



COUNTRY STUDY

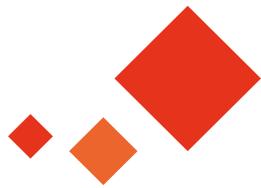
FRANCE

Country monitoring report 2016

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Resulting from the rise of violent extremism and terrorists attacks in Europe in the last years, as well as disturbing developments threatening the universal values of pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality shared by European society. In 2015, upon the invitation of France and the Latvian Presidency to the EU, the Education Ministers adopted the "Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education".

The Paris Declaration defines a set of objectives to transmit through education to strengthen shared principles. Already in 2015 France has adopted action plans "Great mobilisation of schools for values of the Republic" and "Equality and citizenship: The Republic in action" with the aim to develop citizenship and a culture of commitment, addressing inequalities and promoting social diversity and values of the French Republic. The plan was adopted as of the 2015/2016 school year, and for the first time citizenship education was provided in school-based vocational training. Critical thinking and media literacy were included in the contents of the courses to shape informed and responsible young citizens. In 2016 a new action plan against violent radicalisation was adopted. It builds on the components of previous programs. It clearly adopts civic education, media literacy and critical thinking as key elements of "citizen's pathway" as a preventive measure against radicalisation. 



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Promoting access and participation in Lifelong Learning

In 2015 the law on Lifelong Learning (LLL) and vocational training came into force. This might stand behind a recorded significant change in adults' participation from 5.7% in 2012 to 18.6% in 2015. The implementation of the reform is ongoing, and its measures target mostly low-qualified and unemployed. The plan provides training opportunities for job seekers. What has had an impact on the "raise" of the participation rate is as well a better recording of education and training initiatives that were undertaken.

The main objectives of the reform were to improve Lifelong Learning guidance and access to (higher) quality training especially for those who need it most and to reduce skill losses throughout life. It reformed the following aspects: financing arrangements by simplifying the funding system for training and specific measures for apprenticeships; governance through the transfer of competence for LLL to regional level including by setting up a regional public guidance service; and the main measures for training.

However, according to our French members, some of the short-comings should be pointed out that there is a difficulty to make a swift transfer of the competences to regional level when some of the competences will remain with the State, due to, among other the institutional rigidity between both levels. Another element is the fact that the competence is partially transferred to regions which leads to inequalities between the different territories, as not all regions have the same capacity to take over the competences.

Generally speaking, one of the biggest concern related to professional trainings is that people are trained with very specific technical skills that respond to a specific need of the labour market, what echoes and responds to short-term priorities. But as soon as the needs change, these people's training become obsolete and they lack the transversal and social competences which would enable them to adapt. Flexibility of the needs, which is a lasting reality on the job market.

Vocational Education and Training

Participation of upper- secondary students in vocational education and training remains below the EU average and in 2014 was at a level of 42.7%, however, in the last reforms of vocational pathways influenced the increase of students who graduate from upper secondary school with a professional diploma. In 2010 it was 14.2% and in 2015/2016 22.9%. Yet, in the 2014/2015 school year showed a 4% decrease in the number of people who applied for apprenticeships. Since then the negative trend continued until the beginning of 2016 where a slight improvement was noted. This has occurred since the introduction of incentives for SMEs to hire people under the age of 18.

Vocational education and training (VET), as well as apprenticeships have been promoted as tools for enhancement of professional skills and as a way of transition to the labour market for NEETs and early school leavers (ESL). In the last few years few reforms were introduced with the intention of making apprenticeships and VET more accessible. However this is still challenging for low skilled, unemployed, older people and workers in small companies.

Currently offered apprenticeships are solely responding to present needs of the labour market. This makes them a short-term successful solution, therefore further modernisation is needed. School based VET



is receiving a negative assessment due to the lack of its integration and adjustment to present needs to labour market. There is a demand to update the educational curricula for it to allow to develop skills and competences useful in the professional world of work. More synergies need to be built between school and work-based learning.

One of the mishaps of a new system is that there are no sufficient means to prepare and accompany apprentices during their time within the companies. It is a recurrent problem of the upper- secondary students in vocational education and training, as vulnerable youngsters may drop from the training because of this lack of preparation and accompaniment.

Various measures have been taken across the different levels of compulsory and higher education to develop guidance systems, to support the development of entrepreneurial skill sets and to improve links between education and economic actors. Measures include a new national 'Education-Economy Council', still in its infancy, while the implementation of 'campuses of profession and qualifications' has progressed. The Campuses of professions and qualifications are an interesting initiative; however as always with centers of excellence, they have the default to weaken the structures that are not part of it.

Validation of NFIL

In France, the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL) builds upon long-standing practices in the field of identification and recognition of prior learning and professional experiences that were developed in the last few decades. The validation system, which is based on a clear legal framework, has taken shape in the framework of continuous vocational training and labour market policies; it builds upon an individual right to validation of non-formal

and informal learning.

A key milestone was the adoption of legislation in 2002, followed by various decrees, which created the current procedure known as Validation of experience (Validation des acquis de l'expérience - VAE). VAE can lead to the award of a complete or components of a qualification (certification) based on the knowledge and skills acquired through prior experience and learning in a variety of contexts. As mentioned above, VAE is an individual right (which is closely connected to the individual right to continuous vocational training); in order to qualify, individuals must have at least three years of experience in a certain field relevant to the field of the qualification they want to obtain. The 2014 law changes regarding VAE have opened up this procedures for individuals who do not have qualifications at level V (EQF 3), and amongst other positive changes has introduced an obligation for employers to on a two year basis track professional development of employees and involve them in providing information about VAE procedures.

The French VAE system is relatively well developed compared to other European countries, however efforts to broaden access, improve the transparency of the procedure, shorten its length and encourage its use across a wider range of qualifications and profiles are still required. The potential of VAE for many different groups of users – with positive individual impacts in terms of self-esteem, motivation, participation in Lifelong Learning, employability and career development prospects– is still underused. According to our French members, these difficulties may be explained by the following factors:

- Some of the universities in charge of VAE in France still have difficulties to comprehend their participation to continuous professional training. Strong territorial inequalities can be identified depending on the universities and how strong their expertise is on continuous education.
- Another problem is related to the difficulty for the right to go back in training to be fully exercised by



people, as all sectors are hermetic to each other and it is difficult for someone to move from one to another if they wish to change career.

- The new personal training account created by the 2014 law, is not sufficient in terms of number of hours for a person to both carry out VAE and follow the complementary training necessary to get the targeted qualification.
- The administration processes are too long and complex for a certain group of people who face writing difficulties and some certifications require a written explication of their competences during the presentation to the jury. Nor is during the different steps of the VAE procedure, enough guidance provided.
- Beneficiaries have difficulties to find their way around in the French landscape of certifications. Most of the beneficiaries have a low level of qualification and a chaotic professional pathway, leading to different modules of certifications, which reinforces the difficulties.
- Waiting times between the different steps of the VAE procedure are too long, which is due to the difficulty to mobilise the jury members who receive very low financial compensations (the lower the level of qualification, the lower the financial compensations).

Better counseling and career guidance, as well as more support during professional evolution is necessary in France. In this context, supporting and accompanying learners, apprentices etc. along the validation pathway is a major aspect of the work to be done in France to guarantee access to Lifelong Learning to everyone.

Early-school Leaving

The French early school-leaving rate declined significantly in 2012 and is now below the EU average – 9.3% in 2015 against 11% in Europe. There are still difference between dropout rate of native-born 8.7 % in 2015 compared with EU-average of 10.1 %, and foreign-born 16.5% in 2015 compared with an EU-

average of 19%. In the last years France has managed to improve its policies to retain pupils with education and training system by introducing needed reform across all sectors. This resulted in the improvement of prevention measures, equity and new approaches to teaching and governance. Thanks to these changes France has managed to reach its national Europe2020 target of reducing ESL rate below 9,5%. Additional challenge faced by French education and training system is a high share of young people leaving education with no qualifications. Between 2011 and 2013 it was at 15% level.

As pointed by SOLIDAR Foundation's members, in France, the link between social origins and educational performances is very strong. Only 22% of children coming from families with low social level access to higher education (26% in OECD countries). Children from families of immigrant background are over-represented among children with low educational performances.

An important reason of early school leaving is the gap between cultural capital of families (diploma of parents, educational practices in adequacy with school, educational ambition for children,...) and the educational culture of the institution. This gap is even wider in families with a working class background and foreign-origin families that leads to a process of exclusion.

NEETs

The percentage of young people neither in employment, education or training (NEETs) is very close to the overall EU average and in 2015 was at 13.5% versus 15.3% (in EU28). The group of NEETs is mostly composed out of short-term unemployed, and 57.9% of all NEETs are registered with the public employment services.

Since 2014 France started to experiment with its own youth guarantee programme to promptly, and in a



more systematic way, provide NEETs with access to jobs. The scheme is available particularly to vulnerable young people who are guided by a local youth employment services who support their job search. Youth between 16 and 25 years old who are NEETs, whose income is below social inclusion benefit and who are at risk of social exclusion can benefit from the intense support of finding job, work-experience opportunities when receiving financial support. In the end of 2016, 91 departments were providing this support and 80% of youth employment services. They have supported more than 100 000 youngsters. Our French members are critical of this number and stress that this is not enough. They underline that 1.9 million NEET's are currently not part of society and that every fourth beneficiary in homeless structures is aged 18-25. As of 2017 a new "Labour Bill" will replace that scheme and will introduce new opportunities for eligible young people.

The implementation of the Youth Guarantee remains challenging in terms of outreach, information and coordination strategies. A major issue of the implementation of the youth guarantee in France is the lack of coordination between all the actors involved, namely National Employment agencies, local missions, regional Councils and the Ministry of Education. The real challenge will actually be the operational implementation of the measure coordinated by one common platform. Additionally, the poor quality of offers for such young people is regrettable. Another point is the communication on the European Youth Guarantee, as it could be strengthened to ensure dissemination of adequate information to all parties concerned. Efforts to improve outreach are under way with the creation of an inter-ministerial working group to connect existing databases. The coordination process is being reviewed and the role of Pôle emploi should be strengthened.

However, there are more obstacles to the proper implementation of youth guarantee in France according to French CSOs. The generalisation of a collective approach to a one-size-fits-all model needs

to be prevented. The Youth Guarantee has to be adapted to local realities and suit the local context. Moreover, the administrative burden is currently very high. The quantity of documentation and justifications required to access the guarantee in some cases provides an obstacle for young NEETs who are a fragile target group.

Citizenship education

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Resulting from the rise of violent extremism and terrorists attacks in Europe in the last years, as well as disturbing developments threatening the universal values of pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality shared by European society. In 2015, upon the invitation of France and the Latvian Presidency to the EU, the Education Ministers adopted the "Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education".

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adopts civic education, media literacy and critical thinking as key elements of “citizen’s pathway” as a preventive measure against radicalisation.

Council recommendations

In 2015, the unemployment rate increased to 10,4 %. Unemployment is higher among young people, non-EU nationals and less qualified workers. The structure of the labour market is increasingly polarised, with highly educated workers hired on open-ended contracts and a constant proportion of low-skilled jobs becoming more and more precarious.

The French government is required by the Council to improve the links between the education sector and the labour market, in particular by reforming apprenticeship and vocational training, with emphasis on the low skilled.

[Source EUR-Lex; http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2016.299.01.0114.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2016:299:TOC]

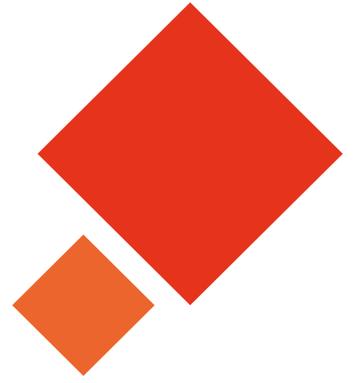


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As part of the Lifelong Learning Watch SOLIDAR Foundation has developed 12 country studies in 2016 covering the status in different Member States when it comes to; Promoting access and participation in Lifelong Learning, Vocational Education and Training, 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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