



## Press Release

Luxembourg, 24 April 2023

# EU funding for digitalisation of schools falling short of its potential

- *Member states have made limited use of EU support for the digitalisation of their schools*
- *Schools were not sufficiently involved in establishing their needs*
- *The EU's target of giving fast internet connections to all schools by 2025 is at risk*

The EU's funding to support efforts towards improving the digitalisation of schools has not had its full impact, according to a new report by the European Court of Auditors. This is due in particular to a lack of strategic focus of member states in using this EU financing.

Significant amounts have been or will be disbursed between 2014 and 2026 through various EU programmes to support digital education. Resources allocated through the post-pandemic Recovery and Resilience Facility alone will be over € 11 billion.

*"The COVID-19 pandemic showed that school systems in almost all member states were not well prepared for distance teaching,"* said Pietro Russo, the ECA member who led the audit. *"This was because schools' internet connections were often inadequate, and because digital equipment for students and teachers was lacking. The EU has ambitious plans for digital education and can help schools in their efforts to make more use of technology. But we believe that EU financing could be better used."*

To check how digitalisation of schools has progressed, the auditors visited six member states in 2022 (Germany, Greece, Croatia, Italy, Austria, and Poland) and found that EU-financed actions could have achieved greater impact if they had been better embedded in national or regional strategies for the digitalisation of schools.

In most cases, the EU-financed projects delivered their intended outputs. However, sometimes EU financing merely replaced national funding that had already been allocated. One of the reasons why schools often could not make the best use of EU money is that they were not sufficiently involved in establishing their digitalisation needs. Moreover, many schools were not aware of the support offered by the EU. Many still report insufficient equipment, or further training needs for teachers. The auditors also found that a common approach to the use of new technologies in class was often lacking, thus preventing schools from exploiting the full potential of digitalisation.

In 2016, the Commission set targets for the member states to connect schools to gigabit internet by 2025 and to enable them to use state-of-the-art IT equipment and adopt innovative ways of

*The purpose of this press release is to convey the main messages of the European Court of Auditors' special report. The full report is available at [eca.europa.eu](https://eca.europa.eu).*

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teaching and learning. However, in 2022, only a small number of schools could actually use gigabit connections. EU countries had varying approaches to promoting the connection of schools, but a lack of stringent strategic planning, together with delays in implementing dedicated programmes, increases the risk that the EU will not achieve the 2025 target for gigabit internet.

The Commission has no comprehensive data on the overall amounts of EU funding spent for the digitalisation of schools. Only a few EU countries assess the results they have achieved with EU financial support for improving digital education in schools. For measures funded by the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the auditors did not consider the link between the expected results in terms of improving digital education and EU funding to be strong enough. Moreover, in some cases cost estimates accepted by the Commission during the negotiations of the national plans did significantly differ from the actual costs incurred during implementation.

### **Background information**

In the EU, member states have full responsibility for designing education policy and the organisation of their schools. The EU supplements and supports actions by member states and provides significant financial support for the digitalisation of schools. To this end, it uses various instruments such as Cohesion Policy funds, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the Connecting Europe Facility and the Erasmus+ programme. In 2018, the Commission adopted a Digital Education Action Plan to support the adaptation of the education and training systems of member states to the digital age. It updated this plan in 2020.

Special report 11/2023, “*EU support for the digitalisation of schools: Significant investments, but a lack of strategic focus in the use of EU financing by member states*”, is available on the [ECA website](#).

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