


UGL News from EUROPE

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# THE EESC AND INCLUSIVE DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

The Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU has emphasised inclusive democratic participation as a pillar of the European Shield for Democracy, requesting an exploratory Opinion from the EESC (European Economic and Social Committee) – SOC/873 – which was adopted during the October Plenary Session. Democratic disengagement from traditional forms of participation, such as voting or party membership, is a sign of a broader decline in civic engagement, linked to the shrinking of civic space, structural exclusion and inadequate participatory mechanisms. This phenomenon particularly affects young people, rural communities, disadvantaged groups, migrants, minorities, people with disabilities, older people and communities excluded from the digital world. In this Opinion, the EESC warns that communities excluded from democratic processes could lose trust in public Institutions and thus become more vulnerable to manipulation and disinformation. Against a backdrop of growing political polarisation across Europe, the Committee argues that strengthening democracy requires not only protecting Institutions from internal



and external threats but also creating opportunities for citizens to participate actively in shaping public policy. According to Councillor Ulgiati «participatory democracy should complement, rather than replace, representative democracy, social dialogue and organised civil society. Citizens must be able to participate through associations and trade unions and develop long-term skills. Furthermore - he added - democratic participation can also be promoted in the workplace through innovative forms of engagement that combine social dialogue and voluntary work».

# EU: EDUCATION AND SKILLS PACKAGE

The Europe of tomorrow is taking shape in today's classrooms and training centres. To help reverse the decline in basic skills and improve teaching and the way in which digital tools and Artificial Intelligence are used in education, the European Commission recently (5th of November) presented the Education and Skills Package, tailoring it to the changing needs of the labour market in order to strengthen Europe's competitiveness and democratic resilience. This initiative focuses on four priorities: 1) improving outcomes in basic skills; 2) harnessing digital tools and AI for education; 3) strengthening the teaching profession; 4) enhancing vocational education and training (VET). A lack of basic skills entails high economic and social costs. Basic skills (literacy, numeracy, science, digital skills and citizenship) are essential for personal fulfilment and a sense of autonomy throughout life. Young people with stronger skills also enjoy better employment prospects, and therefore higher earnings. Conversely, for children growing up in poverty, a lack of basic skills means fewer opportunities to thrive and to break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage. Without a solid educational foundation for all, the European Union risks failing to achieve its poverty reduction




targets, thereby undermining social and territorial cohesion, democratic resilience and strategic autonomy. This is why the Package includes concrete initiatives to reverse the decline in basic skills, through European school alliances that will bring together schools and education authorities from different EU Countries, and through the EU's network of advisory and support services, which will link national and regional services. Furthermore, the Package includes recommendations on how to make the teaching profession more attractive and tackle the shortage of teachers, by improving their working conditions, strengthening training and professional development, and empowering them in the use of AI. Within the framework of the Skills Union, therefore, the Education and Skills Package will help EU Countries to accelerate reforms and enable pupils, teachers and schools to achieve better results.