



European Elections 2019

solidar

Position Paper 3/5

ADVANCING SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EUROPE

SOLIDAR CALLS FOR MORE SOCIAL INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION

In Partnership with:

thistimeimvoting.eu

Social investment: key for inclusive learning societies

SOLIDAR members have a long-standing tradition of empowering people through lifelong learning, and actively promote social cohesion, active inclusion and participation in society. They are active in the fields of adult education, professional and vocational training, education populaire and education for Peace.

The fundamental values of solidarity, equality, participation and social justice are the cornerstones of the process of building inclusive learning societies, where people are given opportunities to develop and to cooperate as free and equal individuals within collective frameworks. The austerity measures imposed by conservative and right wing populist governments targeted and put all education sectors under huge pressure and consciously endangered further European integration and smooth transition from education into labor market in changing world of work. The SOLIDAR members and partners aim towards creating an inclusive learning society on the grounds of openness and democracy, where all members have an opportunity to participate in lifelong and life-wide learning opportunities. This requires both adequate financial resources and sustainable structure for Europe-wide cooperation among all stakeholders.

Our societies are becoming increasingly polarized, divided and as a consequence the willingness to reach intercultural understanding is fading away. Educational activities aiming at facilitating intercultural understanding should be core to the European policies, as requested in the Paris Declaration and as this is a basic condition for peaceful living together and therefore an essential element of the European Union. Both for the relations between communities living in different EU member states and for those with the neighboring countries.

In current European societies intercultural dialogue, facilitated by CSOs is thus the tool that needs to be supported by adequate financial resources as well as proper structure through which the CSO can transparently contribute to the policymaking.

Personal emancipation, individual's full civic, social and economic participation in society and the development of human talents can only be achieved through social investment in education. This means re-envisioning European policies on education to achieve accessible, inclusive, participatory education everywhere in Europe.

Participation and inclusion - The whole school approach

The whole school aims at raising quality and standards for the lifelong learning path of each individual. This approach acknowledges that all aspects of the school community can impact upon learners' health and wellbeing, and that learning, social life and wellbeing are intertwined. Our members and partners report it as a remarkably effective way to tackle early school leaving. For it to be effective, schools need to identify relevant partners from outside of the formal school system and address the needs of the educational community by engaging in continuous, cyclical processes for improvement¹.

Our members have worked with formal learning institutions in an attempt to bring a non-formal and informal learning through various ways, such as close cooperation with families and communities, participation in extracurricular and cultural activities, or helping to organise campaigns in schools to develop a common understanding of objectives and in an attempt to play a key role in promoting cooperation. Our Italian member [Auser](#) for example has led a project engaging senior volunteers in interaction with middle school students, who were eventually enabled to relate to their own school, neighbourhood, community and city. The whole school approach was also core to the [project ASAP - Against School Aggression Partnership project](#), of which [SOS Malta](#) was a partner. In this case, NFIL providers teamed up with school management and authorities to develop a model programme to prevent and tackle bullying and aggressive behaviours in schools. The whole school approach that translates in putting the learner at the centre and cross sectoral cooperation has proven to be an effective methodology for improving the wellbeing of students and their communities.

1. <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/project-result-content/360e3a02-40e9-4c17-b4f9-ca552f0cd970/A%20Whole%20School%20Approach.pdf>

Democracy is based on citizens' civic awareness and participation

When we think of democracy, we often think of parliaments and constitutions, institutions and laws. However, these will not function unless they are built on a democratic culture: a set of attitudes and behaviours that emphasize dialogue and cooperation, solving conflicts by peaceful means, and active participation in the public space. For this reason, formal and non-formal and informal learning providers and stakeholders have to work closely together in order to provide citizens with truly empowering training and education and to achieve democratic learning societies.

For our members the most important role of education is preparation for democratic participation, personal empowerment and the development of a broad knowledge base for social and professional inclusion. With the project [Let's change the mode](#), our member [ISI Bulgaria](#) organised four regional and one national discussions on access to healthcare system and labour rights and violations on labour market. The aim was to be part of the development process and to contribute to raising awareness and implementation of progressive policies at the national level.

For equality and inclusion through vocational education and training and lifelong learning

Vocational education and training is crucial as it builds the skills, knowledge and competences of young people, teaching them how to learn and adapt in a changing world for their personal development and fulfilment. In this light, SOLIDAR Foundation argues that the mobility of VET learners is crucial and needs to be supported by additional measures that take into account the diversity and specificity of VET learners. Disadvantaged learners show more positive results than the others, in particular in completing formal learning and in boosting their self-confidence in their education capacities. However, projects with young people from vulnerable groups need a lot more preparation and resources.

The lifelong learning remains a key when it comes to decent life in nowadays world. New skills have to be acquired on daily basis not only for professional but mainly for personal development and well-being. The advancement of technology, shifting balance between democracy and authoritarian regimes in Europe and changing demographics require easy access to learning opportunities at any age with adapted methods for each learner.

VET has proved to be a particularly effective tool for facilitating the integration of migrants in society. The project [Inclus: Europe for the integration of young migrants and refugees](#) – carried out also by our member [FIC](#) – proved that by supporting youth associations to better understand the obstacles to inclusion in society and the integration in the labour market of young migrants and refugees as well as to empower directly young migrants and refugees to take part in youth associations through the use of non-formal and informal learning methods and training tools.

Our member [Volunteering Matters](#) has carried out trainings for migrant women, men and young people to better understand the school system in England - the [Knowledge Equals Education \(KEO\)](#) project is a great example of an intervention which targets specific vulnerable groups and promotes the integration of migrants. The project delivered volunteer-led programmes to families with primary school aged children and supported parents to play a greater role in their child's education. Our partner [EVBB](#) is leader in representing and making the case for VET to be at the core of any strategy for social inclusion and especially for the integration of youth and migrants.

The European Union has continued to support programmes that aim to promote skills for democracy. Contrary to far-right discourses on seeing formal education as the only tool necessary for the labour market, the European Union has acknowledged and recognised that non-formal learning increases the learner's intrinsic motivation, voluntary participation and critical thinking needed for democratic participation, essential to the future European elections.

For education to become a driver for equality and inclusion in the EU, SOLIDAR demands

- The creation of a platform on the whole school approach for cross-sectoral exchange and sharing of best practices while putting learner in the centre.
- Recognising the role of organised Civil Society and its contribution to democratic and learning societies.
- The diversity of VET to reflect the diversity of VET learners - the further development of the systems should promote jointly agreed European values and promote equal societies.
- To improve the permeability between education systems. Various forms of learning: formal, non-formal, informal and VET must be validated and recognised.
- The promotion of alternative pathways for individuals to re-engage with the education system and implementation of validation and recognition of skills and competences acquired out of formal system.
- Strategy to attract talents to teaching and education including providing teachers and educators with the right skills and competences to face challenges in class and outside of it.

Eager to know more? Check out our publications

- [Lifelong Learning Watch](#)
- [SOLIDAR makes integration happen – The case of Solidarité Laïque in Calais](#)
- [Teachers and Educators for Democratic Europe](#)
- [An inclusive Europe - Co-creating young people's vision for the future of Europe - facilitation guide](#)

solidar

Rue de Pascale 4-6
1040 Brussels
Belgium
T +32 2 500 10 20
F +32 2 500 10 30

Twitter: @SOLIDAR_EU
Facebook: SOLIDAR
www.solidar.org
solidar@solidar.org

Responsible Editor:

Conny Reuter

Author:

Elisa Gambardella

Layout:

Eugeni Brigneti Masgrau

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SOLIDAR is a European network of membership based Civil Society Organisations who gather several millions of citizens throughout Europe and worldwide. SOLIDAR voices the values of its member organisations to the EU and international institutions across the three main policy sectors; social affairs, lifelong learning and international cooperation.