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Digital education (2021-2027): changing eLearning in the EU

The European Union's vision of how to strengthen cooperation to bring effectiveness, inclusion and engagement to digital education.

The massive and "unprecedented" use of eLearning during the pandemic prompted the European Commission to launch an open consultation to gather experiences and good practices to make distance, online and blended education more effective, inclusive and engaging. The suggestions collected between June and September 2020 formed the basis of the new Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027). What are the two priorities of this plan and what are the difficulties it aims to solve? Let's start with the needs.

Data on digitisation in Europe

Eurostat 2019 data highlights the infrastructure and connectivity gaps in several areas in Europe. In particular, where household purchasing power is lower, the main obstacle to distance education is the lack of broadband connectivity and computers. Italy, for example, is in third place, ahead of Romania and Bulgaria, with 19% of 16-24 year olds living in households without digital skills, compared to 8% for the European Union (EU) 27 average. As for teachers, the public consultation showed that 60% of them learned how to use digital education tools during the pandemic without adequate preparation and, more significantly, 50% believe they should continue learning. Read also " **Support for connectivity in Italian schools**" and " **Ideas for making distance learning work in schools**".

Priority 1: Promoting the development of a highly efficient digital education ecosystem

The starting point for ensuring the success of distance education in Europe is to intensify joint efforts to meet the demands for:

- **Infrastructure, connectivity and digital equipment**: awareness-raising action will be taken to intensify the use of European funding such as Connectivity4Schools or other useful funds to purchase eLearning equipment, applications and platforms.
- **Coordination for e-skills development policies**: the Council will make recommendations for distance education in primary and secondary schools by the end of 2021, and a policy dialogue between Member States will be launched by 2022.
- **Teacher education**: Digital transformation plans will be supported through the Erasmus Teacher Academies and the online teacher self-assessment tool, SELFIE.
- **Quality learning content and secure eLearning platforms**: the creation of a European exchange platform for sharing online resources in connection with existing eLearning platforms will be encouraged.

Priority 2: Developing the digital competences and skills needed for the digital transformation

The second priority concerns the strengthening of students' digital competences, starting from pre-school, through:

- **Digital literacy and combating misinformation**: digital literacy will be monitored with a focus on 13-14 year old students and collaboration between teachers, civil society and the media will be promoted to combat misinformation.
- **ICT courses**: a European e-skills certificate (EDSC) will be created; an improvement in digital literacy training will be recommended in order to improve didactic instruction and respond to companies' demands for skills.
- **Information on data-intensive technologies** such as artificial intelligence: AI will be included in the European e-skills

framework and the creation of e-skills teaching resources by education, training and other providers will be promoted.
- **Promoting advanced e-skills**, especially among young people and women: provision of targeted e-skills internships for students, teachers, trainers; policies for increased participation of women in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) studies.

The consultations launched by the European Commission have shown that the emergence of distance learning, dictated by the hectic pace of the pandemic, has further highlighted Europe's fragilities in basic and advanced **e-skills**, infrastructure and connectivity (from broadband to LMS). The two priorities of the Strategic Plan (2021-2027) respond precisely to the need to create a favourable environment for quality distance education by overcoming infrastructural obstacles, the lack of e-skills among teachers and students and by promoting young people and women, as well as strengthening coordination among Member States.

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