

Civic Competences and Lifelong Learning for the Green and Digital Transitions: Is Europe Ready?

Online Conference

7-9 April 2021

Welcoming remarks – Mikael Leyi, SOLIDAR Foundation Secretary General

He launches SOLIDAR Foundation's annual conference, organized for the second year running in partnership with the [Foundation for European Progressive Studies \(FEPS\)](#), at which the [5th edition of the Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor](#) is presented. He **stresses the aspect of partnership and alliance building** that this event has, beyond the presentation of SOLIDAR Foundation's annual flagship publication. **A multi-stakeholder approach for social justice, for enhancing progressive education and democratic participation, and for achieving a sustainable model to achieve inclusive learning societies that leave no one behind is needed.**

He introduces the Monitor as a **research report on policy developments on the field of attainment of skills through lifelong learning**, explaining its structure and the fact that it builds upon previous editions. He encourages participants to have a comprehensive discussion on the importance of non-formal and informal learning for the European citizenry and for democratic participation at times of historic challenges, as now is the time for greater collaboration amongst education stakeholders. He passes the floor to **Elisa Gambardella, Education and Lifelong Learning Coordinator at SOLIDAR Foundation**, who moderates all three sessions of the conference.

Session 1: Global citizenship education | 7 April 11.00-12.30

Opening remarks – MEP Marcos Ros, Socialists & Democrats Group

He addresses the task of raising awareness on citizenship education as a fundamental right and tool to build inclusive, cohesive, sustainable and global societies. **MEP Marcos Ros supports the Monitor's recommendation to increase investment in global citizenship education (GCE), while ensuring that ministries of education prioritize it.** GCE should be more encompassing than education for sustainable development, with teachers playing a key role in promoting it. Therefore, the importance of training them, just as is mentioned in the [2018 Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning](#), is clear. He insists on the importance of key competences linked to volunteering, solidarity, critical thinking, mobility, ecological responsibility and intercultural dialogue that enable people to learn and live in diversity. People require knowledge of regional and local European history and values to promote tolerance, solidarity, gender equality and sexual diversity as key European values, being ready to combat hate speech and crimes, fake news and deliberative misinformation. In this sense, **the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programmes have to be sufficiently funded and well recognized even in the pandemic.** As S&D shadow rapporteur for the European Parliament's own-initiative report on the European Commission's [Communication on Achieving the European Education Area \(EEA\) by 2025](#), he commits to defend affordable, accessible and inclusive education at all levels. At the same time, he stresses the importance of recognising VET and of implementing the Updated Skills Agenda. Concomitantly there is a need for further commitment against early leaving from education and training, for a comprehensive

approach to teaching and learning of languages and for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning through implementing the 2018 Council recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning. He concludes explaining that the EEA is a good opportunity to address all issues and promote education to adapt to the 21st century society.

Presentation of the Monitor findings – Andrei Frank, SOLIDAR Foundation Policy Officer

He presents the Monitor's aims, background and structure. Andrei explains the methodology and lists the case study countries: Estonia, Poland, Italy, Spain, France, Croatia, North Macedonia, Serbia and Sweden. He proceeds to explain the main findings of the GCE chapter, which revolve around the diverse definitions of the topic. SOLIDAR uses a definition that views GCE as global political education, preparing learners to develop a sense of belonging to the global community, and take an active role in society to contribute to a peaceful, just world in which ecological resources are preserved. He discusses the lack of prioritization of the topic at national and European level, and the fact that it is frequently linked to development cooperation rather than to the whole educational system. Prerequisites to promote GCE in education such as adequate support and training for education professionals, updated national education curricula are missing while ideological tensions linked to increasingly extremist sentiments frustrate the promotion of GCE. The informal and non-formal education sector is currently more active on GCE, as the numerous good practices of the Monitor and national case studies reveal, but the lack of a structural approach to this work, one that would be organized in partnerships across all types of education providers, causes gaps in the global competences that learners have. He concludes with the Monitor's recommendations which focus on increased public investment on GCE, mainstreaming GCE in education, providing conditions and training for education personnel to promote GCE, while setting up avenues for collaboration among all education stakeholders to promote a holistic vision of GCE, in a lifelong and lifewide manner.

Panel discussion

Aleksandra Dimic, [Initiative for Development & Cooperation \(IDC\)](#), presents two case studies from the Monitor. IDC Serbia instills values and competencies linked to sustainable development, commitment to human rights, equal opportunities, economic and social empowerment, non-discrimination. Through projects, IDC serves as non-formal and informal learning provider for returnees. [The Good Neighbourhood Clubs](#) represents such an IDC-managed space of education. These three community centres operate in highly multicultural and diverse regions of Serbia are serving the local community as beneficiaries and not only the returnees, with the aim of building unity, solidarity and a sense of belonging. Over 1500 children and young people underwent numerous workshops and educational programmes on the environment, on sexual education, children's rights, digital communication, youth activism, volunteering through these centres. The adults in the communities joined workshops on entrepreneurship. Aleksandra Dimic explains that IDC cooperated with local authorities, relying on their structural, logistical and financial support to develop this programme that prepares citizens and the entire community for digital and green transitions.

The second case study she describes is the New Green Initiative, a partnership with seven other CSOs launched to tackle serious climate issues in Serbia. Pollution in Serbia has reached record levels for Europe and communities must be empowered to protest and to protect their communities. The first big action for the New Green Initiative is developing a multimedia platform to gather activists, CSOs, citizens, educators to prepare communities to know their rights and what they can do to advocate for a greener approach in Serbia. These are first steps but IDC is pleased to lead this effort and empower other CSOs.

Vladimir Garkov, DG EAC Policy Officer Education for Sustainable Development, highlights the Just Transition aspect of the EU's [Green Deal](#), making sure that every reform would have in mind the increasing precariousness and job insecurity post-COVID-19. He also introduces the Commission's [EEA](#) which focuses on green and digital transitions. One action to this end is the Education for Climate Coalition which is a bottom-up approach in which stakeholders can work together on this topic. By end of 2021, the Commission will launch a proposal for a Council Recommendation for education for environmental sustainability, in line with the idea that the Commission can promote peer-learning but not more as education is a national competence.

Also linked with the EEA and the Green Deal, he explains the work to create a competence framework on climate change and sustainable development, ensuring a common understanding amongst stakeholders, teachers, students from all over the EU. He is surprised to see that the SOLIDAR Foundation Monitor is not referring to the Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning as this promotes knowledge, skills, attitudes, for all EU citizens, which would develop abilities to function in the world. Citizenship is specifically described in this framework and education for sustainable development will serve as a bridge between natural sciences and social sciences, linking the actions of people with their environment. People need the ability, readiness and willingness to change their own position when faced with evidence. The green competences framework will be focused on citizenship and science and he is pleased to see in the Monitor a shift from the whole-school approach to the whole-community one as the EU institutions acknowledge that it no longer is only about learning, but about acting and living.

Jernej Pikalo, [PROGRESIVA](#), describes Slovenia's experience with GCE in light of his past experience as former Minister of Education in Slovenia. After ten years of reforming, GCE will be part of formal education in Slovenia, during the third year of upper secondary education. This will start with the current cohort, which will experience GCE only two years from now. The SDGs were mainstreamed through this stand-alone GCE topic but the struggle was significant due to an overcrowded school curriculum. The class' aim will be to raise global awareness, discuss environmental issues beyond local aspects, mainstreaming the conversation on global challenges. However, Jernej Pikalo warns against the development of new types of inequalities, with only some learners having access to GCE. It is essential for all European to develop these soft skills and we must ensure that GCE is part of overall resilience-building structures rather than creating new divisions. He concludes his intervention with a point on the fact that GCE will permeate formal education curriculum, but the issue will be more problematic for lifelong learning, and for ensuring that workers over 30 years can also have access to this type of education. Upskilling and reskilling will also be key for the green transitions and it is important for businesses and companies to also become places of learning. They must also promote key competences and not just labour market related competences.

Rilli Lappalainen, [CONCORD](#) President and [Bridge 47](#) Founder, praises the Monitor and especially the inspirational examples that should embolden people to be open to more learning. He reminds participants of the inclusion of GCE as part of the Agenda 2030 via subtarget 4.7, celebrating the fact that informal and non-formal education were officially recognized thanks to decades of CSOs' work. This must continue to make this target a reality through empowering people to contribute to society. Each individual is essential for promoting peaceful circumstances and working to fight global challenges. He advises CSOs to use positive language that empowers people to work on this while also dropping the jargon around GCE and phrasing these efforts in ways that resonate people's immediate realities. He refers to the idea of ecological-social civilization and to the idea of building skills that support learners to respect the existence of all human beings. People have to be capable to challenge the system they live in while also develop

their own skills. People and CSOs should challenge the EU which might lack competences in education but has the power to advise and to nudge member states in the direction of GCE. He calls for a new pan-European strategy for SDG 4.7 because a holistic GCE is needed in today's world.

Discussion

Participants explore the involvement of employers in the field of developing soft skills for the future. They highlight the content in their trainings, quality assurance on their trainings, certification, while highlighting the importance of connecting actors in a whole-government approach that can set up the environment for employers to be incentivized to develop such skills. Moreover, participants discuss the importance of further investment linked to such trainings. The conversation also moved to the EU level discussing the possibility of the Commission's future initiative on Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) serving as a tool to embolden employers in this direction. However, participants highlighted that the way these ILAs will be designed must offer equal balance to soft skills, to key competences to personal development on one side and to professional competences on the other side. ILAs can be successful only if they are made available for low-skilled people rather than just for those who are already highly skilled.

Closing remarks – Ditta Dolejsiova Trindade, [Global Education Network Europe \(GENE\)](#) Head of Support and Innovation

She introduces the work of GENE, setting up multi-stakeholder dialogues, roundtables and peer learning activities amongst ministries. She congratulates the good practices of the SOLIDAR Foundation Monitor and complements them with the examples of the Irish Global Schools, which use a whole-school approach to provide credits and passports to various schools that promote GCE. Ditta Dolejsiova offers the example of HUMANITAS, a Slovenian CSO, that launched a club for teachers to share information and practices on GCE, helping those lacking experience in facilitating learning on GCE.

GENE operates with the GCE policy term developed in the 2002 Maastricht Global Education Declaration but call on a renewed pan-European process on GCE. The achievements on having critical and planetary perspectives, on putting sustainability and rights at the centre are key but time has come to move beyond the schools with ever-increasing interconnectedness among formal, non-formal and informal education providers, which has been further increased by online tools during the pandemic. There is more cooperation now on GCE at EU and national level, GCE is present in several national strategies on lifelong learning or on youth policy and strategic engagement in many ministries exists for mainstreaming GCE. The value of joint strategies is fundamental for the challenges ahead and for ensuring that no one is being left behind while solidarity and democracy are strengthened at local, national and European level.

Session 2: Digital citizenship | 8 April 14.00-15.30

Opening remarks – MEP Victor Negrescu, Socialists & Democrats Groups

He starts by reiterating the importance of keeping citizenship education high on the EU decision-making agenda. A common answer on education is needed at European level given the common challenges that Europeans experience. Common quality standards across EU member states are needed while employers in each member state have to provide the same access to lifelong learning if the green and digital transition are to be achieved. By providing more emphasis to education in the European Semester process and including digital education in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans more funding and attention can be dedicated to this. As rapporteur for the European Parliament's own-initiative report '[Shaping Digital](#)

[Education Policy](#), Victor Negrescu has pushed for the allocation of at least 10% of the [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#) to the education sector in each country. He explains how with the support of teacher unions, parents' associations, students' organisations and other stakeholders, he has ensured that the Romanian government would follow this. He emphasizes education as the key to more resilient societies, successful green and digital transitions, stronger social standards and a stronger economy. Unfortunately, he explains that not all decision makers are committed to this task. Steps to create an EU institution that can coherently handle citizenship education at EU level can ensure better educated and informed citizens that can withstand all the challenges ahead. Europeans must work together to construct a new meaning for education at EU level and to make the European Education Area a reality for future generations.

Presentation of the Monitor findings – Andrei Frank, SOLIDAR Foundation Policy Officer

He proceeds with the digital citizenship chapter discussing the Council of Europe definition on this as well as the [European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens \(DigComp 2.0\)](#) as sources of inspiration for the concepts used in the Monitor. He presents the current situation in Europe regarding the fact that only 58% of Europeans have basic digital skills. Underinvestment in the digitalization of education has led France, Italy and Spain to lag behind EU and OECD averages when it comes to speed of internet in the education institutions, to existence of digitally equipped classrooms and to existence of online platforms in education institutions. He highlights that not only education institutions lack these tools but also that citizens do not have access to digital devices or internet connections, which represents an inability to access fundamental rights. He warns against the spread of surveillance capitalism, which implies tech companies using the data collected from users and treating them as consumers rather than citizens. In this context, he explains also that the research revealed that CSOs can prevent such abuses and provide digital resources to the population but that this can be the case only if they themselves are trained and adequately funded. Based on the research, SOLIDAR members are insufficiently prepared for digital activism. In this context, he presents some of the Monitor's recommendations which range from closing digital infrastructure and skills gaps through investment, and providing support for teachers to have the needed competence to integrate ICT in the classrooms, to setting up avenues for collaboration between formal, informal and non-formal education providers, and evaluating digital tools' benefits on learners before using them in education.

Panel

Carla Scaramella, [ARCI](#) Project Manager, clarifies that ARCI has been working on media literacy and development of online content before the pandemic. The various activities that ARCI organized had to, however, move fully online during the pandemic. The hundreds of concerts, educational support activities, film screening, debates, cultural initiatives were moved online as part of ARCI's national online campaign, [Viral Resistance](#). All these actions were video streamed on a daily basis providing the people the chance to join this diversified content. Similarly, ARCI has been providing educational support to youngsters at risk of educational poverty. A pedagogical caravan equipped with books, games, theatre props and many other cultural contents was travelling across the disadvantaged areas of eleven Italian citizens to combat early school leaving. The team, formed by a pedagogue, an artist and a storyteller, had to reorganize all activities online during the pandemic. The result was a collection of approximately 40 videos which were shown live and then made available to youngsters over the pandemic. She explains that though ARCI successfully adapted its actions online it continues to believe in the physical occupation of streets, squares, public spaces and hopes that any push towards a digital transition will not fully replace the physical space.

Justin Nogarede, [Foundation for European Progressive Studies \(FEPS\)](#) Digital Policy Advisor, discusses how essential digital infrastructure became for civil rights giving the example of the Dutch government presenting new pandemic-related restrictions in July 2020 only on Facebook and Twitter. People could access governmental information only through a private platform, revealing the irresponsibility over digital communication, even from the governments' side.

He acknowledges digital skills and infrastructure gaps cutting people off civic life, and the role of CSOs educating people on rights, challenging public authorities and private businesses, critically assessing new tools and keeping in mind that private interests in the tech sector do not always align with the public interest. However, he clarifies that not all can be fully aware of tech tools and disclaimers, which implies the need for a collective policy response. The public authorities invested in physical infrastructure but it is important to consider also other types of infrastructure, regulating the digital infrastructure in the same rigorous way as the mobility sector is regulated, for example. The online environment has been mostly shaped by Silicon Valley companies which have different interests than the public one. Search engines and social media treat people as consumers rather than citizens, pushing ubiquitous commercial surveillance, lack of transparency and interoperability, lack of choice. He ends his intervention on an optimistic note, as the pandemic increased the attention to digital regulation. The civil society has been active during this pandemic, pointing out digital technologies' limits, fighting against tracking apps, and taking more responsibility. At EU level, new policies on conditions for online participation were advanced in the past year. CSOs must continue to hold authorities at high standards in education and beyond as skills development can work only with a public response on the online environment.

Elisa Lironi, [European Citizen Action Service \(ECAS\)](#) Senior Manager, presents ECAS' work on European and digital democracy, implementing projects and services for the European Commission such as the [European Citizens' Initiative Forum](#). She explains that digital democracy is formed out of three parts: e-governance - usage of ICT to enhance public administration - , e-transparency – access to e-information on decision-making processes - , and e-participation - usage of ICT to allow citizens to work with public authorities to co-create policymaking. Experimenting with these can help engage more people at a lower cost, but civic education is needed to ensure that this type of democracy is adequately implemented. Therefore, digital education must include media literacy, support for citizens to understand how the virtual space functions in terms of echo chambers, filter bubbles and other algorithms. Beyond skills, people would need access to the internet and actual infrastructure to exert rights. COVID-19 made it clear that even governments lacked the organizational agility to manage sudden changes from offline policymaking to online policymaking. Elisa Lironi considers that solid regulatory frameworks are needed for e-participation. Research shows e-participation's benefits in terms of enhancing participation, representativeness in policymaking and of providing a civic education learning process for people. She supports the Monitor's recommendations linked to skills development and governments' and policymakers' responsibility to protect people's digital rights. She concludes with examples of ECAS' work: a MOOC, to be launched in May, on promoting digital citizenship and e-participation and the [CODE Europe](#) project, through which they crowdsource a pilot action from January until December asking nine countries what their contributions and proposals on air quality would be. This e-democracy process builds the basis of proposals that ECAS and the [European Environmental Bureau](#) will advance on the European Green Deal.

Anusca Ferrari, DG EAC Policy Officer Digital Education, reminds participants of the [Digital Education Action Plan](#) (DEAP) of 2018 which the European Commission published and then updated last year. The update extended the remit of the DEAP to non-formal and informal education as well considering the work

that CSOs have been doing. The public consultation launched for the DEAP yielded over 2700 responses from a wide variety of stakeholders, 90% claiming that the pandemic was a turning point for digital education. Needs and gaps were illuminated in the consultation and many respondents feared deepening socio-economic inequalities among learners. The 14 actions of the new DEAP focus on two main aspects: supporting the digital ecosystem and developing digital skills and competences. To this end, the European Digital Competence Framework (DigComp) serves as the starting point to develop these skills but new updates are needed as digital skills must go beyond technical abilities, while digital skills must now be seen as part to the right to education. As with any rights the onus cannot solely fall on citizens, as the governments and education and training institutions have to share this burden. The Commission is providing studies on digital education in formal education and through its recommendations and guidelines, such as the upcoming guidelines for teachers and educators on media literacy, it supports governments in updating education curricula. In the same vein, the Commission will set up multi-stakeholder expert groups on media literacy and invite various stakeholders to share information on needs for education and training. The creation of the Digital Education Hub serves a similar goal, bringing together formal, non-formal and informal education providers to ensure that all are listened to provide the best possible responses for all learners and citizens.

Discussion

Participants discuss on the importance of making lifelong learning a reality for the future, clarifying that learning does not happen only at a young age, if the challenges linked to the green and digital transition are to be met. They also acknowledge that digital tools will not be risk-free and it is important to experiment with innovations rather than miss out on opportunities. Although that is the case, participants are worried that too much experimentation is already happening with harmful consequences. The increased presence online is correlated with negative self-image, teenage suicide, and many other psychological harms. The oversight of how data from education is exploited as Google technologies are entering public education is worrying as well.

Concluding remarks – Ekaterina Efimenko, [ETUCE Programme Officer](#), distinguishes between digital education and digital citizenship education. She clarifies that providing digital equipment and skills does not make learners become interested in democratic institutions and active participation. An online campaign led to Samuel Paty's murder, revealing risks in the absence of digital citizenship education. She agrees that digital innovative tools should be included in education only via public funding while public-private partnerships and commercialization of education is dangerous due to inequalities in access to quality education. ETUCE identified two main challenges linked to digital citizenship education. One is cybersafety, for both teachers and learners, from the side of cybercrimes but also from the side of knowledge on protecting data and privacy online, from the perspective of surveillance in education which impacts academic freedom and the professional autonomy of teachers. The second one is, that even with continuous, constantly updated training for teachers on digital competences, the absence of educational support staff to help teachers is problematic. She concludes by explaining that digital citizenship education can be done only as long as interaction between teachers, educational personnel, students and other relevant actors is achieved. All outcomes and recommendations of the Monitor are welcomed, but from ETUCE's side it is important to ensure that teachers and education trade unions are involved as partners in any policy discussion since they are the ones on the ground, working and implementing these policies. Digital democratic citizenship should be a type of education that harnesses benefits and opportunities of digital tools while keeping in mind that they are only tools to achieve digital citizenship.

Session 3: Community partnerships for inclusive societies | 9 April 11.00-12.30**Opening remarks – MEP Marcos Ros – Socialists & Democrats Group**

He highlights that education is the basis to build inclusive societies while agreeing with the Monitor's findings on increased xenophobic rhetoric across Europe. He agrees on CSOs' key role to develop communities' capacities for inclusive societies, while supporting the Monitor's recommendations linked to collaboration among CSOs and public authorities on inclusive education projects, to inclusion taskforces that include CSOs and that are monitored and funded continuously. Quoting [article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), he stresses the importance of interculturalism and of building links across cultures while they enrich each other. He reminds participants of studies that show how the Erasmus+ programme yielded beneficiaries with multicultural views and attitudes towards job mobility, social initiative, open-mindedness more advanced compared to their counterparts who did not partake in Erasmus+ actions. Given this, he calls for increase support for the programme to ensure that more people can benefit from it. He concludes by commends the [new Erasmus+ programme](#) for focusing on social inclusion, green and digital transitions, and participation in the democratic life and by suggesting the new European Bauhaus Initiative as another avenue, beyond Erasmus+, to support civil society to build interdisciplinary, pan-European projects. This initiative connects the Green Deal with Europeans' living spaces, building a sustainable and inclusive future by means of sustainable and inclusive spaces.

Presentation of the Monitor findings – Andrei Frank, SOLIDAR Foundation Policy Officer

He explains the need to transition from the whole-school approach to the whole-community approach, ensuring that the idea of learning is not built around the formal education sector solely. He explains the fact that the ideal intercultural societies are not yet attained in Europe. The incidence of racially motivated hate crimes is increasing, the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on ethnic minorities has been more significant and disadvantaged groups continue to experience structural inequality in terms of their living conditions, employment opportunities and academic achievements among many other such inequalities. The growing far-right sentiments across Europe threaten the chance of having truly multicultural societies. In this context, he presents the good practices from the Monitor, highlighting the need for more CSOs to enter multi-stakeholder alliances and national taskforces on inclusion. He explains that the good practices presented must be scaled up to ensure that they are not local innovations but rather structural responses developed in support with public authorities for the promotion of intercultural societies. He concludes with some of the Monitor's recommendations such as the idea of setting up more avenues for collaboration among formal, informal and non-formal education providers, financially supporting CSOs that work on inclusion in the aftermath of the pandemic and scaling up the fight against discrimination.

Panel

Edurne Grau, [La Liga Española de la Educación](#) Board Member, presents vision of inclusive societies in La Liga, which closely works with formal, non-formal and informal education providers, as well as with policymakers and other CSOs when approaching inclusion practices. One example of such an initiative is the [Open Intercultural Classrooms](#) project, developed in collaboration with formal education, as migrant children are assisted to adapt to the new formal education systems. The project offers educational support and safe places in schools to make friends and create bonds. La Liga liaises with the newcomers' parents,

supporting especially the migrant mothers as they would be more isolated due to less social bonds, linguistic difficulties and other barriers. The parents receive the chance to join workshops to develop competences on supporting their children, but also on accessing other La Liga programmes such as Spanish language classes, legal and administrative support for migrants, psychological support. Similarly, the [Integral Community](#) project scales up the work of the previous example, focusing on the entire community, including the native population, and not only on migrants. All of the services from above are offered in this project as well but together with other leisure activities, sports programmes, intercultural gatherings to find the common elements across different cultures and bring them together. Unfortunately, La Liga confronts with financial issues exacerbated by the pandemic which impacted the implementation of this project. She calls for increased financial support at national and European level to ensure that such projects can continue running considering that the xenophobic tendencies are growing in Spain.

Siria Taurelli, [European Training Foundation \(ETF\)](#) Content Coordinator, supports the Monitor's conclusions related to education permeating all aspects of people's lives. She presents an ETF survey on the role and contribution of CSOs to human capital development in the context of lifelong learning. She insists on the global consensus related to the value of non-formal and informal education but acknowledges that people tend to think too often about formal education rather than lifelong learning when discussing learning. The additional inequalities that emerged during the pandemic have further shone a light on the importance of non-formal and informal education and the survey evaluated what CSOs did for such education in a number of countries. She focuses on the responses coming from Serbia as this was the only country in common with SOLIDAR Foundation's Monitor. The findings from Serbia point out to the fact that CSOs are essential providers of key competences. The issue is that they are often not involved in policy dialogue linked to lifelong learning policies. ETF's research revealed the value that CSOs bring to policy dialogue due to their proximity to communities, credibility, and innovative ways of intervening. CSOs, however, require more funding as well as to be involved from the onset of the policymaking process as this improves the outcomes of the policy dialogue. Given these conclusion, she believes that they align very well with the findings of SOLIDAR Foundation's Monitor.

Giuseppina Tucci, [Lifelong Learning Platform \(LLL\)](#) Secretary General, congratulates SOLIDAR Foundation for acknowledging lifewide learning in the Monitor as this aligns with the LLLP's work. She acknowledges the structural inequalities revealed by the Monitor and underlines the fact that CSOs must diversify their own organisation and staff to provide safer space for marginalized people. During COVID-19, CSOs brought the local realities close to the European decision makers. At the same time, CSOs adopted a critical approach to education, decolonialising education and history and combatting extremism at national level. Beyond this work of CSOs, as the Monitor reveals underperforming learners in PISA tests, there also needs to be a reflection on the toll that assessment has on learners' wellbeing and on whether the approach to assessment is intercultural. This year's topic of the [LLL's Annual Conference](#) will be the changing role of assessment and the learners' wellbeing throughout their lifelong learning experience. Beyond the inadequate assessment, there is also the issue of migrant background learners being marginalized towards VET rather than helped to explore which type of education would be best for them. In this context, the LLLP launched its position on the RRF ensuring that each country commits 10% of GDP to education. The LLLP fully supports the idea of connecting stakeholders to co-create policy together which they promote through the [Lifelong Learning Labs](#), the first one taking place in June, in Portugal, with the support of the Council Presidency. However, CSOs should be a partner and never a replacement for public authorities when it comes to civic education. She considers the Monitor recommendations relevant

and a good starting point for further cooperation between the LLLP and SOLIDAR for building a whole-community approach and scaling bottom-up approaches into systemic political changes.

Marta Gutierrez-Benet, DG EAC Programme Manager Erasmus+, considers that the Monitor findings are aligned with European Commission findings identified while preparing the new Erasmus+ programme. The new Erasmus+ brings in qualitative improvements while maintaining the goal to bring together non-formal and informal learning together with formal education via networking, exchange, learning between organisations. The new programme is reliant on four horizontal priorities which are in line with the Monitor: inclusion and diversity, digital transformation, combatting climate change and promoting civic engagement and participation. Specifically linked with inclusion and diversity, which is more relevant for this session, the Commission will develop a framework of inclusive measures, which will extend to all levels and means of learning, to make sure that they become a reality all Erasmus+ projects. This will be implemented also at national level, as the National Agencies will develop national inclusion plans adapted to their contextual realities and designed in cooperation with formal, non-formal and informal education providers. To ensure that the work on inclusion can be advanced, the new programme is more flexible so that smaller scale organisations can also participate. The modular menu of opportunities will open up small scale partnerships through which organisations new to the Erasmus+ can also participate through smaller grants and fewer requirements on international partners needed. Cross-sectoral cooperation is also promoted through the new programme to ensure the involvement of public authorities and other stakeholders for the purpose of promoting more inclusive practices.

Discussion

Participants worry that CSOs are disillusioned regarding inclusion in policymaking and that the current dialogue with policymakers is insufficient. This includes the exclusion of young learners from policymaking. More voice and visibility must be given to these groups, while also more efforts must be made to include people from disadvantaged backgrounds in policymaking and in enjoying the Erasmus+ programme, which is not always the case due to national restrictions. The new programme will bring pedagogical guidance and guidelines on the horizontal dimension to ensure that projects are not only inclusive but that they promote inclusion through the way they design activities, select their staff for working on the project, etc.

Concluding remarks – Jean-Luc Vanraes, [Assembly of European Regions \(AER\) Vice-President for Cooperation and Strategic Partnerships](#)

He introduces AER as bringing policymakers together to learn about climate change, digitalisation, interculturalism, and a myriad of other topics through multi-stakeholders approaches and benchmarking. Jean-Luc Vanraes commends the idea to increase exchanges and cross-sectoral collaborations especially as AER engages various stakeholders beyond policymakers. He supports the idea that non-formal and informal education providers are essential but highlights the fact that many times they compensate work for which public authorities should be responsible. Public service must be improved at EU and national level while non-formal and informal education providers should serve as collaborators that can illuminate ways to improve education and migration in our societies. He calls for increased exchanges across all regions and together with CSOs to see what the ideal situation would be for non-formal and informal learning providers and what public authorities need to do. He congratulates SOLIDAR Foundation for this initiative on cooperation and hopes for the regions to follow the same path.