private partnerships without clear

---

37 G. Di Pietro, F. Biagi, P. Dinis Mota da Costa, Z. Karpinski & J. Mazza (2020). The likely impact of COVID-19 on education: Reflections based on the existing literature and recent international datasets, JRC Technical Report, [here](#).

38 European Commission (2022). The European Semester, [here](#).

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

guidelines, and link lifelong learning only to labour market needs<sup>41</sup>. Based on LLLP's CSRs analysis from 2019, 2020, and 2022, each country, barring Malta and the UK, was encouraged at least once to 'improve the labour market relevance of education', 'foster labour mobility through upskilling and reskilling', 'equip people with the right skills for the labour market', 'address labour market shortages and skills mismatches', 'boost partnerships between educational institutions and businesses to improve labour market relevance of education and training'<sup>42</sup>.

This was coupled with recommendations to ensure fiscal prudence, with each Member State being given this recommendation in 2022<sup>43</sup>. This direction given to education policies emboldens Member States to cut education funding while resorting to private funding and its inherent market logic.

Labour market prioritisation can reflect on which were the consulted stakeholders, with the absence of involvement of education stakeholders being a documented situation in the context of country monitoring performed by the EU and in the development of reform programmes at national level. Such an example can be the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs), which were developed without consulting these actors<sup>44</sup>. Without civil society in consultations, a majority of education

reforms proposed in the eight countries with a published NRRP by March 2022<sup>45</sup>, focused on attuning education and training to labour market requirements<sup>46</sup>.

In Estonia, Luxembourg and Croatia, investment for twin transitions is directed to prepare learners to adapt to new labour market requirements instead of reviewing the paradigm on digitalisation and the environment. The Danish NRRP lumps education with digitalisation, reducing education to "skills acquisition".

Seven countries<sup>47</sup> mainly focused on digitalisation and digital infrastructure to reform education. Across NRRPs, education is instrumentalised to support learners to meet mostly those twin transition goals which are labour-market oriented. These approaches miss out on comprehensive reforms to ensure learners can live in harmony with the environment and ensure an inclusive digital space, which accounts for digital citizenship, but also the use of digital tools for self-learning and personal development.

Furthermore, when looking at the higher education sector, some reforms put forward, as part of the commitments of the NRRPs, have been opposed by the academic community, and the promise/threat of the funds has been used to push them through<sup>48</sup>.

---

41 H. Stevenson, L. Hagger-Vaughan, A. Milner & E. Winchip (2017). Education and Training Policy in the European Semester - Public Investment, Public Policy, Social Dialogue and Privatisation Patterns across Europe, ETUCE, [here](#).

42 Lifelong Learning Platform Statements and Mappings of the European Semester Country Specific Recommendations [2019](#), [2020](#) and [2022](#).

43 Lifelong Learning Platform (2022). What of education in the European Semester's 2022 Country Specific Recommendations?, Reaction to the European Semester 2022, [here](#).

44 V. Caimi & F. Farrel (2021). Civil Society & the National Recovery and Resilience Plans: A reality check, Civil Society Europe - Task Force on National Recovery and Resilience Plans, [here](#).

45 Lifelong Learning Platform (2022). Info-Note on the European Commission Assessment of National Recovery and Resilience Plans, [here](#).

46 AT, HR, EE, FR, EL, FI, LU, PT.

47 AT, BE, HR, DE, EL, IE, LV, PT

48 See the example of the Croatian reform on Higher Education, [here](#) and [here](#).

This is due to the fact that the documents agreed by the Council of the EU contain very general commitments that do not indicate the exact direction of the reform - which risks to be used as a *carte blanche* in the educational reforms. When adding up the total investment of 19 NRRPs' analysed by LLLP, less than 11% of the total funding went to education and training<sup>49</sup>.

Based on the recent monitoring of the RRF performed by the European Commission, out of 26 NRRPs analysed, 14% of the total funding of the RRF went to education and training, amounting to over €70 billion<sup>50</sup>.

This is a positive development, but one that has still to be critically analysed considering that it represents an average. Not all NRRPs committed this sum, but rather when the totals are added up together, this is the sum that goes in education and training. Therefore, this falls short of European Parliament<sup>51</sup> and civil society<sup>52</sup> demands to ensure at least 10% of each NRRP funding is dedicated to education and training. What 14% of the "total" investment means is that some countries went well beyond the European Parliament and civil society demand of at least 10% of NRRPs going to education and training; it also means that many countries went quite underneath.

The EU countries who went well beyond this target tend to be the same countries that

have already been investing 6-7% of their GDP in learning, while countries who have been below the EU average with regards to investment in learning compared to GDP have continued to dedicate less than 10% of their total NRRP investment to learning. Ensuring that each Member State would make this commitment would support closing the social cohesion gaps across the EU.

One can also put in question the adequacy of this funding if most of it, as discussed in the analysis above, is directed towards infrastructural changes. Moreover, it remains to be seen how exactly will these plans be adapted in light of the rampant inflation impacting all EU Member States<sup>53</sup>.

This situation captures how EU-level policy choices determine what the purpose of education and training is and, implicitly, impact the national level funding in the sector. This in turn has a snowball effect that can make Member States heed to impulses of welcoming private investment and the market logic in education and training, potentially even shedding the responsibility to secure learning as a public good and a human right.

Another way to inadvertently contribute to education's commodification is through an institution's funding model. **Performance-based funding** is frequently found in Higher

---

49 European Commission (2022). Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard, [here](#).

50 European Commission (2022). Progress towards the achievement of the European Education Area. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, [here](#).

51 European Parliament (2022). Report on the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, [here](#).

52 Lifelong Learning Platform (2021). Investing in Education and Training for the Recovery of Europe, Statement on the National Recovery and Resilience Plans, [here](#).

53 Euractiv (2022). Inflation causes headaches in EU recovery plan, [here](#).

Education, with each Member State, bar France and the Belgian French Community, employing a funding formula with input-and/or output-related indicators<sup>54</sup>. The most commonly used indicators account for amount of enrolled students or graduates or graduates finding employment<sup>55</sup>.

Without a sophisticated system collating a wider variety of indicators, the risks of reducing education's quality and limiting its aims become evermore prominent<sup>56</sup>. The public sector pushes higher education institutions to rely on a narrow list of indicators, incentivising them to decrease educational quality and standards to produce more graduates in less time, or resort to mass lectures instead of personalised teaching.

**They might also be encouraged to determine study offers primarily based on labour market requirements,** which reduces academic autonomy and education potential to realise personal development, fulfilment and, hence, active citizenship, since these targets and criteria are set by public authorities<sup>57</sup>.

There is a pressure to 'professionalise', delivering specific outputs rather than ensuring that learners are adequately supported to flourish, while more funding is diverted towards the 'managerialisation' of education institutions, taking resources away from practitioners, educators and teachers. This leads to a decrease in education quality and inflated management structures and hierarchies<sup>58</sup>.

## ► Commodification through assessment

Depending on the purpose for which assessment is used, it can reinforce competition among learners, categorising them on conforming to labour market standards. The proliferation of standardised, high-stakes, summative assessment which determines learners' future paths led to goal-oriented learning and the emergence of practices such as teaching-to-the-test<sup>59</sup>.

This situation limits the potential for learners' holistic development while leading to burnout and stress which are correlated with lower academic achievement but also to loss of self-confidence that can contribute to increased numbers of NEETs, early leavers or learners that do not pursue lifelong learning due to their previous learning experiences<sup>60</sup>.

---

54 A. Claeys-Kulik & T. Estermann (2015). Performance-based funding of Universities in Europe, DEFINE project thematic report, p. 24-28 [here](#).

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 De Standaard (2022). There are too many managers in Colleges (Er zijn te veel managers in de hogescholen), [here](#).

59 Lifelong Learning Platform (2021). Rethinking assessments: Prioritising learners' wellbeing, Position Paper, p.19,24 [here](#).

60 Ibid, p. 22.

The all-or-nothing approach taken by most EU Member States on high-stakes, summative assessments exacerbates inequity considering that those most disadvantaged require additional support but they do not have the resources to cover it<sup>61,62</sup>.

Assessment is also an easy way for private, for-profit companies to enter education and training, as they are part of bundles provided by Global Education Industry<sup>63</sup> and EdTech actors. They market AI-enabled solutions to improve how assessment is performed and for educators' assessment.

The risks are that these methods are developed by private companies with no accountability and potentially no knowledge of their tools' impact. Additionally, frequent instances of software failings during assessments led to questioning their reliability<sup>64</sup>. While it must not be forgotten that algorithms and AI are not neutral tools and they have been found to reflect the biases of their programmers and developers - racism, classism, sexism etc<sup>65</sup>.

At least further research is required into the impact of such tools, while external, independent and formalised validation of the tools entering the learning systems should be regularly commissioned by the responsible public authorities.

Moreover, the ranking of education institutions according to assessment scores has been utilised as a means for allocating funding, and in some circumstances teachers; this is true especially at school and university level but it applies to other providers too. Such practices have the intended effect of incentivising education institutions to drive up the academic performance of learners. Unfortunately, evidence reveals that countries with higher levels of income inequality lead to starker disparities within the arena of education.

As a result, tackling educational disparities through incentivising performance is limited in scope. This does not account also for the other side of the coin which is the fact that those education institutions underperforming due to having learners confronting a multitude of socio-economic barriers and having insufficient support will be punished, simply furthering the inequity gaps<sup>66</sup>.

---

61 D. Zwier, S. Geven & H. G. van de Werfhorst (2021). Social inequality in shadow education: The role of high-stakes testing, [here](#).

62 Lifelong Learning Platform (2021). Rethinking assessments: Prioritising learners' wellbeing, p. 26 [here](#).

63 Totality of actors that have the capacity to involve themselves in education globally (chains of private schools, consultancies, MNCs, philanthropic organisations), [here](#).

64 B. Williamson & A. Hogan (2020). Commercialisation and privatisation in/of education in the context of Covid-19, Education International Research, [here](#).

65 The Guardian (2021). Google might ask questions about AI ethics, but it doesn't want answers, [here](#).

66 Lifelong Learning Platform (2021). Rethinking assessments: Prioritising learners' wellbeing.

## ► Commodification through the twin transitions

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the urgent need to boost digitalisation and address the climate crisis, trickling down to the EU's twin transition-anchored new approach to education<sup>67</sup>. However, it is worth seeing what was promoted to understand if the crisis has been used to elicit a hidden privatisation agenda, as called by Stephen Ball and Deborah Youdell, when assessing the education reform language<sup>68</sup>.

Regarding the green transition, 92% of education documents investigated by a 2021 UNESCO report referred to education for environmental sustainability or education for sustainable development. However, the topics' inclusion depth was low or very low in 82% documents and moderate in 17%. The depth was calculated based on the amount of words referring to this compared to the total length of the documents. This prompted UNESCO to call for governments to mainstream the topic in curricula<sup>69</sup>. This call, which can address learners' dysfunctional relationship with the environment, was identified by LLLP in its 2020 Position Paper<sup>70</sup>.

An opportunity for mainstreaming would have been the NRRPs. However, an LLLP analysis of the approved NRRPs, showed

only France and Slovenia making references to investment in education specifically for sustainability reasons. The French referred to retrofitting education institutions to become sustainable<sup>71</sup>. Similar retrofitting measures occurred across other NRRPs, and, though sustainability is connected with learning environments, this reduces education's greening to a process of transforming the sector into a market for private providers specialised in infrastructural changes. On the contrary: learners must challenge global mechanisms that reproduce the climate crisis, instead of embedding sustainability in the model that sustains it.

Education and training's digitalisation through NRRPs focused mainly on acquisitions for ending learners' lack of access to digital tools<sup>72</sup> rather than on broader digital education, which would include managing one's digital identity, digital citizenship, e-health, netiquette, among many other competences for the digital realm<sup>73</sup>. Also, after decades of underinvestment in education's digitalisation, all stakeholders were forced by the pandemic to engage in a comprehensive digital transition process which was compensated by for-profit private actors' entry<sup>74</sup>. Tying public education to private technology infrastructure without

---

67 European Commission (2020). Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025, [here](#).

68 S. J. Ball & D. Youdell (2007). Hidden Privatisation of Public Education, Education International 5th World Congress, Preliminary Report, [here](#).

69 UNESCO (2021). Learn for our planet: a global review of how environmental issues are integrated in education, [here](#).

70 Lifelong Learning Platform (2020). Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Societies, [here](#).

71 Lifelong Learning Platform (2022). Info-Note on the European Commission Assessment of National Recovery and Resilience Plans, [here](#).

72 Ibid.

73 DIGIT Project (2017-2019), [here](#).

74 B. Williamson & A. Hogan (2020). Commercialisation and privatisation in/of education in the context of Covid-19, Education International Research, [here](#).

adequate planning<sup>75</sup> gave the impression that digital technology - rather than people - creates social change<sup>76</sup>. The same unbalanced regard given to technology at the expense of people was exemplified when educators reported difficulties in adapting to new technologies or significant work-life balance and burnout issues caused by the transition<sup>77</sup>. EdTech commodification perils were identified by LLLP's 2017 Position Paper, discussing how GAMAM (Google, Amazon, Facebook - today: Meta -, Apple and Microsoft), swept in to equip education institutions in difficulty with educational resources<sup>78</sup>. The pandemic boosted this, seemingly for free<sup>79</sup>.

The EdTech Venture Capital investment has grown from \$785 million to \$2.5 billion, opening up a market that used to be more widespread outside of Europe before, while the portion of high-value deals has been on the increasing end<sup>80</sup>. However, the gratuity illusion bursts when the cost reveals itself in three ways.

Firstly, subscription fees can be implemented at a later stage, even if users benefitted from a digital solution for free initially. There seems to be a choice then for continuing to pay the subscription or migrate to a new digital solution that is free. However, changing digital solutions is exceptionally costly considering the human and time resources needed for re-training. Therefore, the strategy to implement subscription fees once users become dependent on a digital solution locks education institutions into paying in order to deliver the learning process.

Secondly, users' data being collected and shared with third parties for profit is another type of cost which education and training stakeholders end up paying. Thirdly, the fact that all software provided is connected to a tech giant's other apps and software socialising future consumer generations, which again shows the lack of gratuity that such digital solutions have<sup>81,82</sup>.

**Grassroots examples on the promotion of free software and developing digital citizenship away from the EdTech sector are present across Europe. [CEMÉA France](#), a member of LLLP members [SOLIDAR](#) and [FICEMEA](#), has been promoting the usage of open source tools via [zourit.net](#). CEMEA built a cloud-based solution that provides teachers in various French municipalities the same tools that Microsoft and Google would, but without data collection and learners' commodification. For the moment, 20 schools in France are operating with the Zourit platform, and CEMÉA is expanding its efforts to ensure that more educational institutions can be protected from the tech giants while still empowered to continue digital education. However, there is also a need to ensure governments promote more actively open source tools and support learners in developing competences to use them, since they are less socialised to rely on such tools given the overexposure to EdTech sector tools.**

75 Ibid

76 Lifelong Learning Platform (2017). Reimagining education for the digital age, Position Paper, [here](#).

77 European Commission (2021). Teachers in Europe: Careers, development and wellbeing. Eurydice Report, [here](#).

78 Lifelong Learning Platform (2017). Reimagining education for the digital age, Position Paper, p. 11, [here](#).

79 B. Williamson & A. Hogan (2020). Commercialisation and privatisation in/of education in the context of Covid-19, Education International Research, [here](#).

80 Brighteye Ventures (2022). The European EdTech Funding Report, [here](#).

81 B. Williamson & A. Hogan (2020). Commercialisation and privatisation in/of education in the context of Covid-19, Education International Research, [here](#).

82 Brighteye Ventures (2022). The European EdTech Funding Report, [here](#).



The educators and education experts' autonomy is questioned with EdTech investing in lobbying to enter policymaking all while organisations such as UNESCO and the World Bank include their software in various resource banks. Though this is not an endorsement from international organisations such promotion risks conveying tech giants as legitimate actors for influencing the policymaking and decision-making in education and training or for establishing how learning should be provided<sup>83</sup>.

EdTech will be a €400 billion industry by 2025<sup>84</sup>, a shocking increase compared to the current numbers mentioned above, while attention being paid to the industry's profitability rather than how it supports equitable access to quality education. GAMAM's business model of competition and of transforming learners in data inputs for marketisation strategies can be counteracted by ensuring: interoperability of hardware and software, systematic use of free and open-software solutions, providing access to algorithmic source codes, incentivising free digital resources production, and offering thought through emancipatory pedagogies instead of short-term solutions<sup>85</sup> as well as the mainstreaming of zero-rated websites/applications, i.e. those that apply a price of zero to the data traffic associated with them.

Even in the absence of adequate regulations for tech giants until the adoption of the

Digital Services Act in July 2022<sup>86</sup>, the EU continued to promote public-private partnerships for boosting digital skills and tying this mostly in relation to labour market access<sup>8788</sup>.

**The economic interests superseded any other interest even if employment is only a part of learners' lives.** Rather than focus on basic skills, competences related to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and specialised data management were included in the review of the [European Digital Competence Framework \(DigComp 2.2\)](#) highlighting once more a fascination for new technologies even if risky and when gaps in basic skills are far from being closed. Moreover, LLLP's 2017 Position Paper encourages a focus on basic skills, as the basis of any specialised skills. It is crucial to ensure that skills gaps are not widened when trying to close advanced skills gaps needed for specific economic sectors/industries<sup>89</sup>.

More recently, the European Commission's announcement of the upcoming 2023 European Year of Skills falls under the same category of softly commodifying skills development, as the main objectives have been conflating learning and skills development with upskilling and reskilling workers for specific sectors which have been experiencing labour market shortages. This restrictive vision of learning for the labour market misses on the needs of learners to more broadly adapt to the current and upcoming changes.

---

83 Ibid, p. 56

84 World Economic Forum (2022). Catalysing Education 4.0 Investing in the Future of Learning for a Human-Centric Recovery, Insight Report, [here](#).

85 Lifelong Learning Platform (2017). Reimagining education for the digital age, Position Paper, [here](#).

86 European Commission (2022). The Digital Services Act package, [here](#).

87 European Commission (2022). Shaping Europe's digital future, [here](#).

88 European Commission (2022). European Skills Agenda, [here](#).

89 Lifelong Learning Platform (2017). Reimagining education for the digital age, Position Paper, [here](#).

The threats to democracy, digitalisation and climate change have all been referred to in the context of the Year of Skills yet rather than discussing the transversal competences needed in this regard, the conversation looks mainly at sector-specific skills and job-to-job transitions.

The European Year of Skills must be a stage

to connect the discussions around sector-specific needs with the broader development of transversal competences to face global and local multifaceted issues. If this work is not done interconnectedly, we risk aggravating these issues and their impacts further down the line. Our societies cannot afford it<sup>91</sup>.

## ▶ Re-discovering the purpose of learning

Private funds can improve education's quality and complement policies in their endeavours of increasing participation in lifelong learning, but must happen at no cost to access, inclusion and educators' autonomy. What is required is the **reassertion of democratic control** - determined through democratic processes to preserve education in the public interest. This entails detaching the role of the private sector in education away from the pervading neoliberal imaginary in which it has become increasingly embedded. A cultural shift is required, reframing education as public good rather than only as means for labour market access.

Learning can help everyone reach their potential but only under the right conditions. Therefore, well-being must be inherent to a learning process which encompasses all facets of personal development, including

the emotional side.

Preparing learners for the labour market will continue, but this is insufficient since a learning process attuned to the 21st century society must empower learners to be active citizens, critical thinkers, understanding the interconnectedness of a globalised and digitalised world as well as our interconnectedness with nature.

With civil society and democracy under threat worldwide<sup>92</sup>, learning can instil democratic values to ensure that all learners perpetuate a system in which everyone is respected and allowed to participate, especially as learning is in a causal relationship with social trust, and social and democratic participation<sup>93</sup>. For this, learners with different needs and aptitudes must be guided in a tailored fashion in their self-

---

91 European Commission (2022). Commission kicks-starts work on the European Year of Skills, [here](#).

92 UNESCO (2021). Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education, Report from the International Commission on the Futures of Education, [here](#).

93 Y. Algan, G. Brunello, E. Goreichy & A. Hristova (2021). Boosting Social and Economic Resilience in Europe by Investing in Education, EENEE Analytical Report No.42, European Expert Network on Economics of Education, [here](#).

discovery journey while focusing on their transversal competences development. **Such learning is not confined to the formal sector, expanding to the non-formal and informal contexts.**

Only this approach can develop citizens' systemic thinking, making them understand socio-economic-political processes and their link to their community and ecosystems both local and global. To reinforce this cyclical lifelong learning that is made accessible to learners in their own contexts, public investment is required early on and in a way that reaches the entire population<sup>94,95</sup>.

For this reason, this section aimed to reveal the hidden assumptions behind the language of reform and investment used at EU and national level for education and training and to advocate for a change in the narrative.

LLLPL's 2017 Position Paper on Reimagining Digital Education called for judiciously integrating digital tools in learning, as a complement to other means of learning<sup>96</sup>. LLLPL's 2019 Position Paper called for reimagining all learning environments, better connected formal, informal and non-formal settings to address the current challenges<sup>97</sup>. LLLPL's 2020 Position Paper called for mainstreaming sustainability across learning to make learners internalise it and act upon it in their daily life<sup>98</sup>.

Sustainability should not be confined to

information sharing or greening infrastructure or travel but towards developing competences to form resilient individuals and societies. LLLPL's 2021 Position Paper prioritised assessment as a way of learning<sup>99</sup>, viewing it through the lens of 'learning to learn' and promoting context-specific and formative options to ensure learners can broaden creativity and innovative thinking and apply competences in new contexts<sup>100</sup>.

Through all these papers and over the years, LLLPL demanded increased public investment in education and training across the EU to achieve a specific lifelong learning vision, making sure that this funding is not tied to labour market demands or inaccessible to learners.

The aim is to recognise the wide-scale implications of learning and contribute to a system that holistically develops all learners, prioritising active participation in society and the well-being of both humans and the environment rather than profit.

The following chapter will detail, upon the narrative change, where investment should be directed to make sure that learning is not just a means to deliver profits through a well-trained workforce but rather that learners' needs and desires are met as they access one of their human rights.

---

94 Ibid.

95 A. Thum-Thyssen, R. Cravetto & J. Varchola (2021). Investing in People's Competences: A cornerstone for growth and wellbeing in the EU, European Commission, European Economy Discussion Paper 139, [here](#).

96 Lifelong Learning Platform (2017). Reimagining education for the digital age, Position Paper, [here](#).

97 Lifelong Learning Platform (2019). 21st century learning environments, Position Paper, [here](#).

98 Lifelong Learning Platform (2020). Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Societies, Position Paper, [here](#).

99 Lifelong Learning Platform (2021). Rethinking assessments: Prioritising learner's wellbeing, [here](#).

100 World Economic Forum (2022). Catalysing Education 4.0 Investing in the Future of Learning for a Human-Centric Recovery, Insight Report, [here](#).

## CHAPTER 3

### Where to invest? Beyond education systems that empower the already empowered

This section sets out what it entails to ensure inclusive and resilient education systems by assessing where investment is needed through a lifelong and life-wide learning approach. Education is one of the fundamental pillars of social inclusion<sup>101</sup>, contributing to “citizens’ access to the opportunities, infrastructures and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society”<sup>102</sup>. Broadly speaking, social inclusion in the EU is tackled through the European Pillar of Social Rights’ 20 principles, among which there is education, training and lifelong learning<sup>103</sup>. Our analysis takes into account two inter-related dimensions of inclusion in education: equality and equity. The former encompasses education which ensures equal access and successful participation of all citizens, including those from disadvantaged groups. The latter refers to what happens once individuals are part of the education system<sup>104</sup>.

To address the former, there is a need to mitigate discrimination concerning access to resources for all learners,

regardless of individuals’ origin, background or specific needs<sup>105</sup>. While at the same time, resources are not always readily available. Curricula across Europe tend to deliver content based on the perspective and values of privileged groups.

Women, minorities such as Roma or LGBTQi+ community and other disadvantaged groups are often misrepresented, underrepresented or not present at all in school curricula, failing to provide students with an accurate picture of current European societies that they can relate to.

This can cause students to disengage while reinforcing detrimental dynamics and behaviours<sup>106</sup>. To achieve equity, exclusion from within education has to be addressed through provision of resources and actions adapted to individual learner needs, to ensure equal opportunities<sup>107</sup>.

---

101 Eurofound (2022). Eurofound Glossary, [here](#).

102 Ibid.

103 European Commission (2022). The European Pillar of Social Rights, [here](#).

104 UNESCO (2008). What is inclusive education?, International Bureau of Education, 2008, [here](#).

105 EASNIE (2022). Glossary for inclusive education terms, [here](#).

106 OBESU (2022). Policy paper on Curricula for the 21st Century, [here](#).

107 L. Latta (2019). Equity in Education: Defining Equity, Equality, and Standardization. Impact Tulsa, [here](#).

## ► Are our education and training systems inclusive?

EU Member States have attempted over time to integrate inclusion, equity and equality into their own (policy) structures, by having at least one major policy initiative in place focused on promoting equity in education or on supporting disadvantaged students<sup>108</sup>. However, trends of commodification and privatisation illustrate a persistent gap between approval and implementation of legislation. Data shows that a **learner's socioeconomic background continues to be the strongest predictor of school attainment and early leaving from education and training (ELET)**<sup>109,110</sup>.

Other factors include gender and nationality. At EU level, on average, women have lower ELET rates than men and native-born youngsters have lower ELET rates and better levels of school attainment than foreign-born pupils<sup>111</sup>. These inequalities continue and are exacerbated into adulthood where the usual providers of training are employers, meaning that people not employed nor in training have less learning opportunities<sup>112</sup>.

Research from Eurydice<sup>113</sup> highlights that **“adults with the greatest education and training needs have the least opportunity to benefit from lifelong learning”**, with the participation in adult learning being determined by factors such as educational attainment, employment status,

occupational category, age and skills.

Based on the Adult Education Survey (2016)<sup>114</sup> barriers are linked to time constraints, financial constraints and lack of ‘prerequisites’ (e.g. appropriate entry qualifications). Moreover, reaching out to adults and making them aware of lifelong learning's benefits is challenging. Among the two most influential factors for access to adult learning opportunities are age and educational attainment: adults aged 25-34 more likely to participate in learning than adults aged 55-64 and similarly with adults holding a tertiary degree over lower-level educated adults<sup>115</sup>. All this evidence backs the premise that education and training systems are empowering the already empowered.

Such social variables are shifting adults' motivation for engaging in learning, with recent findings pointing towards the fact that even if lifelong learning is in high esteem, the motivation to participate is still not developed well-enough. Some causes are linked to insufficient learner-centric policies which lead to learning opportunities that do not match the reasons and motivations that learners have to engage in further developing competences<sup>116</sup>.

LLLPL has called attention to the reproduction

---

108 Eurydice. (2020). Equity in School Education in Europe: Structures, Policies and Student Performance. Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, European Commission, [here](#).

109 Lifelong Learning Platform (2019). PISA 2018 Results: A wake-up call to put wellbeing not numbers at the heart of policy-making, [here](#).

110 Lifelong Learning Platform (2020). Education & Training 2020: A view from learning providers and civil society on European co-operation in the field of education and training, Shadow Report, [here](#).

111 European Commission (2022). Education and Training Monitor 2021, [here](#).

112 Lifelong Learning Platform (2020). Education & Training 2020: A view from learning providers and civil society on European co-operation in the field of education and training, Shadow Report, [here](#).

113 Eurydice (2015). Adult education and training in Europe: Widening access to learning opportunities, Eurydice Report, [here](#).

114 Eurostat (2022). Database - Education and Training, [here](#).

115 European Commission (2022). Education and Training Monitor 2021, [here](#).

116 Cedefop (2022). High Esteem but low participation: Strong belief in the value of learning and the pressing need for skills are not enough to motivate adults to participate in lifelong learning, [here](#).

of inequalities and lack of inclusiveness in education and training systems over the years. As seen in the previous chapter, assessments can lead to certain social groups being disadvantaged to a greater extent than others in terms of both exam outcomes and experience – an arrangement that compromises the wellbeing of such groups in their learning<sup>117</sup>.

Digitalisation reduces many barriers, but depending on how it is integrated in learning environments, it can enhance the digital divide and existing inequalities. This is due to the lack of a comprehensive approach when integrating digital technology in learning environments that rarely goes beyond the provision of hardware and software, lacking an appropriate implementation plan that considers the needs of all learners as well as educators.

Equal access to technology does not automatically imply equal learning opportunities<sup>118</sup>, as learners who are the

most in need of support – the ones with lower skills, likely to drop out – or with least resources require an approach that tackles first the issue of basic skills across Europe.

Learning mobility, habitually touted by the EU institutions and Member States as an EU success story, can also reinforce discrepancies in learners' opportunities if implemented in a way that limits access to mobility only to some learners. Data on the Erasmus+ programme shows there is gross under-representation of lower income groups with only those who can rely on economic help accessing the scheme, despite the grants.

A recent study<sup>119</sup> identified that 75% of learners from lower income groups – who wanted to engage with Erasmus+ – felt that the additional costs of applying and participating were too significant.

---

117 Lifelong Learning Platform (2021). Assessments, wellbeing & inequality: what is the link?, [here](#).

118 Lifelong Learning Platform (2017). Reimagining education for the digital age, Position Paper, [here](#).

119 Voxeurop (2022). Erasmus, a European hit affected by inequality, [here](#).

The ***Erasmus Student Network (ESN)*** recently presented their technical recommendations for boosting inclusion in Erasmus+ mobilities, an outcome of their ***Social Inclusion and Engagement in Mobility*** Erasmus+ funded project. Their research pointed out towards the advancement of initial costs that learners need to make, the high costs of the mobility period, the lack of adequate information on where to find funding to access mobilities, among other environmental, institutional and attitudinal barriers<sup>120</sup>. Showing how mobilities are reserved to those more socio-economically advantaged learners, their set of recommendations, as well as support tools for learners, provide ample solutions on how to increase inclusiveness in mobilities and actually match the Erasmus+ programme's goals<sup>121</sup>.

These aforementioned disparities reinforce pre-existing educational and socio-economic inequalities – furthering the advantages of the already advantaged by expanding their social, economic and cultural capital.

Though this is not an exhaustive list, these examples clarify that unless commodification trends are reversed, education will be transformed from a public good to a commodity available only to some.

Such an outcome would serve personal interests ahead of community ones, diminishing education's traditional role as a public good that builds social cohesion and generating unsustainable patterns of social inequality<sup>122</sup>.

Urgent calls have been made to move towards a new social contract for education which would allow the building of participatory and inclusive education and training systems.

The key for this transformation to be successful and sustainable in the long term is to strengthen education as a public good and a shared societal endeavour through a comprehensive approach to investment in quality, future-proof and inclusive education systems where individuals, communities and ecosystems can flourish altogether<sup>123124</sup>.

---

120 K. Allinson & W. Gabriels (2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, [here](#).

121 Erasmus Student Network (2022). For more inclusive & engaging Erasmus+ mobilities, [here](#).

122 F. Rizvi (2016). Privatization in Education: Trends and Consequences, UNESCO Education Research and Foresight, Working Paper, [here](#).

123 World Economic Forum (2022). Catalysing Education 4.0 Investing in the Future of Learning for a Human-Centric Recovery, Insight Report, [here](#).

124 UNESCO (2021). Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education, Report from the International Commission on the Futures of Education, [here](#).

## Public investment for inclusive learning systems: Quantity and quality

As indicated previously, the quantity of public investment has severe implications on equity and inclusion. While the necessity of public funding in the context of supporting greater inclusion often focuses on questions of quantity such as sufficiency and adequacy; equal concern must be attributed to issues of quality. Ample evidence exists at EU level regarding the substantial gains to be had from using public investment in education and training more efficiently<sup>125</sup>.

For example, higher and more efficient spending in education and training would allow governments to spend more on programmes that compensate for students with disadvantaged backgrounds<sup>126</sup>. Efficiency, however, should not merely entail the narrow use of cost-benefit measures.

When this analysis is used there is a prevalent economic logic as opposed to a social one,

meaning the amount of investment can be decided upon the choices that may make economic sense even though they might not support closing social inequality gaps.

More appropriate would be the use of a cost-effectiveness analysis which consists of three steps: i) measure the costs of the alternatives, ii) measure the outcomes of educational effectiveness of the alternatives and iii) costs and effectiveness measures are combined to calculate a cost-effectiveness ratio. Such an approach would allow taking into consideration the wider benefits of learning<sup>127</sup>.

Through the TaMPADA project, LLLP and the project consortium explored alternative ways to measure the progress of adults in learning, oriented at the outcomes of learning, which can be more beneficial for those most disadvantaged learners<sup>128</sup>.

---

125 P.A. Voigt, A. Thum-Thysen and W. Simons (2020). The economic benefits of improving efficiency in public spending on education in the European Union, European Commission, Economic Policy Brief, [here](#).

126 E. Vegas (2015). When Education Expenditure Matters: An Empirical Analysis of Recent International Data, [here](#).

127 Lifelong Learning Platform (2022). ABC of Funding and Investment in Education, [here](#).

128 TAMPADA PROJECT (2021). Policy Recommendations: Tracking and monitoring the progress of adult learners, [here](#).



An example of the different benefits of learning that need to be captured when defining education budgets is the [TAMPADA project](#) (2018 - 2021). The project involved five partners from five European countries (Greece, United Kingdom, Belgium, Sweden, Slovenia). The project focuses on Tracking and monitoring the progress of adult learners and it aims to develop an outreach mechanism for tracking and monitoring long-term outcomes of disadvantaged learners' participation in adult education (AE). The monitoring was done following a holistic approach of the benefits of learning under 4 main dimensions: i) Development of self and life skills, ii) Health and wellbeing, iii) Employability, employment and learning, and iv) Social, community and citizenship. The [toolkit developed](#) by partners has been transformed into a user-friendly digital assessment tool that Adult Education Providers and educators can use to measure their learners' progress. The results of this project are a clear example of how funding on education through a lifelong learning approach and a vision that goes beyond employability can better support learners to thrive and develop competences both for their professionals as well as personal paths. The policy recommendations can be found [here](#).

Given the wide array of aspects that need to be considered when determining the quantity and improving the quality of investment in education, it would be wise to shift towards a more comprehensive approach that includes improving the current techniques or using different methods that paint a better picture on the non-economic effects of the investment and allow upholding inclusion, equality and equity.

For this shift to be successful, the effective participation of all stakeholders in all steps of the decision making process is key. The lack of consultation afforded to key actors such as educators, learners and the broader range of educational stakeholders in the policymaking process can no longer stand:

education stakeholders need not only to be consulted but integrated as active actors in the developments of education and training policies<sup>129</sup>.

The effectiveness of public investment in tackling socio-economic disparities and ensure quality education and training depends on the meaningful participation of beneficiaries in the design, implementation and evaluation phases so that they can address genuine needs and problems on the ground<sup>130</sup>.

An equally important shift in the way we view public investment in education and training encompasses the **move from short to long term vision**. Together with the more comprehensive approach to

---

129 Education Commission (2016). The Learning Generation: Investing in education for a changing world, The International Commission on Financing Global Education opportunity, Report, [here](#).

130 Lifelong Learning Platform (2020). Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Societies, Position Paper, [here](#).

education and training budgeting, this shift cannot effectively take place if we do not consider reforms in the financial legislation at EU and national level. The questioning of the way we calculate public investment has increased, as revealed in previous chapters, since the failure of the post-2008 austerity measures and the inability of current tools such as the [Stability and Growth Pact](#) to deal with its aftermath.

It is unrealistic to expect a different result in the face of the current social, environmental and economic challenges<sup>131</sup>. Taking into consideration the debates around EU fiscal rules, it is prime time to push for a move from a narrow set of indicators towards a more comprehensive approach, not just related to education but encompassing the social, environmental and economic outcomes we aspire to achieve, while also considering the risks of planetary destruction our current course would entail. Reducing the heavy reliance on GDP for example has garnered momentum in recent years, with calls made to move towards different accounts for social, environmental and economic indicators that support the transformation towards sustainable societies<sup>132</sup>.

To launch the process of reviewing the EU fiscal framework, the European Commission has published in November 2022 a Communication on orientations for a reform of the EU economic governance framework. This shall serve as guiding for the EU institutions, and specially Member States

within the Council of the EU, to decide on the new rules which will potentially enter into force in 2024. The Commission aims to simplify the complex governance architecture by relying on a single indicator to measure the debt sustainability of the Member States which will be their net primary expenditure. This indicator and a debt sustainability analysis methodology will inform the European Commission's proposal for a fiscal adjustment path for each Member States. The path is a four-year plan which ensures that the debt of each Member State is plausibly on a downward trend while the deficit can credibly remain below the 3% of GDP rule<sup>133</sup>. Though the flexibility is welcomed, it is not sufficiently ambitious to begin any forward looking discussion by relying on the same arbitrary set of rules that were established in the 1990s. LLLP has been calling for adapting the economic governance framework so that it would exclude public investment in education and training from the calculation of debt sustainability.

The European Commission proposal does not feature such a rule, though the claims have been that the revised rules would allow for Member States to be able to invest freely to address comprehensive challenges. The current proposal, especially as this will continue to be embedded within the European Semester process, risks reproducing the same narrower focus on stability and economic goals which was discussed in Chapter 2 of this Position Paper.

---

131 Lifelong Learning Platform (2022). Public investment in education and training in the EU: trends, challenges and future prospects, [here](#).

132 R. Hoekstra (2019). Replacing GDP by 2030: Towards a Common Language for the Well-being and Sustainability Community, [here](#).

133 European Commission (2022), Communication on orientations for a reform of the EU economic governance framework, [here](#).

Lifelong Learning Platform's [annual campaign of 2022](#) focused on the topic of investment in education and training. Signed by approximately 50 networks representing education and training stakeholders, the campaign's charter calls for:

- Member States increasing investment in education and training;
- public funding devoted to education and training for its own sake;
- public funds to finance inclusive measures in education and training;
- reform the EU economic governance to exclude education and training funding from debt sustainability calculations.

The campaign has been emboldened by a [study](#) detailing the funding and investments trends ever since the 2008 economic crisis and anticipating the future trends. The point made by such campaigns is a joint understanding from practitioners, learners and stakeholders in the education and training sector which assent into the challenges and the situation ahead, putting Member States and the EU in a position where acknowledgement that a rethinking of public funding in education and training becomes an obvious path. Such campaigns illustrate the common desire of the stakeholders and civil society to work together with decision makers in finding solutions that would ensure quality, public funding to create inclusive and equitable lifelong learning systems.

Determining budgets for education and training must start from the premise that, on the one hand securing quality education and training opportunities can only be realised through adequate levels of public expenditure and, on the other, an increase in public investment allocated towards education and training provides an effective tool for addressing the social, environmental and economic challenges across the EU.

Failing to implement comprehensive reforms and returning to pre-Covid financial rules will result in education and training being disproportionately affected once again, resulting in severe consequences for society at large, particularly the vulnerable sectors of our society. What is more important: maintaining a narrow and arbitrary set of financial indicators compiled three decades ago or achieving wider societal, economic and environmental goals today?

## Where to invest to build inclusive education systems?

A comprehensive approach to public investment in education and training is needed to build inclusive education systems that serve as foundations for sustainable and resilient societies. As made apparent in the following paragraphs, financing education and training should be done for its own sake.

A consistent and solid amount of scientific points to this course of action, rather than to finance the sector in order to serve narrow interests<sup>134</sup>; it is only through this approach that it will then bring about the desired

outcomes, including those in the labour market that EU decision-makers aspire to achieve.

This also involves a reconceptualisation of what learning is, moving away from instrumentalising it and shackling learners to knowledge-transmission models. This paper groups the different areas in need of investment according to i) learners, ii) educators, iii) learning environments, iv) communities and v) evidence-based policy and practice.

### Invest in learners

Part of the learners' formal, informal and non-formal learning experience occurs in the household. They require an adequate place to live - from access to sanitation to access to internet -, especially as the pandemic illuminated the drastic effects of home conditions in learning and the dire situation of low-income families without the necessary means and infrastructure<sup>135</sup>.

Going beyond the minimal conditions, younger learners require investment in parents<sup>136</sup> to aid them in developing their

learning to learn competences and to provide them with support in ensuring adequate nutrition standards, mental health and overall wellbeing.

This also accounts for lifelong learning opportunities for parents, so that they can develop competences to support their children, beyond the financial support that is required to make sure that parents can establish certain standards of living for their children.

---

<sup>134</sup> S.E.L. Bengtsson, B. Barakat & R. Mutarak (2019): The Role of Education in Enabling the Sustainable Development Agenda, [here](#).

<sup>135</sup> Y. Algan, G. Brunello, E. Goreichy & A. Hristova (2021). Boosting Social and Economic Resilience in Europe by Investing in Education, EENEE Analytical Report No.42, European Expert Network on Economics of Education, [here](#).

<sup>136</sup> World Economic Forum (2022). Catalysing Education 4.0 Investing in the Future of Learning for a Human-Centric Recovery, Insight Report, [here](#).

An example of the type of training that parents could find beneficial to be able to later on empower their children in their learning journeys has been offered through the [European Parents' Association's](#) Erasmus+ funded project [Creative Thinking for Parents](#). This project attempts to offer short, well-developed and scientifically-tested creative thinking workshops which can be implemented easily to parents, complimented by innovative digital tools targeted at parents, which will enhance their creative thinking skills. The training will consist of face-to-face or virtual, two-hour workshops for parents<sup>137</sup>. Investing in such solutions, developed in cooperation with parents themselves and civil society, can have spillover effects for the capacity of their children to develop creative thinking skills.

Improving access to good-quality care and preschool programmes for children from disadvantaged backgrounds is important, so that they can have the best start in life and reduce early gaps in speaking and other cognitive skills. Evidence from Norway and France, where an expansion of childcare or preschools occurred, showed improved learning outcomes, especially among children with low-income parents<sup>138</sup>.

At the same time, the constant engagement of parents and guardians in the developmental path of young learners can boost the support system that learners have. With limited cost on the side of the education systems, examples from the US, Botswana and Brazil show how effective it was to engage parents via personalised messaging<sup>139</sup>.

[Success](#), greater attention is dedicated to the needs of learners of, mainly, primary and secondary education learning age to participate actively in learning, defining also success in a way that treats academic achievement as interdependent with the well-being of the learners and their chances of developing socio-emotional competences beyond the subject-specific ones<sup>140</sup>.

That being said, without recognising the existence of hidden costs in formal education it becomes difficult to guarantee the success to which EU Member States strive. Research conducted by the [Organising Bureau of European School Students Unions \(OBESSU\)](#) illuminated the concerns of young learners with regards to costs for transportation, books and materials, meals or digital devices.

With the recently approved [Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success](#) The illusion of free education applies to those that can afford to travel to their education

---

137 Creative Parent Project, [here](#).

138 Y. Algan, G. Brunello, E. Goreichy & A. Hristova (2021). Boosting Social and Economic Resilience in Europe by Investing in Education, EENEE Analytical Report No.42, European Expert Network on Economics of Education, [here](#).

139 European Commission (2022). Investing in our future: Quality investment in education and training, Expert group on quality investment in education and training, Final report, [here](#).

140 Lifelong Learning Platform (2022). Statement on the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success, [here](#).

institution on a daily-basis, to those that have the resources to pay for the food available in canteens or to those that have learning materials or digital devices to be able to follow the in-person or hybrid lessons. This does not even account for the more holistic care that should be provided for student welfare, ensuring that learners have access to free mental health services or to free educational social activities. As the situation is right now, the empowered learners continue to benefit from 'free education' while those most in need are put at a greater risk of early leaving.

Adult education and learning (ALE) has also been paradoxically deprived of appropriate funding, despite it being indispensable for the SDG Agenda. Where ALE has been supported, a plethora of benefits were observed including healthier behaviours, higher life expectancy, a significant reduction in lifestyle diseases<sup>141</sup>.

An increased level of funding must be directed towards i) increasing the absolute number of ALE beneficiaries; ii) improving the quality of ALE delivery; and iii) sustaining ALE's lifelong learning perspective. As part of [CONFINTEA 2022](#), Member States committed to increase public funding and resource mobilisation for ALE, to prevent regression in existing budget allocations and to targeted measures for women and learners from vulnerable or marginalised groups to ensure diversity, inclusion, accessibility and equity<sup>142</sup>.

This must be followed through by public bodies reducing their reliance on employers to supply ALE, as this only deepens disparities for people not in employment nor training, while also recognising that investment is needed to cover the different facets in which ALE occurs (formal, non-formal and informal).

One way to follow through can be guaranteeing that lifelong learning entitlements are attached to the individual rather than their job status at a certain time. The EU's [Individual Learning Accounts](#) (ILAs) can be an opportunity to rethink and attempt to enhance ALE's inclusiveness, transparency and quality. Moreover, investment must be destined to comprehensive outreach activities through which people are aware of the benefits of continuing learning and are empowered to invest in their own skills and qualifications, shaping their own career paths and driving transformation<sup>143</sup>.

LLLPL, in its reaction to the Commission's initiative on ILAs, highlighted that support to a universal but differentiated approach to ILAs is key as everybody should benefit from an entitlement to learn. Given the importance of private actors in this area, their role needs to be driven by the entitlements' social mission; while European, national, regional and local investment must be aligned and work in complementarity with public and private stakeholders to ensure an equally accessible and good quality public offer<sup>144</sup>.

---

141 UNESCO (2016). Third Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE 3), Institute for Lifelong Learning, [here](#).

142 UNESCO (2022). 7th International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA): Adult learning and education for sustainable development - a transformative agenda, Institute for Lifelong Learning, [here](#).

143 S. Fernandes & K. Kerneis (2020). Towards an individual right to adult learning for all Europeans, The Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) & Institut Jacques Delors - Notre Europe, Report, [here](#).

144 Lifelong Learning Platform (2022). New EU actions to improve lifelong learning: a first step to learning entitlements?, Reaction to the Council Recommendations on Individual Learning Accounts and Micro-credentials, [here](#).

It must not be forgotten that there is a real danger for funding associated with ILAs to fall into the pocket of private, for-profit companies, rather than reaching the learning providers which are in need of the resources in order to broaden access to learning for those most in need.

As part of such entitlements, guidance and counselling are key to support individuals to reach their full potential, benefiting the society at large, including the economy, and the post-pandemic recovery. Despite this, in many countries access to guidance and counselling is insufficient, distinctly for those who need it the most<sup>145</sup>. Public investment in guidance and counselling must be underpinned by equity of access when delivering strategies and outreach initiatives<sup>146</sup>.

A key aspect of public investment in these services is that it cannot be done in isolation: funding for them must go hand in hand with recognition and validation of learning<sup>147</sup>.

In this way recognising their potential to bring benefits to people who dropped out of education and training and to enable people to identify and recognise all learning that happens outside of formal education.

Going through the process of validation can lead to a huge confidence-boost, increase the motivation to continue learning, finding a pathway to employment, or simply an understanding of their own competences and capabilities<sup>148</sup>. It is worrying that only a few countries have proper national budgets to support validation processes. In many cases, the costs of the validation process is regulated by a collective agreement or paid by a sectoral training fund. However, when this is not present, individuals must pay for the procedure themselves which leads to access barriers to those individuals who are already disadvantaged<sup>149</sup>.

---

145 Inter-Agency Working Group on Career Guidance (2021). Investing in career guidance, Booklet, Revised Edition, [here](#).

146 Ibid.

147 Ibid.

148 Cedefop (2022). Validation of non-formal and informal learning, VET toolkit for tackling early leaving, [here](#).

149 ETUC (2021). Position on enhancing validation of non-formal and informal learning, [here](#).

**An interesting example on recognition of prior learning comes from the *MAXI-PAC project (AEGEE)* which focuses on maximising the previously acquired competences of third-country nationals, such as refugees, to have optimal opportunities in European higher education. Any structure in terms of recognition of qualifications and competences acquired elsewhere is lacking for third country nationals who wish to continue their studies in Europe after they have already made their way into higher education outside Europe. This is the gap that this project sought to address *by developing tools and procedures* to enable universities and universities of applied sciences to effectively scale up the qualifications and competences of third country nationals. The long-term goal is to strive for an inclusive society, where third-country nationals are able to participate in higher education. However, public funding is needed to develop these structures for recognition of previously acquired competences which must be developed ensuring they are co-created by all stakeholders including learners themselves no matter their background.**

To build strong validation systems, sustainable public investment is needed to cover all related costs such as guidance, personnel, infrastructure, instruments and support mechanisms. Governments should ensure that validation remains accessible to all regardless of socio-economic or employment status.

This investment must be sustainable in the long-term and accompanied with better methods to calculate not just the funding

needed but also to make more explicit the return on investment as evidence to support the already known (but less monetarily visible) substantial benefits to society and economy.

Investment is also needed to raise awareness on the benefits of this process. This will help to reach out to potential users who have normally less access to these opportunities<sup>150</sup>.

---

<sup>150</sup> R. Duvekot (eic), A. Karttunen, M. Noack & L. Van den Brande (2020). Making Policy Work, Validation of Prior Learning for Education and the Labour Market, VPL Biennale series n° 7, [here](#).



## Invest in educators

Notwithstanding the unequivocal relationship between quality teaching and learning achievement, the profession remains to a large degree under-valued and underappreciated<sup>151</sup><sup>152</sup>. Part of the issue is reflected in the high levels of stress and exhaustion reported by educators across the EU and the low level of retention, which is also influenced by poorly operating career structures<sup>153</sup>.

In addition, teachers' salaries at pre-primary, primary and general secondary education are still between 4% and 14% lower than those of tertiary-educated workers in other professions<sup>154</sup>.

The proportion of statutory working time spent teaching can also provide information on the additional working hours required for non-teaching activities.

The OECD findings show that in 18 countries, such as the UK, Hungary and Lithuania, at the general upper secondary level, individual teachers often teach more classes than their full-time contract requires<sup>155</sup>.

This overwhelming workload contributes to the lack of attractiveness of the teaching profession and to the working conditions in need of improvement. Adequate funding is a crucial prerequisite for remedying the crux of these interrelated policy concerns.

**Evidence from the Norwegian education and training system showed that, during the 1990s and 2000s, a 10% wage premium added to educators that were going to work in areas dealing with severe recruitment issues had boosted recruitment by 30%<sup>156</sup>.**

Aside from decent wages that amount to a living wage, which are never to be taken for granted, the need for adequate support in the form of readily accessible training that is time-sensitive to the needs of educators and learners is essential to equip them with the capacities to deploy pedagogies and andragogies suited to the world's rapid

changes through carefully planned and purposeful analogue, digital or blended means<sup>157</sup>.

This support should be available to the full range of educators and trainers, including in non-formal and informal sectors<sup>158</sup>.

151 UNESCO (2021). Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education, Report from the International Commission on the Futures of Education, [here](#).

152 Education Commission (2019). Transforming the Education Workforce: Learning Teams for a Learning Generation, Report, [here](#).

153 Eurydice (2021). Teachers in Europe: Careers, development and wellbeing, Eurydice Report, [here](#).

154 OECD (2022). Education at a Glance, OECD Indicators, [here](#).

155 CSEE-ETUCE (2022). Education at a Glance 2022: focus on teachers working conditions and the impact of COVID-19, [here](#).

156 European Commission (2022). Investing in our future: Quality investment in education and training, Expert group on quality investment in education and training, Final report, [here](#).

157 World Economic Forum (2022). Catalysing Education 4.0 Investing in the Future of Learning for a Human-Centric Recovery, Insight Report, [here](#).

158 Lifelong Learning Platform (2020). Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Societies, Position Paper, [here](#).

**To meaningfully explore the adequate moments and ways in which digital learning is to be introduced and promoted in the education & training, parents, educators, teachers, trainers must be supported to grasp age-appropriate media education. To ensure that the learners are not passive consumers of technology, and are not falling into the trap of marketisation by means of for-profit digital solutions entering the learning process, they need to be guided by their teaching/learning counterparts. Development and implemented by the [European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education](#) and the [European Parents' Association](#), together with 9 other projects, the [HERMMES project](#) is funded by the Erasmus+ programme and looks at media education which focuses on age-appropriateness, development-orientation and media maturity. The aim is that at the end of their school career, pupils are media mature, using the full range of analogue and digital media for their own education, participation in civil society and beyond. In addition they should be able to sovereignly decide how much time to spend on digital tools, for which purpose, and always with a conscious and critical approach to the content shared or consumed through media. The project aims to develop guidelines and trainings for parents, teachers and educators to aid them in understanding the full range of usefulness of digital tools and how they can be judiciously presented to learners so as to avoid falling into marketisation traps.**

Moreover, educators should be supported in parallel by non-monetary measures such as reducing class sizes in formal education<sup>159</sup>, strengthening professional recognition and legitimacy for all types of educators, reducing the administrative burden they have to face, increasing institutional support, and fostering cultures of collaboration within and across sectors. The latter includes being supported and financially resourced to engage with a wide set of educational stakeholders<sup>160</sup>.

Investment can contribute to the implementation of pedagogies and

andragogies, adapted to current global changes, encompassing a mix of participatory and deliberative approaches based on collaborative work, peer-to-peer, dialogic and inquiry-based learning for the active engagement of learners. Such investment would also support the mainstreaming of education for sustainability.

Another key practice in need of public investment is experiential learning, an approach whereby learners develop understanding and knowledge through experience moving past the cognitive side of learning.

---

<sup>159</sup> Which has been revealed as a successful practice to improve the academic participation of learners and their competence development. See more in: European Commission (2022). Investing in our future: Quality investment in education and training, Expert group on quality investment in education and training, Final report, [here](#).

<sup>160</sup> UNESCO (2021). Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education, Report from the International Commission on the Futures of Education, [here](#).

Experiential learning can also help to go beyond simply developing sustainability competences or greening the places of learning but actually encompassing the notion of nature as a co-educator where the natural environment becomes an active agent in teaching and learning processes<sup>161</sup>. Governments should provide concrete support and resources to integrate these practices into the curriculum as well as conduct reforms into assessment methods<sup>162,163</sup>.

**Investing in shared/distributive leadership, especially in the context of greater devolution of responsibilities and powers to the local level or to the education institution level, can greatly contribute to improving the working conditions of educators.**

**This is associated with greater belief in their pedagogical abilities as well as with a proactive approach, which contributed to an increase in the adoption of innovative pedagogies and of professional self-efficacy in those countries where more level of collaboration and responsibility were provided to educators. Countries such as Sweden, Norway and Denmark are the European countries that have ensured high levels of professional collaboration and exchange and coordination for teaching <sup>164</sup>.**

**Investment can also be directed towards more mentorship and partnership programmes which could support educators to connect their practice with their surrounding environment. The [Cross-Mentoring programme](#), developed in the Netherlands, focuses on personal meetings between primary school leaders and a leader from the business or non-profit sector. They would together look behind the scenes and coach each other on leadership issues, based on equality and reciprocity. With the aim of learning from each other, that is cross-mentoring. The pilot edition took place in 2020 with thirteen couples. The aim is to form 1,000 couples within three years. School leaders from primary education and other sectors can apply for the programme.**

---

161 Lifelong Learning Platform (2020). Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Societies, Position Paper, [here](#).

162 Lifelong Learning Platform (2019). 21st century learning environments, Position Paper, [here](#).

163 Lifelong Learning Platform (2020). Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Societies, Position Paper, [here](#).

164 A. Schizzerotto, N. Bazoli & Sergiu Burlacu (2022). Collaboration levels and feedback among European teachers: A second-level analysis of TALIS 2018 dataset |Volume 2, European Schoolnet, [here](#).

## ► Invest in learning environments: physical, digital and beyond

Public investment should integrate a more nuanced understanding of learning environments into education, training and lifelong learning policies, guided by the overarching principle to support learners' individual and unique potential. This refers to recognising, including through sustained investment, the value of **learning environments beyond formal academic education as key hubs of competence development.**

Non-formal and informal learning environments are relevant for the learning to learn competence and other “life skills” which support individuals' resilience and participation in wider society<sup>165</sup>.

Public funding should support the design of learning environments based on a needs-centred approach to ensure learners' role as active co-creators of knowledge and their environment. An example of co-creation in learning can be the concept of democratic school governance. Student participation in school life - and meaningful representation at the national and regional level - teaches students many skills fundamental to their civic, social and cognitive development.

Without a shadow of a doubt that the most effective way to promote democratic culture and foster social and civic engagement is not to teach it off a book - but to provide instead a real, concrete space where it can be practised<sup>166</sup>. Similarly, in all learning environments, power-sharing is fundamental to build effective representative structures and to give ownership to learners over their paths.

High quality physical infrastructure (buildings, classrooms, laboratories, and equipment) remains crucial for better instruction, improved learner outcomes, and reduced dropout rates, among other benefits<sup>167</sup>.

Together with ensuring basic services, public investment should consider the design of physical infrastructure through three interrelated factors: naturalness (e.g. light, air quality), stimulation (e.g. complexity, colour), and individualisation (e.g. flexibility of the learning space)<sup>168</sup>.

---

<sup>165</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform (2019). 21st century learning environments, Position Paper, [here](#).

<sup>166</sup> From the forthcoming OBESSU Position Paper (2023). The Importance of Democracy for School Success.

<sup>167</sup> J. Teixeira, J. Amoroso & J. Gresham (2017). Why education infrastructure matters for learning?, World Bank Blogs, [here](#).

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

**The Brussels Planning Office has published a user-friendly guide which roughly translates as “My school, a quality space. Guide for basic education”. The guide supports stakeholders in identifying the quality of their education institution’s spaces and understanding how they could make infrastructural adaptations. Moreover, it guides stakeholders on how to leverage the community as an opportunity for more flexible learning. The opening up of education institutions’ doors towards the surrounding community is shown as a cost-effective method to organise the learning space in a learner-centred manner and boost well-being in the learning process<sup>169</sup>.**

Regarding digital environments, investment has to be geared towards conforming to learners’ needs, allowing them to regulate their own learning and ensure that they do not end up as passive technology consumers.

Therefore, future investment in technologies has to be accompanied by investment in people, widening their access to lifelong learning opportunities to become active, digital citizens who can capitalise on their experiences<sup>170</sup>.

This investment should target adequate content, teacher training and guidance about pedagogical uses. Carrying out this process in a participatory manner will strengthen and modernise the educational systems and increase their effectiveness<sup>171</sup>.

In terms of assessments, a shift is needed towards assessment approaches which are competence-oriented and outcomes-based.

Furthermore, any such approach needs to remain attuned to real-life experiences of learners so as to support them in using the knowledge accrued in learning in their daily life, for a more harmonious participation in society. It also needs to consider the impact on the wellbeing of both learners and educators alike and support the shift towards inclusive education and training systems where assessments are a tool not only of learning but for learning. In this sense, assessments should help teachers and educators monitor learners’ progress and growth.

When given more autonomy, assessments can help teachers and educators build their capacities to adapt their teaching instruction to better respond to the learners’ needs. Any re-envisioning of assessment must account for the detrimental consequences to well-being and inclusivity in learning that have been linked to summative, high-stakes, rigidly standardised forms of assessments<sup>172</sup>.

---

169 S. Dawance, J. Deneff, A. Ribeiro, M. Berbel & M. Touceda (2018). My school, a quality space: Guide for Basic Education (Mon école, un espace de qualité: Guide pour l’enseignement fondamental), Perspective Brussels, [here](#).

170 Lifelong Learning Platform (2017). Reimagining education for the digital age, Position Paper, [here](#).

171 Ibid.

172 Lifelong Learning Platform (2021). Rethinking assessments: Prioritising learners’ wellbeing, Position Paper, [here](#).

## Invest in communities

As it has been reiterated throughout the paper, learning takes place across different settings among which are the local communities where we come in contact with other learners from different walks of life. In order to foster learning in our communities and ensure they reach out to everyone in them, public investment in community-based lifelong learning centres is key.

In a joint paper with Cedefop<sup>173</sup>, LLLP underlined that **combining community-based lifelong learning centres with community-based multidisciplinary teams in 'one-stop shops' offers an unmatched range of potential benefits for quality and inclusive education for all.** These centres can offer alongside lifelong learning opportunities, other services such as emotional, social and multicultural counselling, family support, volunteering opportunities, etc.

Education should develop competences needed by learners to lead a flourishing life while being active citizens. Once education is viewed for this, it becomes clear that such a public good can be delivered only by consulting those receiving it.

The civil society and the community space can mediate the relationship between State and learner<sup>174</sup>, since involving parents, learners, teachers, civil society in the governance of education makes citizens active participants that undergo a process of learning and of taking action within a democratic society.

The community centres need to make active efforts to relate to the needs, experiences and lives of those in socio-economic exclusion to ensure that those who need it the most make use of the services provided.

Among the main features of these centres are: i) Continuity of support over time and flexible levels of support: tailored to levels of need and not simply prepackaged programmes; ii) Outreach: reaches groups missed by prepackaged programmes, including through home visiting family support outreach; and iii) Drop-ins and peer support over time. To successfully implement these centres, a smart use of existing infrastructures plus substantial investment from the public sector is needed.

---

173 Lifelong Learning Platform & Cedefop (2019). Implementing a holistic approach to lifelong learning: Community Lifelong Learning Centres as a gateway to multidisciplinary support teams, Briefing Paper, [here](#).

174 S. Ranson (2012). Schools and Civil Society: corporate or community governance. *Critical Studies in Education* 53 (1), pp.29-45, [here](#).

An example of existing infrastructure which could be used to upscale a Community Lifelong Learning Centre is Familibase, a community-based one-stop-shop that involves a multidisciplinary team engaged in family outreach and working in and around schools in Ballyfermot (Dublin). Similarly, the SPIL centre in Eindhoven is part of municipal family support policy based on multifunctional services directly linked to primary schools in these SPIL Centres. This choice had been made based on the principle of the early detection of children at risk as early as possible and as close to the family as possible. The main reason for this approach is that schools, daycare centres and kindergartens are best placed to ‘find’ children at risk and their parents<sup>175</sup>.

Examples can expand also to connect learning linked to earlier ages with adult learning. The LQN project (*LebensQualität durch Nähe-Quality of life through proximity*) was carried out by five adult education institutions in Austria, Germany and Italy and the *European Association for the Education of Adults*. The project addresses the needs of municipalities to empower citizens and improve their involvement in participatory projects for civic and social challenges. This prompts us to reflect and discuss the role of education in fostering local and regional development, and how active citizens’ participation can benefit the life of the communities<sup>176</sup>.

---

175 Lifelong Learning Platform & Cedefop (2019). Implementing a holistic approach to lifelong learning: Community Lifelong Learning Centres as a gateway to multidisciplinary support teams, Briefing Paper, [here](#).

176 Ibid.

## ► Invest in evidence-based and participatory policymaking

To support the aforementioned reforms and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public investment, it is paramount to direct a substantial amount to education research, monitoring and evaluation. Strategic investments are needed to improve the tools and systems for assessing all aspects of education from the attainment of skills, the quality and relevance of curricula and pedagogies as well as investment needs within the sector<sup>177</sup>.

It is imperative that this type of initiative is inclusive of different kinds of evidence and ways of knowing - including from civil society and key education and training stakeholders - and fosters the exchange of knowledge across borders. It is also important that the data produced remains commonly accessible to all stakeholders and that funding is directed at building the capacity of actors at different levels so the data collected can adequately reflect the different contexts and needs<sup>178</sup>.

In education and training, there is a need to shift our approaches from heavily quantitative-dependent public funding to include more qualitative indicators and perspectives, especially as quantitative-dependent ones have been used in a punitive way, steering funding away from those who need it most.

Public investment in education and training should not be based on monitoring and evaluation methods that flatten experiences, homogenise expectations, and ignore the diversity of context, resources and historical factors. The metrics used should encompass both cognitive and non-cognitive competence development and move away from solely relying on time spent in education, quantity of learners in a course, labour market outcomes or other proxies for learning<sup>179</sup>.

This requires more qualitative monitoring and more monitoring targeted at inclusiveness. To this end, the new indicators on equity from the Education and Training Monitor 2022<sup>180</sup> can serve as a first step towards more qualitative evaluations of the education and training systems. Moreover, all policy interventions ought to be designed on a robust impact evaluation methodology that stresses the importance of relevant stakeholders' involvement from its first designing steps.

Since monitoring equity is difficult in the short term, it is important to adequately support longitudinal studies that go beyond political mandates at EU and Member States level<sup>181</sup>. Civil society organisations can be key partners to governments and beneficiaries in this process.

---

177 World Economic Forum (2022). Catalysing Education 4.0 Investing in the Future of Learning for a Human-Centric Recovery, Insight Report, [here](#).

178 UNESCO (2021). Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education, Report from the International Commission on the Futures of Education, [here](#).

179 Ibid.

180 European Commission (2022). Education and Training Monitor 2022, Comparative report, [here](#).

181 Lifelong Learning Platform (2020). Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Societies, Position Paper, [here](#).



# CONCLUSION

This Position Paper revealed the many angles in which investment in education and training influences not only the sector's available resources, but also the entire logic that goes behind the planning of how learning should look like.

The multiple facets of this, associated with examples of ways in which this can be reformed, might reveal a herculean task for the EU and its Member States in addressing how education and training can best prepare all learners throughout their life for adjusting to all societal aspects. However, even if structural reforms are required, the main element that this Position Paper highlights is the classification of education as a public good.

The crux of the matter is that **any reform should be aimed at meeting learners' needs and prioritising the learning process** itself rather than transforming education and training into a tool that boosts profits and treats people solely as human resources ready to fill in labour market gaps.

Investing in education and training requires the provision of structural support to all learning processes, ensuring that funding for the sector is designed for the purpose of addressing the wide variety of societal needs, which include economic ones, but expand also towards the social ones.

At the same time, the goal of this position paper is not to ostracise different sources

of funding or even different methods of managing how learning is delivered and received, but rather to draw attention to the principle that any strategy used must be for the benefit of ensuring that **all learners have access to quality education and training in a lifelong and life-wide learning approach.**

Re-envisioning the sector in this manner requires drawing attention to the practices where profit-making and the interests of the few have been promoted so that all education stakeholders can work together to address such distortions of the learning and ensure that inclusion, equity and equality are promoted at all steps.

It would be misleading to view learning in a vacuum and criticise the market-logic as an external force that changes the goals of the learning process. The way learning is structured reflects to a certain extent values, underlying assumptions, goals and definitions of what success is in a society.

While this paper cannot explore how preconceived ideas about the benefits of a market-oriented approach have permeated all facets of life and impacted policy-making in a wide-range of fields, it does help to see how this system is uncritically reproduced through learning that perpetuates it and adapts to it.

This position paper can serve as further considerations of what type of large-scale, structural mindset change is required in order

to weather current challenges while not leaving anyone behind in the process and ensuring that all learners are prepared for the great variety of societal challenges, which include economic ones but are not limited to them.

LLLPL strongly calls for adequate and appropriate public investment in education and training and for categorising learning as a public good. This would institute a requirement to boost democratic oversight on the governing of education and training

and of any future policy developments, a more ambitious revision of current fiscal framework than what the European Commission proposed and a revision of rules at both national and EU level to ensure that funding in education and training is solely allocated at meeting the learners' needs as well as a revision of the learning process to ensure that it does not only cater to close labour market gaps but wider societal goals and it does not fall prey to the flawed self-regulation powers of the markets.

# LIFELONG LEARNING PLATFORM

EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY FOR EDUCATION

The Lifelong Learning Platform is an umbrella that gathers 42 European organisations active in the field of education, training and youth. Currently these networks represent more than 50 000 educational institutions and associations covering all sectors of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Their members reach out to several millions of beneficiaries.

Rue de l'industrie, 10 - 1000 Brussels, Belgium  
info@llplatform.eu - +32 2 89 32 515  
[www.llplatform.eu](http://www.llplatform.eu)