Turning point for cross-sectoral collaboration in the Education and Training Monitor 2025

Background

On 12 November, the European Commission launched the Education and Training Monitor 2025 (E&T Monitor). This report provides a snapshot of the state of education and training systems across the 27 Member States. Each edition has a particular focus, with this year's spotlighting STEM education and basic skills attainments.

Lifelong learning in Europe: Cross-sectoral collaboration on the rise

The Lifelong Learning Platform welcomes the multiple calls across the Monitor for **cross-sectoral collaboration** and its holistic perspective over learning. A series of policy suggestions considered effective points towards tailored learning offers which depend on a wider variety of stakeholders connecting formal, non-formal and informal learning. To boost participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC), outreach for families, and low-threshold services are considered. To lower the early-school leaving rate whole-school actions, mentorship, and learning camps are suggested. Recommendations to smoothen the transition from VET to higher education and vice-versa are provided, while community learning is pointed out for adult education. **These are only some of the instances showing that both the Member States and the European Commission identified the positive impact of actions that combine formal, non-formal, and informal learning, while leveraging partnership between different stakeholders to provide tailored actions for learners.**

Biggest threat to European education and training systems: Inequity

Socio-economic background continues to be a strong predictor for the underachievement in education and training. Nevertheless, upon analysing the sector specific sections, multiple types of compounded disadvantages appear to leave European learners behind. In ECEC, participation has risen on average to 94.6% in 2023 across Member States. However, participation of children below the age of 3 was 24.4% for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion participating, compared to 42.5% for the rest. There are wide disparities across countries, considering how in places like Romania and Slovakia the rate of participation for 3-year-old children is below 70%. Some proposed mechanisms to reduce this gap included public grants covering tuition fees, investing in staff, and flexible provisions.

In school education, 28.8% of students from a disadvantaged **socio-economic background** experience a six-time higher rate of underachievement **than the rest of their peers**. Parents' financial situation can allow children to have access to the best schools, private tutoring, and partake in extracurricular activities, exacerbating the lack of equity in schools. These disparities

are enhanced for students with a **migrant or refugee background**, as well as for those with **special needs**, compounding these inequalities. **Thus, the promise of education as a 'great equaliser' is fading.** In secondary education, while the **amount of early school leavers decreased** to 9.4% among 18-24 year olds, **migrant background learners are twice more likely to leave school early compared to native born children**. To tackle this, three cross-sectoral strategies are presented within the Education and Training Monitor: **strengthening academic skills**, **providing socio-emotional support to learners, and offering academic and non-academic mentoring**. The LLLPlatform also recommends targeted socio-economic and welfare support to ensure that the learners have access to their basic needs and can engage in learning activities.

In tertiary education, the first determinant for drop out is **financial difficulties**, not only related to the tuition fees, but also the cost of living. It is followed by the student's migration background, and the learners benefitting from parental guidance. To mitigate this, **flexible learning paths**, such as blended, and distance learning, are proposed, along with the validation of competences acquired in a non-formal or informal setting, and targeted financial schemes.

In adult education, age, employment status, and educational attainment are key determinants of who can pursue more training, pointing again to the fact that those most in need of further training are often unable to access these opportunities.

Socio-economic factors have a transversal impact, going beyond the different sectors of learning, as learners from a disadvantaged background had lower achievement rates on competences related to **civic and citizenship education or to digital and information literacy**, compared with students in a socio-economic, or cultural position that provides certain advantages or opportunities that are not equally available to everyone.

The fine line between progress and regress: the impact of digitalisation

The Monitor builds on data from PISA 2022 and 2024 OECD working paper, which underlines that digital tools used for non-educational purposes can be considered as '**digital distractions**' and **negatively impact the learning experiences**. A case study on the implementation of generative artificial intelligence (genAI), conducted in Turkish high schools, during math classes, demonstrates that students who benefited from the support from genAI to solve mathematical problems performed better, compared to those that did not use it. However, once the genAI is removed from the control group, they perform worse than the group who never had access to genAI. This experiment highlights **the benefits of using AI as academic support**, but **it reminds of the central importance of developing particular competences, and reflecting on how unguided use of genAI can hinder the learning process.**

The recent smartphone bans in classrooms across Europe are presented, reflecting a growing trend that has sparked timely and welcome discussion. While research shows mixed results and such measures should be approached with careful attention to the local context, the main challenge lies in **developing comprehensive digital literacy strategies**. With 44% of Europeans still lacking basic digital skills, risks such as dis-/mis-information, cybercrime, and

inappropriate use of technology persist. All of these can undermine self-efficacy, socio-emotional competences and general learning to learn competences. **LLLPlatform welcomes this analysis considering the focus on digital infrastructure has not always been backed at Member State level by a comprehensive adaptation of learning to digital realities.**

Forward- approach to gender equality

A central pillar of this year's Monitor has been the state of STEM education across the EU, while shining a light on gender disparities in this context. The Monitor points out that in medium-level VET, female students in STEM fields account for less than one in six students (15.4%). In higher education, 32.2% are enrolled in STEM fields, but this is a sector of learning where women make up a larger student body population than men. Current labour market structures continue to **marginalise women** within STEM fields, particularly in sectors such as ICT and engineering.

The Monitor correctly prioritises increasing women's presence and visibility in STEM, and proposes effective solutions on female role models and breaking down gender stereotypes. However, true equity requires ensuring that women and all learners are not merely trained to serve labour market needs at a given historical moment. This reductive perspective on STEM needs to be replaced by a focus on the **STEAM methodology**, **fostering interdisciplinary learning and transversal competences development** to ensure that women, and all other learners, are fully equipped to **navigate and influence a rapidly evolving society.**

Patches of darkness: missing data in education and training

The Monitor draws attention to the lack of consistent data for ECEC, VET, and tertiary education. Moreover, LLLPlatform would go one step further to **highlight the lack of data in terms of non-formal and informal education, with the Monitor continuing to predominantly rely on data from formal education**; this lack of data makes the whole picture of E&T in Europe fragmented and incomplete, as it misses out on a large part of learning experience for most learners in Europe. The challenges in data collection ranged from an absence of common definitions for general and vocational paths for VET as well as for non-formal adult learning, to insufficient data collection on student characteristics in tertiary education. Eurostat should, therefore, engage in consultations with the Member States and partner countries so as to create common definitions, and collect and share reliable data. **Most glaring was the absence of data on learning mobility**, which greatly underestimates the number of students participating. Regardless of the format, level and sector of learning, data limitation creates blind spots that undermine evidence-informed policymaking, at a time when the EU agenda insists on more evidence in education and training.

Tackling the challenges identified by the Monitor and going the extra mile: LLLPlatform recommendations

The Education and Training Monitor 2025 highlights recent progress in this field, but also exposes deep inequalities, digital challenges, lack of comparative data and a persistent

short-sighted focus on STEM. LLLPlatform wishes to build on the available data and to propose the following recommendations:

- Continue **recognising the value of cross-sectoral collaboration and whole-community approaches** by providing further resources to pilot such initiatives and fostering better cross-sector collaboration
- Leverage on the Erasmus+ programme to further pilot such initiatives, while also **increase its dimension for cross-sectoral projects** and structural support for organisations facilitating such cooperation
- Provide **tailored approaches to learners with fewer opportunities ensuring more guidance and support**, with specific strategies for each of the following groups: learners with a migrant background, learners from a disadvantaged socio-economic background, learners with special needs, learners in rural environments. These approaches require multisectoral collaboration between education, health, and other social intervention services.
- Support the development of **digital literacy strategies for all learners** and contribute to the development of methodologies and curricula which better incorporate the way learning changes in the digital realm, also by promoting cross-sectoral cooperation
- Provide **adequate training and relevant forms of continuing professional development for educators not only on the usage of digital tools, but also on adapting teaching methodologies** (including SEL) to develop learners' digital competences (including digital citizenship) beyond mere usage of technology
- Further **combat gender stereotypes in education and training**, ensuring that learning materials are tailored accordingly, that role-models and mentoring is provided, and that further incentives for both men and women are provided to pursue learning tracks which they might be less inclined to
- While addressing gender stereotypes, ensure that all learners have access to the **STEAM interdisciplinary approach**, developing their transversal competences rather than
- **Further invest in data collection from all learning environments, prioritising those sectors in which there are gaps** by also involving Eurostat in coordinating the alignment of data collection and conducting multi-stakeholder consultations at the national levels to ensure that the specificities of the sectors are taken into account. Ensure that consultations, as well as the selection of national experts, are transparent and accessible.
- Strengthen the **relationship between researchers and practitioners in education and training**, better linking the Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe programmes.

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