The United Kingdom has various different national systems when it comes to citizenship education along with the validation of non-formal and informal learning, thus this report will mostly leave out Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and instead focus on England and its lifelong learning and citizenship system. Our members at SOLIDAR Foundation have deemed citizenship education as unsatisfactory, with policy gaps and the lack of education and training for teachers. With media literacy and critical thinking being relatively well developed in terms of projects involving CSOs, government and private stakeholders, tackling hate speech and media literacy within formal education must be reinforced with civil society involvement in the process. Furthermore, the last EU referendum and the decision to leave the EU for the United Kingdom translates into a deeper challenge to the concept and meaning of citizenship, which should be addressed by policy makers in the long term.
1. Ensuring that people acquire civic and intercultural competences

Despite its international reputation for promoting parliamentary democracy, England does not have a long track record in citizenship education as it only became a formal curriculum subject for the first time in 2002. However, citizenship has been reinforced since with the introduction of a new National Curriculum in 2014 with an emphasis on promoting a core ‘canon of knowledge’ for pupils through core subjects. The new Citizenship National Curriculum has a strong emphasis on political, legal and economic knowledge at the expense of the development of skills and active citizenship elements.

Citizenship education is covered by the national curricula but with a high degree of discretion in how it is taught. England, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own national curricula that sets out teaching requirements for citizenship which address politics, parliament and government, the legal system, how the economy functions, the role of the media, human rights, and European and international relations. Teachers use topical political and social issues to help pupils develop key skills of research, discussion and debate, as well as to represent the views of others, think critically, evaluate and reflect. In England, citizenship is a statutory National Curriculum foundation subject in secondary schools, while it is a non-statutory subject in primary education.

In the United Kingdom, the current state of citizenship education is relatively poor. According to our members, in England and Wales citizenship was never fully embedded into the education system despite being part of the national curriculum in England for key stages 3 and 4 and being statutory in secondary schools. Moreover, citizenship education continues to focus on British values and objectives to prevent radicalization in schools.

Hence, the absence of a statutory entitlement and a comprehensive law education creating a basic framework for citizenship from elementary school to higher education reflects the lack of the overall vision for education. Furthermore, our members have drawn concerns stemming from Brexit challenging the concepts of citizenship, thus stretching further the notion of citizenship. The need to bring qualitative content for citizenship education needs to be matched with the level of funding as well as the level of importance on political agendas.

As found in the previous Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor, civil society organisations are outpacing formal education providers when it comes to promoting social justice and participatory structures. For instance, our UK members have promoted social justice through training for migrant women and men, and young people to better understand the school system in England, such as the Knowledge Equals Education (KEO) project which targets specific vulnerable groups and promotes the integration of migrants.

Furthermore, the need to have further trans-sectoral partnerships between formal and non-formal education providers in England is voiced through the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), which acts as the voice of the voluntary sector vis-à-vis public authorities and the government. Furthermore, the Network of National Volunteer Involving Associations brings together dozens of volunteer-involving associations (CSOs) from across the UK, and often engages with public authorities and the government in public consultations, advocacy, responses to consultations. However, this is done in the context of promotion of volunteering and active citizenship as mechanisms for strengthening social cohesion, rather than the formal education sector.

3. https://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/project/knowledge-equals-opportunities/
4. https://www.ncvo.org.uk/
Validation of NFIL

There is no national strategy for validation in England and Northern Ireland, with five different qualifications frameworks operating in the UK. With no single national framework for validation, there are however four clear structures by which individuals can have their prior learning validated, which apply to different types of learning⁶.

2. Enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, particularly regarding the use of the internet and social media

In 2017 the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) introduced the Internet Safety Strategy green paper as the outcome of the consultation with a wide range of stakeholders with a focus on online safety. It covered a range of topics such as stressing a commitment to develop children and young people’s digital literacy. In its response to the green paper, the government recognizes the importance of working closely with the private sector, as it believes that companies need to take a more proactive approach in dealing with harmful content.

The Government’s response through its digital strategy mentions some innovative initiatives outside the formal curriculum which provide young people with opportunities to develop their digital skills. For example, the Raspberry Pi Foundation is providing low-cost, high performance computers to learners alongside outreach and education to make more young people access computing and digital making⁷. Furthermore, the BBC Make it Digital programme partnered with over 25 organisations to provide the micro:bit (a pocket sized codeable computer) to every child in year 7 (aged 11) to inspire them to develop their interest and digital creativity⁸.

Following the EU Referendum and the preparations for Brexit, lots of youth orientated and led CSOs were set up to challenge the rise of racism and fake news resulting from the Referendum and run-up to Brexit. For instance, My Life My Say (MLMS) is a youth-led, party neutral non-profit organization on a mission to re-brand politics and secure a better Brexit for young people by facilitating their direct involvement in the decision-making processes. They try to achieve this through their grassroots campaigning, All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) research, report launch, partnership with the Department for Exiting the EU/ the European Commission, Brexit Cafes and their APPG advocacy. To date, MLMS has worked with over 30,000 young people directly and thousands more indirectly. MLMS is the secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group for a Better Brexit for Young People (APPG-BBYP) that is chaired by Stephen Kinnock MP⁹.

8. https://www.bbc.co.uk/makeitdigital
Recommendations

- Increase funding to citizenship education along with qualitative content
- Have further trans-sectorial partnerships including formal education providers with CSOs
- Develop a UK-wide approach for the validation of non-formal and informal learning
- Take action in order to tackle hate speech and enhance media literacy within education systems towards vulnerable groups and ensure that formal education providers are more inclusive

CASE STUDY
Women Against Exploitation and Violence Speak Up

Volunteering Matters is the leading UK volunteering charity engaging more than 30000 volunteers each year through over 180 programmes. The organisation works with many different vulnerable groups - people with disabilities, vulnerable, isolated groups, and helps them, through volunteering, to integrate and be part of their communities. They are supported by other volunteers, who often themselves share similar backgrounds and have overcome similar challenges. In 2017, Volunteering Matters developed a project called WASSUP (Women Against Sexual Exploitation and Violence Speak Up), where young women supporting other young women and girls, especially those from a migrant background, are engaged in peer support and training programmes in schools to combat gender-based violence and sex trafficking. This youth social action project was delivered by 30 young women in Ipswich to educate peers on the issues of sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, honor based violence and gang grooming along with raising awareness in the wider community on these issues. To do this, the group have collectively built a toolkit which they deliver in 90 minute sessions in schools across Suffolk. They base the sessions on the life of a fictional character called Astra, and use film, spoken verse, imagery and flashcards they have created to journey young people though various decision-making scenarios based on Astra’s life. The toolkit then informs young people of the risks and impact of their decisions. The toolkit addresses difficult issues with authenticity of young people’s insights and knowledge, and has already been delivered to 600 schoolchildren across Suffolk.
This Monitor is a contribution to further examine the relationship between citizenship and lifelong learning experiences and policy outcomes in and outside of the classroom in various European countries. Mapping the different approaches that SOLIDAR Foundation members have taken in promoting EU values in relation to citizenship education and lifelong learning for greater democratic participation of citizens, the outcomes will be disseminated towards European and national policy-makers and offers an array of best practices to collect, use and transfer among networks. The SOLIDAR Education and Lifelong Learning Forum will further work on the topic and develop a long term sustainable advocacy strategy for CSOs towards national and EU-wide authorities to influence the debate and revision of national curricula and education systems.

Through its member and partner organizations, SOLIDAR Foundation engages 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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With contributions from SOLIDAR Foundation member VM & partners