



Resilient Societies & the Contribution of Education

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Resilient Societies: The Contribution of Education

Europe is currently facing multiple challenges, including the aftermath of COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, migration waves, and economic insecurities, which are exploited by populist movements threatening democracy. Economic struggles, marked by a 9.2% inflation rate in 2022, have led to significant price hikes in housing, electricity, gas, transport, and food (Eurostat, 2023). Socially, global displacement is rising rapidly, with 122.6 million displaced people in 2024 and two billion living in conflict-affected areas (ICMPD, 2025). Migration remains a divisive issue in Europe, with differing stances on border control and humanitarian approaches. Rising political polarisation, misinformation, and extremist rhetoric exacerbate challenges to social cohesion, with radical parties gaining traction due to public dissatisfaction with mainstream politics and economic concerns.

In this volatile social context, education plays a pivotal role in fostering democratic principles, well-being of all people, and resilience of state institutions. It can help to combat misinformation through critical thinking, media literacy, and civic engagement. Above that, inclusive education policies are essential for a full integration of minorities and reduction of existing disparities. Social and emotional learning supports psychological resilience, helping students manage stress. Schools foster dialogue, inclusion, and solidarity, especially during periods of political and social polarisation at various governance levels.



Three Horizon Europe research projects CLEAR, LET'S CARE, and SCIREARLY – funded under the Call *Inclusiveness in Times of Change*, organised the Joint European Research Seminar 'Resilient Society: The Contribution of Education.' In this event, scholars and stakeholders gathered to discuss the pertinent issues in European educational policymaking and research, seeking to understand how resilience can be tackled in and through education. During the course of the seminar, several key issues have been raised:

- Beyond strengthening individual resilience, focus should also be shifted on building resilient schools and educational structures that support all learners.
- Vulnerability should be understood as a structural issue rather than an individual trait, requiring systemic changes to address inequities.
- Resilience is built through interconnected and multi-level support systems across individual, institutional, and societal levels.
- Teachers, students, families, as much as other local/regional educational stakeholders must be actively involved in shaping education policies and practices to ensure their relevance and effectiveness.
- Education should not only be viewed through an economic lens; its role in fostering citizenship, social cohesion, and well-being must also be recognized.



Strengthening Education Systems towards Resilience

Key Lessons from Horizon Europe Projects



The three Horizon Europe research projects CLEAR, LET'S CARE, and SCIREARLY address educational systems - more specifically academic underachievement and early school leaving - as crucial aspects contributing to building resilience. By addressing disengagement and underachievement, early school leaving is reduced, and students are more likely to complete their education and contribute positively to society. Schools also act as hubs for social inclusion, promoting civic engagement, solidarity, and democratic values, ultimately contributing to greater social cohesion in European societies.

Considering education's contribution to resilient societies, this Joint Policy Brief aims to answer the question:

In what ways can education systems support young people's educational engagement and achievement to promote both individual success and societal resilience?

CLEAR

Educational achievements are increasingly being quantified and individualised. A new culture of reflexivity, responsiveness, and recognition is needed to account for the complexity of local/regional contexts.

Young people's agency correlates with external limitations and subjective sense of power. It is therefore necessary to acknowledge the wide array of external constraints (spatial, structural, intersectional) that limit their actions and provide them with sufficient institutional support to spark their agency.

Institutional support must be accompanied by empowerment and inclusion of young people in the decision-making processes. Instead of framing young people as passive recipients, groups at risk or youth in need of assistance, the inclusion of young people's voice in the decision-making arenas is of utmost importance.

A systemic mismatch between young people's educational outcomes and their living and learning spaces persists to intensify intersectional disadvantages. Institutional rigidity, persistence of stratifying cultural and social norms, and the labour market inaccessibility/instability impinge on young people's social and spatial mobility. Since most policies are category-based, and affected by silo effect, they are often inaccurate to look at the complexity of youth conditions.

A lack of institutionalised spaces to articulate the contradictions and misunderstandings between various educational stakeholders leads to fragmentation of educational landscapes. This further deepens the divide between local and regional/national decision-making. In addition, various institutional logics aiming at the inclusion of groups in vulnerable positions create a nexus of conflicting interests operating past each other, which underscores the need for a more collaborative actions.



SCIREARLY

Dialogic learning environments and high expectations matter. Dialogue-rich environments foster literacy, reasoning skills and critical thinking, especially when students engage with diverse viewpoints. High expectations and celebrating success promote engagement and ambition, extending benefits to families, particularly in disadvantaged contexts.

Learning and well-being go hand in hand. Socio-emotional factors significantly impact academic performance. Supportive teacher-student relationships enhance self-regulation, fostering both well-being and achievement.

Maximizing learning requires valuing students' diverse knowledge. Innovative pedagogies, such as translanguaging and using dialogue as a tool for equitable participation in heterogeneous classrooms, leverage students' cultural and linguistic intelligence and lead to both positive interactions and academic outcomes.

Ensure a resilient and future-ready teaching workforce. Teachers' well-being and professional growth are essential. Research-based training, grounded on the science of learning and development, helps educators reflect on biases and improve student engagement. Enabling forums for sharing best practices also strengthen professional learning communities.

Multiprofessional support within and beyond schools is crucial. Counsellors, social workers, psychologists, and other specialised professionals working together can effectively address students' diverse needs and are an essential buffer against underachievement and early school leaving.

Involvement of children, families, and communities promotes greater educational engagement. When children are involved in decisions about their learning, they feel more invested in their education. Engaging families in school activities and decision-making also fosters equitable educational practices and improves academic outcomes.

LET'S CARE

Children learn best when they feel safe. Strengthening emotional security, well-being, and socio-emotional skills reduces fear and enables sustained engagement. When students experience a predictable, caring environment and a sense of belonging, their motivation and participation increase.

Teachers play a central role in creating relational safety. When educators receive strong professional development, emotional support, and adequate working conditions, they can build warm, secure teacher-student relationships that promote trust, engagement and stability.

Build Safe, supportive school environments. Through coordinated action across relational climate, resource availability, and teaching and learning processes, schools can provide flexible pathways, early-support mechanisms, and clear structures. This strengthens belonging, reduces disengagement, and ensures every student feels valued.

Strengthen family-school-community partnerships. Parental involvement is fundamental for preventing dropout and supporting development. Partner with families and community organizations, including third-sector groups, to create a supportive ecosystem reinforcing education's value beyond school.

Policies should ensure coherent, equitable conditions for safe education. Anti-segregation measures, early-childhood access, financial supports, cross-sectoral coordination, and investment in the teaching profession allow schools to implement caring, inclusive practices consistently. Stable policies are essential for long-term impact.

Address vulnerability and promote diverse aspirations. Students facing socioeconomic and health hardship, discrimination, or migration-related challenges benefit from coordinated services, inclusive environments, and targeted support during transitions. When barriers are reduced, aspirations expand and participation becomes sustainable.

Joint Policy Recommendations

Based on our shared understanding of the issues at stake, we have formulated the following recommendations for European policymaking.

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1 Make well-being and ‘safe education’ pillars of quality education

A substantial body of research shows that students thrive in secure, inclusive, and supportive school environments. Policies should actively promote and incentivise evidence-based practices such as cooperative learning, dialogic reading, and the development of social-emotional skills. Clear standards that foster safe, relational school climates help reduce disengagement and early school leaving, placing well-being at the core of educational quality and strengthening societal resilience.
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2 Empower and support teachers to lead resilient learning

Our findings highlight teachers as pivotal relational figures for fostering both learning and well-being. As such, policymakers must ensure that teachers are well supported and equipped with evidence-based training, including in providing socio-emotional support, inclusive pedagogy, and managing classroom diversity. Strengthening the teaching profession directly reinforces the resilience of education systems.
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3 Enable structures for family and community involvement in schools

Active community partnerships improve student outcomes and school climate. Engaging parents and leveraging families’ cultural knowledge supports learning and integration, especially for disadvantaged groups. Policymakers should foster local partnerships and access to third-sector resources, such as social workers, NGOs, and community associations, to build trust, coordination, and schools’ role as hubs of social cohesion.
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4 Address systemic inequalities and expand aspirations

Ensuring equitable access across rural, urban, disadvantaged, ethnic minority, and disabled populations is essential for long-term resilience. Tailored guidance, mentoring, and anti-discrimination measures help students overcome barriers and develop meaningful aspirations. High expectations and positive role models shape trajectories, strengthen individual resilience, and support more cohesive European societies.
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5 Promote room for manoeuvre for local and regional stakeholders

Local and regional practitioners have first-hand contact to young learners. They are aware of the diverse life paths and biographies of their clients and trainees, yet are invested with limited power to successfully navigate them through the institutional and bureaucratic structures. We strongly recommend to strengthen the capacity and flexibility of local/regional stakeholders to overcome existing institutional constraints and devise effective solutions for youth in vulnerable and multi-disadvantaged positions.

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DISCLAIMER

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