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¹ • Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
 • Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
 • Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

none

ITEMS DEBATED

EDUCATION

Equity and inclusion in education and training*

The Council approved [conclusions](#) on attaining education and training systems that provide truly socially inclusive, fair, successful, and high-quality education and training for all. While member states have achieved many of the Education and Training 2020 targets (Education and Training is a European framework for cooperation in education and training) the early leavers rate for those with disabilities remains high at 20.3%. Foreign-born pupils are also more likely to leave education prematurely than their native-born peers (22.2% and 8.9% respectively). Students with fewer opportunities have lower expectations of completing tertiary education (43.4%) than their peers (82.3%).

The conclusions take stock of the progress made so far in improving equity and inclusion in education and training in order to promote educational success for all, and aim to give a new impetus to EU-level cooperation and national work in this field.

Among other points, member states are invited to:

- encourage and facilitate access to high-quality early childhood education and care for all children, regardless of their individual, family or social circumstances.
- increase the availability, accessibility and quality of digital tools and resources at all levels of training and education and provide targeted support for disadvantaged learners and learners with disabilities.
- address any teacher shortages, in particular in special needs education and in multicultural and multilingual settings.

In addition, the Commission is invited to:

- develop, together with member states, policy guidance on reducing low achievement and increasing upper secondary (or equivalent) education and training attainment.
- conduct work on proposals for possible indicators or EU-level targets in the areas of equity and inclusion.

European Universities initiative*

Ministers approved [conclusions](#) on the European Universities initiative. The conclusions note that, after two project calls, 41 pilot alliances have been established, involving more than 280 higher education institutions, covering 5% of all higher education institutions across Europe. The European Universities initiative is one of the flagships of the work to build a European Education Area by 2025. In this context, the Council invites member states to use all available funding mechanisms to support the initiative, including the new opportunities under the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

Ministers and the Commission are also invited to explore and test the use of micro-credentials in higher education as this could help to widen learning opportunities and strengthen the role of higher education institutions in lifelong learning. (A micro-credential is proof of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a short learning experience.) The Council also recommends increasing cooperation between education authorities, higher education institutions and stakeholders in order to remove obstacles to cooperation at European level. In this context, ministers suggest exploring the need for and feasibility of joint European degrees within the alliance of European Universities.

Member states call on the Commission to report, by the end of 2021, on the main outcomes of the mid-term review of the first alliances, with a view to further developing the European Universities and fully achieving their ambitious potential.

Evolving scenarios for the transformation of EU higher education

Ministers held a public policy debate on the challenges faced by higher education institutions and on potential policy action in this respect. The presidency invited ministers, on the basis of a [background note](#), to share their perspective on the following questions:

- Do you agree that European Universities alliances should be ‘test beds’ for interoperability and cooperation between member states regarding European research and teaching career development? How can joint recruitment schemes for teachers and researchers achieve effective ‘multidirectional’ and ‘balanced’ brain circulation across Europe?
- As a member state, what specific measures are you prepared to take to promote a European approach to quality assurance for joint degrees?
- Are you considering adopting national legislation allowing for micro-credentials in higher education?

Member states welcomed the potential of the European Universities alliances and the role they can play in cooperation between EU higher education institutions, and they also flagged other possibilities for exchanges such as Erasmus+ or Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions. Sustainable funding for the European Universities alliances was also raised, as was the importance of enabling non-involved networks to benefit from the exchange of information and best practices.

With regard to joint degrees, several member states reported that they have processes in place or are making efforts in that direction. Some expressed hopes that in the years to come it will be possible to ensure more flexible paths to full joint accreditation throughout Europe. Many also pointed to the importance of quality guarantees when it comes to joint degrees. Some delegations highlighted the importance of EU recommendations in this respect.

As regards micro-credentials, delegations underlined their relevance in the context of the transformation that the labour market is undergoing and the role they can play in non-formal and lifelong-learning education schemes. While some countries have micro-credential schemes in place, others mentioned the need for further discussion at national and European level, for instance with respect to a common definition.

Other business

The presidency reported on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education and training.

The Slovenian delegation reported on the work programme for the policy areas under the responsibility of the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council of the incoming presidency.

YOUTH

Participation of young people in decision-making processes*

A [2019 flash Eurobarometer](#) showed that young people are very active in democratic life, and that levels of participation are increasing, with three-quarters of young respondents having been engaged in some form of organised movement. Still, young people have fewer opportunities to participate and are underrepresented in decision-making processes.

Young people are affected by the entire political agenda. Their involvement in finding responses to societal, environmental, digital, economic, cultural and political challenges is therefore essential.

The [conclusions](#) that ministers approved today pointed out that for an effective approach to multilevel governance in the field of youth policy it is important to support the establishment and development of youth representation at all levels and to recognise young people's right to self-organise.

Ministers emphasised that it is essential that all young people have equal opportunities for participation, involvement and empowerment at all levels of relevant decision-making processes. The digital transformation could provide an opportunity for innovative and alternative forms of participation such as digital democracy tools. At the same time, lack of digital skills or access to digital tools is a challenge to ensuring that participation is inclusive.

The Council therefore calls on member states and the Commission to support active and sustainable structures for youth participation in the development of policies at all levels and in all fields and to support the further development of approaches aimed at increasing youth participation in decision-making processes. Member states are also invited to promote and support the setting up or improvement of sustainable multilevel governance structures in order to facilitate youth participation in decision-making processes and agenda-setting.

A rights-based approach to youth policies

Ministers held a public debate, on the basis of a [background paper](#), on how national, local and regional authorities can engage, connect with and empower young people. They discussed the following questions:

- What are the main actions to be taken at national, regional and local levels to develop rights-based cross-sectoral youth policies to tackle the challenges aggravated by COVID-19?
- What future steps should be envisaged at EU level to further develop cross-sectoral youth-related policies based on rights?

Ministers highlighted the impact of the pandemic on youth rights and the need to avoid a ‘COVID generation’. Young Europeans must be empowered to design their own future, and hence be placed at the heart of EU initiatives such as the Conference on the Future of Europe and the European Bauhaus. Access to information, education, wellness and mental health, decent jobs, housing and equal opportunities are among the areas where enhanced action is needed. Ministers welcomed the new youth-related programmes and initiatives (Erasmus+, the reinforced Youth Guarantee, the European Solidarity Corps and Next Generation EU) and underlined the need for enhanced support for young people, in line with the Porto social summit declaration. Finally, ministers emphasised the need for inclusive EU youth policies and welcomed the upcoming appointment of a Youth Coordinator at the Commission. They also underscored the importance of organised youth representatives in the involvement of young people in decision-making.

Other business

The presidency reported on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth.

The Slovenian delegation reported on the work programme for the policy areas under the responsibility of the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council of the incoming presidency.

CULTURE

Recovery, resilience and sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors

Culture plays a crucial role in the European identity and has an important social and economic impact. In the [conclusions](#) that the Council approved, ministers restate that the cultural and creative sectors are among the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people working in these sectors often lack social protection and unemployment support and face significant uncertainty.

In order to promote the recovery of the cultural and creative sectors, the conclusions identify six priorities:

- Improving access to available funding, including by taking advantage of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, simplifying application processes and reducing the bureaucracy of funding programmes.
- Enhancing the resilience of professionals in the cultural and creative sectors.
- Strengthening mobility and cooperation by making it easier for artists and other professionals in these sectors to move freely across the EU and take advantage of exchanges and collaboration.
- Expediting the digital and green transitions. Artists and creatives should be encouraged to upskill in order to compete in the digital arena. The cultural and creative sectors play a key role as drivers of sustainability.
- Improving knowledge and preparedness for future challenges, including through sharing know-how and best practices in order to be able to optimally handle unexpected phenomena that may disrupt these sectors in the future.
- Taking cultural scenes and communities and their needs and views into account when establishing priorities for cultural policies, strategies and programmes.

Media and audiovisual: an action plan to support recovery and transformation*

In December 2020, the Commission adopted an [action plan](#) to support the recovery and transformation of the media and audiovisual sectors. Ministers approved [conclusions](#) as a response to the action plan and its measures to ensure that Europe's media emerges stronger from the crisis and that its recovery will go hand in hand with a process of transformation.

The challenges currently faced by the news media and audiovisual sectors include globalisation, digitalisation and a significant drop in revenues. Pre-existing vulnerabilities have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The conclusions highlight the importance of these sectors for the EU's economy as well as for European cultural diversity, their key role in providing both entertainment and reliable and factual information, and their crucial function in democratic debate.

The action plan contains a number of concrete measures to support the sector financially: the MEDIA INVEST initiative will provide €400 million to support investment in the audiovisual industry and the NEWS initiative will help news media to access loans and investment.

The conclusions also underline the importance of a legislative and policy framework which supports cross-border collaboration in the audiovisual market. This should allow the market to expand and compete at European and global level by producing and distributing content with the potential to attract international audiences.

Diversifying funding sources and mechanisms to safeguard and protect Europe's cultural heritage

Europe's cultural heritage is a public good with important social and economic value. However, its protection is under threat due to budgetary pressure, and this has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. Public support for protecting and safeguarding cultural heritage remains essential but should be complemented by improving access to European funding programmes and diversified funding sources. The presidency invited ministers to express their views on this topic, on the basis of a [background document](#), and in particular on the following two questions:

- What could be done at European level to promote the diversification of funding sources and mechanisms for protecting and safeguarding cultural heritage, as a complement to public sources?
- What are your thoughts on the launch of a feasibility study, pilot project or impact assessment with a view to creating a strategic advisory body, e.g. an agency, observatory or other body, that would develop, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, a long-term vision for the promotion, safeguarding and protection of European cultural heritage?

Ministers firstly highlighted the importance of Europe's cultural heritage, its intrinsic economic and societal value and its contribution to supporting the EU's recovery from the crisis (by benefitting the tourism sector and as an asset for job creation). They therefore agreed that it is essential to invest in Europe's cultural heritage and discussed new funding opportunities in this respect, such as lotteries or incentives to attract private investors.

As regards EU-level action to diversify the funding of cultural heritage, delegations raised the importance of strategic cooperation and the exchange of best practices between member states, and the possibility of learning from each other, for instance by sharing information, to ensure long-term financing of cultural heritage.

A number of delegations welcomed the idea of a feasibility study or impact assessment to look at the possibility of establishing a strategic advisory body, but some also underlined the need to avoid duplication of effort. In this context they expressed their wish to make better use of existing structures and initiatives such as the expert group on cultural heritage.

Other business

The Slovenian delegation reported on the work programme for the policy areas under the responsibility of the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council of the incoming presidency.

The presidency reported on presidency conferences in the area of culture and the media.

The Spanish delegation addressed the impact of video-on-demand (VOD) platforms on the EU's audiovisual market, and in particular on the relationship between the various participants in the value chain. ([Information note](#))

The German delegation provided information on the culture policy perspective in the negotiations to amend the VAT Directive, especially as regards taxation of the art trade. ([Information note](#))

The Slovenian delegation reported on the designation of the European Capital of Culture for 2025. ([Information note](#))

SPORT

Sport innovation*

The [European Union Work Plan for Sport for 2021-2024](#) recognises that sport could contribute to achieving the EU's overall political priorities, including in relation to innovation. Around two-thirds of Europe's economic growth over recent decades has been driven by [innovation](#). Innovation should be regarded as a key priority for the development of the sport sector; it is expected to foster opportunities to increase citizens' participation in sport and physical activity, to enhance socio-economic development through sport and to address present and potential future challenges.

Ministers approved [conclusions](#) stating that sport is often the source of new ideas and innovations but that innovation can also be a driver for development in all areas of sport, shaping how sport is played, viewed, and organised, and enhancing the positive role and practice of sport in society, as well as in the transition from healthcare to care for health, social integration and cohesion, and education.

The conclusions invite member states to promote and support research and development initiatives and projects in the field of sport innovation, particularly with universities and research centres, to create and disseminate knowledge, and provide tools for better policy development and sport innovation benchmarking.

They should also support and encourage cooperation between the sport movement and other relevant organisations, regional and local authorities, universities and research centres, civil society, and the private sector on addressing barriers and challenges to sport innovation and entrepreneurship, such as those related to financing, brain drain, data protection and intellectual property rights.

In addition, member states should explore innovative solutions, including digital and technological innovations, to protect the integrity of sport and combat corruption in sport, to tackle cross-border challenges such as match-fixing, doping and violence, and to preserve a clean, safe, non-discriminatory and healthy sport environment.

The Council calls on the Commission to promote cooperation with and between the member states, involving the sport movement, relevant third countries and sports clusters and networks. The Commission should disseminate information about available financial support for sport innovation and related initiatives through EU programmes such as Erasmus+, LIFE and Horizon Europe.

Sport diplomacy

Member states held a public debate about how to use sport diplomacy to promote Europe's interests and values. Even though some member states have already become active in this field, the EU – as opposed to the US and China – does not yet have a clear strategy. The EU has limited competence in the field of sport but the Treaties state that 'the Union shall foster co-operation with third countries and the competent international organisations in the field of sport'. In this context the EU has already established a high-level group on sport diplomacy and adopted Council conclusions (in 2016). A [background note](#) was issued in preparation for the public debate, at which ministers were asked to respond to the following questions:

- Does the EU's cultural and educational diplomacy offer a blueprint for the development of an EU sport diplomacy strategy? What are the potential benefits of an EU sport diplomacy strategy?
- What should the next steps be for member states and the EU in fostering an EU sport diplomacy strategy?

The policy debate started with video messages from Maria-Francesca Spatolisano (UN ASG for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs) and Thomas Bach (President of the International Olympic Committee).

Member states recognised the potential of sport in the context of the EU's external relations as a means of building bridges between countries and citizens. As a promoter of the EU's values sport can play a role in bringing forward human rights, sustainability, social inclusion and fairness and solidarity. Many delegations underlined that European sport diplomacy could borrow from the experience of the EU's educational and cultural diplomacy. The role of sport movements and other actors such as the EU's delegations in third countries and the Council of Europe was also mentioned. Ministers highlighted the European Week of Sport, the involvement of elite EU athletes, and the organisation of grassroots sport initiatives in third countries as good examples.

Other business

The presidency reported on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sport.

The Slovenian delegation reported on the work programme for the policy areas under the responsibility of the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council of the incoming presidency.

The EU member states' representative for the incumbent trio presidency on the WADA Foundation Board informed ministers about the WADA Executive Committee and Foundation Board meeting.

The Commission provided information on the HealthyLifestyle4All initiative, which is set to be launched in September 2021. ([Information note](#))

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED
