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European Union

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| From: | General Secretariat of the Council |
| To: | Delegations |
| Subject: | Council conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 11/2023: 'EU support for the digitalisation of schools. Significant investments, but a lack of strategic focus in the use of EU financing by member states' |

Delegations will find attached the abovementioned Council conclusions, approved by the Council (Agriculture and Fisheries) at its meeting on 25 July 2023.

Council conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 11/2023: 'EU support for the digitalisation of schools. Significant investments, but a lack of strategic focus in the use of EU financing by member states'

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. TAKES NOTE of the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 11/2023¹ and the Commission's detailed replies accompanying the report.
2. EMPHASISES the full responsibility of Member States for designing education and training policy and organising their schools.
3. RECOGNISES that EU measures can support Member States, authorities on all levels and education and training providers in their digitalisation efforts and UNDERLINES the role of the European Union in supplementing and supporting actions by Member States through the use of various EU funds.
4. UNDERLINES the importance of a broad approach on digitalisation in schools, including infrastructure, equipment, connectivity, content and pedagogical methods, and fostering digital skills among teachers, trainers, other education and training staff and school leaders, including by offering continuous education and training.
5. ACKNOWLEDGES that much work has been done in the Member States and at EU level on furthering digital education and skills, for example through the Erasmus+ programme, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the Digital Education Action Plans 2018-2020 and 2021-2027, the Working Group on Digital Education (DELTA), the structured dialogue on digital education and skills conducted by the Commission in 2022 and through various tools developed within the EU context.

¹ For the purposes of the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 11/2023, a more in-depth assessment was conducted specifically focusing on the actions undertaken to support digital education in schools of six Member States: Austria, Croatia, Germany (North Rhine-Westphalia), Greece, Italy and Poland.

6. AGREES with the European Court of Auditors' acknowledgement that:

- digital education prepares learners to thrive in life, become engaged citizens and integrate into the job market;
- digital education and skills, and the availability of digital infrastructure and equipment, have become all the more relevant at all education levels since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Member States can use EU financial support for the digitalisation of schools through various instruments, each with its specific objectives and characteristics, such as the Erasmus+ programme, the Cohesion Policy Funds, the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the Connecting Europe Facility;
- there is scope for improvement in the use of EU financing for the digitalisation in schools.

7. CONSIDERS that the recommendations made by the European Court of Auditors are relevant and can contribute to the ambitions of Member States to support, where relevant, the digitalisation of schools, but REGRETS that statistics based on individuals presented in the Special Report are not systematically disaggregated by sex. The Council RECOGNISES the lack of comprehensive data on the state of digital infrastructure in schools; however, concerning recommendation 3a, the Council EMPHASISES the importance of avoiding an increased administrative burden for Member States, while concerning recommendation 3b, the Council UNDERLINES the importance of respecting each Member State's priorities and strategies in the area of education and digitalisation.

8. WELCOMES the Commission's intention to:
- promote EU actions under the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 more actively and enhance the impact of strategic partnerships;
 - take action, where appropriate and in close cooperation with the Member States, to strengthen the link between the objectives of the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027, EU support, and national and regional strategies for the digitalisation of schools;
 - take action, where appropriate and in close cooperation with the Member States, to strengthen the link between EU support for the digitalisation of schools and clearly defined objectives, needs and scalable outcomes for schools, established in Member States.
9. TAKES NOTE OF the Commission's intention to periodically collect up-to-date data for monitoring the actual connectivity of schools, and report on the outcome.
10. EMPHASISES, nevertheless, that the actions by the Commission should be carried out with due regard to subsidiarity and national circumstances and data collection and monitoring should be performed in close cooperation with the Member States.
11. REAFFIRMS its commitment to work together to enhance the digital readiness of education and training systems in the Member States, through for example the sharing of best practices, peer learning activities and the promotion of cooperation projects between education and training providers.
12. LOOKS FORWARD TO future-oriented discussions in the context of digital education and skills through initiatives such as the proposals for Council Recommendations on key enabling factors for successful digital education and training and on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training put forward by the Commission.
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