*Third Draft of the ‘Manifesto’:*

**The EU Recovery Plan should be geared towards education, research and innovation**

The EU leaders agreed on EU recovery plan and budget 2021-2027 on 21 July.  A comprehensive package of **€1 824.3 billion** which combines the **multiannual financial framework (MFF)** and an extraordinary recovery effort, **Next Generation EU (NGEU)**.

*EU Council and Parliament will hammer out the details in the coming month. During the German Presidency. A huge responsibility. The signatories below recommend to gear the EU Recovery Plan towards education, research and innovation. Both the seven year budget and the additional recovery fund. A strategic choice that will determine Europe’s future internally and in the world.*

The COVID-19 virus has shaken the world to its core, testing our societies, economies and our way of living, working and learning. To get on top of this, a recovery plan is more than necessary and urgent. The European Union showed it’s leadership in organizing the EU budget to power a fair socio-economic recovery, repair and revitalise the Single Market, to guarantee a level playing field, and support the urgent investments, in particular in the green and digital transitions, which hold the key to Europe's future prosperity and resilience.[[1]](#footnote-1) ‘Next Generation EU’ must help the member states of the EU to recover from this crisis in a sustainable manner, with a historic budget of €750 billion. Still this month, negotiations are taking place within the EU regarding the destination of the EC's proposed funding for the recovery policy. This letter, co-signed by an international group of experts, makes an urgent recommendation. We hope that the European Parliament and the European Council will change the significantly less expected growth in education and research, as proposed by the Commission Von der Leyen.

Although we fully support the focus on a fair and inclusive recovery for all with a *Digital Education Action Plan* which wants to ensure digital skill for all EU citizens, we believe it is unthinkable there is no stronger emphasis on education next to research and innovation. We consider the social agenda for education not to be neglected in the recovery-plan of our future. We should treat the COVID-19 crisis as a wake-up-call, not only for digital learning, but also for investing in education programs focused on a more inclusive, open and resilient system. The new standard includes improved accessibility for the most vulnerable groups, improved learning platforms, integration of digitization and distance learning, and the improved capacity of teachers to design and facilitate distance learning.

Harnessing the full potential of education for the benefit of society through challenges-based, solutions-driven research and innovation. Research-performing actors generally, and universities in particular, have a crucial role to play through their research activities in strengthening Europe’s contribution to the achievement of high-level EU policy goals, such as combatting climate change, addressing the issue of ageing societies and contributing to the SDGs. The important role played by universities in tackling global health challenges should be reflected upon by EU and national policy makers, and by universities themselves. Any lessons learnt, and implications that might influence the future role of universities in contributing to the SDGs and to tackling global health challenges (including those arising unexpectedly) should be considered. The *Sustainable Development Solutions Network* (SDSN) promotes integrated approaches to implement the SDGs through education. SDSN firmly believes that education and knowledge is the first of six transformations needed towards achieving the SDGs[[2]](#footnote-2).

*Economic and social recovery requires a consistent investment in the future ‘Knowledge Society’.* This applies to all European member states. A substantial part, not less than half of the budgetary fund (in particular the 750 billion) is to be used for education and training, research and innovation. The concern for sustainability requires such a decision. The younger generations will not forgive them for not investing, nor will they forgive the workers left behind by a lack of continuous training, the community of researchers and scientists in terms of entitlement to innovation, the teaching staff for the different levels of the educational system.

Within the seven year budget) the EU created little space for both *Horizon Europe* and *Erasmus+,* to increase European support for health and climate-related research and innovation activities. But the University-sector itself is very critical. “Our inability to overcome the pandemic quickly has shown that we have significantly underinvested in fundamental, frontier-led science,” responded the Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities. “*Continuing this trend would be a major mistake*.”[[3]](#footnote-3) We are disappointed and concerned by the limited budget proposed for the EU’s flagship programs *Horizon Europe* and *Erasmus+.* The core missions of universities address holistically all challenges related to the coronavirus crisis and they will contribute best to the common recovery and societal resilience if there are more synergies across research, innovation and education policies and funding programs, and coordinated efforts between funders at European, national and regional levels. It is now important to reach an agreement in time so that the European Union can move forward and deliver on its ambitious objectives in 2021.[[4]](#footnote-4)

We strongly belief that at least 30% of all resources should be devoted to education, training, research and innovation. Concretely, a number of key action points can be mentioned that are primordial and that implement both the care for inclusive education and for excellence:

- Creative learning environment and sustainable school buildings (including renovation for clean energy);

- Drastic investment in recurrent learning (vouchers, guidance, platforms, micro-credentials) vocational and technical education, language learning;

- Digital agenda; high-speed internet and logistic support for distance learning;

- Catch-up programs for underprivileged and migrant pupils European and national offers for their integration;

- Research programs and shared infrastructures on a European level to strengthen excellence and competitiveness; support to the European University Alliances.

The Commission intends to focus on investment and reforms for long-term growth and the resilience of economies, but when education and research is not sufficiently mentioned we risk ignoring our future generations. To drive sustainability, as the Commission aims, Europe must invest in education, research and innovation.

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1. <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_940> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Sachs, J.D., G. Schmidt-Traub, M. Mazzucato, D. Messner, N. Nakicenovic, and J. Rockström (2019), “Six Transformations to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”, Nature Sustainability. DOI: 10.1038/s41893-019-0352-9 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/eu-pandemic-recovery-fund-neglects-long-term-research> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.cesaer.org/content/5-operations/2020/20201007-joint-mff-statement.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)