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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Draft Council conclusions on supporting well-being in digital education
- *Presentation and examination of the Presidency text*

In view of the meeting of the Education Committee on 4 July 2022, delegations will find attached the above-mentioned draft conclusions as prepared by the Presidency.

Delegations are kindly invited to send their written comments to the Presidency (Sarka_Brabnikova@mzv.cz and Lucie_Priknerova@mzv.cz) and the Council Secretariat (eycs@consilium.europa.eu) by **15 July 2022** cob.

Draft Council conclusions on supporting well-being in digital education

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

IN THE CONTEXT OF:

1. The political discussions at the Gothenburg Social Summit in 2017, which stressed that 44% of Europeans do not have basic digital skills, that 90% of jobs in the future will require digital skills and competences, and that 40% of European companies struggle to recruit ICT specialists. Launching a reflection on the Future of Learning, to respond to future trends and the digital revolution, including artificial intelligence, was one of the topics discussed by European leaders on that occasion.
2. The communication from the Commission on achieving the European Education Area by 2025, which underlines the need to create supportive learning environments for groups at risk of underachievement and support well-being at school.
3. The Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), which stresses that education and training have a vital role to play when it comes to shaping the future of Europe and for citizens to find personal fulfilment and well-being, to be prepared to adapt and perform on a changing labour market and to engage in active and responsible citizenship.
4. The Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027), which outlines the concept of a digital education ecosystem and stresses the importance of digital skills and the development of competences for everyday life.

5. The Structured Dialogue on digital education and skills with Member States, facilitated by the Commission, and its whole-government approach towards digital education.
6. The Council Recommendation on blended learning approaches for high-quality and inclusive primary and secondary education, which underlines the importance of prioritising well-being (both physical and mental) and suggests including learner well-being and anti-bullying policies in school objectives.
7. The Council conclusions on digital education in Europe's knowledge societies, which emphasise that digital education should consider the well-being of all actors involved in the learning process.
8. The Education and Training Monitor 2021, which focuses on the topic of well-being in education.
9. The communication from the Commission 'A Digital Decade for children and youth: the new European strategy for a better internet for kids (BIK+)', which focuses on the improvement of children's well-being in online environments.
10. 'The Digital Competence framework for citizens' (DigComp 2.2) produced by the Commission.



RECOGNISES THAT:

11. For the purposes of these Council conclusions, well-being in digital education is understood as a feeling of physical, cognitive, social and emotional contentment which enables individuals to maximise their potential and self-realisation in all digital learning environments or through digital education tools and methods, helps them to act safely online and supports their empowerment in online environments.¹ These Council conclusions focus on digital well-being in and through education at primary, lower and upper secondary levels.
12. Digital technologies have radically changed the way in which people learn, work, consume information and communicate. Digital transformation brings new challenges and opportunities for pupils and students and has an impact on their cognitive, physical, social and emotional life.
13. High-quality and inclusive education should enhance the opportunities opened up by the digital transformation to support pupils' and students' well-being in digital learning environments. This should be systematically supported with regard to all aspects of the digital education ecosystem.²

¹ Cognitive well-being can be defined as 'successful participation in society in a variety of roles - as lifelong learners, as productive workers, as active citizens - thanks in part to their possessing the knowledge and competences required to fulfill those roles effectively'. Physical well-being can be understood as individuals' health level and their capacity to lead a healthy lifestyle. Social well-being covers pupils', students' and learners' interactions with others, as well as their perception of the digital learning environment. Psychological well-being refers to pupils', students' and learners' opinions and feelings about their own lives and the personal objectives they have set themselves (Panesi, S., Bocconi, S. and Ferlino, L., *Promoting Students' Well-Being and Inclusion in Schools Through Digital Technologies: Perceptions of Students, Teachers, and School Leaders in Italy Expressed Through SELFIE Piloting Activities*, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2020).

² The digital education ecosystem includes digital education infrastructure, connectivity and equipment (including accessible and assistive technologies), high-quality digital education content, institutional leaders and teaching staff with the know-how to integrate digital technologies in the pedagogical process, the development of digital knowledge, skills and competences and conditions for interpersonal relations in digital learning environments.

14. The reinforcement of pupils' and students' well-being is a two-way process. Digital education ecosystems can produce stressors impacting well-being but at the same time can promote the development of pupils' and students' well-being and improve their living and work prospects.
15. The digital gap poses a serious threat to well-being in digital education, often reinforcing existing inequalities or creating new ones. School systems should be able to respond to any problems of unsatisfactory access, equipment or learning conditions facing pupils and students, especially in the case of students from a disadvantaged background.
16. New learning models, including those involving the use of accessible and findable digital tools, extend outreach to disadvantaged pupils and pupils living in remote areas, support stronger motivation and commitment to benefit from online experiences and together with the use of learner-centred approaches, lead to a reduction of the digital gap.
17. During the current security crisis and with the arrival of pupils and students with an immigrant background and/or a language other than the language of instruction in the EU, digital tools and high-quality content can facilitate the continuity of their education and training and their integration into Member States' education systems and can help them to cope with possible traumatic experience. Digital education technologies offer a powerful way for Ukrainian refugees to stay connected to their language and culture, and continue to learn in their mother tongue.
18. Focus on critical thinking, media literacy and resilience to disinformation should be strengthened at all levels of education and in all training systems with a view to empowering pupils and students and providing for a positive and safe experience online.

19. Teachers, educators and mentors, together with administrative and management staff, have an important and irreplaceable role in the development of education environments and in supporting the emotional well-being of pupils and students. They should develop their digital competences and be well-informed about the benefits and challenges of the use of digital tools in education.
20. The purpose of integrating digital technologies into educational processes is to support and facilitate the work of teachers; they are not intended to replace physical presence and interactions.

ACKNOWLEDGES THAT:

Pupils' and students' well-being can be supported by:

A. Acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences required for the fostering of well-being in digital education

21. Individuals should benefit from a digital environment throughout their personal, professional and civic lives. Development of digital knowledge, skills and competences can support their emotional prosperity and contentment and foster their ability to adequately respond to the challenges and risks present in the digital world.
22. Digital skills development policies and measures should be designed with due regard for pupils' and students' well-being as well as their individual needs, with a special focus on disadvantaged groups. They should also be aimed at increasing their resilience. Digital competence³ involves confident, critical and responsible use of digital technologies. Digital skills such as computational thinking, ICT problem-solving and data literacy are needed both during the initial stages of education and on a life-long basis so as to enable individuals to become better integrated into society and to have better access to job opportunities.

³ See e.g. European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Vuorikari, R., Kluzer, S., Punie, Y., *DigComp 2.2, The Digital Competence framework for citizens: with new examples of knowledge, skills and attitudes*, 2022.

23. Digital technologies influence the way in which pupils and students learn, seek and share information and also how they socialise. Pupils and students are exposed to a broad variety of information, including disinformation and misinformation. Therefore, media literacy, critical thinking and problem-solving skills are essential, in particular in the context of the current security crisis, which is having a crucial impact on the digital environments and online space in the EU.
24. Skills relating to the safe use of digital tools, including cybersecurity, can have a significant impact on pupils' and students' well-being and resilience.
25. Social and emotional skills⁴ will allow pupils and students to use digital social networks without risk of emotional or social harm and to be aware of the risks of excessive internet use.
26. Pupils and students should have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills and competences necessary to enable them to create, share and use digital content, and should be aware of the rules related to intellectual property.
27. Advanced and specialised skills are needed for the development of ICT products and services and advanced digital technologies, including those which may have a positive impact on the individuals' well-being.

B. The design of learning forms, methods and digital environments that enhance pupils' and students' well-being

28. Learning forms and methods should improve the relevance and effectiveness of the education process as well as pupils' contentment and self-confidence in all learning environments. In this context, the accessibility, safety and quality of the digital infrastructure and digital technologies are crucial. The development and use of advanced digital technologies in education can be beneficial, especially for disadvantaged pupils and students and for pupils and students with disabilities.

⁴ Communication, collaboration, interpersonal skills etc.

29. When digital education policies are being designed, the following aspects should be considered:
- *the environments* where learning takes place, with the socio-economic, cultural and family background of learners as well as other relevant circumstances being taken into account.
 - the tools and devices employed, while their use is tailored to the individual needs of pupils and students (influenced by e.g. health condition and socio-economic background):
 - The digital education ecosystem should support work with innovative education tools, including gamification, augmented reality/virtual reality and social networks, which respect an ethical and transparent approach, data privacy and non-discrimination by design, while taking into consideration their benefits and potential risks.⁵
 - The use of digital technologies may take up time for other activities that are beneficial for health, such as physical exercise or sleep. Consideration should therefore be given to balance between on-screen and off-screen time and to time management.
 - *the learning tasks* that are used in the education process leading towards intended learning outcomes.
 - The use of high-quality digital education content designed with sound pedagogical purpose and delivered in a modern, accessible and easy-to-use fashion.

⁵ E.g. internet addiction, excessive on-screen time, gaming disorders and health-related issues such as sedentary behaviour leading to obesity.

C. Inter-personal relations in the digital education ecosystem

- 30.** The digital education ecosystem is based not only on a digital infrastructure and digital tools and content, but also on individuals: learners, educators and other actors, who use technological means for communication, creation of content and networks. It is essential to take the social aspect into account when designing digital education ecosystems.
31. Technological progress has changed the forms of communication and opened up new opportunities for empowerment and self-expression and digital citizenship⁶.
32. Digital interactions can help in the development of social skills and strengthen social connections. However, pupils and students can also be exposed to digital risks (such as cyberbullying, hate speech, fake news, privacy breaches, online frauds etc.)⁷ that are harmful to their well-being.⁸ It is important that pupils and students be aware of the scope and variety of these risks and know where to find support.

⁶ According to the Council of Europe, ‘a digital citizen is someone who, through the development of a broad range of competences, is able to actively, positively and responsibly engage in both on- and offline communities, whether local, national or global’ (Richardson, J., Milovidov, E., *Digital citizenship education handbook: being online, well-being online, rights online*, Council of Europe, 2019).

⁷ A 2019 OECD study defines a typology of risks: contact risks, content risks, privacy risks and consumer risks (Burns, T., Gottschalk, F. (eds.), *Educating 21st Century Children: Emotional Well-being in the Digital Age, Educational Research and Innovation*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2019).

⁸ For example, cyberbullying can be even more harmful than ordinary forms of bullying because the reach of humiliation is expanded to a large audience online, and words and images can remain in the online environment indefinitely.

33. Social comparisons fostered in the online world can have a negative impact on mental health and self-esteem, particularly in adolescence. Pupils' and students' body image concerns and sense of social alienation can be triggered or intensified if they are exposed to 'ideal' images on social media. The use of online social media is also connected with the phenomenon known as the 'fear of missing out'.
34. Teachers and other actors involved in the learning process should develop their digital knowledge, skills and competences and be well-informed about the benefits and challenges of using digital tools in education.⁹ They should support pupils' and students' motivation to learn and develop them to their full potential, to help them to grow into coherent, mature individuals, who are aware of their strengths, weaknesses, life goals and aspirations and who have built a positive self-image while respecting others and their individual needs.
35. Wise digital parenting and family background should be part of a digital education ecosystem.

⁹ Various factors can have an impact on teachers' well-being, e.g. excessive workload, perceived lack of recognition and respect for the teaching profession, excessive class sizes, lack of support for schools with unmanageable student misbehaviour issues, and, in some countries, inadequate or unequal funding.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR NATIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY, TO

36. Place an emphasis on strengthening pupils', students' and teachers' well-being when designing national policies and strategies in digital education;
37. Promote the designing of learning processes with regard for their impact on pupils' and students' well-being and where relevant encourage cooperation between digital education ecosystems and mental health professionals and services;
38. Improve the individualisation of learning processes, e.g. by integration of advanced digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, with a special emphasis on support for the well-being of disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils and students and prevention of gender bias;
39. Develop pupils', students' and teachers' skills in order to manage the balance between on-screen and off-screen time, and support schools in developing proper time management as regards digital and face-to-face learning activities;
40. Support the design of learning processes and the use of digital technologies in education in order to help pupils and students with an immigrant background and/or with a language other than the language of instruction in the EU become integrated into the education systems of Member States;
41. Support the development of pupils' and students' resilience with regard to the threats in the digital world in order to reduce the risks and offer safe online opportunities for young people;
42. Explore ways to support teachers in promoting pupils' and students' critical thinking, media literacy and working with data and information, including an informed approach to misinformation and disinformation.

INVITES THE COMMISSION, IN LINE WITH THE TREATIES AND WITH FULL RESPECT FOR SUBSIDIARITY, TO

43. Support research on the impact of the use of digital technologies on pupils' and students' well-being, and draw up a study on the perception of well-being needs in digital education environments among pupils, students and teachers. Design a model of efficient procedures aimed at improving well-being in digital learning ecosystems and ultimately criteria for a 'digital well-being school model' in schools;
44. Encourage the development and sharing of high-quality content for teachers and professionals aimed at further developing their knowledge, skills and competences and promote tools (e.g. consider organising a Digital Education Hackathon to improve well-being in digital education), engage with learner-centred pedagogical approaches and work with diverse groups of pupils and students;
45. Support the use of EU programmes, such as Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps, Horizon Europe and the Digital Europe Programme in the promotion of pupils' and students' well-being in digital learning environments including the use of advanced digital technologies for learners with special needs and exploring the potential of gamification and AR/VR technologies for pedagogical purposes;
46. Reflect in its upcoming proposals for a Council recommendation on the enabling factors for digital education and a Council recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training the need for a holistic and integrated digital education ecosystem that promotes quality and inclusion and fosters well-being.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

European Council

- European Council conclusions of 14 December 2017 (EUCO 19/1/17 REV 1).

Council of the European Union

- Council Recommendation on blended learning approaches for high-quality and inclusive primary and secondary education (OJ C 504, 14.12.2021, p. 21).
- Council Resolution on the governance structure of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) (OJ C 497, 10.12.2021, p. 1).
- Council conclusions on digital education in Europe's knowledge societies (OJ C 415, 1.12.2020, p. 22).
- Council conclusions on countering the COVID-19 crisis in education and training (OJ C 212 I, 26.6.2020, p. 9).
- Council conclusions on European teachers and trainers for the future (OJ C 193, 9.6.2020, p. 11).
- Council conclusions on the Economy of Wellbeing (OJ C 400, 26.11.2019, p. 9).
- Council Resolution on further developing the European Education Area to support future-oriented education and training systems (OJ C 389, 18.11.2019, p. 1).

- Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area (OJ C 195, 7.6.2018, p. 7).
- Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning (OJ C 189, 4.6.2018, p. 1).

Declarations

- Osnabrück Declaration on vocational education and training as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies (30 November 2020).

European Commission

- Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A Digital Decade for children and youth: the new European strategy for a better internet for kids (BIK+) (COM(2022) 212 final).
- Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 (COM(2020) 625 final).
- Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 – Resetting education and training for the digital age (COM(2020) 624 final).
- Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (COM(2020) 274 final).

- Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (COM(2020) 152 final).
- Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture: The European Commission's contribution to the Leaders' meeting in Gothenburg, 17 November 2017 (COM(2017) 673 final).

Studies

- European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Vuorikari, R., Kluzer, S., Punie, Y., *DigComp 2.2, The Digital Competence framework for citizens: with new examples of knowledge, skills and attitudes*, 2022.
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Education and training monitor 2021: education and well-being*, 2021.
- Panesi, S., Bocconi, S. and Ferlino, L., *Promoting Students' Well-Being and Inclusion in Schools Through Digital Technologies: Perceptions of Students, Teachers, and School Leaders in Italy Expressed Through SELFIE Piloting Activities*, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2020.
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology, *Ethics guidelines for trustworthy AI*, Publications Office, 2019.
- Richardson, J., Milovidov, E., *Digital citizenship education handbook: being online, well-being online, rights online*, Council of Europe, 2019.

- OECD, *How's Life in the Digital Age?: Opportunities and Risks of the Digital Transformation for People's Well-being*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2019.
 - Burns, T., Gottschalk, F. (eds.), *Educating 21st Century Children: Emotional Well-being in the Digital Age, Educational Research and Innovation*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2019.
 - OECD, *The Protection of Children Online: Risks Faced by Children Online and Policies to Protect Them*, OECD Digital Economy Papers, No. 179, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2011.
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