



On 25 January, new UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay participated in the First European Education Summit, hosted by EU Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport Tibor Navracsics and featuring the participation of sixteen Ministers of Education from across Europe. The summit offered an excellent opportunity for Ms. Azoulay, who was on her first visit to Brussels since her election, to underline the importance of this event for inclusive and quality education in Europe, a crucial cornerstone for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4.

The main purpose of this first high-level event, which brought together about 450 participants, including many Ministers of Education from around Europe, was to discuss the relevance of the European Education Area 2025. The EEA 2025 was first presented on November 1st ahead of the Social Summit held in Gothenburg, Sweden, where EU leaders and Ministers discussed the social dimension of Europe with a specific focus on education and culture. The main goals outlined for this project are making international mobility feasible for all, creating a network of European Universities as well as promoting lifelong learning opportunities across Europe.

In his opening remarks, EU Commissioner Tibor Navracsics insisted on the often underestimated power that education and culture may have in fostering cohesion and building stronger, resilient societies based on solid common values and a sense of belonging. He welcomed the diversity of representatives attending the summit, and encouraged the attending Ministers to engage in discussions that could help understand how to solve the main challenges that a European Educational Area would pose. “This Summit is the first step on a longer journey. It will certainly not be the only one” he concluded, before leaving the floor to Italian astronaut of the European Space Agency, Samantha Cristoforetti who drew attention to the importance of girls’ education in science, technology, engineering and math (commonly referred to as STEM education) based on her own life experiences, as well as the benefits that the “cultural shock” of an experience abroad might bring to a young student’s future life.

The UNESCO Director-General then delivered her keynote speech devoted to the main achievements and strengths of the European Education Area 2025. Referring to the same wording chosen for the SDG4 in the 2030 Agenda, Ms. Azoulay welcomed the project aimed at achieving “an inclusive, quality education that can provide lifelong learning opportunities” necessary to be actively involved in social, cultural and political life. The UNESCO Director-General highlighted three main valuable axes of this new European project. First, the adaptation of learning material to an evolving world, taking into account the importance of digital education. Second, the challenge of mobility, which involves the work UNESCO has been doing with the European Commission on the recognition of technical and professional qualifications. Finally, she acknowledged that the transmission of values that contribute to the emergence of a shared European consciousness is crucial in this new chapter of the European project.

All the themes mentioned in the opening and first keynote speeches were then broadly discussed in the following High-Level Panel discussion, featuring Tibor Navracsics, European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Jean-Michel Blanquer, Minister for Education of France, Petra Kammerevert, Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament, Anna Ekström – Minister for Upper Secondary School and Adult Education and Training of Sweden and Zoltán Balog, Minister of Human Capacities of Hungary. Questions were raised about the challenges of the digital revolution and on the need for education on media skills. The undeniable importance of the mutual recognition of technical and vocational qualifications was also mentioned, CULT Committee Chair Kammerevert drawing attention to the fact that recognised certificates are as valuable as a University degree.