

EDUCATION, YOUTH, CULTURE AND SPORT COUNCIL

Brussels, 17-18 May 2021

The Council will take place on Monday 17 and Tuesday 18 May 2021. The education session will be chaired by **Manuel Heitor** (Minister for Science, Technology and Higher Education). The youth session will be chaired by **Tiago Brandão Rodrigues** (Minister for Education).

The culture/audiovisual and sport sessions will be chaired by **Graça Fonseca** (Minister for Culture).

Monday 17 May will kick off with an EU Youth Dialogue breakfast (8.30-9.30) involving the current trio presidency (Germany, Portugal and Slovenia) as well as the future French presidency, Commissioner Gabriel and youth representatives (notably from the European Youth Forum). The presidency will inform ministers about the outcome of this event at the beginning of the youth session in the afternoon.

The first session will start on Monday at **10.00** and will be dedicated to education. The Council is due to approve conclusions on equity and inclusion in education and training to promote educational success for all, and on the European Universities initiative. Ministers will also hold a policy debate, in public session, on the evolving scenarios for the transformation of EU higher education.

Education ministers will attend a working lunch with Commissioners Gabriel and Schmit on the subject of adult education and in particular the renewal of the European Agenda for Adult Education.

In the afternoon (at **15.00**), ministers are expected to approve conclusions on strengthening multi-level governance when promoting the participation of young people in decision-making processes. They will also debate, in public session, the promotion of a rights-based approach to youth policies.

On the second day, the meeting will start at **10.00** and focus on culture and audiovisual affairs. The Council is due to approve conclusions on the recovery, resilience and sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and on the Media and Audiovisual Action Plan. There will also be a public debate on the diversification of funding sources and mechanisms for the safeguarding and protection of European cultural heritage.

In the afternoon (**15.00**) ministers are expected to approve conclusions on sport innovation and will hold a policy debate in public session on sport diplomacy in the context of EU external relations.

¹ This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the Press Office.

On Monday 17 May, Minister for Science, Technology and Higher Education **Manuel Heitor** and Minister for Education **Tiago Brandão Rodrigues** will hold a press conference at 12.40 (on education) and Minister for Education **Tiago Brandão Rodrigues** will hold a press conference at 18.00 (on youth).

On Tuesday 18 May, Minister for Culture **Graça Fonseca** will hold a press conference at 13.00 (on culture). Minister for Education **Tiago Brandão Rodrigues** will hold a press conference at 18.00 (on sport). (The timings of the press conferences are merely indicative.)

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[Education, Youth, Culture and Sports Council - meeting page](#)

[Press conferences and public events by video streaming](#)

[Video coverage in broadcast quality \(MPEG4\) and photo gallery](#)

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EDUCATION

Equity and inclusion in education and training

The Council will aim to approve 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%).

These 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.
- to 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.
- to address - where they exist - 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 are expected to approve 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 towards 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 life-long learning. (A micro-credential is a 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 for 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 will hold a public policy debate on the challenges faced by higher education institutions and on potential policy action in this respect. This could include guaranteeing that European Universities become 'test beds' for student-centred approaches such as embedding physical, blended and/or virtual mobility in the curricula and ensuring that European Universities make full use of the EU's excellent research and innovation capacity in the higher education sector to support a new generation of highly skilled and competitive European researchers and a stronger dimension of research and innovation in Europe.

The presidency will invite 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?

YOUTH

Strengthening multi-level governance when promoting the 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 whole political agenda. Therefore their engagement and involvement in finding responses to societal, environmental, digital, economic, cultural and political challenges are essential.

It is in this context that ministers recall that for an effective approach to multi-level governance in the field of youth 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 emphasise 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, the 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 multi-level governance structures in order to facilitate youth participation in decision-making processes and agenda setting.

At EU level, the [EU Youth Dialogue](#) has played a key role in involving young people in the decision-making process, through youth councils, the European Union Youth Conferences and national working groups.

A rights-based approach to youth policies: The drive for commitment in the future?

In their transition to adulthood, young people face specific challenges which place them in a position of vulnerability. This results in a need to improve young people's access to rights. This should be reflected in a human rights-based youth policy. The pandemic has a negative impact on human rights, including civic space, with the deepening of pre-existing inequalities and increased pressure on persons in vulnerable situations.

Ministers will hold a public debate, on the basis of a [background paper](#), on how national, local and regional authorities can engage, connect and empower young people. They are invited to reflect on 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?

CULTURE/AUDIOVISUAL

Recovery, resilience and sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors

Culture plays a crucial role for the European identity and has an important social and economic impact. In the conclusions that the Council is expected to approve, 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:

- Improve access to available funding by - among other things - taking advantage of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, simplifying application processes and reducing the bureaucracy of funding programmes.
- Enhance the resilience of professionals in the cultural and creative sectors.
- Strengthen 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.
- Expedite 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.
- Improve knowledge and preparedness for future challenges through, inter alia, sharing know-how and best practices in order to be able to optimally handle unexpected phenomena that may disrupt these sectors in the future.
- Take 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. The ministers' conclusions are 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 European cultural diversity, their key role in providing both entertainment and reliable and factual information as well as the crucial function they have for the democratic debate.

The action plan contains a number of concrete measures to support the sector financially: its 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, among others, supports cross-border collaboration between audiovisual market actors. 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 an 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. The [EU Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022](#) had already identified the topic of alternative funding for cultural heritage as a means of prioritising the sustainability of cultural heritage. In a 2020 special report, the European Court of Auditors also recommends the use of private funds to safeguard Europe's cultural heritage. 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 has prepared a [background document](#) and has invited ministers to express their views on the following two points:

- 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?

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 on 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 are expected to approve 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. It 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

Since sport is part of the diplomatic toolkit of the EU's global counterparts, ministers will debate 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 coherent strategy.

Sport has always been used to convey political messages. Nowadays, sport diplomacy is referred to as a regular and strategic use of sport to achieve external relations objectives. It can help to strengthen the bond with foreign countries and its citizens and improve a country's appeal or increase its international standing (for instance through the organisation of major sporting events).

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). At the public debate, prepared by a [background note](#), ministers are 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 be the next steps for member states and the EU in fostering an EU sport diplomacy strategy?

Pre-recorded messages by the UN's Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs Maria-Francesca Spatolisano and the President of the International Olympic Committee Thomas Bach will be broadcasted.

Other business

The presidency will report on the state of play of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education and training, youth, and sport.

The Slovenian delegation will report 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 will report on presidency conferences in the area of culture and the media.

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

The Spanish delegation will address the impact of video-on-demand (VOD) platforms on the EU's audiovisual market, and in particular on the relationship between the different actors in the value chain.

[Information note](#)

The German delegation will provide information on the culture policy perspective in the negotiations to amend the VAT Directive, especially considering taxation of the art trade.

[Information note](#)

The Slovenian delegation will report on the designation of the European Capital of Culture for 2025.

[Information note](#)

The Commission will provide information on the HealthyLifestyle4All initiative which is planned to be launched in September 2021.

[Information note](#)
