



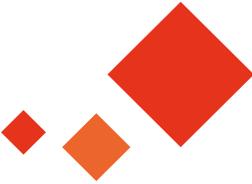
COUNTRY STUDY



IRELAND

Country monitoring report 2016

Ireland is doing very well in terms of early school-leaving (ESL), as their early school leaving rate of 6.9% in 2015 proves (whereas the EU average is 11%). It also confirms that Ireland already reached its 2020 national target of 8 %. In Ireland men are much more likely to drop out from school than women, and in contrast to other EU countries foreign-born students perform better at school than native-born.



With the national action plan 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools' (DEIS), Ireland has a comprehensive early school leaving strategy. It focuses on addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education. Some 860 primary and second level schools are participating in DEIS. All of these schools are eligible for a range of additional supports to help them to improve attendance, retention and educational outcomes for their students. Since the launch of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme 2015-2017, a set of intervention measures targeting youth under 18 who are at risk of dropping out of school were put in place. Moreover there are as well ongoing initiatives to support youth who has already disengaged from the education system, to work with them to re-enter education and benefit from diverse alternative options.



IRELAND

Promoting access and participation in Lifelong Learning

Ireland's positive trend over the past years with regards to participation in Lifelong Learning (LLL) has changed in the last few years and since 2012 we can observe a decrease in the number of people participating in education and training. In 2015 only 6.5% of Irish adults were involved in LLL in comparison to and EU average of 10.7%, what is only half of the desired level of participation by 2020.

In 2016 the Irish government has developed a strategic plan (May 2016 Programme for Government) that upholds a commitment to invest more in education that was followed by a comprehensive Action Plan for Education for period 2016-2019, with the ultimate goal of developing the best education and training system in Europe within the next few years.¹ Investment in the development of Lifelong Learning and increasing participation is as well one of the key objectives of their new National Skills Strategy 2025 - *Ireland's Future*. The proposed actions, as well as their strategy very much focuses on reaching out to disadvantaged groups, continuous advancement of the educational sector, and skills.

It is very much welcomed to see that the strategy has set as one of their priorities, the building of strong links between education and community. Building bridges between different groups of stakeholders, as well as different social and economic realities becomes key to enhance ones opportunities, and strengthens the creation of learning societies. One of the examples is the proposal to improve the way employers work with

¹ <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Strategy-Statement/Departmentof-Education-and-Skills-Strategy-Statement-2016-2019.pdf>

education and training systems in order to stimulate development of skills that are needed and use the skills available for growth of local communities.

It is expected that the Strategies when implemented will have a positive impact on promoting access and participation in Lifelong Learning for all groups of learners, through diverse forms of learning and training.

Vocational Education and Training

The economic crisis has largely impacted the number of apprenticeships offered, especially in the construction sector. The employability of recent upper-secondary VET graduates is significantly lower in Ireland 59.4% in comparison to the EU average of 73%. Amongst others, these are factors that make vocational programs less attractive for young Irish to follow, as they are hoping for an education that will provide them with skills and competences adequate to the needs of the labour market, so they can consequently land a job. Therefore to better promote Vocational Education and Training (VET), it is needed to update the curricula and include elements of work-based learning, to work on improving permeability between different types of education. The reform is needed to make sure that young people are prepared for a constantly changing *world of work*, and their skills and competences support them in any upcoming transitions while upholding a capacity for continuous Lifelong Learning.

From the providers' side, it is expected that the set up Regional Skills Fora² will support VET providers, enhance cooperation with employers with regards to development of educational offer that addresses current and upcoming skills needs as technological developments, and provides students with skills and qualifications relevant to professional needs.

² <http://regionalskills.ie/>



Validation of NFIL

In Ireland, *Recognition of Prior Learning* (RPL) incorporates prior formal, informal and non-formal learning which is validated within the context of a specified destination award from level one-to-ten on the National Framework of Qualifications. The recognition of non-formal learning has been facilitated systematically through the practice of the inclusion and alignment of awards through a range of awarding bodies, including professional awards and those developed and used internationally by different industrial sectors.

The fact that RPL was developed as a bottom-up initiative with a strong support of stakeholders from the education and training sector, has strongly enabled a unified understanding of RPL, recognition of workplace learning and learning outside of the formal education system. In addition, it provided a good basis for further development of RPL arrangements. Nevertheless, there is a problem with a lack of dedicated funding and at times, access to full information on the RPL procedures.

Early-school Leaving

Ireland is doing very well in terms of early school-leaving (ESL), as their early school leaving rate of 6.9% in 2015 proves (whereas the EU average is 11%). It also confirms that Ireland already reached its 2020 national target of 8%. **In Ireland men are much more likely to drop out from school than women, and in contrast to other EU countries foreign-born students perform better at school than native-born.**³

With the national action plan '*Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools*' (DEIS), Ireland has a

³ https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-ie_en.pdf

comprehensive early school leaving strategy. It focuses on addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education. Some 860 primary and second level schools are participating in DEIS. All of these schools are eligible for a range of additional supports to help them to improve attendance, retention and educational outcomes for their students.⁴⁵ Since the launch of *the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme 2015-2017*, a set of intervention measures targeting youth under 18 who are at risk of dropping out of school were put in place. Moreover there are as well ongoing initiatives to support youth who has already disengaged from the education system, to work with them to re-enter education and benefit from diverse alternative options.

NEETs

Ireland has managed to slightly decrease its NEETs rate (neither in employment, education or training) to 19.7% in 2015 after it reached its peak at 22% during the Great Recession between 2006 and 2011. The majority of NEETs - 88% is registered within governmental services. 40% of NEETs are young people aged between 15-19 (2013), given that compulsory education in Ireland ends at the age of 16. As estimated by the OECD⁶ in Ireland 65% of youth who dropped out of school before completing upper secondary education are NEETs. Similarly to the comparison of school performance, the foreign-born NEETs rate is not higher than the Irish-born ones.

The Irish government presented a comprehensive Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan to the Commission in 2014, identifying measures to build on services and initiatives already in place and to increase their impact by tailoring them to address the particular

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/docs/2014/monitor2014-ie_en.pdf

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2015/cr2015_ireland_en.pdf

⁶ <http://www.oecd.org/ireland/sag2016-ireland.pdf>



challenges of youth unemployment. Nonetheless, more measures need to be implemented, within the Youth Guarantee, to improve the situation of young people. In 2015 over 19.000 offers available within the Youth Guarantee scheme were taken up.

As reality shows, one out of five young Irish is neither in employment, education or training, and national statistics show that around half of the young people are registered for more than a year. This leads to the conclusion that the current available programs need improvement and more funding to better the situation of young people in Ireland and prevent them from further exclusion. There is a vast need to invest more in education, training, and work experience measures for young people and to reverse the funding cuts on training allowances for youth.

Citizenship education

As of 1st September 2016, a new subject “politics and society” was introduced as part of the *Leaving Certificate*. Currently the subject is an option tested in 25-30 school⁷, however, as of 2018 the subject will become obligatory in all Irish upper-secondary schools. The curricula covers aspects of power and decision-making at local and international level, human rights, active citizenship, globalisation, electoral system, media literacy etc. A practical approach to the development of civic skills takes form through a citizenship project that needs to be taken by individual students to allow them to pass the course, which makes up for 20% of their final grade. Teachers responsible for delivering this course must have qualifications in the areas such as politics, social science, anthropology etc. The Irish government undertook a revision of “*Framework for the Junior Cycle 2015*” to ensure that civic, social and political education becomes part of the well-being programme, as well as digital media literacy.⁸ It is planned that

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-ie_en.pdf

⁸ www.education.ie/en/Publications/PolicyReports/Framework-for-Junior-Cycle-2015

citizenship education will become part of programs at lower secondary schools as of 2017.

Council recommendations

“The Council recommendation 2016 highlights that skills mismatches remain and skills shortages have emerged in certain areas, while upskilling and reskilling opportunities remain insufficient, and the decrease in education expenditure could have a negative impact on educational outcomes in the future.”

[Source: EUR-Lex, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2016.299.01.0065.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2016:299:TOC]

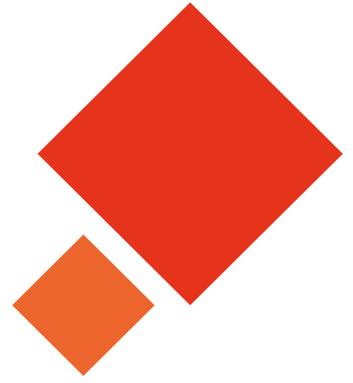


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As part of the Lifelong Learning Watch SOLIDAR Foundation has developed 12 country studies in 2016 covering the status in different Member States when it comes to; Promoting access and participation in Lifelong Learning, Vocational Education and Training,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