

European Parliament Ambassador School

2020-2021 REPORT

STRATEGIC SUPPORT UNIT FOR LIAISON OFFICES

European Parliament Ambassador School 2020-2021 report

THE PROGRAMME

The European Parliament Ambassador School (EPAS) programme **aims** at raising awareness about European parliamentary democracy amongst students (14-18 years of age) promoting active European citizenship and increasing networks of schools, teachers and students that are engaged with the European Parliament, its Members and the European Parliament Liaison Offices (EPLOs).



To be part of the network, participating schools organise activities that raise awareness of European parliamentary democracy and European citizenship by using the educational material provided by the EP. They appoint teachers and students as Senior and Junior Ambassadors respectively, organise activities for Europe Day and establish an EP/EU Info Point at schools, among other activities.

Since the members of the Bureau approved the continuation of the programme in 2019, the following actions have been implemented to **enhance the EPAS programme** and boost engagement with teachers and students.

a) Increased visibility of the programme through the new EPAS website

A multilingual EPAS website¹ has been created to promote the pan-European perspective of the programme and support the communication actions carried out in the framework of EPAS. The new EPAS website will be fully integrated into a platform that will gather the EP's entire youth offer.

b) Interactive learning resources open to all interested schools

To support teachers in giving lessons on the European Union, the programme provided EPAS schools with teaching material and learning resources² for students

¹ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/ambassador-school/en/>

² <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/ambassador-school/en/learning-resources.html>

aged 14-18. Following the 2019 European Elections, the learning materials were updated, further adapted to the target audience and offered to all interested schools (beyond the EPAS network).

c) Extensive inter-institutional cooperation

The new generation of Europe Direct centres started working in May. Their revamped mission statement identifies Europe Direct centres as 'partners' of the European Parliament and pinpoints the need to work closely with EPLOs. More specifically, Europe Direct centres will cooperate with the EPLOs to implement activities targeting the youth community, such as the European Parliament Ambassador School Programme.

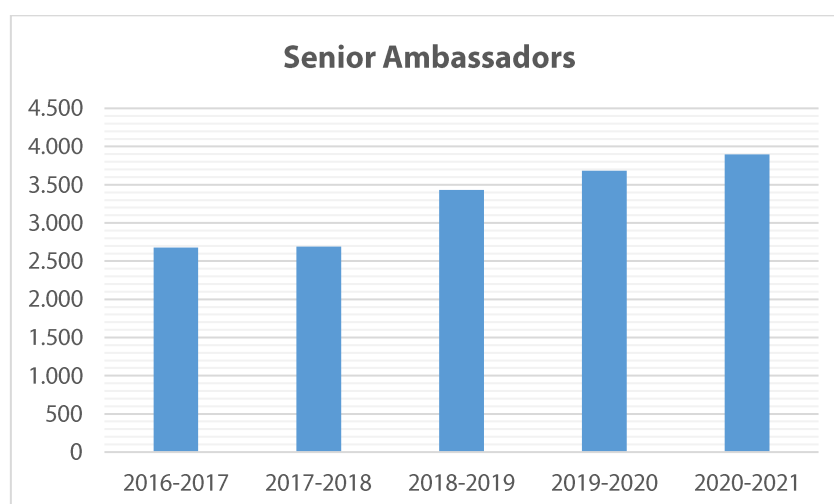
In addition, the EC has been a key partner to promote the learning resources developed in the framework of the EPAS programme. The EPAS material is available on the Learning Corner. The EPLOs also cooperate regularly with the EC Representations in educational and EPAS related activities.

d) EPAS eTwinning group

Following the need raised by many Senior Ambassadors, the Strategic Support Unit for Liaison Offices (SSU) has worked closely with the Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) to set up a specific EPAS eTwinning³ group in April 2021. More than **230 EPAS Senior Ambassadors** have already joined the group.

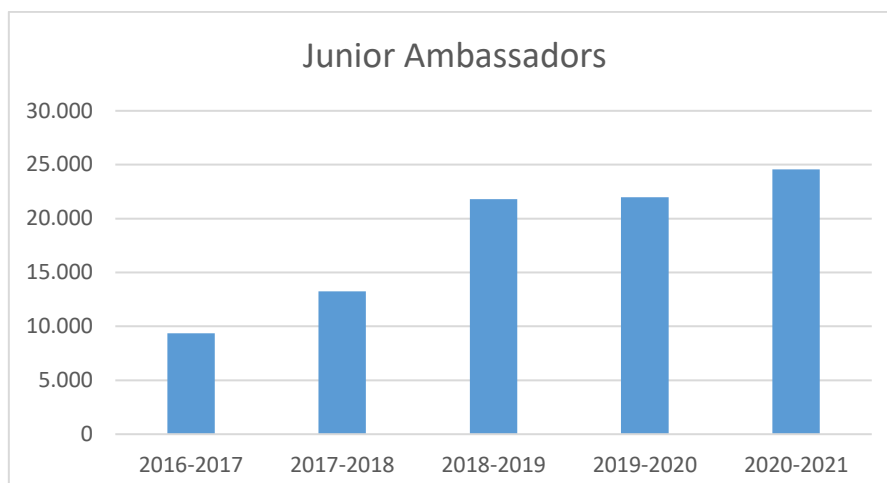
THE NETWORK

After the school year 2020-2021, the network counts **3.897 Senior Ambassadors** (215 new Senior Ambassadors) and **24.566 Junior Ambassadors** (2.587 new Junior Ambassadors), from **1.572 certified schools** in 26⁴ Member States.



³ eTwinning offers a platform for staff working in a school in one of the European countries involved, to communicate, collaborate, develop projects, share and feel part of an important learning community in Europe. Many Senior Ambassadors are already connecting to teachers around Europe through eTwinning. It is co-funded by Erasmus+, the European programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport.

⁴ The EPLO in Malta could not implement the programme in 2020-2021 due to important disruptions in the academic system caused by the pandemic. Besides, as of the school year 2021-2022, the programme will be implemented also in the United Kingdom.



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The school year has been **marked by the COVID-19 pandemic**. As a result, schools and EPOs have been forced to carry out their activities online. Despite the uncertainty, changes and cancellation or postponement of live events, the EPOs have managed to implement the programme successfully and **increase its outreach**.

Although in 2020-2021 schools were **better prepared** to implement a fully online programme, the **fatigue and regular curricular demands were higher** than in the previous school year. In this sense, teachers have made an extraordinary effort to carry out the programme. In addition, it is important to consider that in most cases **educators participate voluntarily** and without an official recognition of the hours invested in the programme.

The **online approach** has brought challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, after one year of home-schooling, "online fatigue" is a reality and some schools decided to drop out or were less engaged. In addition, in some cases, EPOs have realised that online training can have an



impact on the engagement and performance of teachers. Therefore, the offices that have identified this challenge have reinforced the capacity-building aspect of the programme, when necessary. Moreover, the pandemic has highlighted the **differences in accessing high-speed internet** and the **need for "real connections"**.

On the other hand, the pandemic has been an opportunity to exploit the potential of **online engagement**, reinforce the **pan-European aspect** of the programme and **expand our offer for students**.

The EPOs have reached out to **a wider audience, organised a higher number of activities and reinforced transnational cooperation to host international events**. **EPOs** have organised **436 events**⁵ (63 more than in the 2019-2020 school year) while schools have hosted **11.980 EPAS events**.

The new format has also encouraged MEPs **to be more active in the programme, 242**⁶ **MEPs** have participated in EPAS activities during the school year.

One of the biggest **challenges** faced by the EPOs has been to **keep teachers and students motivated while not being able to offer interesting incentives** such as trips to Brussels or Strasbourg to participate in Euroscola. While **8.866** EPAS students have participated in online **Euroscola** sessions, the online version of this activity has **not been perceived** as a reward for most schools.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The pandemic has forced us to shift to an online format. Although the EPOs agree on the opportunities that have arisen, they highlight the need of **combining online and offline activities** to leverage engagement and keep the network motivated. In this sense, they recommend organising **hybrid events**.

Secondly, in most countries, **educators** work on the EPAS project **voluntarily**. Therefore, it is essential to **continue taking steps towards the official recognition of the programme**. In this sense, some offices have worked with national education authorities to recognise the training that teachers follow through EPAS. In other cases, the Ministry of Education acknowledges the hours allocated to the implementation of EPAS. To improve in this area, some offices suggest working towards acquiring a similar status to programmes such as Erasmus+.

⁵ From September 2020 to August 2021

⁶ From September 2020 to August 2021

Regarding the **offer**, after two years of home-schooling educators and students are looking forward to having opportunities to **travel and connect** with EPAS Ambassadors from different countries. In this sense, the offices suggest **increasing the number of activities for Junior Ambassadors** and organising **more pan-European online and offline events** in Brussels and Strasbourg.

In this sense, EPOs will be able to organise **offline transnational activities as of 2022**. The main **objectives** of the initiative are to enhance the pan-European perspective of the programme, create additional incentives to boost engagement in view of EE24 and leverage the potential of the Europa Experience spaces.



Moreover, the Strategic Support Unit for Liaison Offices (SSU) is cooperating with different units to expand the number and type of incentives provided to the network. Therefore, in 2022, the SSU will organise a **Human Rights seminar in Brussels** together with the Civil Society Outreach Unit (CSOU) and the Visits and Seminars Unit (VISSEM); and the **House of European History** will host exclusive online events for the EPAS network.

Different training sessions and activities for educators are offered in the framework of **together.eu**⁷, a pan-European community that encourages citizens to participate in democracy.

Some offices also suggest leveraging the potential of the **Digital Citizens' journey** in the context of the programme. This tool empowers citizens, in particular youth, to meet, discover and experience Parliament wherever they are. The Digital Citizens' Journey is composed of **the Immersive Online Experience (IOE)**, **the Virtual Role Play Game (VRPG)**, and **the Virtual House of European History (VHEH)**. As pointed out by the offices, this tool could help Junior Ambassadors to connect with students in other countries.

⁷ <https://together.europarl.europa.eu/youth/educators>

In addition, according to some offices, the programme should provide **vocational schools** with a more extensive offer. Therefore, it is recommended to organise specific events and offer ad hoc materials and resources.

COMMUNICATING THE PROGRAMME

EPAS on social media

The offices

Seven offices⁸ manage a specific EPAS social media account, in addition to their primary EPLO social media accounts. EPLO Dublin has a social media account targeting the educational community in Ireland (1.776 followers).



The schools

478 schools have created a specific EPAS social media account. In Bulgaria alone, 93 schools have an EPAS account.

Central Facebook page

The page counts **5.647 followers**, -619 new followers-. During the school year, more than **130 posts** were published with a total **reach of 50,870 users**. Moreover, the content was shared **932 times** and the posts had **more than 3.400 reactions**.

⁸ Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, Luxembourg, Romania and Slovakia. In total, these accounts gather more than 6.200 followers. Out of the 6.200, 4.793 users follow the Romanian account.

EPAS in the media

During the school year 2020-2021, **1.942 pieces about EPAS** were published on the media. The majority -1.676- were produced by written media. The **highest coverage was reported in Spain** -515 written pieces, 30 TV pieces and 73 radio pieces-. The programme was also highly covered by newspapers in **Romania** - 454 written pieces-, **Italy** -163 written pieces- and **Hungary** -155 written pieces-.

