

XX September 2022

## Briefing for Members – Pathways to School Success

### 1. What is this Briefing about?

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2022, the European Commission adopted a **Proposal for a Council Recommendation entitled Pathways to School Success**. This initiative was a response to the commitment shared by the European Commission and the European Union Member States to achieve a collective vision for a [European Education Area](#) (EEA) that ensures inclusive and quality education for all. This is further supported in Principles 1 and 11 of [the European Pillar of Social Rights](#) which guarantees the right to education and training in order to promote more equitable societies.

For background, the EEA was established during the 2017 Gothenburg Social Summit with an objective to assist Member States in building more resilient and inclusive education and training systems. More recently, the Commission outlined its vision for the EEA in a [Commission Communication](#) and a [Council Resolution](#) on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training for the period 2021-2030. Among others, the resolution set EU level targets to reduce 15-year-olds underperforming in basic skills (reading, mathematics and science) to less than 15 percent, and early leavers from education and training to less than 9 percent.

More concretely, Pathways to School Success functions as an instrument to attain the targets of the EEA by 2030 through its replacement and expansion of the [2011 Council Recommendation on Policy to Reduce Early School Leaving](#). Instead, this initiative enlarges the scope by including two areas of educational concern, underperformance in basic skills and early leavers of education and training. Additionally, based on input from researchers and stakeholders, this initiative identifies underperformance and early leaving as interconnected issues triggered by a combination of factors (social, economic, family-related, limited access to early childhood education and care, segregation and grade repetition) with the strongest determinant being socio-economic status. Due to this, the recommendation calls for integrated strategies that cover a range of areas that can impact educational outcomes such as a learner's well-being, "irrespective of who they are or where they come from".

Pathways to School Success is timely as 3.2 million young people (18-24 years old) in the EU are reported as early leavers from education and training, with one-in-five fifteen-year-olds underperforming in basic skills. Moreover, as learner well-being is correlated to educational attainment, the reality that 10 to 20 percent of school children report experiencing mental health issues (anxiety and depression) and a declined sense of belonging, raises strong concern. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated disparities in educational outcomes as it elevated stress and anxiety among learners, decreased access to essential services and instigated educational inequalities as students from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds were less likely to have access to the internet or electronic devices needed for virtual learning.



Funded by the European Commission under the ESF+ programme 2022 – 2025

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This document presents an analysis of the most significant points included in the recommendation and summary of the next steps that Eurodiaconia plans to undertake in cooperation with its members. This briefing is most beneficial to our members working on topics such as youth, mental health, childhood poverty, inclusive education, employment and social exclusion. Finally, it will be accompanied by a position paper on access to quality and inclusive education with emphasis on the challenges and recommendations at the national and EU level to ensure every child has access to quality and inclusive education.

## 2. **What is in the Council Recommendation?**

To begin, Pathways to School Success accentuates quality and inclusive education as foundational to personal fulfilment, employability, and active, responsible citizenship as well as a tool to cease intergenerational poverty and support upward mobility and social cohesion. Along its path towards making national education and training systems more equitable, the recommendation outlines some key objectives. These include decoupling educational attainment from social, economic and cultural status, achieving the targets of the EEA by 2030, promoting inclusive education and training based on equity, quality, well-being and respect for diversity and last, developing mutual learning regarding educational outcomes and well-being with emphasis placed on students from a disadvantaged background.

Concretely, Pathways for School Success calls on Member States to:

1. **Develop or Strengthen Integrated and Comprehensive Strategies towards school success:** which are encouraged to decouple educational outcomes from socio-economic status to make education more equitable and inclusive. To achieve this, these strategies should include prevention, intervention, and compensation measures, be evidence-based and combine universal measures with targeted and or individualized provisions for learners acquiring additional attention. Finally, these strategies should be based on structured cooperation across actors in different policy fields, benefit from adequate funding and be accompanied by a clear implementation and evaluation plan.

Moreover, these strategies need to implement a "whole school approach" which includes putting the learner's well-being, interest and needs at the centre, giving time, space and adequate support to school leaders, teachers, trainers and other staff, and ensuring members of the school community (learners, parents, local community) and external stakeholders engage actively in a collaborative way to promote educational success. Last, the strategies should address systemic change by looking at structures which have detrimental impacts on learners belonging to disadvantaged groups. In this sense, the strategies are based on a broad and inclusive approach, which is not solely focused on academic results but also considers elements such as personal, social and emotional development and learners' well-being at school.

The European Commission presents guidance for Member State's national strategies in the annex of the recommendation. Below you can find a simplified non-exhaustive list of some key instructions:

- Coordination across policy areas including health, social services, employment, housing, justice, inclusion of refugees and other migrants, and non-discrimination
- Paying specific attention to child and young people at risk of disadvantage or discrimination ensuring an intersectional approach and including appropriate measures for groups at risk
- Provide an implementation plan with clear targets and milestones, a monitoring and evaluation plan and the creation of a coordination mechanism or structure to allow for review.
- Offer enhanced individualized support for learners with complex needs.
- Provide solutions at school level or in partnership with other actors for learners who have difficulties in satisfying basic needs due to socio-economic background
- Provide funding arrangements for refugees and newly arrived migrants to ensure access to tuition or preparatory classes and a smooth entry into the education and training systems at all levels.
- Ensure staff are trained and qualified and have access to initial and continued training.
- Promote a school culture which values diversity, fosters well-being, promotes belonging and creates a safe environment for a dialogue
- Ensure generalized and equitable access to affordable, high quality and adequately staffed early childhood education and care.
- Promote active anti-segregation policies.
- Support the inclusion of learners with disabilities in mainstream schools.
- Offer routes back into mainstream education and training for those who have left.

**2. Develop and Strengthen Data Collection and Monitoring System:** this should be done at the national, regional, and local level for a collection of quantitative and qualitative data on learners as well as factors that affect learning outcomes, especially socio-economic background. They should ensure that disaggregated data and information on a wide range of aspects are available at different policy levels and used for prevention and early intervention, analysis and policy design and monitoring and evaluating the national strategies.

3. **Optimize use of National and EU Resources:** for investment in infrastructure, training tools and resources to increase inclusion, equality and well-being in education.
4. **Report on the Monitoring and Evaluation:** of their strategies through the EEA and the European Semester.

Concretely, the European Commission will support the implementation of Pathways to School Success through the following actions:

1. **Facilitate Mutual Learning:** among Member States and relevant stakeholders on educational success through the Strategic Framework for EEA, setting up and promoting an expert's group on "...", and actively involving young people through the European Youth Dialogue.
2. **Support the Development and Dissemination of Guidance Materials and Resources:** on educational success for all learners in cooperation with Member States, including the European Toolkit for Schools "Promoting inclusive education and tackling early school leaving".
3. **Support Professional Development opportunities for educational staff:** by sharing good practices from Erasmus+ staff exchanges, projects and networks, making online courses available and micro-credentials for teachers, trainers, and school leaders hosted by the new [European Platform for School Education](#).
4. **Monitor and Report:** on the implementation of the Council Recommendation and on the progress on the EU-level targets through [the European Semester](#), the [Social Scoreboard](#) and the [EEA Strategic Framework](#).

The Recommendation on Pathways to School Success is complimented alongside several initiatives and implementations of Action Plans. Below you can find a non-exhaustive list:

- [The European Year of Youth 2022](#)
- [The Child Guarantee 2021](#)
- [The EU Strategy on the Rights of Child 2021](#)
- [The EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025](#)
- [The Strategy on Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030](#)
- [EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020-2030](#)
- [EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#)
- [2020 Council Recommendation on a Bridge to Jobs and Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee](#)

- [2020 Council Recommendation on VET for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience](#)
- [2019 Council Recommendation on high-quality early childhood education and care systems](#)
- [Skills Agenda for Europe](#)

**FUNDING:** The European Commission is also responsible for the dissemination and encouraging the use of EU funds to support inclusion, well-being and equity in education. Most notably, the [Erasmus+](#) programme, for the period 2021-2027, prioritizes inclusion and diversity, as well as more specifically tackling learning disadvantages, early school leaving and low proficiency in skills. Moreover, Erasmus+ funding can support teachers and school staff in acquiring new competencies and developing inclusive strategies and curricula through [Erasmus+ Teacher Academies](#).

Additional EU funding will be available through [the Recovery and Resiliency Facility](#), the [European Social Fund+](#), the [European Regional Development Fund](#), [Digital Europe Programme](#), [Horizon Europe](#), [The Technical Support Instrument](#) and [the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund](#).

### 3. **The Way Forward**

The Commission Proposal for a Recommendation will first go through negotiations with national education ministers from EU Member states within the Council of the European Union. An agreement is expected before the end of 2022. Following the agreement, the Commission will then support the implementation of the Recommendation through the Erasmus+ programme and fostering cooperation and exchanges between Member States and stakeholders.

### 4. **Eurodiaconia's Assessment**

Eurodiaconia welcomes the European Commission's initiative on Pathways to School Success and envisions it is a steppingstone of good guidance for Member States. We are pleased that the European Commission continues to value inclusive and quality education and training as a tool to tackle intergenerational poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion. However, we feel this initiative falls short in tackling some key challenges that pose potential threats to ensuring quality and inclusive education for all.

- I. As educational systems remain in the competency of Member States, this initiative remains non-binding and will rely on buy-in from Member States;
- II. The initiative does not call for action plans, delegated coordinators or submission dates for the national strategies, which would create stronger incentives for Member States to act;
- III. There is no budget directly linked to this initiative and does not address the bureaucratic, complex and time-consuming nature of applying and accessing EU funding;

- IV. The initiative and the accompanying guidance for Member States remains vague which removes responsibility, accountability and concrete steps to ensure the successful implementation and monitoring of the initiative as well as the guarantee of systemic change in national educational and training systems. Moreover, the vagueness of the plans threatens to withhold stakeholders and those with lived experiences from participating in the overall process of the initiative;
- V. The evidence used to support the recommendation heavily focuses on socio-economic status and gender as indicators of educational outcomes. Instead, wider disaggregated data can give a more intersectional dynamic to the initiative and allow Member States to accordingly respond in their national strategies.

## 5. What Can Our Members Do?

To continue the momentum on ensuring inclusive and quality education for *all* children, Eurodiaconia has identified some key actions for our members.

- Register and Participate in Eurodiaconia's Conference in November which will launch the position paper on "Access to Quality and Inclusive Education" as a tool to tackle child poverty. Please contact Magdalena Bordagorry at [magdalena.bordagorry@eurodiaconia.org](mailto:magdalena.bordagorry@eurodiaconia.org) for more information;
- Take part in Eurodiaconia's Child Guarantee Monitoring Group. This will be a permanent working group with Eurodiaconia members who are working with children from disadvantaged backgrounds or who are interested in child poverty to monitor the implementation of the Child Guarantee at the national level. Please contact Magdalena Bordagorry at [magdalena.bordagorry@eurodiaconia.org](mailto:magdalena.bordagorry@eurodiaconia.org) for more information;
- Contact your Ministers of Education as national strategies must include cooperation and dialogues with different stakeholders;
- Liaise and build allyship with national, regional and local organizations, authorities and stakeholders that might be involved in the national strategies. This could enhance the quality of the engagement and cooperation among stakeholders;
- Highlight lived experiences by consulting children and youth who are vulnerable and marginalised to achieve meaningful participation. It is beneficial to start engaging with children and youth to explain what the Pathway for School Success entails and explore how they want to be involved;
- Share information about Pathways for School Success across your network, with your organization and beyond. For example, you can speak with national, regional and local media, or publish a press release with your hopes for making your national educational systems more inclusive and equitable.

## 6. Further Information and Links

- [Pathways for School Success](#)

### Other Eurodiaconia Briefings for Members:

- [EU Anti-Racism Action Plan](#)
- [Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation](#)
- [Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion](#)
- [European Child Guarantee](#)