



# COUNTRY STUDY



FINLAND

## Country monitoring report 2016

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## FINLAND

### Promoting access and participation in Lifelong Learning

Finland has maintained its champion status regarding the level of adult participation in Lifelong Learning (LLL) which is the third highest in the EU (with 25.4% in 2015 it is well above the EU average of 10.7%). However, participation for older and low-skilled adults is significantly lower in comparison to the overall population, although the rates are still significantly above EU average. Unlike in many other Member States, participation of people born outside of Finland was actually higher (28%) than of those born in the country (24.3%). One of the most important elements of the Finnish formal education system's mission is its aim to build learners' capacity for sustainable lifestyles, Lifelong Learning and active citizenship.

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### Vocational Education and Training

One of the key projects for the Finish Government is the *strategic Vision Finland 2025* document reform

vocational upper secondary education. The Vocational Education and Training (VET) system was reformed to be skills-based oriented, modular, practical and based on providing flexible learning pathways, as well as incorporating the recognition and validation of skills and competences acquired outside of the classroom. The reform launched in late 2015 tackles the previously faced challenge of the low number of apprenticeships that were available. The reform focuses on increasing and diversifying learning at the workplace, developing apprenticeships models, and new forms of training agreements. This is all part of flexible and open pathways towards obtaining qualification. The process includes learner, training provider and employer who all involved in a clear and coherent process of formation. This scheme will be fully enrolled in 2018. Yet all this comes with the challenge of facing funding cuts that affects the vocational training budget with 190 million euro as of 2017. Reducing funding available per capita reduces funding available to vocational upper secondary education and training by EUR 59 million in 2016 alone. Apprenticeship training faces budget cuts of EUR 19 million.

It is important to note that the transition between vocational education and the labour market appears to be quite successful, as the employment rate of recent upper secondary graduates stood at 71.6% in 2014, which is one of the highest in the EU.

### Validation of NFIL

Validation of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL) has relatively long and established roots in Finland. However, Finland has no single law regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning, as laws and regulations for each field of education define validation separately. These fields include general upper secondary education, vocational education and training (including adult VET), and higher education.



The amended Vocational Education and Training Act from 1 August 2015, apart from strengthening the learning outcomes approach, promotes validation of prior learning.<sup>1</sup> This law amendment aims to support building flexible and individual learning paths where results of validation of prior learning can be incorporated. Validation of NFIL is a subjective right of the individual and the competences of an individual should be validated regardless of when and where they have been acquired. In Finland validation procedures are embedded in formal qualification structures in VET and in Higher Education. Moreover Finland works on a project *“Accelerated transition to working life”* that mainly concerns higher education but it also sets objectives regarding secondary education. *“The objective is to prolong careers and provide for flexible learning paths to facilitate the transition to advanced studies by young people”* and will incorporate elements of validation. Works should be completed by 2018.

The strength of the Finnish validation arrangements is good co-operation between all stakeholders. For example, social partners including employers are strongly involved in all aspects of development of validation procedures. They are present along the entire process from designing the content of qualification requirements to individual validation procedures. This is one of the main fundamentals that builds transparency and cooperation, promotes trust and high market value of the system, i.e. employers see qualifications gained through validation as equally valuable or trustworthy as the qualifications gained through school-based learning.

In Finland, various forms of organized support and guidance in awareness building of Lifelong Learning exists. As our members point out, there has for example been a training program for Union Learning

<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-fi\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-fi_en.pdf)

Representatives, whose task is to help workers to find accurate programs to validate their skills and competences. These persons can be co-workers and/or a steward as a Competence Pilot (ULR) and/or shop stewards at the workplace. The aim is to understand the worker/employee as a Lifelong Learner, to recognise the outcomes in Lifelong Learning and to empower workers through education and informal and non-formal learning. Moreover, they receive tools and methods for helping workers with learning disabilities and they also network with vocational training organisations and NVQ (National Vocational Qualifications) in order to support workers. The study program for Union Learning Representative is developed together with the Central Confederation of Trade Unions and the Worker’s Education Association in Finland (Työväen Sivistysliitto), which is a member organisation of our Finnish members.

### Early-school Leaving

Finland is performing better than the EU average in tackling early school leaving (ESL) (with a rate of 9.2% of early school leavers compared to an EU average of 11% in 2015). However, its rate has remained fairly stable over the last decade, whereas the EU average has improved. Finland has reached its national Europe2020 target of 10% of early school leavers, yet has to face a significant challenge regarding dropout rates of foreign-born pupils. 18.1% of foreign born students does not finish school, in comparison to 8.7% of their Finnish counterparts.

One of the main findings from the 2012 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment shows growing differences in educational outcomes in Finland. Despite of maintaining a high position in the ranking as EU top performers, it is observed that since 2009 they are worsening especially with regards to learning outcomes in numeracy and literacy. The skills gap is the widest among the native born and first generation migrants. As a matter of fact, migrants, in particular boys, present a significantly higher rate of



school drop outs than girls. This poses a challenge for Finnish educators to better integrate this group into education and training system.

One of the prevention measures taken by Finnish government was to invest in early childhood education, to reinforce chances of pupils to succeed and to help in tackling early school leaving. Additionally, the Finnish government introduced a preparatory education programme for general upper-secondary education that is particularly aiming at migrants. Finland's Youth Guarantee could also help to lower the early school leaving rate in the future, as it encourages people who have left education early to return to education or training through re-entry into education. As of 2015 a compulsory one year pre-school education was introduced, and as of 1 August 2016 changes have been applied resulting from public sector consolidation measures. Financial consolidation and austerity measures in education and training usually reinforces inequalities, therefore this policy action should not affect pupils who are struggling and to offer them the necessary support early on.

## NEETs

In Finland, the situation of youth seems to be better in comparison to the average in the European Union. Only 11.8% of young Finns are neither in employment, education or training (NEETs) and 15.8% remains unemployed. Almost every other NEET is registered with the employment services, and one third of all NEETs receive financial assistance.<sup>2</sup> This significantly lowers the risk of social exclusion of NEETs. The particular aspect of being a NEET in Finland is that more than 50% of NEETs are short-term unemployed, and others who are part of this group are resuming family responsibilities what leads to their non-activity on the labour market.

In 2015 the Youth Guarantee provision was strengthened with provision of one-stop guidance [2 https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef1602en2.pdf](https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef1602en2.pdf)

centres for youth below the age of 30. These places provide the necessary support and information to youth on their perspective careers. Government plans that services for young people outside education, work and other required support (NEET) will be enhanced through outreach youth work and by offering guidance, advice and support service packages. The task of outreach youth work is to contact young people in need of support and to help them within the sphere of services and other support that will promote their growth and independence as well as their entrance into education and employment.

Implementation of the educational guarantee part is considered to have been more successful than that of other services and measures. However, Finland needs to make efforts to meet the requirements of the programme also in terms of social, health and rehabilitation services. This could be achieved by taking better account of young NEETs and targeting specific subgroups combined with stronger attention to vocational education and training apprenticeships. Overall, the Youth Guarantee has successfully allowed to improve the situation of youth in Finland, yet the recent change of responsibility for the program (from employment to education ministry) followed by cut in funding, may jeopardise the efforts and reaching the ambitious objectives set in the strategy.

## Citizenship education

Citizenship education is part of the compulsory curriculum and is taught as a separate subject at lower secondary and upper secondary education in Finland. However, citizenship education is also embedded in primary education where it is integrated in other courses (such as environmental and natural sciences, history, biology and geography), thus at primary level it is based on a cross-curricular approach. It is worth noticing that Finland carries out national tests for monitoring purposes focused, not on particular subjects, but on competences in particular fields. Social and civic competences are included



on a periodic basis. In 2011, 15-year old students' knowledge, skills and attitudes relating to civic and citizenship education and active participation were tested.<sup>3</sup>

Non-formal and informal learning provides opportunities for adults to further develop their civic competences. As reported by our Finnish members, the essential feature of non-formal education, such as liberal adult education, is the diversity of the curricula, the voluntary nature of participation and the use of learner-based methods. The institutes set up both their objectives as the way they use the state subsidy independently. As already mentioned above, currently there are more than 300 non-formal and informal learning providers (folk high schools, worker's education institutes, adult education centres, summer universities, sport training centres and study centres). Furthermore, additional studies for adults exists, which are provided by universities (Open University and Open University of applied science) as well as vocational schools.

Lastly, Finland plans to work on national and Scandinavian level on programs for continuing professional development for teachers and other school staff and youth workers to better recognise extremism and cater needed responses to emerging problems.

### Council recommendations

*"The low-skilled are affected most by the poor performance of the labour market. Cutting the budget for active labour market policies at a time when there is an increasing demand for such measures could harm opportunities for the above-mentioned groups to return to work. In terms of activation, the complex benefits system with its different types of allowances can result in significant inactivity and low wage traps. The arrival of a comparatively large number of migrants and refugees in Finland in 2015 could*

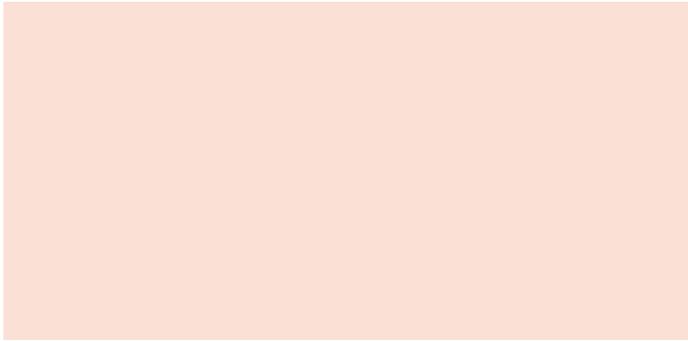
<sup>3</sup> [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic\\_reports/139EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/139EN.pdf)

*serve to counter the effects of population ageing, but only if they are successfully integrated into the labour market and the education system. There are matching problems in the labour market, partly due to the structural change in the economy, as new jobs are created in different geographical areas and industries compared with those where jobs have been lost. Measures that increase affordable housing in the Helsinki area and effective policies to help people update their skills and find work are needed.*

*Therefore the Council recommendation suggests Finland to take measures to reduce regional and skills mismatches."*

[Source: EUR-Lex, [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C\\_.2016.299.01.0079.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2016:299:TOC](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2016.299.01.0079.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2016:299:TOC)]





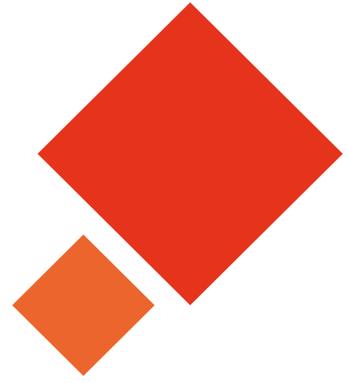
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As part of the Lifelong Learning Watch SOLIDAR Foundation has developed 12 country studies in 2016 covering the status in different Member States when it comes to; Promoting access and participation in Lifelong Learning, Vocational Education and Training, Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (NFIL), Early-school Leaving, NEETs and Citizenship education in reference to 2016 Council's country-specific recommendations.

The SOLIDAR Foundation is the cooperation platform of SOLIDAR; a European network of NGOs working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide. SOLIDAR brings together 60 member organisations based in 25 EU member states and in 6 candidate countries. We work together in Social Affairs, International Cooperation and Lifelong Learning. The Building Learning Societies pillar includes 23 members, covering 18 EU member states.

SOLIDAR Foundation engages through member and partner organisations citizens in EU decision making processes, empowers people through lifelong learning and VET, and voices their concerns to the EU institutions by carrying out active lobbying, project management and coordination, policy monitoring, research and awareness-raising.



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