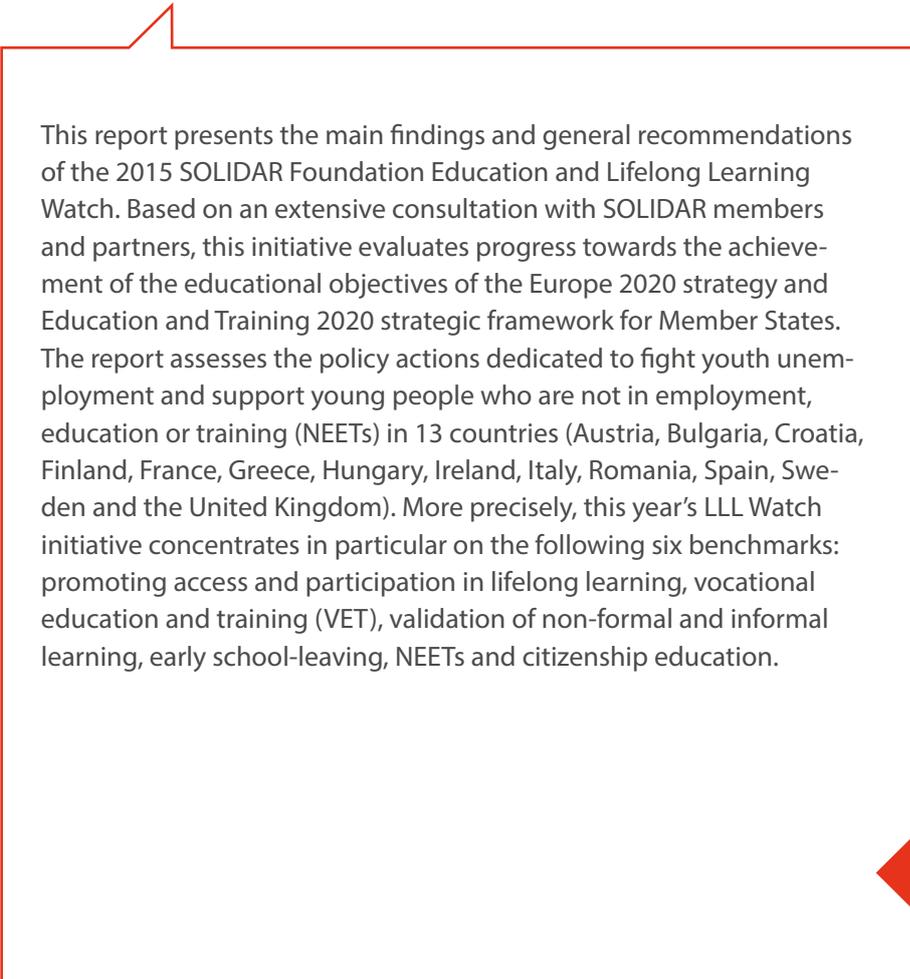




# GENERAL REPORT

## Education and Lifelong Learning Watch 2015



This report presents the main findings and general recommendations of the 2015 SOLIDAR Foundation Education and Lifelong Learning Watch. Based on an extensive consultation with SOLIDAR members and partners, this initiative evaluates progress towards the achievement of the educational objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy and Education and Training 2020 strategic framework for Member States. The report assesses the policy actions dedicated to fight youth unemployment and support young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs) in 13 countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom). More precisely, this year's LLL Watch initiative concentrates in particular on the following six benchmarks: promoting access and participation in lifelong learning, vocational education and training (VET), validation of non-formal and informal learning, early school-leaving, NEETs and citizenship education.







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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the main findings and general recommendations of the 2015 SOLIDAR Foundation Education and Lifelong Learning Watch. Based on an extensive consultation with SOLIDAR members and partners, this initiative evaluates the development and commitment of national governments towards learning societies in order to make lifelong learning a reality and to foster the participation of people in education and learning. More specifically, this assessment is based on 13 country studies (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom), where national policies are evaluated against six benchmarks in the area of education. The report concludes with general recommendations to achieve the educational objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy and Education and Training 2020 strategic framework for Member States in order to build learning societies.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Education and Lifelong Learning Watch (LLL Watch) is a monitoring tool that provides information on different aspects of education, policy trends in the field of education as well as challenges faced at the European and national level regarding lifelong learning. Every year, SOLIDAR together with its national expert groups monitor the development and commitment of national governments towards learning societies in order to make lifelong learning a reality and to foster the participation of people in education and learning. The focus is particularly on those who are far from formal education and have a weak income position, young adults who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs), early school leavers, as well as unemployed people at the risk of skills deterioration.

The LLL Watch report has been created by using available public information and the contributions from SOLIDAR members and partners.

This year's LLL Watch initiative concentrates in particular on six benchmarks:

- The state of play in **promoting access and participation in lifelong learning**, from national strategies to adult participation in lifelong learning.
- The main features of the **vocational education and training (VET)** system in place, and the biggest challenges facing VET, work-based learning and apprenticeships.
- The state of play of **validation of non-formal and informal learning** and national arrangements for validation.
- Existing measures to prevent **early school-leaving**.
- The state of play on young people **not in employment, education or training (NEETs)** and measures applied to support the social inclusion and reintegration of NEETs.
- The main characteristics of **citizenship education** and its role in increasing active citizenship.

In addition, the LLL Watch report assesses the Country Specific Recommendations on Education by the European Council for each country monitoring report, evaluating where progress has been made and what still remains to be addressed in the view of the Council within the European Semester.

Education and Lifelong learning are still not perceived as a top investment priority for the Member States what is an obvious contradictions between the EU's proclaimed policy ambitions. Although the EU has acknowledged the importance of education for social inclusion as well as social and economic development (the Paris Declaration or Communication on Rethinking Education), a Eurydice report shows that there was only a moderately positive evolution of the planned national education budgets (with 16 countries/regions increasing their national education budget by at least 1%). Four countries/





regions still made cuts to their education budget, which in Greece, Slovenia and Northern Ireland was by more than 5%<sup>1</sup>.

Furthermore, educational poverty, which is defined as the share of young people failing to reach minimum standards related to their educational attainment or their education achievement, remains far too embedded within the 28 EU Member states. For year 2015 no less than 6 Member States received country specific recommendations concerning the need to raise the efforts aimed at integrating disadvantaged students<sup>2</sup>. More than seven years after the beginning of the economic crisis, the share of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs) is exuberant high and the high early school-leaving rate, especially in the most crisis-shaken countries, aggravate the problem.

The LLL Watch initiative of the SOLIDAR Foundation reflects the state of play of education and lifelong learning policies within the EU and more specifically within 13 EU member states<sup>3</sup>. Firstly, this report presents the main findings and overall trends found in this year's analysis of country studies. Secondly, it presents SOLIDAR's general recommendations developed together with the practitioners from education & training sector for each of the themes covered by benchmarks.

## 2. MAIN FINDINGS AND GENERAL TRENDS

The 2015 edition of the **LLL Watch initiative** report first outlines the main findings and overall trends found in this year's country studies of Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

1 European Commission; Eurydice (2016). *National Sheets on Education Budgets in Europe – 2015*.

2 European Commission (2015). *Education and Training Monitoring Report – Europe*.

3 Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom

### 2.1. Promoting access and participation in lifelong learning

The country monitoring reports show a mixed image in terms of promoting access and participation in lifelong learning (LLL). As a matter of fact, only six out of the thirteen countries (Austria, Finland, France, Spain, Sweden and the UK) have a higher rate of adult participation on LLL than the EU average of 10.5% in 2013. Whereas the Scandinavian countries, in occurrence **Finland** and **Sweden**, are the frontrunners and have LLL rates over the 20% threshold, **Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia** who were the last to join the EU have very low rates of participation between 1.7% and 2.9%. **Hungary** and **Greece** also bring up the caboose with rates around 3%. **Ireland** and **Italy** as well lie considerably under the EU average of 10.5% with rates of respectively 7.3 % and 6.2 %, in contrast to Spain and Austria who are slightly above the EU average.

Overall, although only six out of thirteen countries have adult participation rates above the EU average, **the trend appears to be positive** as nine countries improved their rates compared to 2010 (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Romania, Sweden), three country rates remained stable (Greece, Italy, Spain) and only one country's rate deteriorated (the UK). It is noteworthy to mention that France increased its rate from 5.5% in 2010 to 17.7% in 2013.

Nevertheless, these developments should be viewed in relation to the EU benchmark for 2020 that has been set up for adult participation in LLL. Given that this latter expects at least 15% of adults to participate in lifelong learning by 2020, the recent developments and the current efforts of the EU appears to be too insufficient. Between 2010 and 2013, the EU average rate of adult participation in LLL increased actually only by 1.4%, namely from 9.1% to 10.5%.

Possible reasons **to explain the low participation rates** in LLL in the above mentioned countries can be that LLL and adult education are no yet deeply





rooted in all the EU member states, and/ or the countries lack comprehensive national strategies on LLL. Moreover, there is a lack of promotion and information on LLL in several countries which entail a lack of transmission of interest and attractiveness in return. A high majority of small enterprises cannot afford to take initiatives of training of their staff. Given that about 90% of all the enterprises in the EU are micro enterprises<sup>4</sup>, which means that they employ less than 10 people, this seems to play an important role. Another reason may be the impaired collaboration between employers, employees and educational and vocational training providers, who simply act independently and do not interact with each other enough. Educational and vocational training providers offer programs that do not mirror the interest of the employers that directly impacts the engagement of the employees in training and continuous education. Last but not least, some countries such as Hungary for instance are confronted with a paradox in LLL. While the demand for LLL has significantly increased, the provision of training has shrunk.

Eventually it is important to highlight the pressing challenge of integrating asylum seekers and refugees in the education system and labour market. Indicators show that the share of early school leaving among foreign-born learners in the EU is still nearly twice as high as among the total population.

## 2.2. Vocational education and training

The percentage of vocational students at secondary level varies widely between EU Member States, ranging from 27.3% in **Hungary** to 75.3% in **Austria**. The dual VET system in Austria combines good quality workplace experience and practice with vocational college based education. This seems to pay off the efforts, since the country has an employment rate for recent upper secondary graduates which is one of the highest

<sup>4</sup> Annual enterprise statistics by size class and NACE, Eurostat 2015

in the EU (88.7%, as compared with an EU average of 75.6%) and a NEETs rate that is one of the lowest (8.7% against an EU average of 17% in 2013).

Overall, however, only six out of the thirteen countries (**Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Italy, Romania**) have a share of vocational students at secondary level which is above the EU average (50.4%). Also in terms of developments and trends it appears that the results are mixed. Whereas only five countries (**Finland, Greece, Hungary, Spain, the UK**) were able to increase their rates, Austria's and France's rates remained stable and Bulgaria, Croatia, Ireland, Italy, Romania and Sweden witnessed a negative trend of their upper student's participation in VET.

The VET systems in the 13 countries face a number of common challenges. One of the biggest is transition from VET to the labour market. For example, in **Croatia** who has a striking participation in VET rate of 71.3%, due to an insufficient level of basic skills resulting in poor quality training courses or "skills mismatch" many young people remain unemployed. This is particular cause of concern for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as Roma students, who are over-represented in VET sector. Another challenge for VET students is the limited and insufficient number of available apprenticeships. Even the best VET system is actually futile when students are being set back by a lack of available apprenticeship places.

It is also problematic that VET systems in some countries do not always give access to Higher School. The lack of permeability between work-based learning and higher education becomes problematic, for instance in **Sweden**, where practical experience is required to enter and progress in the labour market.

## 2.3. Validation of non-formal and informal learning

Non-formal and informal learning (NFIL) allows to





acquire and develop civic, social and intercultural competences and transversal skills, which result with empowering citizens, giving them the skills to interact and peacefully coexist with other people, and enabling them to develop a critical and analytical mind, be creative, active and open-minded. NFIL, as important component of national lifelong learning policies, can be crucial for the development of individuals themselves, employment and social cohesion and contributes to social inclusion by reducing poverty and empowering the marginalized in society.

Among the thirteen countries, only **Spain, Finland and France** have developed a comprehensive national strategy at the time of writing this report, whereas **Romania and Italy** have a national strategy in place but some elements are missing. **Croatia, Greece and Austria** are in the process of developing a strategy, which leaves **Bulgaria, Hungary, Ireland, Sweden and the UK** with no national strategy in place and no intention to develop one in the near future.

Although Ireland does not have a national strategy and **Romania's** national strategy is missing some elements, their validation system builds upon an individual right to validation of skills and competences developed through non-formal and informal learning. **France and Finland's** validation system also builds upon that right-based approach.

However, this does not mean that countries within the same category (national strategy; national strategy but elements are missing, strategy under development; no strategy) are in the same position regarding validation or that having a national strategy implies a higher level of development or take-up of validation practices. In addition, having a strategy does not necessarily mean that it is enacted<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014. Final synthesis report.*

Eleven of the thirteen countries (**all except the UK and Croatia** where the production of a framework is under development) have legal frameworks for validation. The majority of the countries have multiple frameworks in place covering different sectors - VET, school and higher education Acts that enable formal education and training institutions to recognise learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal settings. This is the case for Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Spain, Italy and Sweden. In Hungary and Romania exists a legal framework for other initiatives that also covers validation and France has a single legal framework for validation.

Nonetheless, as in regards to the national strategies, the creation of validation arrangements does not always imply the creation of comprehensive validation systems. In cases when laws may not be fully implemented yet, whereas stakeholders may adopt pro-validation measures and practices in the absence of a law.

#### 2.4. Early school-leaving

Early school-leaving (ESL) is closely in relation with unemployment, social exclusion, and poverty. It is therefore of greatest importance to fight early school-leaving in order to equip young people with the much-needed skills and competences that allow them to participate actively in society and the labour market, to empower them and to foster active citizenship.

In terms of early school-leaving, the EU seems to do quite well. In 2013 the EU average was 12% and was thereby only 2% above the required 10% of the EU 2020 headline on reducing school-drop outs. Only Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Spain and the UK had a higher share of early school-leavers than 10% in 2013 (Greece had a rate of 10.1%). In particular, **Italy, Romania and Spain** had very high rates ranging from 17% to 23.6%.

Nevertheless, the slow but steady progress (all





of the countries but **Croatia, Hungary and Sweden** showed a positive trend between 2010 and 2013) is hiding significant disparities between but also within countries. As a matter of fact, it is of particular note that the phenomenon of ESL is prevalent among certain groups at risk, such as young people living in rural communities, young people from families with modest income and/or whose parents have no education or only primary education, young men, foreign-born people, Roma and other minorities. In the case of **Hungary**, the government decided to decrease the school age from 18 to 16 and thus increased the extent of ESL. The number of early school-leavers was actually dropping before the introduction of this measure and started to rise again, from 10.5% in 2010 to 11.8% in 2013.

As opposed to these high ESL rates, **Croatia** is performing very well and remains one of the EU member states with the lowest ESL rate with 4.5%, even though there has been a slight increase of the rate.

Overall, an analysis of sub-indicators suggests that reasons for good performances include a high investment in education, favourable family environments and good participation patterns in early childhood education.

### 2.5. Measures to support NEETs

With youth unemployment reaching record highs in the EU, NEETs increasingly came into focus of EU policy makers. Eight out of the thirteen countries had higher rates of 15-29 years olds out of employment, education or training than EU average (15.9%) in 2013. **Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Italy and Spain** even had a share of NEETs above 20% (Romania's rate was 19.6%) and were therewith the bad pupils of the EU. **Hungary and Ireland** were just below the 20% threshold with rates around 18.5%. In opposition, **Austria** and the two Nordic countries (**Finland and Sweden**) were among the well performing countries and had a

share of NEETs between 7.9% and 10.9%. All in all, there was an upwards trend of the rate in most of the countries between 2010 and 2013, with only **Austria, France, Ireland and Sweden** being able to reduce their rate.

As it is the case with ESL, certain vulnerable groups or groups at risk can be identified who are increasingly exposed to the risk of becoming a NEET: disabled young people, young parents, young women, Roma and other minorities, the low-skilled.

Following the European Council recommendation on setting up a Youth Guarantee scheme in order to face the excessive high NEETs rate, all 28 member states have submitted an Implementation Plan. However, not all of the national Implementation Plans are meeting the challenge of youth unemployment since there remain some discrepancies regarding the definition of quality offers (that the beneficiaries are expected to be offered under the forms of traineeships, apprenticeships, jobs or further education). Moreover, it is questionable whether sufficient human capacity at the Public Employment Service will be ensured for implementing the scheme and administrative barriers often discourage young people. The implementation of the Youth Guarantee is furthermore challenging in terms of outreach, information and coordination strategies. To illustrate, the Spanish Youth Guarantee scheme was only able to reach 4.2% of the 706.900 young people under 25 considered as NEETs in 2014. Last but not least, the generalization of a collective approach needs to be prevented. The Youth Guarantee needs to be adopted to local realities and suit the local context.

According to a EUROFOUND study, due to the severe economic crisis, young people in **Greece** have expressed low expectations of the effectiveness of and opportunities offered by the existing scheme, 'Education-Training-Employment'. Their reasons for not participating are mainly due to the 'distortion or shrinkage of the welfare state





rather than personal choice<sup>6</sup>.

## 2.6. Citizenship education

Citizenship education is part of the curriculum in all the thirteen countries and is implemented through a subject-based (stand-alone or integrated) and/or cross-curricular approach. Usually, citizenship education has three main objectives: educating people in citizenship and human rights through an understanding of the principles and institutions (which govern a state or nation); learning to exercise one's judgement and critical faculty; and acquiring a sense of individual and community responsibilities. These objectives suggest four major themes for citizenship education: the relations between individuals and society: individual and collective freedoms, and rejection of any kind of discrimination; the relations between citizens and the government: what is involved in democracy and the organization of the state; the relations between the citizen and democratic life; and the responsibility of the individual and the citizen in the international community<sup>7</sup>.

Citizenship education exists as a **compulsory separate subject both in primary and secondary education** in France, Greece, Spain and Romania. Where citizenship education is taught as a separate subject, the length of time it is taught as a compulsory subject varies considerably from one country to another. France is the leader in the EU in terms of citizenship education, as in total over twelve years are dedicated to citizenship education starting at the age of six.

In Austria, Hungary, Italy and Sweden the course is a **cross-curricular subject at primary and secondary level**, whereas it is being taught as a

<sup>6</sup> EUROFOUND (2015). Developments in working life in Europe 2014: EurWORK annual review. Retrieved from: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/comparative-information/developments-in-working-life-in-europe-2014-eurwork-annual-review>.

<sup>7</sup> Unesco. Citizenship Education for the 21st Century. What is meant by citizenship education? Retrieved from: [http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/mods/theme\\_b/interact/mod07task03/appendix.htm](http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/mods/theme_b/interact/mod07task03/appendix.htm)

**separate subject at secondary school** in Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Ireland and the UK (with either no citizenship education course at primary level or a cross-curricular subject in primary school).

It is noteworthy that **Finland** carries out national tests for monitoring purposes focused, not on particular subjects, but on competences in particular fields. Social and civic competences are included on a periodic basis. In 2011, 15-year old students' knowledge, skills and attitudes relating to civic and citizenship education and active participation were tested.

With regards to adults, the non-formal and informal sector of the two Nordic countries (**Sweden and Finland**) offer quite a lot of opportunities. In Finland, the essential feature of non-formal education such as liberal adult education is the diversity of curricula, voluntary nature of participation and use of learner-based methods. The institutes set up objectives independently and have independent responsibility over the use of the state subsidy.

Sweden has unique practical workshops in democracy, the so-called study circles. A study circle is a group of people between eight and twelve participants who meet regularly and study together. There are absolutely no constraints and anyone can start one and anyone can join the circle, with no requirements for prior knowledge or admissions tests. In addition, they can meet anywhere, at times that best suit the group. The participants decide for themselves the content and working methods in the study circle, and then jointly seek new knowledge, skills and insights. These methodology is widely recognised, promoted and used primary in the adult education sector (using the non-formal and informal learning methods) is a practical way to promote democracy and self-organisation in Sweden. The participants discover how to re-analyse and question things, develop courage and security and learn how to dialogue and act. The methods are a true exercise in practical democracy.





### 3. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Following an overview of the main findings and overall trends, this year's LLL Watch initiative report presents SOLIDAR's general recommendations to develop learning societies for each of our benchmarks.

#### 3.1. Promoting access and participation in lifelong learning

SOLIDAR calls on Member States to **promote and facilitate access to lifelong learning** and educational opportunities, especially for those who received least education and are the most disadvantaged. Furthermore, open and flexible learning pathways are key to ensure opportunities for all to return to education. Member States need therefore to **increase financial resources for promoting lifelong learning** for all. The majority of EU member states have cut investment in education, and this has in particular affected access to education and lifelong learning opportunities, reducing the number of learners especially among the socio-economically vulnerable groups.

SOLIDAR believes that **a holistic approach to lifelong learning** is required, focusing on supporting not only access to the labour market, but also personal empowerment and the development of multi-disciplinary skills, competences and knowledge throughout people's lives.

Lifelong learning strategies and **policies that prevent skills obsolescence, stimulate continuous education and training** opportunities to upgrade skills, knowledge and competences in order to keep up with changing demands **need to be at the heart of policy-making**. Additionally, the benefits of lifelong learning should be recognised, such as well-being, self-fulfilment, and making an active contribution in society.

It is important both to establish learning programmes that **develop all eight key competences**

as defined in the European framework of key competences for lifelong learning and to equip individuals with the transversal skills needed through life. Investment should not purely be focused on the technical acquisition of skills and designed exclusively to achieve employability but it should also focus on personal fulfilment, social integration and active citizenship.

#### 3.2. Vocational education and training

SOLIDAR calls on Member States to **reform the VET systems** in a way that ensures firstly equal access to training and apprenticeships, secondly **permeability** between education systems, higher education and the labour market, and finally that ensures personal development for students. VET providers have to permanently adapt and update their VET offer, so as to respond effectively to the needs of the labour market. Vocational education and training systems in many countries are suffering from **'low attractiveness' and quality**, especially when it comes to apprenticeships and work-based learning. SOLIDAR recommends Member States to **review the relationship between welfare and apprenticeships** (as well as other vocational work-based learning) in order to ensure that there is not an inadvertent motivation to refrain from entering VET and to put in place a **strong framework for quality assurance**.

Furthermore, **inter-institutional cooperation** at various levels is also a key element in developing and implementing a VET strategy, as well as **investing in specific coaching** measures for VET apprentices and trainers to reduce dropout rates and to ensure that the training is suitable for young people.

Last but not least, it is of greatest importance to guarantee that the **apprenticeships offers are sufficient** and to make sure that apprenticeship offers **cover a wide range of economy sectors**.

#### 3.3. Validation of non-formal and informal learning

SOLIDAR believes that countries need to **esta-**





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**Validation systems** that allow individuals to participate in the process of validation: identification, documentation, assessment and certification of skills and competences acquired in all forms of learning. It results can be used for advancing the career prospects, for further education and training, for self-fulfilment and one's personal development. Member States should therefore **develop a strategy** to actively support the creation of learning societies and learning workplaces, promoting the validation of skills, competences and knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning within society and at the workplace.

In order to do so, **sufficient investment** in the development and maintenance of appropriate validation systems must be ensured – and specific funds for non-formal and informal learning should be allocated. In order to bridge educational inequalities, and empower people with limited opportunities to access formal education, it is necessary to acknowledge competences and qualifications developed through alternative learning environments. Therefore, despite austerity, investment in financing the validation of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning is needed to provide people with equal opportunities to access further education and the labour market by **making the validation of skills and competences an individual right**.

Moreover, SOLIDAR recommends to increase the **cooperation between member states** in promoting the recognition of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning and enable the peer-learning.

Finally, in order to face the challenge of the refugee crisis, member states should increase the use and strengthen the recognition of validation of non-formal and informal learning **for migrants and refugees**. The identification and validation of prior competences are strategic tools for migrants

and refugees to speed up their process of inclusion and integration into society.

### 3.4. Early school-leaving

SOLIDAR call on member states to develop comprehensive strategies to reduce ESL which address the entire education spectrum and include **prevention, intervention and compensation measures**.

In terms of **prevention**, it is important that **equal access to quality education for all children and young people is guaranteed**. According to the final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving<sup>8</sup>, the following characteristics of the education and training system can help reduce obstacles to completing upper secondary education:

- Access to good quality early childhood education and care (ECEC)
- Relevant and engaging curriculum
- Flexible educational pathways
- Better integration of newly arrived migrant children
- Smooth transition between different levels of education
- High quality, attractive and engaging vocational education and training (VET)
- Involvement of pupils and parents in school decision-making
- Initial and continuous education for education staff
- Whole school approaches
- Strong and well-developed guidance system
- Cooperation with the world of work

With regards to **intervention**, measures should take a **holistic approach** and provide individual guidance in addition to **practical and emotional support**. Easy access to teachers and other professionals supporting their educational and personal development is therefore needed. Moreover, **guidance and mentoring together with cultural**

<sup>8</sup> European Commission (2013). *Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support. Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving.*





and extra-curricular activities to broaden their learning opportunities are needed. The report highlights the following examples:

- Early Warning Systems (EWS - refer to different methods and routines aimed at identifying and responding to early signs of ESL. The intention is to provide timely and targeted support for pupils at risk of ESL)
- Systemic support frameworks within schools
- Focus on the needs of the individual pupil
- Extra-curricular and out-of-school activities to enrich the learning offer
- Support to teachers
- Empower families and parents to support their children's education
- Raise parental awareness of ESL

Last but not least, although preventing ESL is more efficient than compensating its effects, **compensation** measures will always be necessary for those young people who have had their education interrupted due to various reasons. SOLIDAR believes that alternative education and training opportunities for young people could be **second chance schemes** or other **individually tailored programmes that focus on re-integration into mainstream education** or on providing practical work experiences in combination with schooling.

### 3.5. Measures to support NEETs

Although structural youth unemployment has existed throughout the past decades, the numbers reached during the peak of the economic crisis threaten the future of an entire generation. In 2014, there were 13.7 million NEETs. Therefore, focused **actions at local and regional level** are of the utmost importance for tackling the problem and giving young people a new perspective.

In this context, SOLIDAR believes that it is particularly important that young people are being offered **decent quality work opportunities** (ap-

prenticeship incentives, work experience and work-based learning) as well as **educational guidance and counselling** (further education, professional education). **Tailored and meaningful actions for NEETs** are needed, including empowering young people who are outside formal structures, and offer opportunities for meaningful learning and quality employment with realistic prospects for the future. Furthermore, full potential should be unleashed from Erasmus+ among professionals and apprentices and they should be encouraged to make use of the programme.

With regards to the Youth Guarantee, one of the EU's latest initiatives to tackle youth unemployment, the budget of 6 billion euro allocated for the programme for the period 2014-2015 in 2012 is well below the 21 billion euro per year required for an effective Youth Guarantee according to the International Labour Organisation. The European Policy Centre (EPC) stresses that the long-term sustainability of the Youth Guarantee scheme is endangered, especially in crisis-shaken Member States/regions that have to deal with severe budget constraints<sup>9</sup>. In addition, regions often need more than just financial assistance and could be helped with the proper roll-out of the programme. Furthermore, many measures are also likely to stop once EU financial support will be over. SOLIDAR calls therefore on the European institutions to **secure and increase the funding** of the Youth Guarantee and to **provide more than just financial help** to member states in need.

It is also crucial to **develop more comprehensive outreach strategies** and to better address **the issue of the quality of offers**. Member States need also to make efforts to meet the requirements of the programme in terms of social, health and rehabilitation services. This could be achieved by taking better account of young NEETs and targeting specific subgroups combined with stronger attention to vocational education and training

<sup>9</sup> European Policy Centre (2015). *One year after the Youth Guarantee: Policy fatigue or signs of action?* Retrieved from: [http://www.epc.eu/documents/uploads/pub\\_5619\\_one\\_year\\_after\\_the\\_youth\\_guarantee.pdf](http://www.epc.eu/documents/uploads/pub_5619_one_year_after_the_youth_guarantee.pdf)





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apprenticeships.

Furthermore, it is necessary to set up a real **coordination and cooperation** between administrations, organizations and social agents, to help improve the employability of a group of young NEETs. It is particularly important to tackle this problem from a cross-sectoral perspective, and the role of non-governmental organizations can be a key to reaching them.

SOLIDAR recommends Member States to **adapt the Youth Guarantee schemes to local realities**. Policy and practice need to be adapted to suit the local context when designing reforms. Implementing a new model that has been successful in another region requires specific educational infrastructure that many countries simply do not possess, such as number of education and training providers able to provide targeted trainings and programs, as well as apprentice schemes developed with the employers/companies, or a cultural context that promotes a new model or promotes the concept of vocational training.

The Youth Guarantee should always be complemented by other **diverse national measures** to support NEETs. **Social clauses in public procurement** for instance could also be used as a strategic tool to support social inclusion. Requiring contractors to deliver social requirements means that vulnerable groups such as NEETs or young people with low qualifications can profit from the training and work integration measures provided by the contracting authority.

Moreover, besides initiatives aiming at developing young people's skills and competences in order to facilitate the transition to already existing jobs, such as the Youth Guarantee, **other measures are needed that create and provide decent jobs**.

### 3.6. Citizenship education

Looking at the state of active citizenship in today's Europe, it is important to focus directly on the democratic and citizenship education, which is a key part of the transversal competences each individual should have to foster democracy, solidarity and tolerance within society.

While citizenship education is already part of the national curriculum in all thirteen countries, SOLIDAR calls on Member States to **promote**, while respecting the principle of academic freedom, **the inclusion of education for democratic citizenship in Higher Education institutions**, in particular for future education professionals.

SOLIDAR believes that civic education **classes and workshops should be provided by practitioners** as they have the necessary knowledge and expertise in delivering courses of good quality. There should also be **investment and development of teachers' training** on citizenship education.

As already mentioned above, the development of social, civic and intercultural competences should again take priority in education agendas, not only within formal education settings, but it should also be made available for other learners through non-formal and informal learning. Lifelong learning opportunities for all, especially civic education and education in values and rights, make a substantial contribution to personal development. **Civic engagement should be a lifelong learning process**.

Since participation starts at the local level, there is a need to reach and engage all of the people in the debate and improve peoples' willingness to **discuss politics and their understanding** of it. Therefore, it is important to promote active and political participation in democratic life **from an early age**, as young people tend to disengage the most. Political literacy and engagement is crucially important in a society where young people, according to recent studies, lack interest in politics.





In light of the rise of **radicalisation and extremism**, **schools and other educational establishments play a pre-eminent role** in the development of a resilient community that upholds the values of non-violence, liberty, democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and tolerance. Furthermore, civic education promotes active citizenship and solidarity and thus fosters the socio-cultural integration and inclusive education of all.





## ANNEX 1 - OVERVIEW TABLE

	EU average		Austria	Bulgaria	Croatia	Finland	France	Greece	Hungary
	2010	2013	2013						
<b>Access and promoting LLL</b>									
adult participation	9.1%	10.5%	13.9% +	1.7% +	2.9% +	24.9%	17.7% +	3% =	3% +
<b>VET</b>									
2013									
Percentage of vocational students at ISCED 3	50.1%	50.4%	75.3% =	50.6% -	71.3% -	70.1% +	44.2% =	33.1% +	27.3% +
<b>Validation of NFIL</b>									
2013									
Coherent national strategy	/	/				X	X		
National strategy but some elements are missing	/	/							
Strategy in development	/	/	X		X			X	
No strategy	/	/		X					X
Individual right to access	/	/				X	X		
<b>ESL</b>									
2013									
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)	13.9%	12%	7.3% -	12.5% -	4.5% +	9.3% -	9.7% -	10.1% -	11.8% +
<b>NEET's</b>									
2013									
young people 15-29 years	15.2%	15.9%	8.6% -	25.7% +	22.3% +	10.9% +	13.8% -	28.5% +	18.4% +
<b>Citizenship education</b>									
2013									
obligatory curriculum	/	/	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
seperate subject at primary school	/	/							
cross-cutting subject in primary school	/	/				X			
seperate subject at secondary school	/	/	/	X	X	X			
seperate subject at both levels	/	/	/				X	X	
cross-cutting subject	/	/	X						X





	EU average		Ireland	Italy	Romania	Spain	Sweden	The UK
	2010	2013						
					2013			
			<b>Access and promoting LLL</b>					
adult participation	9.1%	10.5%	7.3% +	6.2% =	2% +	11.1% =	28.1% +	16.1% -
			<b>VET</b>					
					2013			
Percentage of vocational students at ISCED 3	50.1%	50.4%	32.2% -	59.2% -	61.9% -	45.5% +	49.4% -	38.6% +
			<b>Validation of NFIL</b>					
					2013			
Coherent national strategy	/	/				X		
National strategy but some elements are missing	/	/		X	X			
Strategy in development	/	/						
No strategy	/	/	X				X	X
Individual right to access	/	/	X		X			
			<b>ESL</b>					
					2013			
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)	13.9%	12%	8.4% -	17% -	17.3% -	23.6% -	7.1% +	12.4% -
			<b>NEET's</b>					
					2013			
young people 15-29 years	15.2%	15.9%	18.6% -	26% +	19.6% +	22.5% +	7.9% -	14.6% =
			<b>Citizenship education</b>					
					2013			
obligatory curriculum	/	/	X	X	X	X	X	X
seperate subject at primary school	/	/						
cross-cutting subject in primary school	/	/						
seperate subject at secondary school	/	/	X					X
seperate subject at both levels	/	/			X	X		
cross-cutting subject	/	/		X			X	



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This general report has been developed in the framework of the Education and Lifelong Learning Watch initiative, a tool implemented by members and partners of SOLIDAR to evaluate the commitment and progress of national governments towards learning societies in order to make lifelong learning a reality and to foster the participation of people in education and learning.

SOLIDAR FOUNDATION is the cooperation platform of SOLIDAR, a European network of NGOs working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide. SOLIDAR brings together 61 member organisations based in 25 EU member states and in 6 candidate countries. We work together in Social Affairs, International Cooperation and Lifelong Learning.

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