Building Learning Societies: Investing in Education and Lifelong Learning
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Social Affairs, International Cooperation and Lifelong Learning.
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The economic fall-out from the financial consolidation of 2011-2012 resulted in a total of 19 EU Member States cutting their spending in education following the blind austerity logic. This is one of the most visible effects of the crisis and the austerity policies on education in Europe. Education infrastructure is one of the priorities in the new Commission’s (yet to be introduced) Jobs, Growth and Investment agenda but it is clear that investment in education at all levels, from European to national, needs to be made secure and further cuts should be prevented. There is a need to work towards strengthening the Social Acquis and increasing the social cohesion within the EU by adopting long-term policies oriented towards social investments.

The Europe 2020 Strategy objectives set for education, especially the objective of reducing early school leaving rate to below 10%, are still far from being achieved. For the EU to reach the targets in its Strategy, it must emphasise strengthening social inclusion, and the promotion of the principles of universally accessible quality education and training opportunities. Education and lifelong learning play a crucial role in supporting social inclusion, bridging the inequalities in society, and strengthening active participation in society from early childhood well into adulthood.

Austerity policies and the lack of sustainable investment in education are undermining the work towards achieving the educational and social objectives on the one hand, and on the other, they have a long lasting impact on current and future generations. Young people who are unable to access education today will suffer from the consequences throughout their life - their chance of having access to, and exercising, their social, cultural and economic rights will be reduced.

In this briefing paper, the SOLIDAR Foundation, together with its members and partners, presents a closer look the state of play in 12 EU Member States regarding education and lifelong learning. It was completed with national and European recommendations to support education as a driver for inclusion, participation and lifelong learning inside and outside formal education systems.

To fight against inequalities in education and to counteract social distress, we need sound policies and investment in the development of education to ensure access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for everyone.

Building learning societies needs investment now!

Conny Reuter
SOLIDAR Foundation Secretary
Education in Europe is struggling between delivering the EU2020 education targets on the one hand, and national governments cutting funding in all fields of education on the other. The EU is still a long way from achieving the EU2020 targets on education; and austerity policies are creating inequalities in education across the continent. At the same time the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs) is continuously growing. Investment in education and lifelong learning opportunities could be a solution.

In this briefing paper, the SOLIDAR Foundation provides country-specific monitoring reports and European evidence-based recommendations on the actions that need to be taken for it to reach the EU2020 targets on building inclusive education in Europe.

The country monitoring reports in this paper introduce and examine the situation in 12 countries Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom with regard to some aspects of education and social inclusion.

Each country monitoring report provides the following information:

- 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**
- An overview of public national **investment in education** in relation to GDP, and trends in national investment regarding the different educational sectors.
- The main characteristics of **citizenship education** and its role in increasing active citizenship.
- Information about the policy measures applied to support and promote participation and social cohesion through **active citizenship and volunteering**, as examined in ‘SOLIDAR Briefing #65: Europe 2020: How to spur social progress for a more inclusive Europe’.
- 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.
In addition, the country monitoring reports assess the Country Specific Recommendations on Education by the European Council in the past two years, evaluating where progress has been made and what still remains to be addressed in the view of the Council within the European Semester.
OUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE EUROPE 2020 REVIEW

The SOLIDAR Foundation has contributed to the process taking stock of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth\(^1\), by participating in the public consultations that will contribute to the creation of further proposals for the strategy in 2015. SOLIDAR involved member and partner organisations, particularly through their contribution to the Social Progress Watch. Its response to the consultation was formulated specifically to highlight access to education and lifelong learning for all, together with the call to reinforce a balanced and inclusive strand in the Europe 2020 Strategy.

**Analysing the challenges Europe is facing as a result of austerity, the SOLIDAR Foundation calls for Europe to move towards social cohesion, building a socially inclusive Europe and creating inclusive growth.**

For the EU to meet its targets set in the Europe 2020 Strategy, as laid out in SOLIDAR briefing #63 “Empowering people through non-formal and informal learning”\(^2\) the SOLIDAR Foundation calls for focussing on strengthening social inclusion, and the promotion of the principles of universally accessible and quality education, training and non-formal and informal learning opportunities amongst others, accompanied by a strong social investment approach seeking to strengthen people’s current and future capacities, and improve their opportunities to participate in society and the labour market.

Therefore the revision of the Strategy provides an opportunity to restore commitment to the inclusive dimension of the Europe 2020 Strategy, and make the educational targets more visible. The targets of the Education and Training 2020 Framework also promote the increase in participation in lifelong learning.

The key policy recommendations:

1. **Amplifying educational and social targets as policy levers.**

   Current educational targets set out in the Europe 2020 Strategy of reducing the school dropout rates below 10%, and current social targets of reducing the number of people either in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion, should not only be kept as they are but they should be used as the levers of the proposed policy initiatives. In recent years, many of the EU Member States had to implement structural reforms that resulted from top down economic governance, rather than following the need to reduce the high level of unemployment and the number of people living in - or at risk of - poverty and social exclusion. Moreover, they have negatively affected investment in education and lifelong learning in some of the Member States. We expect that the revision of the Strategy will change this paradigm, and reinforce the

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\(^1\) [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm]

\(^2\) [http://solidar.org/IMG/pdf/63_empowering_people_throug_h_nfil.pdf]
2. **Supporting NEETs in search of decent work and further learning opportunities.**

In 2013, there were 7.5 million NEETs ("Not in Education, Employment or Training"). Additionally, the transition from attending school to working and earning an income is severely undermined for various (structural) reasons and – pushed on by further austerity-driven cutbacks in education – the number of NEETs is increasing rapidly. It is therefore essential to create labour market and lifelong learning opportunities for youth using the Youth Guarantee schemes.

3. **Recognising and valuing skills and competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning.**

From the present moment to 2020, the number of skills-intensive jobs will continue to increase while the demand for low level skills jobs will decline. Therefore we call for a holistic approach to lifelong learning, focusing on supporting not only access to the labour market, but also personal empowerment and development of multi-disciplinary skills, competences and knowledge throughout people's lives. People should have access to lifelong learning opportunities throughout their lives, and a right to the validation of learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning. Validation should be seen as a tool to overcome inequalities and foster further educational and employment opportunities, and ‘skills audits’ should be made available for all.

4. **Promoting inclusive education and training systems.**

One of the key elements in the future ‘Jobs, Growth and Investments Agenda’ is to focus on the educational infrastructure and its modernisation. In order to combat early school leaving and to meet diverse learning needs and recognise learning outcomes, we call for the development of inclusive learning societies to guarantee equal access to education and training for all. The access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities is indispensable for social inclusion and social justice.

5. **Equitable partnership with the civil society.**

We call upon the EU Institutions to strengthen evidence-based policy making that is accompanied by the better engagement of civil society organisations and social partners in the process of European Semester. Moreover the ‘social scoreboard’ should enhance social progress. We believe that better cooperation with the stakeholders will support the inclusive strand. The stakeholders are ready to contribute to the implementation of the economic and social priorities of the EU using their areas of expertise.
6. **Strengthening the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs.**

The “Agenda for new skills and jobs” has brought the idea of bridging the existing gaps between education and labour market, into focus at the European level. This can be seen within other European initiatives (such as the Alliance for Apprenticeships). A growing number of member states are taking action on this through reforming national education systems. They are placing more emphasis on work-based learning and apprenticeships as a way of easing the transition from education to work, and providing the skills needed in the labour market. To make steps toward inclusion through the flagship initiative “Agenda for New Skills and New Jobs”, the SOLIDAR Foundation recommends developing 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.
Education and lifelong learning in Europe are heavily affected by austerity policies that have cut national budgets. Rising inequalities in educational attainment and access to education and lifelong learning are a visible issue, also bringing to light other areas of social well-being and inclusion.

Using available public information, together with contributions from SOLIDAR members and partners, country profiles have been created for 12 EU Member States. These country profiles provide information on different aspects of education, policy trends in the field of education, and challenges faced at the national levels regarding lifelong learning.

Education, and the quality of different education systems in Europe, is a complex issue with variations between different countries and even regions. The findings of these country monitoring reports show that many of the national challenges are also international challenges that occur in more than one country. Equally, the education systems everywhere in Europe have seen the impact of the economic crisis and financial cuts in education resulting from the crisis.

In order to promote societies where everyone has equal access to quality education and lifelong learning and tools for social participation through education, the SOLIDAR Foundation and members work actively together towards inclusive, quality education in all its forms in Europe.

In the light of these challenges within education and lifelong learning in Europe, the SOLIDAR Foundation makes the following recommendations to promote access to quality education and lifelong learning:

- Adult participation in lifelong learning, and access to lifelong learning, remain issues in many countries. **Creating and promoting lifelong learning opportunities** and also opportunities outside the formal education systems are crucial to guaranteeing access to lifelong learning for all.

- **Vocational education and training** systems in many countries are suffering from ‘low attractiveness’ (lack of appeal) and quality, especially when it comes to apprenticeships and work-based learning. These systems need to be reformed in a way that ensures **access to training** and apprenticeships; **permeability** between education systems, higher education and the labour market; and **personal development** for students.

- In line with the Council’s recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning, national validation mechanisms need to be set up by 2018, where this has not yet been done, for **recognising the learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning** that enable empowerment and participation.

- **Early school leaving** remains an issue, especially affecting young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Even in countries where the overall early school leaving
rate is below the EU average, the rates are significantly higher in these disadvantaged groups. To achieve the EU2020 target of reducing early school leaving to under 10%, more inclusive and preventive measures need to be introduced to reach those in higher risk of social exclusion.

- The majority of EU Member States cut investment in education in 2011-2012, and this has in particular affected access to education and lifelong learning opportunities. Sustainable, increased investment needs to be secured in all countries to prevent further social inequality.

- To successfully reintegrate and support the growing population of NEETs, the SOLIDAR Foundation recommends creating tailored and meaningful actions for NEETs, which support personal development, participation in society and the realisation of their potential and life chances.

- Improving support and guidance measures at national, regional and local levels in order to both prevent young people dropping outside the system, and also support the young people in all phases of their education. Support and guidance are especially important in transition periods from one education system to another, or from education to labour market.

- In order to take steps towards inclusion, we call for active support to create learning societies and learning workplaces.

In addition to these European recommendations, each of the following country profiles includes country specific recommendations put forward by the national civil society organisations to provide education and lifelong learning opportunities for the Member States to implement at the national level. We encourage the Member States to closely cooperate with these civil society organisations when implementing the country-specific recommendations issued by the Council.
ANNEX: COUNTRY REPORTS
AUSTRIA

With a comparatively low rate of youth unemployment, a low proportion of NEETs and a high participation rate in lifelong learning, Austria is among the better performing European countries when it comes to education. Austria already has measures to counter-act many social problems, such as NEETs, but it still suffers from social inequality within education, and a lack of coherent tools or measures outside the formal education structure.

Recommendations

- The involvement of youth as volunteers needs to be continued, as it increases the social commitment and awareness of youth.
- The education levels reached in Austrian schools needs to be even across all schools, with equal opportunities based on social equality for all Austrian pupils.
- There needs to be coherence in implementing validation schemes of NFIL (Non-Formal and Informal Learning) across the country.
- Enhance permeability between different education and training paths.
- Eradicate the educational gaps between young people from different socio-economic backgrounds and improve social equality of education.

Promoting access and participation in lifelong learning

Austria has one of the highest percentages in Europe of lifelong learning with 13.9% of people aged 25-64 receiving some form of education regularly.

The Austrian Council of Ministers accepted the “Strategy for Lifelong Learning in Austria” in 2011, in which one of the five principle guidelines is promoting participation in lifelong learning. This guideline includes measures for cooperation between educational institutions and stakeholders to set up nationwide, needs-oriented educational programmes. These measures also promote closer ties and cooperation between the individual educational institutions and the labour market, and they demand mutual recognition of learning outcomes in the public, the non-profit and the private education sectors.³

Vocational education and training

Vocational education and training (VET) plays a significant role in Austria's education system. 79.9% of students in upper secondary education are in vocational training. In this ‘dual model’, they choose between an apprenticeship, combining work-based learning, and school-based or vocational college learning. The economic crisis has not affected the participation rate or occupation choices of students in VET since 2007 in any way, nor the access to vocational education in formal education.

There is a strong framework in place for quality assurance in the content of VET. In work-based learning, the concrete contents of the training are regulated for every apprenticeship in a training regulation (Ausbildungsordnung), which includes the ‘in-company curriculum’ – a type of curriculum for the company-based part of apprenticeship training. Provisions for the apprenticeship-leave examination

³ VET in Europe – Country report Austria, CEDEFOP
are also included in the training regulation. However, this is only the situation for Initial (secondary) vocational education and training (IVET), not for Continuous VET (CVET), which is not regulated by any specific law.

The Austrian education system is characterised by an early differentiation of VET paths starting at lower secondary level, and a broad VET provision at upper secondary level. In this way, one major objective of Austrian VET policy is to continue to enhance permeability between different education and training paths. In terms of permeability between different educational levels, all VET qualifications lasting a minimum of two years provide general access to higher education.

**Validation of non-formal and informal learning**

The European Council of Ministers accepted the “Strategy for Lifelong Learning in Austria” in 2011, in which one of the actions to be implemented by 2020, is setting up measurements for recognising non-formally and informally acquired knowledge and skills in all education sectors.

Since 2010, the topic of validation has gained importance in Austria. Many activities are started, but no uniform framework for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning is yet in place.

The European Union goal of offering individuals the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned outside formal education and training is partly fulfilled. Some regulations have been introduced which include mechanisms and arrangements that enable the recognition by formal education and training institutions of learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal settings.

Many initiatives in Austria can be linked to the adult education sector and second chance education, the labour market and the third sector. Traditionally there is a strong orientation of education and economic culture towards the initial vocational education and training sector. There is a traditional focus towards occupational profiles and descriptions of activities, and also formally acquired qualifications as proof of abilities and competences.

Validation exists in many contexts but it is still lacking in coherence. Also, there is no general right for individuals to access validation initiatives as the access requirements for each initiative are defined separately. Beneficiaries (the low-qualified and early school leavers) seek to enhance their employability, or to gain access to higher education programmes. Some initiatives are targeted towards migrants. Many of the competence audit or portfolio initiatives particularly focus on empowerment of the participants.

**Early school leaving**

In the view of the European Commission, the Austrian education system needs to improve performance to mitigate the demographic trends and the trend towards a more skills-intensive economy. Education outcomes, as measured by the PIRLS, TIMSS and PISA tests, are below average among both 10 and 15 year olds, even though Austria’s investment in education and training for primary and secondary schools is slightly above the EU average. More than one in four young people aged 15 has poor reading skills, and the results are only slightly better in mathematics. These young people face
difficulties accessing initial vocational education and training, which is crucial for their access to the labour market.

Currently, the Austrian school system is highly segregated. There is a strong link between the parents’ education and income level and the academic success of the child. Children from households with high incomes are more likely to obtain a high school diploma. Social selection in the Austrian education system happens as early as the age of 10, when children are separated into different schools according to their educational level. There is an ongoing discussion about a common school-leaving certificate and a general qualification for university entrance (Zentralmatura) for all youngsters in Austria. However, the new government put a stop to the planned reorganisation of the school system into a “Gesamtschule”, an all-in-one school for all children aged from 7 to 14.

There is a lot of demand for private tutoring for school pupils but this is an expense which a lot of parents cannot afford. Private lessons and coaching for children at no cost, provided by social organisations for example, are in high demand. Private lessons are even more important for children from a migrant background because their parents are often not able to help them in their studies as they do not have the language skills.

Since January 2013, a youth coaching programme has been implemented throughout all of Austria’s federal provinces. This programme provides advice and support for young people from the 9th year of school onwards, and it is designed to help them find an educational or vocational path. Young people in danger of dropping out or failing to complete school receive special support.

**Investment in education**

The majority of the Ministry of Education budget is reserved for formal education in schools and universities. Although the budget is relatively high, at 5.8%, there are major problems in these areas (such as fitting out the buildings and training the teachers). When the overall education budget gets tight, money is saved from the adult education sector. There has been a very good initiative in adult education which is financed by the Ministry. For about three years, basic education, including reading and writing and making the secondary school exam has been offered for free, and there are a lot of places available. The remaining funding is usually on the basis of project-financing and only lasts for a one-off period.

There are a lot of discussions on the topic of non-formal and informal learning, and there are also some projects and institutions which deal with the topic. In the last few years, there has been a change in attitude on this topic, but there are also lot of vested interests and a real change takes a very long time. There are some pilot projects dealing with adult education and its connection with other education sectors, but until now no final agreement has been reached about how to implement the change in different stages.

It would be desirable if there was a change in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. For a comprehensive implementation and change in the curriculum, Austria will need a lot of time and a lot of money. Another aspect is the employers who will have to adapt to recognise the certificates.
Citizenship education

Citizenship education is not a separate subject at either primary or secondary level in Austria because it is a part of the national curriculum, as in every EU Member State.

In vocational colleges, it is taught as citizenship education, a subject in its own right. In every other type of school it is offered from grade 8 combined with another subject – history, contemporary history, law or economics.

In addition, citizenship education is defined as a principle of teaching for all types of school and at every level; the content parameters are decreed as a basic principle. This means that every teacher can be called upon to teach citizenship education – even at primary level and up to grade 8.

Promoting active citizenship and volunteering for social cohesion

Civil society is strong in Austria, and citizens have access to the ‘Bürgerkarte’. The “Bürgerkarte” is a tool to facilitate official administration by enabling electronic transactions, but it is not designed to keep track of government policies. The “Bürgerkarte” is not without controversy, given the pre-existing concerns about security and data information abuse.

Volunteering is an important part of Austrian society as almost 47% of Austrians participate in formal or informal volunteering. Nevertheless, some groups are not as represented in volunteering as others. The involvement of youth in volunteering needs to be continued, as it increases their social commitment and social awareness. People with a migrant background are also under-represented in formal volunteering work. Migrants are known to be more active in neighbourhood help and in ethnic community organisations rather than in ‘established’ volunteering organisations. Including youth and migrants more in projects, and offering them easy access pathways to get involved, is a recommendation that supports active citizenship. Volunteering helps create social cohesion.

In 2012, a new law on volunteering was established, setting out structures and rules, particularly for voluntary social service, people working with government organisations, and also volunteer work abroad. The rules and legal structures foster and support volunteer commitment, especially among youth. Social organisations can employ young people as volunteers for one year. Social commitment and social awareness among the youth is supported in this way.

Participation as a volunteer in social service (Freiwilliges Sozialjahr) in Austria gives young people especially the possibility of getting experience in the social and health sector in an NPO (non-profit organisation). The legal framework of the volunteering law in Austria (Freiwilligengesetz) gives the participant the security of health, pension and accident insurance as well as pocket money. Work in an NPO should promote the social engagement and awareness of the participant - this volunteering service includes women and men from the age of 17.

Measures to support NEETs

Austria has the fourth lowest level of NEETs in the EU at only 8.2%, and measures predating the beginning of the economic crisis, such as national
counselling frameworks for different levels of education and employment and the ‘training guarantee’ were introduced in 2008.

The ‘training guarantee’ means that every school graduate who does not have a place at an upper secondary school, or who cannot find a company-based apprenticeship place, is given the opportunity to learn a trade at a ‘supra-company training centre’ (the so-called training workshops, Lehrwerkstätten) financed by the Austrian government’s employment service. ‘Supra-company apprenticeship training’ has been set up as an equivalent part of dual VET alongside the regular company-based model. The target group for this measure is young people who cannot find a company-based apprenticeship place, despite their best efforts.

Also another new measure (AusbildungsFit) that especially targets NEETs was tested in two federal provinces of Austria, and it will now be extended to the rest of Austria. The ‘low-threshold programme’ AusbildungsFit focuses on young people with poor reading skills and poor results in mathematics. It provides training in basic qualifications and soft skills, an intensive vocational orientation, the opportunity to complete compulsory schooling, and consistent socio-pedagogical support.

**Country Specific Recommendations**

Within the European Semester, Austria is performing reasonably well, but in recent years, the country-specific recommendations for Austria have highlighted the issue of poor educational outcomes despite Austria’s above average spending on education. More than 25% of 15 year olds have poor reading skills, and outcomes are only slightly better in mathematics.

The biggest issue within the educational outcomes is the difference between young people from a migrant background and the rest of the country. This achievement gap is higher than anywhere else in the EU. Austria is also not doing enough to prevent early school leaving.

As a result of the continuing significant impact of socio-economic backgrounds on educational achievements, the council recommendations for Austria in 2012, 2013 and 2014 have included a recommendation to improve educational outcomes in particular for young people from a migrant background. Measures include enhancing early childhood education and reducing the negative effects of early selection and solidifying initiatives to stop them from dropping out of school.4

*With a contribution from Sabine Stellnberger, Berufsförderungsinstitut Oberösterreich, Austria*

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4 Council Recommendation on the National Reform Programme 2014 of Austria and delivering a Council opinion on the Stability Programme of Austria, 2014
BULGARIA

Despite introducing some new strategies to solve problems within the education system, Bulgaria is still struggling from many educational problems. These include very low lifelong learning rates, a high number of NEETs, ensuring that vocational education and training is relevant and inclusive education, and the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Bulgaria needs to introduce several policy developments to improve the situation and reach the Europe 2020 targets.

Recommendations

- Adult education opportunities and measures to prevent early school dropouts, particularly among disadvantaged groups.
- Develop a national, coherent scheme for validation of NFIL.
- Improve access to quality education and lifelong learning for all.

Promoting access and participation in lifelong learning

The percentage of people taking part in lifelong learning in Bulgaria is the lowest in the entire European Union with only 1.7% of people aged 25-64 receiving some form of regular education. In particular, the participation in adult education is alarmingly low in Bulgaria. Only 1.2% of adults engage in educational activities. To meet the Europe 2020 targets for lifelong learning the Bulgarian government has increased public financing and it is expected that 2014 will see an increase of around 75% in the number of employed and unemployed enrolled in adult education courses financed by the State budget.

Equal access to education for disadvantaged groups is ensured through the provision of financial support to students, in accordance with the 2013 Law on the state budget of the Republic of Bulgaria (LSBRB) and the tri-annual budget framework. It includes the annual provision of textbooks free of charge to students with special educational needs, the inclusion of children from ethnic minorities in “host” schools, and free commuting for children up to the age of 16 to state and municipal schools.

Adult education opportunities and measures to prevent early school dropouts are needed particularly among disadvantaged groups.

Vocational education and training

Up to 59% of upper secondary school students in Bulgaria are in vocational education and training. However, Bulgaria is still experiencing setbacks, such as limited opportunities and training that is badly adapted to the needs of the various target groups, and the lack of support systems. The problems are further aggravated by the fact that the majority of the potential trainees have a lower socio-economic and educational status. The Bulgarian education and training systems are not adapted to market needs. The vocational training system requires updating in order to provide young people with skills relevant to their learning and further opportunities in the world of education and employment. Currently the situation among working youth shows that education is often unrelated to the jobs as for 54% of young workers young people’s educational background is not related to their employment.
The State plans to manage admission to secondary and higher education together with the participation of employers, in order to bring the number and structure of qualifications into line with the needs of the labour market and future developments in fundamental sectors in the economy. Vocational training will also be adjusted to the needs of municipalities and regions by including a wide range of institutions and business representatives when determining the orientation and organisation of vocational education. The Bulgarian VET model is highly school-based, and improved cooperation with the labour market would improve the possibility of young people getting access to quality work-based learning to enhance their skills and employability.

Apart from the relevance of the education itself, the students and graduates in VET suffer from insufficient flexibility between the different learning solutions. They suffer especially between vocational education and training and higher education, and the lack of further education possibilities, including adult learning. Bulgaria needs to enhance the quality of its vocational education and training and to integrate it better into the general educational structures so as to allow for flexible pathways, reduce early school leaving and improve access to lifelong learning.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning

The Ministry of Education and Science has adopted a Strategy for Lifelong learning (2014-2020). The National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET) has developed a project called “New opportunity for my future” which is linked to the process of validation of the results of non-formal education in the field of VET. The main result of the project is a system of validation of competences gained in non–formal and informal learning. A test period for the system was implemented, free of charge, until the end of October 2014. The LLL (Life Long Learning) Strategy aims to reach 5% participation in all LLL activities by 2020.

The process has so far reached results by acquainting the wider audience with the key documents: --the National Strategy for ongoing vocational training 2005-2010; the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2007-2013; the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2014-2020, the Council Recommendations from 2012, and the existing schemes such as “Youthpass”and “The National Programme for Youth”, which is a major step towards developing a national policy.

Despite these developments and the current strategy, there remains no overarching validation scheme for non-formal and informal learning in place in Bulgaria.

Early school leaving

Equal access to education for disadvantaged groups is ensured through the provision of financial support to students, in accordance with the 2013 Law on the State budget of the Republic of Bulgaria (LSBRB) and the tri-annual budget framework. It includes the annual provision of textbooks free-of-charge to students with special educational needs, the inclusion of children from ethnic minorities in “host” schools, and free commuting for children up to 16 years old to state and municipal schools.

To improve the effectiveness of policies in support of children at risk, the Inclusive Education Project was launched using ESF funding. The project will conduct a screening test for 3 year olds in all
kindergartens across the country (about 50,000 children) to identify children who may develop, or have developed, learning difficulties. 470 speech therapists and psychologists will be trained to perform the test, and following the screening, 25 kindergartens across the country will set up groups for children with special educational needs (SEN). However, the early school leaving rate in Bulgaria is still 12.5%, so the country needs to implement proper measures to achieve the EU2020 goal of under 10% early school leaving.

**Investment in education**

Government investment in education was about €1.43 billion, or 3.6% of GDP, in 2012. In 2013 the percentage figure remained the same (3.6%) with the gross amount rising very slightly to €1.49 billion, a rise of around €70 million euro in one year. In 2014, in accordance with an LSBRB, investment in education was 3.8% of GDP (or €1.58 billion). Despite this slight growth, this item in the State Budget is one of the lowest in the EU. At the time of writing (November 2014), the 2015 LSBRB (Law on the State Budget of the Republic of Bulgaria) was not yet prepared and it is hard to foresee what the concrete parameters will be. The numbers will probably be similar. Since a new right wing coalition government was formed at the beginning of November, more austerity measures were announced as part of overcoming the economic crisis. Nevertheless, the Education sector was defined by the Government as a priority. No significant changes or transformations are foreseen.

In general, for the last few years, the accent has been on skills development related to the labour market and finding the first job. Overall, about 86% of the expenditure is in the field of pre-school and school education, 12% is directed to higher education and science and 4% is invested in the development of LLL programmes and activities. The plan for the next two years has no major differences. In general, the priority is to increase the percentage of people taking part in LLL from 1.7% (as mentioned before) up to 5% by 2020. Despite this, there are no significant major public investments in the field of non-formal and informal learning, except for funding NGOs working in this field.

**Citizenship education**

Citizenship education is a separate subject taught at secondary level, both in general upper secondary education and in vocational upper secondary education. The state has defined the standards and objectives for citizenship education. This includes firstly the most important social spheres (the family, the school, the work environment, small communities and so on), secondly the development of citizen attitudes and skills, thirdly general human values including the laws of a democratic state, fourthly the structure and function of both the national and the European institutions, fifthly citizenship, sixthly orientation around the global and regional processes, and finally responsible participation in public life.

**Promoting active citizenship and volunteering for social cohesion**

Bulgaria is the only European country which does not have a law regulating volunteering. This is the main obstacle for the NGOs and the civil society organisations which work with volunteers. Currently in Bulgaria it is the NGOs that are mainly involved voluntary work. Not only are they engaging volunteers, they are also managing training and campaigns
about volunteering. The expectations concerning improvements in voluntary work in Bulgaria are therefore focused on them, and on the informative, cooperative and professional development of volunteering. For the first time, the Bulgarian National Assembly has set up a committee which works together with NGOs. This committee monitors the dialogue with members of NGOs and holds public discussions on topics which are important for civil society. It also considers proposals for referendums and citizen initiatives. At the present time, a law on volunteering is being drafted and it will be presented to the committee in the National Assembly, which for the first time regulates social relations associated with organised volunteering in Bulgaria. The purpose of this law is to regulate legal relations of volunteering to encourage active citizenship, to develop civil society and to strengthen solidarity (Briefing 65).

**Measures to support NEETs**

Bulgaria has concerning levels of both youth unemployment at 30% and NEETs at 24.6%.

Under the national ‘Employment for Youth’ initiative, Bulgaria has committed itself to reduce the 15-24 year old unemployment rate to 23% and the rate of young people not in employment, education and training (NEETs) down to 19% by the end of 2013. Nevertheless, an integrated approach to youth policies is still lacking, hampering the successful delivery of the Youth Guarantee. Given that almost one young person in four is neither involved in the labour market nor in the education system, the pool of NEETs is proposed as the main target group for labour market activation policies in the country.

The youth unemployment rate in the 15-29 age group continues to rise, and in 2013 it reached 28.5% (0.2 percentage points. higher than in the previous year). At 62%, the share of unemployed young people without qualifications and facing a ‘specific barrier’ is the highest in Europe.

In 2014, Bulgaria launched the implementation of the European Youth Guarantee Initiative. In response to the EU Council recommendation on establishing a youth guarantee as well as reducing youth unemployment, the National Assembly approved amendments in the Employment Promotion Law, which introduced new incentives to support youth employment. One of these new incentives is to provide qualified young people with their first job. It provides monetary incentives to employers who create additional vacancies to hire young people under the age of 29, who have completed their secondary or higher education and who have no work experience, in positions according to their education and qualification level. The subsidy period is 6 to 18 months, and the amounts start at 30% for the first six months, increasing to 50% for the 7-12 month period, and 75% for final six months.

**Country Specific Recommendations**

In the Country Specific Recommendations for 2013 and 2014, Bulgaria is facing the challenge of failing to improve the overall quality and efficiency of its education system. It suffers from having one of the highest proportions of NEETs, implying a severe under-utilisation and under-development of human capital. The recommendations also call for taking up the School Education Act, providing a framework for implementation of the necessary comprehensive reforms of the school system, including the
modernisation of curricula and improved training for teachers.

Another re-occurring issue in the Bulgarian education system is the inclusion and access to education for disadvantaged groups, in particular Roma children, and the poor quality of vocational education and training. The Council has repeatedly recommended that Bulgaria extends the coverage and effectiveness of its active labour market policies to match the profiles of job-seekers, and reach out to non-registered young NEETs, in line with the objectives both of the youth guarantee and improving access to quality education.

With a contribution from Stefan Georgiev, Institute for Social Integration, Bulgaria
Even though Croatian education has experienced substantial reforms over the last decade, its performance shows several weaknesses at different levels. In particular, Croatia lacks sufficient public investment in education to improve the accessibility and quality of its education systems. Equally, national policy reforms and strategies created to improve education in the past years are a good step, but they have not been well implemented.

Recommendations

- Develop a national, coherent scheme for the validation of NFIL.
- Reform VET to make it more attuned to the labour market, and provide students with the skills and personal development opportunities needed
- Improve access to quality education and lifelong learning for all
- Implement the long-awaited reform of citizenship education in order to improve participation and active citizenship from a young age.

Low participation in lifelong learning is the result of two types of obstacles, firstly the lack of a coherent institutional framework and, secondly, this is combined with a poorly developed infrastructure for most of the relevant providers.

Vocational education and training

The VET system in Croatia requires reorganisation in order to become more attuned to the labour market and provide the students with the skills and personal development opportunities needed. Initial VET is well represented at upper secondary level, accounting for more than 70% of students enrolled at this level in 2011, well above the EU average of 50%. Women are also especially well represented within the system, as 64% of young women in upper secondary are VET students. However, the popularity of an education system does not guarantee quality education, and participation drops when looking at continuous VET or adult learning.

The development of the Croatian VET system lacks a coherent approach. The different tracks of the VET system function more or less completely separately, but they fail to set clear operating jurisdictions.
between competent public bodies. Moreover, they are not anchored in a broader strategic economic and educational outlook. Up to 57% of Croatian enterprises offer some form of vocational training, but there is no coherent system of quality assurance in place for everyone, and the gap between the training institutions, schools and companies is wide.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning

Currently Croatia does not have a system in place for validation of non-formal and informal learning, or a national strategy for validation. The topic is embedded in several national strategies, most importantly in the National Strategy for Adult Education (2007), which has as an objective the introduction of validation of non-formal and informal learning at the national level. Equally, the Development Strategy of the Vocational Education System sets “developing qualifications based on skills and learning outcomes” as an objective and it emphasises that Bulgaria needs to consider models of evaluating and recognising informal and non-formal learning.

As the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning still cannot be formally validated, and there are numerous cases where other pieces of legislation either fail to take logical steps to promote lifelong learning, or they seem to work directly against its objectives, a system of incentives for up-skilling contributions to competitiveness should be promoted, rather than de-skilling where it is achieved by downward wage pressure.

Early school leaving

Croatian rates of early school leaving are traditionally low (4.5% in 2013), but recent research indicates that this may partly be a result of some rather unfavourable processes within the three year VET system. In a nutshell, schools providing three year VET programmes are facing increasing problems in finding sufficient numbers of first-year pupils to maintain those programmes and therefore make employment of school staff worthwhile. Consequently, they often take various measures to prevent dropping out, one of these mechanisms is assigning pupils to the less popular programmes (such as tailoring, for which there is not much demand) or programmes less demanding assistance, usually reserved for students with disabilities or learning difficulties. Further analysis is needed to examine whether these practices are widespread across the three year VET system, and to understand its ramifications for social inclusion.

A serious effort, however, will be required to reach the national and European 2020 target. Educational outcomes at primary and secondary level are low, and they raise the question of the quality of compulsory education. In particular, the educational achievements of 15 year-old students have deteriorated, remaining below the EU average. Participation in early childhood education is low compared to the EU average, despite some improvement in recent years.

Investment in education

According to the Independent Union of Research and Higher Education Employees of Croatia, Croatia spent 3.21% of its GDP on education in 2013 and 3.05% in 2014. Planning and
projections for 2015 show that additional cuts in the education sector are predicted, with spending possibly as low as 2.95% of GDP. This budget allocation covers a wide range of services under the competence of Ministry of Science, Education and Sports and puts Croatia at the bottom of the League of EU countries when it comes to public spending on education.

**Citizenship education**

Citizenship education is a separate subject taught at secondary level, in both general and vocational upper secondary education in Croatia. A ‘Framework Curriculum’ from 2010 defines the knowledge, skills and capacities and attitudes for the cross-curricular programme 'Education for human rights and democratic citizenship'. These objectives may be implemented in different ways - through an inter-disciplinary approach, as a separate optional subject, as extra-curricular activities such as projects and community-based activities, or they may be systematically applied through the entire school curriculum. Croatia is also one of the few countries in Europe where the teaching time of citizenship education is only specified in upper secondary education.

Croatia is also one of the few countries in Europe where the teaching time on citizenship education is only specified in upper secondary education. It was anticipated that the full implementation of citizenship education will start in 2014, but this deadline has been extended until all the technical preconditions are met, which brings uncertainty in the enforcement of the decision. Therefore citizenship education still remains an optional subject in those schools that experimentally included it in their curriculum.

**Promoting active citizenship and volunteering for social cohesion**

Active citizenship, especially when it comes to young people, is more and more recognised by policy makers in the public debate in Croatia. Research efforts undertaken by several Croatian non-governmental organisations on knowledge and the attitudes of young people towards participation in communities indicate a lack of familiarity with democratic processes, and also a lack of motivation to participate in the everyday life of the community. Thus, when it comes to active youth participation, we face problems in both the main categories which influence its outreach and effectiveness - skill sets and motivation. One of the potential solutions to this problem of creating “passive citizens” may be introducing knowledge about the human rights system and political knowledge and skills in schools. Education is recognised as a good instrument for “reaching out” to every citizen. Civil society in Croatia, as well as parts of the academic community, recognises the importance of civic education. After years of advocacy, civic education has finally become a relevant policy issue in the Croatian context. In 2012, the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports adopted a Decree on Experimental Implementation and the Monitoring of Civic Education Curricula in twelve elementary and secondary schools for the school years year 2012/2013 and 2013/2014. As a part of this Decree, the Croatian Youth Network and Agency for Teachers Education coordinated the implementation of national civic education curricula in 12 schools (8 primary and 4 secondary) throughout Croatia.

The youth sector in the Republic of Croatia has been developing rapidly since the beginning of 2000s. In the last decade, a
few different youth organisational forms and structures have developed under the influence of youth organisations, especially those engaged in voluntary work. Notwithstanding these development trends, there is no systematic approach by the government towards this sector. For several years, there has been a wide discussion on possible solutions. The Ministry of Social Policy and Youth is currently creating the National Programme for Youth, including a wide scope of objectives and measures in different policy areas such as education, youth work, and support for the development of youth organisations, employment, and culture and leisure time. The current process of creating the third programme has shown some progress in terms of inter-sectoral cooperation.

Although volunteering has a long tradition in Croatia, which can be linked to the concept of solidarity, it is only in the last 10-15 years that we have seen concrete developments in this area. This is due to a strong development of the institutional framework and volunteering infrastructure. Although the public image of volunteering has had a huge positive “make over”, the number of volunteers still remains fairly low in comparison with other EU countries. However, Croatia fares better than other countries in the region, or the other post-communist countries. The Act on Volunteering is a key institutional mechanism which defines and promotes volunteering. It dates back to 2007 and it was amended in 2013. The law is fairly non-restrictive and it has only undergone minimal changes, mainly with the aim of facilitating obstacles to volunteering, protecting vulnerable groups and encouraging the recognition of experience as a volunteer in the labour market. The government is currently preparing the first national strategy for the development of volunteering which focuses on promoting volunteering among young people, increasing volunteering opportunities, developing systems for volunteering in crisis situations, strengthening the volunteering infrastructure and recognising and validating the learning outcomes from volunteering.

The following challenges remain: the need to strengthen volunteer centres as key pillars of a volunteering infrastructure; the promotion of volunteering in schools; increasing the frequency of volunteering; recognition of volunteering in the labour market and formal education; increasing volunteering opportunities beyond the civil sector (particularly in the health care, social care and education systems); systematic collection of data on volunteering and regular field research; setting up a system for determining the economic value of volunteering; and finally the promotion of employees’ (or corporate) volunteering. 5

**Measures to support NEETs**

In Croatia, in 2012, some 22% of 18 to 24 year-olds were not in employment, education or training, compared to the EU average of 17%. There are also wide differences with markedly more young male NEETs than women NEETs in Croatia compared to the EU average.

In 2012 and during most of 2013, the Croatian government mostly focused its efforts on expanding traineeship schemes. In the second half of 2013, Croatia finally began investing considerably in developing its own Youth Guarantee scheme. Most of this work was carried out by the inter-sectoral working group, encompassing representatives of the

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public sector, the trade unions, employers and civil society organisations. The Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan was submitted in late December 2013, paving the way for about €62 million from the Youth Employment Initiative Fund. Nevertheless, there are serious issues regarding the scheme’s comprehensiveness. For example, there was a lack of time coordinating stakeholders around the most demanding interventions, such as professional career guidance which was of interest to many unemployed young people. Finally, problems especially relevant in the Croatian context exist in relation to long-term youth unemployment. In line with the latest elaborations from the European Commission, the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan is very much focused on building a system of early intervention (within a 4 month period), whereas measures tailored to the needs of those youngsters who are at greatest risk of social exclusion are pretty much left out. This fact poses the question of societal responsibility and systematic efforts aimed at those young people who very much represent the face of a long-term lack of interest in building a coherent régime of labour market integration. When the financial crisis hit, the lack of labour market integration took its toll.

**Country Specific Recommendations**

As Croatia only joined the European Union in 2013, there is only a country specific recommendation for 2014.

From the Council’s perspective, the situation in the Croatian labour market is of particular concern to young people as their unemployment increased drastically and reached almost 50% in 2013, while the proportion of NEETs also keeps increasing. Croatia also faces serious challenges in education as regards labour-market relevance and the quality of provision across all educational sectors. Work-based learning and careers guidance across secondary and tertiary education are lacking, while employers’ engagement with vocational education and training, and secondary and tertiary education, is also low.

The government needs to implement measures to improve the labour market relevance and the quality of education outcomes firstly by modernising the qualification systems, secondly by putting in place quality assurance mechanisms, and finally by improving school-to-work transitions, notably through strengthening vocational education and work-based learning.

A possible solution to these problems is the pending Croatian Framework for Qualifications and the national Strategy on Education, Science and Technology, but these policies need to be implemented effectively before possible outcomes can be seen.

*With a contribution from Nina Rapo, SOLIDAR*
In the field of education and lifelong learning, Denmark has been performed extremely well for a long time, compared to many other European countries. Nevertheless, Denmark has also been affected by the economic crisis and needs to further develop measures to tackle inequalities in education, especially to guarantee equal access to education.

Recommendations

- Develop a national, coherent scheme for validation of non-formal and informal learning.
- Reform VET in order to improve the accessibility and the inclusion of vocational training, including increasing the number of apprenticeships to reduce early school leaving.
- Introducing preventive measures to control early school leaving.
- Improve access to quality education and lifelong learning for everyone.

Promoting access and participation in lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is deeply rooted in Danish traditions and culture. Denmark is one of the EU leaders in adult participation in lifelong learning with a rate of 31.6% in 2012 against an EU average of 10%. More women participate in lifelong learning (37.8%) than men (25.4%), but there is no significant difference between native-born (31.6%) and foreign-born (31.5%) citizens. While the great majority of learning activities in adult education in the EU are of a non-formal nature, this is less the case in Denmark, where almost 6% of adults report having participated in formal learning during the last twelve months (EU 2.4%).

The high participation rates reflect several conditions such as the national strategy to focus on knowledge-intensive specialist sectors and lifelong learning, a large public sector, and a tradition for strong ties between educational institutions and the social partners. Adult vocational training programmes, offering short vocational training programmes to skilled and unskilled workers, as well as to the unemployed, have a significant role to play in this regard.⁶

Access to enterprise-provided vocational training is high, with 85% of enterprises reporting as having offered such courses (EU 66%). Nevertheless, the majority of learning happens outside employment: more than three times as many adults report having participated in "other job-related learning activities" than in activities sponsored by their employers. Denmark has also begun to place more emphasis on policies that reach more marginalised groups in society and that seek to close the socio-economic gaps in society. The local integration council in Aarhus, for example, has launched a campaign to publicise and reverse declining participation rates among disadvantaged groups in collaboration with the Danish Youth Council.

Vocational education and training

Denmark has a well-functioning and organised system of dual vocational training, combining school- and work-based learning with apprenticeships. Over

⁶ CEDEFOP country report
50% of students in upper secondary education are in VET, in either technical VET or business schools (handelsskol). There is also a system of tertiary VET providing professional bachelor degrees in different sectors. Denmark also introduced a programme that bridges the gap between general upper secondary education and VET. It offers young people the opportunity to gain both vocational qualifications providing direct access to the labour market, and general qualifications providing the same opportunities for continuing in higher education as students in the general upper secondary programmes. This improves the further education and the employment opportunities for young people.

A problem in the VET system in Denmark is the more or less constant lack of apprenticeship placements for students in VET. This leads to prolonged studying times during which students cannot do the work-based learning in their schedule. In the worst cases, the socially disadvantaged drop out as they do not have the resources to fight for apprenticeship placements. At any given time, a considerable number of students enrolled in VET are likely to be inactive, not attending classes or in a training placement, although they have not (as yet) officially dropped out, and this statistic also shows up in the completion rates for VET.

When no suitable placements are available in a desired programme to begin vocational training, students are offered admission to another associated main programme where placements are available. Another possibility is for the student to enter a training agreement with the college itself, where practical training also takes place at the college. Improving the availability of training placements is a political priority, as is finding alternatives for company-based training.

**Validation of non-formal and informal learning**

Denmark has a long tradition of individual competency evaluation. It has been practiced in vocational training since 1997, in Basic Adult Education since 2001, and in vocational education and training programmes since 2003. But from 2004 to 2014 it was developed much more.

To understand the Danish attitudes to the question it has to be understood in the context of the Danish Society Model, with active citizen’s participation on all levels. Many civil society organisations play a strong and direct democratic role. In Danish culture, there is a long tradition of non-formal and informal education and learning in civil society organisations, in Folk High Schools, in Adult Education Organisations running democratic and cultural activities, evening classes, study circles and so on.

For many years this kind of non-formal and informal learning culture compensated for limited formal education and skills, and real skills were in many fields seen as equally as important as the documentation from formal education and skills. This gave low-skilled, unskilled and skilled workers a chance for social mobility in their jobs, in their overall careers, in various organisations, and in politics.

As a result of changes and industrial restructuring, Denmark is getting 200,000 low skilled and unskilled workers who do not fulfil the demands for skills needed to get a new job or keep a recent job. It will lack a skilled and more educated workforce in the future. In the EU as a whole, millions of workers are in the same
situation. The challenge for Denmark and the rest of the EU countries is to lift the level of education. In this respect, it is important that everyone’s real skills are recognised. This challenge is important for everyone. There is no reason and it is not meaningful to let everyone start from the beginning to get a qualification for a permanent job. The question of evaluation, validation and recognition of real skills and prior learning must be seen as part of the real knowledge and skills a person has, regardless of how they gained the skills. They could come through work, non-formal and informal education and learning, leisure, cultural experience, NGOs, trade unions or political activities.

In 2005 the Ministry of Education published a discussion paper about the recognition of prior learning: “Your skills – finding Denmark’s hidden competencies”. It was a discussion paper to qualify the initiatives to be taken by all stakeholders. Its focus was mainly on the recognition of prior learning or real skills in connection with the formal education system, which was very job-market and labour market oriented. New legislation in 2007 made it obligatory in certain educational areas to fulfil the right of adults to ask an educational institution to assess their real skills and get them recognised in the education system.

To conclude, Denmark has a long experience recognising real skills and prior learning. It is now implemented in the formal education system, and it benefits a lot of people, society and businesses. However the third sector is lagging behind in documenting these real skills.

**Early school leaving**

Denmark has already reached, and gone under the EU2020 target of a ratio of under 10% for early school leavers. However, despite compulsory education working well in reaching all children, the upper secondary level is performing significantly worse. The highest amounts of drop outs is within initial vocational education and training, where the problem persists due to insufficient amount of work-based learning placements for everyone enrolled, despite 85% of enterprises reporting as having offered training.

Simultaneously, Denmark has introduced measures for reintegration through vocational education and training, a programme called “Projection Schools”, which provides young people under 25 who have not completed a qualifying education with a different learning experience through practical work in a binding real working community. 7 This however is a measure addressing an existing problem, instead of a preventive approach.

**Investment in education**

Denmark spends 8.75% of its GDP on education, which is one of the highest amounts of public investment in the world, and the highest in the OECD and EU countries. Between 2008 and 2010 Denmark also increased the total public expenditure in education, despite the decrease of GDP due to the financial crisis.

Of the public investment, the majority is going towards formal education and especially vocational education training and higher education, and less towards non-formal and informal learning activities. The formal education receives higher funding in comparison as it is seen as necessary for growth and employment.

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7 CESifo DICE Report 3/2012
Citizenship education

Citizenship education is not a separate subject at either primary or secondary level, but elements related to citizenship education are embedded in the general objectives and values of the education system. There are no requirements for subject-based citizenship teaching, nor for introducing it through a cross-curricular approach. Additionally in Denmark, according to the Act on the Danish Folkeskole and regulations on upper secondary education, the teaching and daily activities of schools must be conducted in a spirit of intellectual freedom, equality and democracy.

Promoting active citizenship and volunteering for social cohesion

In Denmark civil society policy is formulated by the Parliament. The NGOs and CSOs (Civil Society Organisations) play a role in dialogue and consultation in national and European issues. Denmark is one of the most active European countries in volunteering and active citizenship. Active citizenship is related to the fact that Denmark is a country where the politicians have not become distanced from the population, and where most citizens are members of many different types of NGOs and CSOs.

The socio-economic sector of Denmark continues to develop. A Centre for Social Economy has been established. At the end of 2013 a strategy to make it easier to establish social economic companies was launched.

Measures to support NEETs

Youth unemployment has increased in Denmark not unlike in many other countries, although it remains well below the EU average at 13.7%. However, youth unemployment is a high priority in the government’s policy plans. This is partly due to the preventive measures to tackle the problem of losing or never getting a foothold on the labour market. Almost 50% of unemployed young people have other difficulties in addition to unemployment, and they are characterised as “not labour market ready”, living on social benefits rather than unemployment benefits. The preventive measures are also intended to get young people out of unemployment or inactivity before their working life becomes marked by it. Another problem highlighted by our Danish members and partners is that youth unemployment does not differentiate between skilled, unskilled, highly educated and uneducated young people – unemployment has increased among all these groups.

Denmark is still processing the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans, to help not only the young unemployed but also the 7.6% of young people not in employment, education or training.

Country Specific Recommendations

The Country Specific Recommendations call on Denmark to improve the quality and cost effectiveness of its education and training systems, including decreasing the dropout rates of vocational training, and increasing the number of available apprenticeship placements for future skills needs and productivity. The Council Recommendation also points out that Denmark needs to further implement measures to improve the employability of marginal groups and people from

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disadvantaged backgrounds, and work towards getting better educational outcomes for these people. The vocational education and training system and work-based learning are especially in need of further reforms.

*With a contribution from Arbejdernes Oplysningsforbund, Denmark*
FRANCE

France has been engaged in ambitious reforms across all sectors and levels of education and training for the past two years. Overall, the French education system continues to deliver results on average in comparison with its international peers, but it is still unable to reduce educational inequalities. Disparities have been widening during the last decade, due to the sharp increase in the number of low achievers. Vocational training in particular, together with access to lifelong learning and apprenticeships, are insufficiently developed.

Recommendations

- Improve lifelong learning opportunities.
- Modernise the VET system, including adding more work-based learning and apprenticeships possibilities.
- Actively take measures to prevent early school leaving. A better link between non-formal and formal systems could be an instrument for a better comprehensive education.
- A more comprehensive reform of the education system is needed to reduce school dropout rates, as well as improve vocational training. The quality of education should be distributed more evenly, avoiding large differences in the level of education among all pupils.

Promoting access and participation in lifelong learning

In France, throughout their lives, people can access education as part of a process of lifelong learning. In 2008-2009, 85% of young people aged 2-22 were in education, i.e. almost 15 million schoolchildren and students. In 2009, one in three employees participated in a training programme. Lifelong learning gives everyone a chance for education, either at school or university, or through vocational education and training for all working people of whatever age. In 2013, 17.7% of French people between the ages 24 and 64 were participating in some form of education or training.

The framework training law of 24th November 2009 included the principle of a universal and lifelong right to career guidance, and it created a public career information and guidance service. Today, everyone has the right to career information, advice and guidance.

Vocational education and training

The French initial VET system is very school-based, with a combination of general education, theoretical and practical vocational education, project work and internships, in which the student spends 12-16 weeks over two years. Equally the upper secondary VET, vocational baccalaureate includes some work-based learning through internships, but the amount of work-based learning in France is below the European average, especially when compared to countries with highly company-based VET systems. In France, the training market is free; this means that training bodies have no obligation to make public the way they construct their courses or qualifications, which makes the quality assurance of training more challenging.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning

There are numerous certification systems
in France, considering that certification stems from acts consisting of evaluating a person’s acquired competence and knowledge as compared with a reference defining: the nature of the acquired competence and knowledge to be evaluated; the evaluation criteria used to show possession of this acquired competence and knowledge; the methods used to make such evaluations or the actors competent to make such evaluations.

The law of 2002 is an inter-ministerial cooperation and the responsibility for its implementation depends on the type of qualification targeted (ministry and stakeholders). Specific rules and practices for implementation are under the responsibility of each ministry awarding qualification.

Abilities assessment is an arrangement provided that enables employees to draw up a summary of their personal and vocational experience at a given point in their vocational career. The objectives are to update the professional and personal experience of a person; to identify knowledge and skills acquired in their professional and personal life; and to identify their potential. This process permits people to analyse their personal and vocational abilities in order to set up a future vocational or training project. It can be carried out within the framework of a training plan or training leave.

The widest validation arrangement is the validation of experience acquired (VAE). This individual entitlement, set up by the French social modernisation law of 2002, enables people holding jobs or job seekers to obtain all or part of a vocational certification, in the same way as for certification obtained through apprenticeship, or through initial or ongoing training. The application is free, but guidance has a cost (different forms of financial support exist - grants from the vocational training funds, a financial contribution from the employer or from the employee). The employers can combine financial support with two days' leave of absence to prepare the VAE. Increasing numbers of companies are implementing collective VAE for their employees (they help their employees to find accompaniment for the procedure, and propose adjustments of working hours, in order to raise their employees’ qualification levels).

There are similar provisions for employees in the public sector and self-employed people (farmers, craftsmen, self-employed workers, tradesmen and shopkeepers, members of the professions) can also undergo training. They make obligatory contributions to finance their training, by paying into a collecting organisation approved by the French State. 49.1% of French people aged 25-64 take part in non-formal education each year.

**Early school leaving**

The French education system has not been able to reduce the early school leaving rate which has remained at around 12% over the last six years.

The recent ‘Youth priority’ action plan, which is still to be implemented, includes concrete medium-term measures related to education, early school leaving and employment. Two positive aspects of the “youth priority” action plan are the appointment of an inter-ministerial delegate for youth, as well as the participation and inclusion of CSOs and peoples’ education organisations in the ongoing work of the action plan.
In France, within the Ministry of Education, the Mission to Tackle Early School Leaving (mission de lutte contre le décrochage scolaire - MLDS) is in charge of preventing ESL and helping school leavers return to school or training. Under the leadership of the Ministry of Education, up to eight different Ministries are involved in reducing ESL. Regular policy dialogue across Ministries has been developed, for example, inter-service meetings take place every two months and inter-service working groups have been established with responsibility for developing common tools, collecting best practices and organising awareness-raising events. In the framework of the inter-ministerial coordination, 360 local 'platforms' have been created throughout the country since 2010. They work in partnership with local stakeholders and networks active in the fields of education, youth work, youth inclusion and provision of guidance, employment, health, justice and agriculture. Their aim is to ensure that more coordinated and tailored solutions are offered to young people identified as early school leavers.10

France has also given attention to second chance education through 40 schools aimed at young people who have not finished secondary education.

Investment in education

France spends 5.68% of its GDP on education. In the view of the SOLIDAR Foundation’s French members, there has been a very good and necessary reform of the formal education system in the past two years, even if the financing of one part of the reform was not sufficient. The link between formal and non-formal education is very clear and positive in the new reform. Nevertheless, one part of the budget has to be developed by the municipalities or regions, who protest as they do not have the budget for development. On another hand, the Ministry of Youth and Sports financially supports associations and non-formal organisations in the field of citizenship and non-formal education. There is a very committed choice from the government to invest in different sectors of education, but the different organisations in our sector think that it is not enough.

There have not been major changes in the public investment in the last two years. In November 2014, a new plan for fighting against early school leaving was accepted, with a national plan creating an important link between formal and non-formal education.

Citizenship education

In France, citizenship education is a separate subject taught throughout primary, lower and upper secondary education. In total, over 12 years of citizenship education starts at the age of 6.

In France, the 2006 common core of knowledge and competences includes ‘Social and civic competences’ and specifies the related knowledge, skills and attitudes pupils should acquire by several key points during compulsory education (the 2nd and 5th years of primary education, and last year of lower secondary education). However, apart from school life, only the specific subjects dedicated to citizenship education are identified as learning contexts. 11 France also has the highest amount of annual


dedicated time to citizenship education in the EU.

Promoting active citizenship and volunteering for social cohesion

Different programmes promote youth volunteering in France, such as the civil service programme (“service civique”) and volunteering in companies or public administration. The Civil Service programme gives all 16 to 25 year olds an opportunity to engage in a public utility mission in non-profit or public organisations for a period of 6 to 12 months. The objective of the government is to reach 10% of the age group in 2017, including 25% of disadvantaged youngsters.

There are also possibilities of engaging in volunteering without an age limit, such as international solidarity, the army, or the fire service. Currently “le movement associatif” is running an evaluation of volunteering activities outside the legal framework. The promotion of volunteering and citizenship is helped by a subsidy (model operating grants) to different national non-formal and youth organisations.¹²

Measures to support NEETs

The unemployment rate in France is 10.9%. Although a number of measures for young job-seekers were enacted in 2012, youth unemployment increased rapidly throughout the year, in particular among people with the lowest level of education. The youth unemployment rate was 25.4% in 2013, although it fell slightly in April 2013. A gap exists between the comparatively large proportion of young people pursuing their studies and those with the lowest level of education, whom unemployment has hit primarily. However, senior unemployment is rising steadily, as well as long term unemployment.

The likelihood of moving from a temporary to a permanent job remains much lower than the EU average. The government has launched an initiative to offer 150,000 subsidised jobs to young people (the ‘emplois d’avenir’), mostly in the public sector and with a focus on the most deprived areas and the least qualified. The government also intends to establish a Youth Guarantee scheme which was tested in 10 pilot areas in France in 2013.

In the view of the French members of SOLIDAR, the rising level of unemployment and social dropouts among young people, of whom 14.5% are NEETs, calls for additional measures to strengthen the conventional policies of social and professional integration. In certain cases young people in disadvantaged situations lack the capacity to engage in actions which are too prescriptive or too binding for their psycho-emotional situation. A longer, step by step approach is therefore needed, including positive construction and the enhancement of self-esteem, and the learning of essential social skills.¹³

Country Specific Recommendations

In the past few years, the Council Recommendations for France have targeted in particular adult participation in lifelong learning, education inequality (where France has amongst the highest levels of the OECD countries), and the development of the vocational training and apprenticeship schemes.

¹² Europe2020: How to spur social progress for a more inclusive Europe?, SOLIDAR, 2014

¹³ Europe2020: How to spur social progress for a more inclusive Europe?, SOLIDAR, 2014
A sixth of young people in France leave education and training without a qualification, and measures to promote apprenticeships should be targeted especially to young people with low or no qualifications, including significantly increasing the number of apprenticeships. Positively, the number of adults in lifelong learning has increased over the past few years.

France needs to modernise its vocational training system, improve the transition from education to the labour market and reduce educational inequalities in particular by strengthening measures on early school leaving.

*With contributions by David Lopez, La ligue de l’Enseignement, France*
Germany is a high performing country when it comes to the overall picture of education and lifelong learning, with an especially strong vocational training system in place. The issues remaining to be tackled include access to (vocational) education, inequality in education for people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the lack of an existing framework for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Due to its governing structure, with education being the responsibility of individual federal states, some differences can be seen between the different states. However, Germany has improved its performance in many areas, such as increased adult participation in lifelong learning in the past years.

Recommendations

- Improving inclusion within education, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Introducing a national comprehensive arrangement for the validation of non-formal and informal learning
- Raising the profile and participation of adults in lifelong learning, including outside formal structures

Promoting access and participation in lifelong learning

In Germany, adult participation in lifelong learning increased by 0.1% to reach 7.9% in 2012, while the EU average is 9.3%. In terms of investment in education and training, general government expenditure has declined slightly - it fell from 4.4% in 2009 to 4.3% in 2012.

Vocational education and training

The German VET system, also called the Dual Model, has earned significant praise around Europe as it is seen as very efficient, and it is often linked to Germany’s comparatively low unemployment figures. Germany has a strong cultural and historical context to support successful work-based learning, as companies have been involved in vocational training for centuries, and training has always been enterprise-centred. Vocational training is appreciated and valued as equal to academic education in Germany, and its appeal in society generally helps to keep the system alive, getting people to participate in and securing the accessibility of vocational training. It is therefore understandable that 55.6% of upper secondary school students in Germany are in vocational education and training.

The German model is based on work-based learning and apprenticeships, and the student is usually employed by the company providing the training, together with a school for general education with a ratio of 90% work-based and 10% school-based learning.

However, despite the positive aspects of the vocational training system in Germany, it is not without problems. The permeability of VET graduates is inadequate between different education systems (in particular in access to higher education) and also in the labour market. This is often due to high specialisation which limits the employment possibilities, especially in the labour market. The general environment in companies supports apprenticeships, but where they cannot find an apprenticeship within a company on their own, young
people are in need of other measures to access vocational training.

**Validation of non-formal and informal learning**

In the 2010 European Inventory on Validation of non-formal and informal learning, Germany had no legal framework and no standardised system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Given the allocation of responsibilities within a complex educational system, there are a variety of possible approaches, particularly below the political level. In contrast to other European countries, most of the approaches in Germany are established below political level (i.e. below regulative level), aiming at the acknowledgement of non-formal and informal learning as a precondition for a possible later “further” validation connected with entitlements. Many different approaches at regional and national level have been developed for different target groups in recent years through public funding. However, despite the variety of different approaches, there is no overall framework in place that could be identified as a validation arrangement.

**Early school leaving**

According to SOLIDAR’s partners, Germany should improve the general educational and training level of all adults, and not simply focus on labour market activation policies. In addition to lifelong learning indicators, it is also important to take general education and training opportunities in Germany into consideration. The overall educational level needs to be improved, with an emphasis on regional differences and early school and vocational education dropout rates, as well as on the situation of disadvantaged groups. There is still a negative correlation between social background and educational success. The more disadvantaged the social background of a child or youth is, the higher the risk of failing in the education system. The education system in Germany should be primarily focused on social justice and equal opportunities.

Germany’s school dropout rate (9.9%) remains below the EU average (13.5%) in overall terms and it is at a good level, having gone down from almost 15% in 2000. The same applies to the educational participation of the German population. A particularly high degree of educational participation of 58.7% for 25-64 year olds is revealed at upper secondary level, and in the post-secondary non-tertiary sector.

**Investment in education**

Germany spends 4.3% of its GDP on education, and is one of the 19 EU Member States that has decreased their expenditure in education in recent years. However, its national reform programme stipulates that investment in education and research will not be affected by budgetary consolidation. The German Länder, or regions, which organise a major portion of education, have equally increased expenditure on education (usually amounting to about one third of their total spending) to varying degrees.

In Germany, the financing of vocational training and continuing training is based on a system of mixed financing with a variety of different backers, both public and private. In this respect, the financing system of IVET and continuing general and vocational education differs quite substantially from that of the schools and

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14 Education and Training Monitor 2014, European Commission
universities sector, which benefits from relatively comprehensive public funding.

**Citizenship education**

In Germany, according to the Resolution of the Standing Conference of 6 March 2009 ‘Strengthening Democracy Education’, schools should promote the participation of pupils and students at all educational levels in institutions such as foundations and charitable trusts in their immediate surroundings. Citizenship education does not exist as a separate subject in Germany, as it is an integral part of other subjects and included in the curriculum at all levels of formal education. However, the emphasis on citizenship education may vary from one federal state to another as the federal states (Länder) are responsible for the design and implementation of citizenship education.

**Promoting active citizenship and volunteering for social cohesion**

Volunteering in Germany is an indispensable part of the civil protection and rescue services. However, Germany faces difficulties in its management of volunteering. Due to demographic changes and the abolition of compulsory military service, aid agencies face huge challenges in recruiting new volunteers. Although there has not been any empirical research on this matter, it is assumed that voluntary work is declining and it is difficult to find long-term volunteers. It is very complicated to get employers’ permission to do voluntary work, and it is becoming more difficult to combine work with volunteering.

In the opinion of SOLIDAR’s German members, this situation could be improved by increased innovation and the promotion of volunteerism among older people. More training and qualification possibilities for the elderly could not only improve voluntary work, but they could also become part of lifelong learning.\(^{15}\)

**Measures to support NEETs**

Germany is performing comparatively well when it comes to youth unemployment and the number of NEETs, which in 2013 was at 9.7%, far below the EU average.

The German government and other policy makers, together with employers and business organisations, very much take a labour market needs-oriented focus in ensuring that education, training or employment is available for young people. To satisfy future labour demand, not only NEETS but also other groups, such as women and migrants, need to be drawn into the labour market and supported in their education and training.

In the case of NEETs, most policy measures in Germany are targeted at young adults who did not graduate from school, and have not successfully completed vocational training, or suffer from other disadvantages disrupting their integration in the labour market. Educational matters are the responsibility of the 16 German states (Länder), which run their own programmes. A comprehensive overview of all measures on the regional and national levels is not available.

**Country Specific Recommendations**

In recent years, the Country Specific Recommendations have focused on two aspects related to education: increasing investment in education, especially in

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\(^{15}\) Europe2020: How to spur social progress for a more inclusive Europe?, SOLIDAR, 2014
order to reach the 2015 goal of 15% total public and private investment in education, and raising the educational achievement of disadvantaged people.

Though some progress can be seen in both areas, the link between educational achievement and socio-economic background remains especially strong, and this situation is stressed in the latest recommendation from 2014.

With a contribution from Katharina Wiegmann, AWO-Bundesverband e.V., Germany
GREECE

Greece has been impacted gravely by the economic crisis and austerity measures. Since May 2010, the euro area Member States and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been providing financial support to Greece with the aim of supporting efforts to restore fiscal sustainability. They have implemented structural reforms to improve the competitiveness of the Greek economy.

While academic education has a long history in Greece, adult learning and vocational education and training have suffered especially from poor quality and low participation rates. VET is stigmatised and seen as a poor choice for young people. Some steps have been taken in the past years to improve the education system.

Recommendations

- Further implementation of concrete measures to accompany the policy developments for lifelong learning.
- Reduce the number of early school leavers with disadvantaged backgrounds by improving social inclusion in education.
- Continue the already existing steps to create a national arrangement for validation of non-formal and informal learning.
- Measures should be implemented to improve adult education opportunities, particularly for migrants, the unemployed, women, and older people.
- The VET system in Greece needs to be updated urgently to match the needs of the learners, and it must provide quality education for everyone in vocational training. Introducing work-based learning models is one step.

Promoting access and participation in lifelong learning

Adult participation in lifelong learning in Greece has been, and still is, far below the EU average, and it is one of the lowest in the EU (2.9% in 2012), particularly among migrants, the low-skilled, the unemployed, women and older people.

A law from 2010, known as the “Development of Lifelong Learning”\(^\text{16}\), attempts, for the first time in Greece, to set up a single comprehensive framework for Lifelong Learning. In this context, the implementation of LLL policies aims to create significant structural changes. The coordination of the public, private and social sector involved in the promotion of LLL in Greece will strengthen cooperation and networking for development and growth in a knowledge economy and society.

Lifelong learning is a strategic tool for the implementation of the new policy priority on human resources qualifications. It is embedded in the redesign of the Greek growth model, focusing on improving people’s knowledge, skills and competences. The same law also launched a National Network of Lifelong Learning (NNLL) for coordinating administration bodies with distinct responsibilities and LLL providers in different learning areas.\(^\text{17}\)

Vocational education and training

Vocational training in Greece must be

\(^\text{16}\) Official Governmental Gazette 163/??/21-9-2010 - L.3879/2010

\(^\text{17}\) Reforms Promoting Lifelong Learning in Greece, EQAVET, 2011
strengthened, as for many years vocational training was not part of the Greek mentality, and it was considered a ‘lower level’ of training. This is clearly visible in the participation in VET at the upper secondary level, which stands at only 39%. In the past years, due to the economic crisis, the number of jobless people over 35 years old has increased dramatically. Vocational training can help to fight unemployment, especially among low-skilled people. In September 2013, the Greek Ministry of Education launched a new law on vocational training. Through this law, the Ministry attempted to upgrade vocational training by adding targets which are more necessary for the Greek economy as well as being attempts to connect vocational training with businesses. However, vocational training still needs to be strengthened and promoted further.

At the present time, following new legislation on VET which strengthens work-based learning within the system and expands Greek apprenticeship schemes, the vocational training system is in transition, and the reforms caused by the legislation are taking place. VET in Greece allows access to higher education and mobility between general and vocational education. Many students in Greece, however, do not view VET as an attractive option to start with due to common stereotypes and poor connection with the world of employment.¹⁸

Validation of non-formal and informal learning

In Greece, there is not yet an integrated national legal framework or system of validation for non-formal and informal learning. However, the importance of non-formal and informal learning and its validation has risen, and some significant steps have been taken.

Specifically, the 2013 Law on the “Organisation and Operation of the Youth Foundation and Life-long Learning and of the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance and other provisions” gives the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP) the job of developing a qualification recognition and certification system for skills acquired through non-formal education and informal learning. It will also oversee the certification of qualifications and their correspondence with the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) levels.

At the operational level, and for the achievement of the goals related to the certification of qualifications acquired through non-formal and informal learning and the licensing of certification bodies, EOPPEP (through the operational programme “Workforce Development”), implements as a beneficiary the project “Development of a National Non-formal Education and Informal Learning Outflows Certification System”, co-funded by the European Social Fund and national resources.

The certification of the workforce qualifications deriving from non-formal education and informal learning is inextricably connected to education, vocational training and employment. As a result, it has to be based on National Standards, which include educational standards, and vocational standards whose function is described within EOPPEP’s certified vocational profiles (evaluation, validation and certification standards).

¹⁸ Spotlight on VET in Greece, CEDEFOP, 2014
This piloting case, where the certification system was applied, was based on fair participation as the only prerequisite was work experience regardless of whether they had prior training in the same or in a similar field. It fortified the participants’ right to choose to take part in any of the four stages of the process (recognition, documentation, evaluation, and certification). The relevant qualifications and degrees that were granted were defined within the national qualifications framework, and they corresponded to specific initial vocational training titles.

**Early school leaving**

The overall percentage of early school leavers in Greece is only 10.1%, but Greece has a particularly high early school leaver rate in its migrant community (33%).

One of the measures designed to prevent early school leaving in Greece is training teachers in the support needs of the cultural background and other issues faced by specific groups at risk of dropping out. As a result, teacher training can contribute to the fight against ESL (Early School Leaving). In Greece, initial teacher training has been adapted to address the diversity of the student population. From 2002 onwards, CPD (Continuous Professional Development) programmes have been targeted at teachers wishing to develop their skills teaching Greek as a second language to Muslim children who speak Turkish at home and who start primary school without knowing Greek. These courses teach engagement with the target group of children. Additionally in Greece, making pre-primary education compulsory for all five year-olds is considered to be the most promising strategy for preventing ESL in the future.\(^\text{19}\)

**Investment in education**

The Lisbon European Council on 23rd and 24th March 2000\(^\text{20}\), and the “Europe 2020”\(^\text{21}\) strategy have set a series of guidelines to harness the full benefits of the opportunities that emerged from the new economy to reduce unemployment and enhance educational achievement (among other aims). The attainment of these targets in Greece was hindered by the financial crisis, which first occurred in 2007, and it has limited public expenditure in all levels of education.

In 2013, the total paid public expenditure on education was €5.5 billion. During the period 2005-2008, public expenditure on education increased by 21.4% (€1.3 billion), in 2005 it was €6.4 billion and by 2008 it was €7.7 billion. However, during the period 2008-2013, these costs were reduced by -28.3% (or €2.2 billion) with an average annual rate of decrease of -6.4%. It should be noted that the corresponding average annual growth rate of the country's GDP over the same period was 3 times lower (-2.1%). In the State Budget for 2014, €5.1 billion is directed into training, which is reduced by 7.9% when compared to 2013, despite a marginal increase in GDP in 2014.

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\(^{19}\) Reducing early school leaving in Europe, European Parliament, DG for internal policies, policy department B, 2011


Greece, has far lower levels of education spending than one might expect on the basis of its levels of social spending.

The 2012 Adult Education Survey, carried out by the Hellenic Statistical Office\(^\text{22}\), indicates that the highest participation rate in educational programmes (formal and non-formal educational programmes) is among persons aged 18 – 24 years old (54.5%). While the participation rate in formal education programmes for people aged 25 – 64 years old was 2.6%, the participation rate in non-formal education in the same group age was 13.7% - the highest participation rate. However, studies are still needed on the public investment of the national government between different sectors and types of education, for example non-formal and informal learning.

**Citizenship education**

Citizenship education is compulsory in Greece at primary and secondary levels, adding up to four years of compulsory education on citizenship. “Social and Civic Education” has existed as a subject since the 80s, and together with “Politics and law”, it forms the compulsory citizenship education.

The Cross-themed Curriculum Framework for Compulsory Education was introduced in 2003, and this document lays down the framework for citizenship education. Greek citizenship education includes the following dimensions: spiritual development; moral development; social, economic and political development; cultural development; the development of a Greek identity; and finally the cultivation of social relations, social cohesion, personal responsibility and social solidarity.

Within the discipline, dialogue and argumentation skills are enhanced, and the following are also promoted at the level of attitudes and values: social justice and cohesion; solidarity at the international level to deal with global problems and protect human rights; the development of a Greek conscience while at the same time respecting universal values; and respect for and the protection of democracy. Furthermore, participatory and experiential methods of citizenship are promoted.

**Promoting active citizenship and volunteering for social cohesion**

In Greece, participatory citizenship is considered important. However, Greece has shown a decline in the involvement of adults across all the different forms of participatory citizenship. The economic crisis in Greece resulted in a dramatic change on the political scene. For 35 years the political situation in Greece remained the same, dominated by the two major parties. Since 2009, when the economic crisis first appeared and the two major parties had to implement austerity measures, Greek voters have sought to “punish” the parties responsible for the current situation. The economic situation in Greece, in combination with the indignation of its citizens, resulted in extreme political behaviour and the appearance of an extreme right party - Golden Dawn. It must be noted that Golden Dawn currently lies third in the opinion polls and its popularity is rising. The parties participating in the Greek government should try to win back the trust of Greek citizens and convince them by informing them about the reality of the extreme parties in Greek society. Young people appear disappointed and ignore
the real political situation. The Greek government should pay special attention to the mobilisation of young people by giving them information and motivating them to participate in democratic institutions.

Volunteering has been developing in Greece, especially in the past three to five years as a result of the economic crisis. Organisations, local authorities, communities, unions, and other bodies organise voluntary actions to support citizens in need by providing food, medicine, clothing, and services.

Volunteering can be a form of non-formal education and vocational training. If non-formal education were better recognised and institutionalised in Greece, it could be a great tool for the establishment of volunteering in Greece. 23

Measures to support NEETs

Greece has one of the highest rates of NEETs and youth unemployment in Europe. 28.2% of young people aged 15-29 were NEETs in 2012, and up to 59% of young people in Greece are unemployed.

The majority of NEETs in Greece are women aged 20-24, and they usually have the following characteristics. They have previous professional experience, a family background of low education levels, and they are thinking about emigrating for better opportunities. Up to 25% of NEETs have higher education. 24

The Youth Action Plan 2013-2015 was launched by the Greek government to tackle youth unemployment. It aims to reinforce the national work force with people aged 15-24 and 25-35 by taking several measures, such as creating new workplaces, developing young people’s qualifications, and strengthening youth entrepreneurship. The National Youth Action Plan will be combined with the European Youth Guarantee.

Greece promotes youth entrepreneurship which is addressed at all sub-groups of young people. Greece must develop young people’s skills and qualifications and it must provide incentives, such as technical and financial support, for young people to be able to proceed with setting up their own business. Youth entrepreneurship must be further strengthened by both the public and the private sector. This is the route to development, economic growth and the creation of real workplaces. Measures to strengthen youth entrepreneurship can include the establishment of specific Consulting Structures in the Technical Education Schools and the Technical Education Institutes, the promotion of non-formal education, and the further empowerment of already existing structures such as “Youth Entrepreneurship Support Structures”.

Country Specific Recommendations

There are no country-specific recommendations for Greece in the past two years as this may duplicate measures set out in the Economic Adjustment Programme for Greece.

With contributions from Giota Chatzimichailidou, currently writing a PhD for the Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Peloponnese and Vasilis Siomadis, IME GSEVEE, Greece

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23 Europe2020: How to spur social progress for a more inclusive Europe?, SOLIDAR, 2014

24 Who’s the Greek Next? NEets’ Profile in Greece: Parameters, Trends and Common Characteristics of a Heterogeneous Group, International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 2014
ITALY

Italy has suffered badly in the recession, evidenced by the number of NEETs and the rate of youth unemployment. However, the economic challenges have made Italy create a vocational training system. Many education-related problems still exist.

Recommendations

- Implement better coherence between different VET systems at regional levels to improve school-to-work transition.
- As the high school dropout rate is linked to both rising poverty and the government’s austerity measures, national policy should prioritise free access to education, particularly for poor families. Measures to improve lifelong learning opportunities for adults are needed.
- Further measures need implementing to prevent youth unemployment, especially the risk of increasing the number of NEETs.
- Create a national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Promoting access and participation in lifelong learning

Adult participation in education and lifelong learning in Italy is below the EU average of 5.7%. Although Italy does not have a national system for adult learning, some lifelong learning opportunities do exist.

The system called CTP (Centre Territorial Permanent/ Centri Territoriali Permanenti), are centres for adult education and training. They have adopted teaching methods for adult learning, offering the experience of training and formal and non-formal education for adults. In 2014, the CTP will be reduced in number and transformed into Provincial Centres for Schooling in adulthood. These centres will be dedicated to the teaching of Italian language for foreigners and immigrants, and assigned to take care of school dropouts and over 16s expelled from school. However, the majority of adults do not know of these possibilities, and those who take part in lifelong learning opportunities agree that it is not enough to continue to train students and adults from ‘ready-made’ knowledge conveyed in a way that is far too remote from the flexibility necessary in everyday life and at work.

Vocational education and training

Unlike other secondary or further education, VET in Italy is governed at the regional level, creating a non uniform collage of VET and work-based learning systems across the country. Recently Italy set up strengthening VET as an objective, in particular focusing on the youth guarantee scheme and measures for companies, including encouraging cooperation between companies. The package also includes introducing apprenticeship schemes for higher education. Apart from some apprenticeship schemes at upper secondary level, most VET in Italy is highly school-based. The vast majority of students in upper secondary education are in VET pathways, with participation at almost 70%.

The apprenticeship schemes were reformed in 2011, and now include giving apprentices employee status, which

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25 Italy - School, lifelong learning – the present and the future, 2014
includes insurance benefits that cover job injuries and accidents, occupational diseases, other health problems, ageing and disability, maternity and household allowance, and also labour social security insurance. The social partners (trade unions and businesses working together) perform a crucial role in professional apprenticeship regulation through collective bargaining. The social partners define the contents, the provisions related to specific occupations, and the tools to carry out training. They also establish the professional qualification that needs to be acquired and the certification procedures, as well as setting out the necessary requirements for tutors and trainers in the work place. 26

Data on educational attainment, employment and unemployment, as well as the OECD skills surveys, suggests that Italy faces the double challenge of a labour market that in southern regions cannot fully absorb the human resources available. It also shows a skills mismatch resulting from educational choices that do not give people the opportunity to find jobs.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning

When it comes to the validation of non-formal and informal learning, Italy is at an experimental stage, where it recognises and accepts the needs for initiatives, but it is still uncertain whether and how this could influence existing structures and systems on a more permanent basis.

In 2001, a decree from the Ministry for Labour ruled that the ‘Certification of competences in the vocational training system’ required national standards of skills in a certification system that will be developed ‘shortly’. This certification system is for results in more formal vocational training, rather than the wider sector of non-formal and informal learning.

One example from Italy is the ‘Educazione Continua in Medicina’ programme and its validation process, which supports the updating of skills among medical staff. It is structured as a validation system that permits recognition of at least 150 points (training credits) in three years. Training credits estimate diligence and time spent by medical staff on continuous updating and improving the qualitative level of their activities.

Italy, however, still needs to move from the recognition of professional training into the recognition of all non-formal and informal learning, for which there is no arrangement in place. The focus also needs to stretch from the regional level to the national level to ensure the implementation of a coherent approach to validation.

Early school leaving

With an early school leaving rate of 17.1% in 2013, especially in the southern regions, Italy performs significantly worse than the EU average and this translates into a lack of basic skills. In addition, Italy has the lowest tertiary education attainment rate in the EU for the 30-34-year-old age group.

There is also evidence of a difficult transition from education to the labour market, including for highly skilled young people, which is compounded by the effects of the economic crisis. In 2012, almost one in five young tertiary education graduates were unemployed.

26 VET in Italy, Cedefop, 2014
The increasing school dropout rate goes hand in hand with rising poverty in the country, and increasing cuts in public sector budgets that support families, children, and young people. An effect of the government's austerity policies is that local authorities have reduced some important services such as transport, support services for students with disabilities, and school meals. In 2012, 29.9% of the Italian population was at risk of poverty and social exclusion. In 2013, the government invested €40 million to support poor families. A “social card” (direct benefit) of €40 per month was created; but this measure falls far short of real needs.27

Investment in education

Italy’s general public expenditure on education as a share of GDP (4.2%) is among the lowest in the EU. The government, in its budgetary plan for 2014, estimates that government expenditure on education will decrease from 4.0% of GDP in 2010 to 3.6% in 2015. There is also a visible trend of increasing private funding in education, while public investment is decreasing.

Citizenship education

Citizenship education is not a separate subject at any educational level in Italy, but under the ongoing cross-curricular area of ‘Citizenship and constitution’ launched in 2008, all teachers must include objectives related to citizenship and the constitution in the teaching of their subjects or subject areas. They must also undertake teaching projects aimed at deepening pupils’ knowledge of the Italian Constitution and developing values for active citizenship.

The assessment of students in relation to these specific activities is, however, the responsibility of the history, geography and social science teachers.

According to the 2008 law which introduced citizenship education in schools, all schools are required to establish effective partnerships with local authorities and police forces as well as with cultural and sports associations and NGOs. These measures aim to encourage the active participation of the pupils and students outside the classroom, which will be a positive move.

**Promoting active citizenship and volunteering for social cohesion**

Article 118 of the Italian Constitution establishes that: “The State, regions, metropolitan cities, provinces and municipalities shall promote the autonomous initiatives of citizens, both as individuals and as members of associations, in carrying out activities of general interest, on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity”. This establishes the general environment of voluntary action and therefore also for volunteers’ training.

However, more than in other European countries there are several obstacles to a real and effective active citizenship. Measures are needed to further support the sense of solidarity and social cohesion amongst Italian citizens. 28

**Measures to support NEETs**

Young people have been hit hardest during the recession, their unemployment rate doubling since 2008. It reached a

27 Briefing 65: Europe2020: How to spur social progress for a more inclusive Europe?, SOLIDAR, 2014

28 Briefing 65: Europe2020: How to spur social progress for a more inclusive Europe?, SOLIDAR, 2014
The youth unemployment rate is rising and currently stands at 42.4% and the number of NEETs is increasing. Various initiatives have been launched to support youth employability and the increase in labour market participation. However, the government has not put in place policy strategies to create new jobs for young people.

Italian labour law is one of the most flexible in Europe and in Italy there are many different forms of employment contracts, but companies still do not hire young people. The trade union CGIL has been asking for a long time for long-term strategies on job creation for young people.

Italy submitted its Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan \(^{29}\) (YGIP) in November 2013. The policies presented in it build on earlier reforms and they seem broadly adequate. However, implementation will be crucial. The involvement of the regions will also be crucial, and also the lessons learnt from previous policies. The YGIP should include clear commitments and measures. If properly used, the Youth Guarantee could prove helpful to combat youth unemployment.\(^{30}\)

**Country Specific Recommendations**

Italy is encouraged in the Country Specific Recommendations to improve the transition from education to the labour market, especially through strengthening vocational education and training and through the Youth Guarantee. Another issue is education outcomes and early school leaving, which Italy needs to tackle, as well as improving counselling services for higher education students.

In 2013, it was recommended that Italy should implement the National System for Evaluation of Schools. This had many recommendations - improving school outcomes and thereby reducing the rate of early school leaving, increasing the use of work-based learning in upper secondary vocational education and training, strengthening vocationally-oriented tertiary education, and creating a national register of qualifications to ensure wide recognition of skills. All these recommendations have led to action in Italy and the situation is improving.

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30 Briefing 65: Europe2020: How to spur social progress for a more inclusive Europe?, SOLIDAR, 2014
In recent years, the austerity policies in Spain have particularly resulted in severe cuts in education. This has created problems in almost all areas of education from access to vocational training to early school leaving. The financial cuts have led to social exclusion in education, and they have hurt the mass of young unemployed.

Recommendations

- Stop cuts in education and increase spending to ensure access to education
- Sustain the arrangement for validation of non-formal and informal learning. Better promotion of opportunities and guidance is needed.
- Continue citizenship education in all levels of education.

Promoting access and participation in lifelong learning

In Spain there is an alarming absence of technical teams when it comes to educational levels and the skills needed in the country, given that in recent decades higher education has been seen as synonymous with prestige compared to medium-level skills. This has led to an exponential growth in socially excluded sectors of the population who, lacking access both to university training and to formal professional training, suffer poor levels of qualification brought on by early school leaving, a lack of prospects, more and more impoverishment, and the generation of pockets of poverty made up not just from native Spanish workers but, increasingly, from immigrants, regardless of their qualifications in their countries of origin.

The fruit of the commitment shown by the Spanish Government to devoting particular attention to lifelong learning and, in correlation with the objectives established by the European Commission, to increase learning by adults during the 2010-2020 period, means that an Action Plan for Lifelong Learning 2012-2014 was published. It offers national specificity to the European policies, the aim of which was to increase the professional, personal and social competences of the population as a whole, as a way of complementing those acquired during initial schooling. But all of this is aimed, first and foremost, at those groups with low or minimal qualifications, as a means of integrating them into the productive and social fabric.

Vocational education and training

Vocational training in Spain has suffered greatly in recent years as spending cuts in public education have had a huge impact on young Spaniards who have been rejected by the labour market and now have limited access to public vocational training and education because of the lack of available places.

Vocational training in Spain is provided by two authorities: either within the education system or through the national employment services. The first offers initial VET, mainly for young people after compulsory education, and the second offers continuing VET for adults. However, there is also a separate curriculum for adult VET within the education system, offering initial qualifications. All the VET qualifications have been revised in the past years to raise the attractiveness of VET. After all, less than half the students in secondary education are in VET, which is below the European average and it can
increase even further as a result of the cuts in spending on education.

**Validation of non-formal and informal learning**

The Spanish National System for Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training, known in Spanish as SNCFP, was established by Spanish Organic Act 5/2002 of 19 June 2002. It consists of instruments and actions which are necessary to promote and develop the integration of Vocational Education and Training, as well as instruments that assess and accredit professional skills.

By December 2014, the process of validation was well established across the country with different authorities involved in the process of official validation of competences. Validation is now possible in 26 different professional sectors, and the validation process often serves as a mechanism to access formal education.

However, despite the existing system, the public suffer from a lack of information about the validation opportunities, and the existing promotion material is targeted at a very wide, general group of people rather than targeting specific groups. Additionally, the national system of careers guidance is not working properly and it suffers from lack of funding. The privatisation of public services also threatens to close off opportunities for minority groups.

**Early school leaving**

According to Country Specific Recommendations for 2013, there is a need to reinforce the contribution of the education and training system at all levels of human capital in Spain. Major challenges in the education system are the transition from education and training to the labour market, a persistently high rate of early leavers from education and training (24.9% in 2012) and insufficient tailoring of skills and capabilities for market needs.

In the view of our partners, the difficulties in making the transition from school or university to the labour market can be seen in the difficulties young people experience during their education, such as expensive fees for public universities, lack of university recognition, over-qualification, and forced migration abroad because of the lack of opportunities in Spain.

There is a need for better promotion of education, as well as soft skills training in order to secure the better integration of young people into society. The key measures must be based on both the labour market and the lack of public resources for education. Education should be promoted as a social value, not as a means of getting employment, as it appears that vocational training is stigmatised for the working class.

**Investment in education**

The different sectors and types of education in Spain are subject of the widespread budgetary cuts realised by the current Spanish government who is realising the neoliberal economic policies while realising the demands of the European Union. The reduction of public spending - following the rhetoric of fighting the deficit – affects education, health, social services etc.

The Spanish educational system, from preschool education until University education, undergoes a shock treatment which causes its constant deprivation and reduction of capacity to ensure the right to education in terms of quality, equity and adequacy. Since 2010 the budgetary cuts
experienced by the education and training systems have reached seven billion euros, and year by year the education budget is decreasing. In the current academic year, according to the forecast of the Ministry of Education, the public spending will be decreased to 3.9% of GDP, with a decline of more than percentage point since the year 2009; while the average level of spending on public education in the EU is at the level of 5% of GDP.

We can witness, that at all levels and in all educational sectors, due to reduction of public investment, the situation becomes more severe: fewer teachers, increasing number of students per class, lowering the expenses for the educational centres, reduced spending on complementary courses, special education, diversification of curricula and ICT inclusion. Moreover the cuts affect as well scholarships (including Erasmus) and increase of the university fees that result with the exclusion of students coming from families of low income.

The budgetary restrictions have been implemented with a diverse intensity in the regions, as the Spanish educational policy is deeply decentralised in its management. For example the local government of Castilla la Mancha in 2013 has made a cut of the school budget of 29.7%.

Regarding the non-formal and informal learning, and decentralisation of the system, it is difficult to quantify the data, except from the professional trainings, or learning opportunities provided by entities such as popular education movements or private entities, nevertheless the reality proves that this sector has undergone a sever budgetary cuts, deeper than the formal education.

In the view of Liga Española de la Educación y la Cultura Popular, it is indispensable to overcome the current economic crisis, and change the policy paradigm to place investment in education and consequently the promotion of right to education (favouring the equity and equality) as the top priority.

Spain has been continuously cutting national expenditure on education since 2009, and the current share of GDP is 4.55%, which is below the EU average. In 2014 the State Budget said that, in order to limit public spending, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport intends to concentrate its financial resources on strategic programmes for the education system, such as on the scholarships and grants programmes for students and the budgetary programme for early childhood and education (ECEC).

Despite the low expenditure on education in general, Spain has invested a comparably high focus and resources towards validation arrangements. In the recent years, from 2010 to 2013, the government has supported validation through budgetary entries dedicated to the training of assessors, evaluators and guides; implementing the procedure for the accreditation of competences in a uniformed fashion over the entire country and developing a national system for qualifications and professional training.

**Citizenship education**

Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights is a school subject that has been widely discussed in recent years in Spain and throughout Europe. The subject was first introduced as recently as 2006 on a recommendation from the Council of Europe which says education for citizenship is necessary to promote civic and human values. However, it received strong opposition from conservative groups. In 2013, the Spanish government put forward its draft “Education Act for the Improvement of Educational Quality” which suppressed Education for Democratic

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Citizenship and Human Rights in primary, secondary, and baccalaureate programmes.

**Promoting active citizenship and volunteering for social cohesion**

Taking into account European political, economic and social diversity, our Spanish partners think that a European Directive on volunteering would be a valuable initiative, providing a basic framework in which volunteer engagements are regulated. Currently the legislation on volunteering dates from 1996, and it therefore requires updating. In recent years, new profiles of volunteering have emerged which go beyond the current law, such as social and environmental, cultural, and international volunteering. More recently, the Spanish government has expressed interest in changing the law through a participatory process involving volunteering organisations.

As a result of the economic crisis, there has been an increase in the number of people volunteering\(^{31}\); however the levels are still lower than the EU average. This sudden rise in the volunteering rate can also present a risk as many of these new volunteers carry out ‘assistance tasks’ and thereby replace regular employment, instead of original volunteering tasks such as action for social change.

**Measures to support NEETs**

Tough measures are needed to reduce the number of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) which amounts to 23.1%. The development of early career counselling in cooperation with schools can help to achieve this aim. Job-search assistance for the young unemployed and early school leavers, and improved systems for the validation of skills and knowledge acquired at work to facilitate re-entry in education, can also help.

The population that is neither employed or in education (NEET) is particularly large in Spain at 21.1%, though not the highest in the EU. Since 2010 this percentage has been decreasing.

**Country Specific Recommendations**

Spain is encouraged in the Country Specific Recommendations to improve the labour market relevance of education and the number of qualified young people, as the number of early school leavers remains very high. Another topic to tackle is improving and further promoting vocational education and training, in particular dual vocational education.

*With contributions from Victorino Mayoral Cortés, Liga Española de la Educación y la Cultura Popular, Spain*

Sweden has historically performed well in most educational comparisons, and it is statistically doing better than many other EU Member States. The issues to tackle arise when looking at educational attainment, access to education and other barriers for people with an immigrant background.

**Recommendations**
- Public spending on education should not be decreased;
- Work-based learning elements of vocational training need to be reinforced;
- The integration of people from vulnerable backgrounds into education needs to be strengthened.

**Promoting access and participation in lifelong learning**

Sweden has a comprehensive, cross-level approach and strategy for lifelong learning and the appreciation of quality education is well shown in this strategy, as it focuses on quality and educational attainment. In Sweden there is a well-established tradition of broad public education consisting of voluntary and societal initiatives. It has long been self-evident that a person's education should not be dependent on social background, gender or financial resources.

The strategy covers all forms of learning, formal as well as informal, and non-formal. It also covers all levels and parts of the education system, from pre-school to adult and higher education. It takes into account and gives meaning to learning in both working life and in societal life, as well as in other life contexts. The strategy also has a focus for adult learning, not only directed at compensating for shortcomings in knowledge, but also to broadening opportunities for adults to raise their skills level.

The strategy and culture for lifelong learning can be seen in the participation rate, as 28% of adults participate in lifelong learning in Sweden, a participation rate significantly higher than most other EU Member States.

**Vocational education and training**

After almost 20 years of vocational training being very school-based and not much different from academic secondary education, the VET system in Sweden was reformed in 2011. The new system is now more vocationally oriented with fewer academic courses, but the system is still being reinforced. Despite close communication with the employers and industry during the years of more academic vocational training, the work-based learning and apprenticeship schemes require further measures. In general, VET in Sweden is still school-based, apart from the specific apprenticeship schemes where more than half of the training needs to take place in a work-place.

Sweden is one of the few countries in Europe where tertiary vocational training is separate from academic universities. These institutes are called yrkeshögskoleutbildning and provide higher specialisation in different crafts. Adults, who do not have a vocational

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qualification, can undertake secondary vocational training in adult training centres.

**Validation of non-formal and informal learning**

Sweden has a long history of validating non-formal learning, now working towards a national system where informal and non-formal learning lead to equally valuable qualifications.

The Swedish Adult Education Association, which consists of 10 study associations including ABF (Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund – the Workers' Educational Association) gave a company called Nordic Validationforum the task of producing modules for validation of informal and non-formal learning. The work is supervised through the Validationgroup in the Swedish Adult Education Association. The modules will include self-assessment, group-work and evaluation. The timeframe for these modules is 12 hours, and the validation is led by tutors.

With the EQF (European Qualifications Framework), the perspectives are now even broader, and the hope is to establish a validation system with European dimensions to the national strategies. Sweden has two existing frameworks: the framework for qualifications for lifelong learning and the framework for higher education. The framework for qualifications for lifelong learning is currently in the build-up stage, while the framework for higher education has already has already been established and is fully under way.33

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33 ABF, SOLIDAR member, 2014

**Early school leaving**

Sweden is below the EU2020 target of early school leaving at 7.1%, but this percentage is higher among people from immigrant backgrounds. A recurring challenge in Sweden is the integration of these groups of people into education to reduce early school leaving.

The present government in Sweden is focusing on increasing the individual’s own choices through tax reduction.

**Investment in education**

In Sweden, general government expenditure on education and training has declined in recent years from 7.2% to 6.8% of GDP.

Our Swedish members assert that the present government in Sweden is focusing on increasing the individual's own choices through tax reduction. This ambition has had a negative impact on public spending with consequences for the education system. The privatisation of public services has also contributed to the decrease in school budgets, while a concentration on economic solutions for unemployment rather than skills training is having negative impacts on the individual's situation.

The new government, elected in 2014, is planning to increase the total budget for education, both for the study organisations and for the "Folk high schools". The budget for education is 2015 is 64 million kronor (around €6.95 million). The total budget in Sweden is 886,629,040 kronor (around €96,372 million).

There have not been any investments in non-formal and informal learning in the overall budget in the recent past. There
are no new investments in this budget either. The task is given to “Folkbildningsförbundet”, which is the association for all ten study associations and it is in the budget for them. The budget given to the study associations and folkhögskolor is 3,671 million kronor (€399,000).

Some of this budget will be going towards validation of non-formal and informal learning arrangements.

**Citizenship education**

In current Swedish education policy, two different modes of citizenship education dominate when it comes to creating ‘democratic citizens’: a society-centred citizenship education, and a consumer-centred citizenship education. Beginning with the society-centred citizenship education, its ‘democratic task’ may be described as a question of empowering children and young people as well as other adults in education with skills and qualities that are assumed to be democratic. The second mode of citizenship education, consumer-centred citizenship education, can be described differently. Less stress is placed on the acquisition of substantial cultural qualities by children and young people, and also adults in education, than is the case in society-centred citizenship education. Instead, certain ‘attitudes’ towards life and politics are assigned a more central role in the educational task of fostering democratic citizens.

**Promoting active citizenship and volunteering for social cohesion**

In Sweden, there is evidence of an increase in the work of volunteers for the common good of society. This has led to concerns that, in times of austerity when governments are cutting back on public services, volunteers are used to fill in the gaps in service provision formerly provided by paid employees. Often volunteering policies and schemes are organised on the ground by NGOs and civil society organisations.

Our Swedish members highlighted that although it is important to develop the volunteering opportunities in different sectors of a community, public responsibility should not be reduced and replaced by volunteering due to tax cuts, privatisation and other structural changes in the welfare system. Traditionally NGOs in Sweden have been involved in the social sector and members have been doing voluntary work, but this has not been referred to as volunteering, instead it has been called ‘work on the behalf of the organisation’.

**Measures to support NEETs**

The percentage of NEETs in Sweden is comparatively low at 7.8%, and counter-active measures have been in place for a long time, but integration of young people and people from migrant backgrounds needs further action. Youth unemployment rose to 22.9% in 2013. In the view of our partners, the measures taken by the government to tackle the unemployment of disadvantaged groups are of a fiscal approach with less attention to the importance of skills training and education. In short, they have individualised their measures but not changed the basic prerequisites that would enable Swedish youth to get employment. In addition to this, the number of public sector job opportunities has been reduced due to tax cuts.

Sweden has had a Youth Guarantee scheme in place since 1984, and it has been revised and remodelled periodically.
ever since. The most recent scheme was introduced in 2007. The job guarantee, as it is called in Sweden, is aimed at unemployed young people between the ages 16 and 24 and it seeks to offer employment services quickly to help young people improve their chances of finding employment and education opportunities.

**Country Specific Recommendations**

Sweden is repeatedly recommended to reinforce the reforms and development of work-based learning and apprenticeships as the education system fails to supply a proportion of young people with the necessary skills for successful integration into the labour market.

*With contributions from John Haataja and Åsa Stenlund-Björk, Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund, Sweden*
THE NETHERLANDS

The Netherlands are seen as a great example for the rest of the Europe when it comes to vocational education and training. Together with Germany and Austria, it has low youth unemployment and NEET rates. Not unlike other countries, the Netherlands needs to work on improving educational equality for disadvantaged young people.

Recommendations

- Introduce more measures to prevent early school leaving from VET;
- Ensure the right level of investment in education to guarantee quality education at all levels;
- As the significant school dropout rate is linked to rising poverty and the government’s austerity measures in the public sector, national policy should prioritise free access to education, particularly for poor families;
- Measures to improve lifelong learning opportunities for adults are needed;
- The promotion of existing non-formal and informal learning arrangements to ensure equal opportunities for everyone.

Promoting access and participation in lifelong learning

In the Netherlands, adult participation in lifelong learning (LLL) reached 16.7% in 2012, surpassing the 15% benchmark set out in Europe 2020. While a number of initiatives have been undertaken to encourage training, a formal comprehensive framework for LLL could further increase the efficiency of the system, allowing for the possibility of using funds for LLL for both intra- and inter-sectoral schooling.

Vocational education and training

The Netherlands have one of the highest participation rates in VET in Europe. 71% of upper secondary school students are in vocational training. The students can choose between two ‘learning routes’ in which students combine work and study: either a school-based route (from a minimum 20% to maximum of 60% in practice in a learning company) or a work-based route, more similar to apprenticeships (with a minimum of 80% experience in the workplace). In both routes, students gain the same diploma. This diploma offers the possibility of continuing studies in higher education.

Despite the high participation rate, the Dutch VET system suffers from a high number of early school leavers. This challenge is paired with the challenge of finding a good balance between generic key skills with a high transfer value, and specific knowledge and skills from different vocations to improve the quality of VET.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning

A national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning, known nationally as validation of prior learning, has been in place in the Netherlands since 1998. This validation system and the importance of non-formal learning are widely recognised in Dutch society and by employers, who use this for professional assessment. The validation document awarded by the national arrangement can used as a proof of skills’ or to obtain...
exemptions in learning programmes, and even a partial or full qualification.

The first step towards lifelong learning using the Accreditation of Prior Learning was taken in 2000. With ‘accreditation’ the focus in the policy was initially on accrediting prior learning outcomes against national qualification standards, a narrow view on validation which was held up until 2006. Currently there is a validation system with a wider focus in place in the Netherlands, accompanied by a legal framework.34

**Early school leaving**

The level of early leavers from education and training in Netherlands is 9.2%. Measures to prevent an increase in the dropout or early leaving rates are needed to avoid an ever larger number of unskilled youth, and a further increase in youth unemployment.

So far the Dutch government has introduced a number of measures to prevent early school leaving, including increasing the minimum school leaving age from 16 to 18, strengthening career guidance, and introducing new methods and tools for tracking children and young people.

**Investment in education**

The Dutch Government is still one of the leaders in investing in formal education when compared to other European countries. In non-formal education, however, it is not as strong as it could be. Investment in education for volunteer organisations particularly lags behind. In the past few years, the government has been transforming the social and welfare system with a combination of budget cuts and decentralising tasks to local government. Volunteer and civil society organisations are faced with a tremendous increase in demand for their services as a result. To better prepare volunteers for these new tasks and to strengthen civil society, it would be beneficial if the Dutch Government invested more into non-formal education for volunteer and civil society organisations.

**Citizenship education**

Citizenship education has only become a separate subject in primary education since 2005, and it is integrated into curriculum areas that can be organised into teaching blocs at the discretion of the school. The subjects which incorporate aspects of citizenship education are mostly social sciences, history, geography, languages, and ethics or religious education. In the first years of school education, aspects of citizenship education might be integrated into a subject or a curriculum area dealing with the basic concepts for understanding the world and society, such as ‘Personal and world orientation’.35

From the point of view of the teachers, the attention given to global citizenship in the lessons is almost equal amongst primary school and secondary school teachers. However, in both sectors, this attention is more often occasional than structural.

**Promoting active citizenship and volunteering for social cohesion**

There has been a decline in voting in national elections in the Netherlands.

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Research shows that many political parties have problems finding enough suitable candidates for the local council elections.

The Netherlands are very active in volunteering, with about 40% of adults engaged. However, volunteering and informal care is still a growing sector in the Netherlands. The current government is actively reaching out to the voluntary sector to assist and improve the overall wellbeing of citizens. However, the government's austerity measures cannot be justified by plans to expand the voluntary sector. And on the other hand if much more effort is being asked from volunteers, more means are necessary to facilitate this.

There is a lot of experience with activities where (young) volunteers in a peer-to-peer contact support young pupils of secondary and vocational education with a high risk of early school leaving. The results of these interventions are rather positive. With more facilities, this approach could be intensified. In 2008 – 2012, the Dutch government invested in educating volunteers from nationwide active volunteering organisations. From 2012, this has not been the case anymore, as a result of which possibilities for the education of volunteers have been strongly reduced. The innovation of education and blended learning has become especially difficult.

**Measures to support NEETs**

Youth unemployment has been increasing at an accelerated pace in recent times, reaching 11.1% in 2013. In order to prevent a possible loss of human capital, as well as labour supply shortages, particularly in the health care, education, and public administration sectors, measures to stop a sharp rise in youth unemployment are needed. 5.5% of young people are not in employment, education or training.

Most of the measures introduced by the government to prevent young people becoming NEETs are preventive, and they focus on fighting early school leaving. There are, for instance, no measures targeted at NEETs who have completed higher education. The focus is on making young people active as quickly as possible, through an internship or voluntary work, and to have all young people registered regionally.  

**Country Specific Recommendations**

In both the 2013 and 2014 country specific recommendations, the only recommendation for the Netherlands regarding education has been to protect expenditure in education, as this is seen as an area directly relevant for growth.

*With contributions from André Hudepohl and Sofie Vriends, Humanitas, the Netherlands*

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36 Eurostat
37 Eurofound
Assessing different aspects of education in the UK can be challenging, as education governance is divided nationally between England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales individually. Some common challenges are the low supply and attractiveness of vocational training across the country, and educational inequalities based on socio-economic backgrounds. The UK is performing well in adult participation in lifelong learning.

Recommendations

- Take action to improve the image of vocational education and training, and increase participation in VET courses;
- Measures to improve the quality of education and vocational training are needed;
- A more focused action plan with preventive measures is necessary to fight the high level of school dropout rates and the increasing number of NEETs;
- Ensure sustainable funding for non-formal and informal learning opportunities.

Promoting access and participation in lifelong learning

The percentage of adults participating in lifelong learning shows a negative trend. In 2012, adult participation in lifelong learning in the UK fell to 15.8%, but the percentage is still positive from the European perspective.

Lifelong learning and lifelong guidance, and social inclusion, are principles that are central to all current UK policy on learning, irrespective of the separate policies emanating from the devolved administrations and the UK parliament. For example, the Department for Education and Skills has published a Skills Strategy White Paper that sets out targets and strategies for ensuring that individuals have the skills to be employable and enjoy fulfilled lives. The problems with lifelong learning and access to it remain in its implementation, mainly problems targeting the right priority groups, welding together a large group of providers and organisations, and quality assurance and standards of different opportunities offered.

Vocational education and training

Participation in VET in upper secondary education in the UK is one of the lowest in the European Union. Only 38% of young people are enrolled in VET, and apprenticeships are more common than the school-workplace combinations of VET. Apprenticeships are regulated by a framework including a work contract and qualification within the framework.

VET qualification may in some cases allow the graduate to continue on to higher education. However, there is no automatic right to progression from one qualification framework level to the next, as education providers and awarding organisations retain the right to set entry requirements for individual qualifications, and the trend for young people moving from VET to universities has declined in recent years. At the same time, the number of young people taking up apprenticeships has increased steadily, several incentives for employers to take on an apprentice have been introduced, and a reform of apprenticeships in England is underway. The British VET systems are subsequently under review to improve quality and
relevance of VET to labour market needs. There is an aim to increase VET graduates and employees with intermediate skill levels as well as to decrease the number of young people leaving school with low basic literacy and numeracy skills. Another major challenge faced by VET in the UK is the low attractiveness of VET. When asked whether they would recommend vocational education and training to a young person, only 26% in the UK, compared to an EU average of 32%, stated that they would recommend it.\textsuperscript{38}

**Validation of non-formal and informal learning**

In the UK (England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland), arrangements for validation do exist and are used, but there is no single framework for validation at national level. There is an increased dominance of the skills agenda valuing accreditation over validation, and the number of state-funded providers of non-formal and informal learning has been reduced.

Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) in non-accredited learning is a staged process designed firstly to focus on and promote the needs and interests of learners, secondly to allow for negotiation of the content and outcomes of learning programmes, and thirdly to encourage learners to reflect on and recognise their own progress and achievement. The RARPA promotes and supports informed learner self-assessment, peer assessment and dialogue about learning between students and tutors, and it enables the achievement of planned learning objectives and learning outcomes not specified at the outset to be recognised and valued.

SOLIDAR’s members in the UK see that in England there are gaps in the infrastructure enabling progression from informal learning to formal qualifications and employment. A priority in moving towards the European recommendations on the validation of non-formal and informal learning is to build on systems that are already in place, such as accredited learning and Europass.

**Early school leaving**

The UK has managed to reduce the number of early school leavers from 14.9% in 2010 to 12.4% 2014, which is still below the EU average, but not below the EU2020 target of less than 10%.

The UK has chosen not to set a national target to follow up on the Europe 2020 headline target in this area. The school leaving age, below which participation in education or training is compulsory, was raised from 16 to 17 in 2013 in England and it will be raised again, to 18, in 2015. This is expected to have a positive effect on the early school leaving rate.

**Investment in education**

There has been a major shift away from investing in further education colleges and independent learning providers. These suppliers provide the bulk of VET provision within the UK, and as such it is likely that the quality of provision and the breadth of offer would be adversely affected.

834,000 16 to 18 year-olds choose to study in colleges compared with 438,000 in maintained school and academy sixth forms (Association of Colleges), therefore

\textsuperscript{38} Special Eurobarometer 369 (2011) Attitudes towards vocational education and training.
despite having the majority of learners, cuts are impacting on colleges the hardest.

The adult skills budget is expected to be cut by 40% in the next four years, and funding for 18 year-olds is being reduced by 17.5% this year. The adult skills budget funds all vocational training for those aged 19+.

A trend of learners paying for a larger portion of their training is likely to be seen over the next few years, for example the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) has introduced Advanced Learning Loans for those studying at level 3 or above. Such a shift may well marginalise those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and create a further barrier to entering into higher level qualifications.

The government has also stripped away requirements for those teaching within further education to hold a recognised teaching qualification, creating a disparity between further education and compulsory education. This could lead to a lower standard of teaching, and ultimately impact upon the quality of provision.

We should also amplify the above observations to the extent to which the changes in investment may compound the inequalities faced by those most likely to benefit from being able to access VET provision, which would help them in turn move closer to the labour market. As Professor Michael Marmot (Chair of the independent review on health inequalities in England, as set out in the report 'Fairer Society Healthy Lives' 2010, and commissioner of the Review of Social Determinants and the Health Divide in the WHO European Region, 2013), warned in 2012, the UK's current high levels of young people not in employment, education or training was 'a public health time bomb waiting to happen'. The Review of Social Determinants report called for EU funds to support action to reduce health inequalities, including programmes that promote early development, quality education and training, and fair and safe employment.

Promoting active citizenship and volunteering for social cohesion

In 2012-13, an estimated 19.1 million people volunteered formally, through a group, club or organisation, totalling approximately 1.9 billion hours. 72% of the population volunteered at least once in the last year – either formally, giving unpaid help through groups, clubs or organisations, or informally, giving unpaid help as an individual to people who are not relatives. Volunteering rates have increased since 2011 and there is evidence of a specific growth in volunteering among young people. Volunteering provides large economic and social benefits. It is estimated that the economic value of formal volunteering in the UK is in the region of 1.3%-1.6% of GDP – around £23 billion. Levels of participation in regular formal volunteering are related to the level of area deprivation, where participation generally decreases as the level of local deprivation increases. A fifth (19%) of people living in the ten per cent most deprived areas take part in regular formal volunteering compared with 36% of people living in the ten per cent least deprived areas. There is also a positive relationship between participation in regular formal volunteering and level of education. People with higher qualifications are more likely to take part in volunteering than those with lower level or no qualifications. People from managerial and professional occupations, and full-time students, are more likely to participate in regular formal volunteering than those who...
have never worked or who are long-term unemployed.\textsuperscript{39}

Volunteers play an important role in improving people’s experience of care, building stronger relationships between services and communities, supporting integrated care, improving public health and reducing health inequalities. The support that volunteers provide can be of particular value to those who rely most heavily on services, such as people with multiple long-term conditions or mental health problems\textsuperscript{40}.

Volunteering is an important component of social action. It takes many forms and presents tremendous opportunities for people to make a positive difference to their own lives and to the lives of others by contributing their time and energy to an individual, service, community or cause\textsuperscript{41}.

**Measures to support NEETs**

Around one million 16-24 year olds in the UK are not in education, employment, or training (NEET). They constitute 62% of unemployed 16-24 year olds, the rest are in education or training. However, only 55% of people who are NEET are unemployed, the rest are economically inactive, as they are not seeking work or not available to start work. There are several government schemes with elements aimed at reducing the number of young people who are NEET, such as the raising of the participation age, the Youth Contract, and the Work Programme.\textsuperscript{42}

**Country Specific Recommendations**

The recommendations for the UK focus on vocational education and training and apprenticeships. The first has been criticised for being too focused on basic skills instead of the labour market need for more advanced qualifications. The quality, amount and qualification system for apprenticeships equally need to be improved and simplified to encourage enterprises to provide apprenticeships and a sufficient supply of apprenticeship placements.

*With contributions by James Moon and Duncan Tree, CSV, the United Kingdom*

\textsuperscript{39} Community Life Survey: August 2012 – April 2013 - Statistical Bulletin, Cabinet Office
\textsuperscript{40} Volunteering in Health and Care: securing a sustainable future, King’s Fund
\textsuperscript{41} Social Action for Health and Wellbeing – DH Strategic Vision for Volunteering, 2011
\textsuperscript{42} ONS, November 2013
Is about
> Non-formal and informal learning
> Vocational Education and Training
> Decent Work for Young People

We strive for

- Building learning societies in which each member’s personal contribution is being valued, and skills, competences and knowledge are both shared and developed. Social inclusion of NEETs through vocational education and training.
- Access to quality education and lifelong learning in promoting social justice.
- A Europe that recognises and values the learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning.