

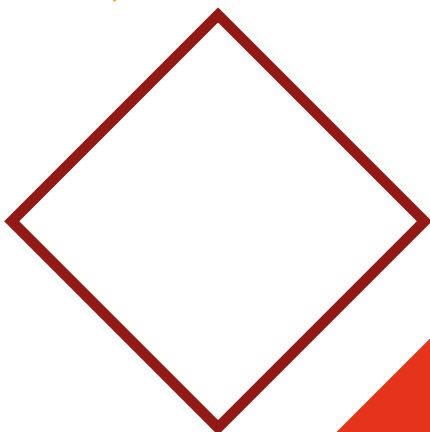
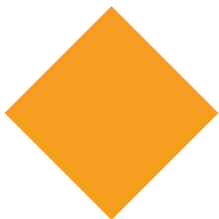
**solidar**  
FOUNDATION

BUILDING  
LEARNING &  
SUSTAINABLE  
SOCIETIES



# CITIZENSHIP AND LIFELONG LEARNING MONITOR 2021

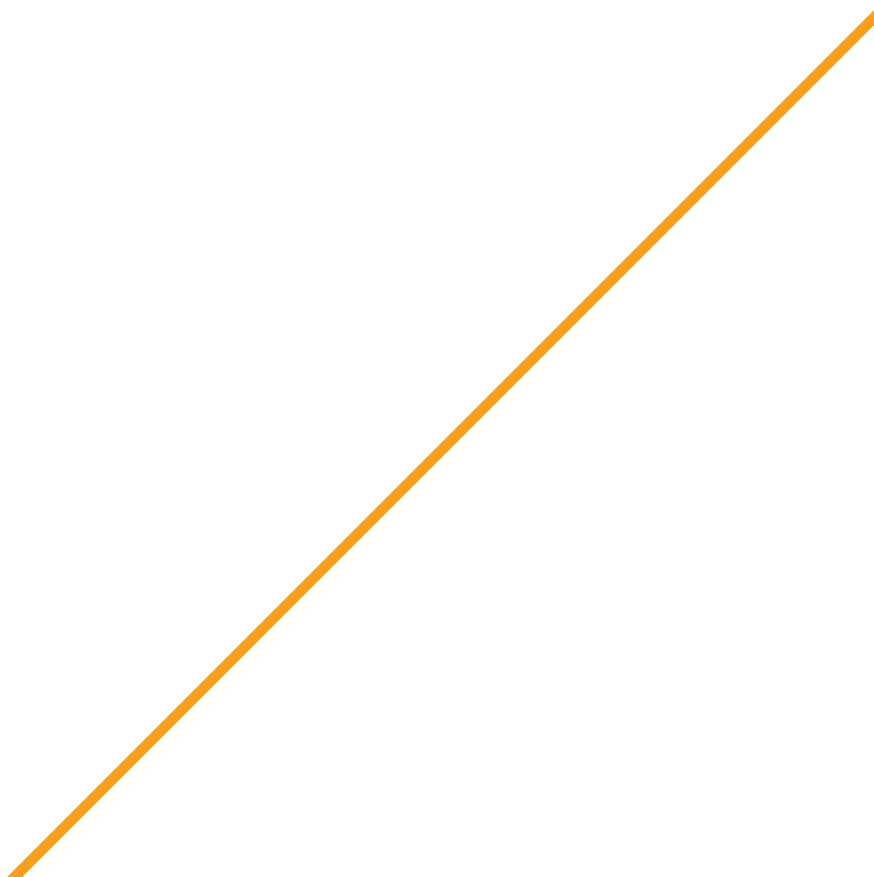
UNITED KINGDOM





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>EDUCATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY (EES) IN A POST PANDEMIC WORLD</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>EES in formal education</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>EES in informal and non-formal education</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Shrinking civic space in the context of the pandemic</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Spotlight: Poverty as a political choice</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Civil society strikes back</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>17</b>

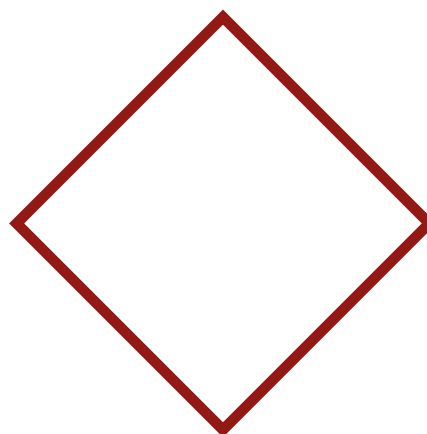




## ABSTRACT

The following report represents one of eleven national case studies feeding into the sixth edition of the SOLIDAR Foundation's annual Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor. The purpose of the Monitor is to analyse the developments in the fields of global citizenship education and lifelong learning policies in the UK and their linkages with the state of the civic space in the country. The UK report is focused on two main topics: Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Education for Environmental Sustainability (EES) in the frame of Global Citizenship Education (GCE), as well as the narrowing civic space and the interconnected way in which Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) counter such shrinking space. The report considers the different approaches to the mainstreaming of EES and ESD in the different countries in the UK, highlighting issues in terms of the equal access to a topic that is essential in light of the climate crisis looming over everyone. It considers the non-formal and informal education options for the topics, underlining the lack of a structural connection

with formal education, the many options of innovative teaching and learning in these education formats, but also the decreasing funding for the CSOs which is frustrating the delivery of education. All this is connected with the shrinking civic space, considering that without a vibrant space, people cannot co-create and co-implement greening initiatives or exert their newly acquired green competences. The situation of the shrinking civic space prior to the pandemic and during the pandemic is considered, illustrating how 2021 was a year of many legislative initiatives which have been decried by the civil society for their violations of various rights. These are all considered in the report, together with the work that CSOs and people have done in terms of protesting especially in light of the reduced funding to CSOs and of the increasingly common perception that CSOs are meant to provide services rather than to be involved in policymaking and have political stances. The Monitor concludes with a set of recommendations devised as a response to the identified hurdles.





## INTRODUCTION

The report begins by analysing the provision of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) outlining the landscape of education providers working on the topic and the challenges encountered in updating formal education to develop the skills needed for the twin transition. It looks into how ESD is provided in informal and non-formal education as well, identifying ways through which the different formats for providing education could better collaborate. Then, it delves into the issue of the shrinking civic space, considering how this space is essential for people to take an active role in tackling the global challenges that are causing eco-anxiety and grief. The civic space has progressively

narrowed in the UK, due to the restrictions in freedom of assembly and the right to protest. To counter such narrowing, UK civil society has focused on cooperation to protest the government's undermining of civil society, which has manifested also by an the overreliance of the authorities on CSOs as service delivery partners, while decrease the funding allocated for CSOs. The report will consider good practices from the members of SOLIDAR Foundation at all points in its analysis and will conclude with a set of recommendations linked to the findings and linked to the idea of mainstreaming and upscaling the work that SOLIDAR Foundation members are doing on the ground.

# EDUCATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY (EES) IN A POST PANDEMIC WORLD

## EES IN FORMAL EDUCATION

In recent years, the United Kingdom has undertaken efforts to integrate GCE and particularly ESD in formal education. The concept of GCE is recognised as essential to equip learners for a global, complex and interconnected world in which they can feel empowered as agents of change. Each country in the United Kingdom pursues its own educational agenda, therefore presenting variance in the approach to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)<sup>1</sup>. Education in the United Kingdom is in fact, devolved, meaning that it is a legislative matter where decision-making has been delegated by Parliament to the devolved institutions, such as the National Parliaments<sup>2</sup>. In the last years, UNESCO reported<sup>3</sup> that across the UK, developments in ESD are still relatively small scale, mostly based on projects within fixed time frames and resources, resulting in uneven good practices across the country. The lack of coherent view at policy or practice level about how ESD can contribute to improve learner outcomes led to increased uncertainties amongst educational institutions and practitioners about how much emphasis to place on sustainability within teaching and learning.<sup>4</sup>

While there is no statutory requirement for ESD in the National Curriculum in England, it forms part of a range of subjects in the English National Curriculum. Students are currently taught about climate change and environmental issues across different subjects, namely science

and geography. In September 2020, the [UK Climate Assembly](#), a citizens' assembly that was set up in 2019 by 6 Select Committees of the House of Commons to understand public preferences on the UK's strategy to tackle the climate crisis, published a [report](#) which included the recommendation that climate change should be made a compulsory subject in all schools. A proposal for an [Education \(Environment and Sustainable Citizenship\) Bill](#) was introduced in the House of Lords in May 2021, with the aim to make climate change and GCE part of the national curriculum taught in schools in England<sup>5</sup>. The bill would amend the [Education Act \(2002\)](#) to include a general provision



1 UK Parliament (2022). *Devolved Parliaments and Assemblies*. Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/how/role/relations-with-other-institutions/devolved/>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

2 UK Government (2022). *Devolution: detailed information*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/topic/government/devolution>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

3 United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO (2013). *Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the UK – Current status, best practice and opportunities for the future*. Pp.3-4. Available at: <https://unesco.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/UKNC-ESD-Policy-Brief.pdf>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

4 Ibid. P.17.

5 Evennett, Heather (2021). *Education (Environment and Sustainable Citizenship) Bill [HL]*. House of Lords Library. Available at: <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/education-environment-and-sustainable-citizenship-bill-hl/>. Last accessed: 25 February 2022.

for education on the environment and sustainable citizenship in the national curriculum. Furthermore, commitments to strengthen education for sustainability through soft policy were brought forward during the [26th United Nations Climate Change Conference \(COP26\)](#) in November 2021, when the Education Secretary launched the [Draft Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy](#) which purports to introduce “climate change education” via the introduction of a model science curriculum at primary level by 2023 which aims to teach children about nature and their impact on the world around them<sup>6</sup>. The draft Strategy presents positive elements, such as the support to teachers through the provision of access to training underpinned by the [Early Career Framework](#) and the focus on the development of green skills. However, it also presents worrying aspects, namely, **the call for political impartiality in the provision of climate education, which suggests that the topic should be taught without referencing the social and economic dimensions of climate<sup>7</sup> that are at the very core of the climate crisis and the solutions proposed to overcome it.** Further, the call for discouraging pupils from joining specific campaigning groups rings hollow as campaigning can be a key tool to promote climate education as well as active citizenship at large<sup>8</sup>.

In Wales, a significant emphasis has been placed on sustainable development by the Welsh Government with particular prominence given to Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship, tackling at once ESD and GCE ([ESDGC](#))<sup>9</sup>. In the country, ESDGC is enshrined in soft policies such as the [Common Understanding for Schools on Education for Sustainable Development and](#)

[Global Citizenship](#) (2008), a guidance document that supported the delivery of such themes in schools<sup>10</sup>. Nevertheless, ESDGC is no longer managed as a standalone agenda but is now considered to be mainstreamed in wider government Sustainable Development commitments. In the most recent version of the [National Curriculum](#) for 11–19-year-old (2008), ESDGC is one of the five themes in the Personal and Social Education (PSE) framework.

In Scotland, Sustainable development is one of the Scottish Government’s key national performance outcomes and features in many aspects of Government policy. The Scottish Government has made a substantial commitment to the ESD through soft policy. The most recent major revision of the curriculum in Scotland, the [Curriculum for Excellence](#) (2019), and its phased introduction has allowed ESD to be fully integrated into many aspects of the curriculum, particularly in technologies, science and social subjects. One of the four core capacities of all learners defined in Curriculum for Excellence, that young people should become ‘responsible citizens’, signals a commitment towards sustainable living. Other initiatives, such as the [John Muir Award](#), [Fair Trade Schools](#) and [Forest Schools](#) have also facilitated a wider understanding of ESD in schools. [Learning for Sustainability](#) is a cross-curricular approach, that weaves together global citizenship, sustainable development education and outdoor learning.

In Northern Ireland, [Education For Sustainable Development](#) is part of the required minimum content for Key Stage 3<sup>11</sup>. Since 2007, ESD has been a statutory requirement within the school curriculum. In the country, the teaching

6 UK Department of Education (2021). *Sustainability & Climate Change: A draft strategy for the education & children’s services systems*. Pp.12-14. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1031454/SCC\\_DRAFT\\_Strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1031454/SCC_DRAFT_Strategy.pdf). Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

7 UK Department of Education (2021). *Sustainability & Climate Change: A draft strategy for the education & children’s services systems*. P.12.

8 Ibid.

9 United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO (2013). *Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the UK – Current status, best practice and opportunities for the future*. Pp.10-12.

10 United Nations (2022). Indicator 4.7.1. *Sustainable Development Goals Data for UK*. Available at: <https://sdgdata.gov.uk/4-7-1/>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

11 Refers to Post-Primary Years 8, 9 and 10 which accounts for learners aged 11 to 14 years.

of ESD has been often undertaken by civil society, for example, the [RSPB](#) and the Red Cross have been active, as well as a broad coalition of organisations, under the banner of the [Education for Sustainable Development Forum](#). The Forum, which gathers civil society, universities, several local authorities and government agencies, was established in 1995 with the aim of enhancing the profile of environmental education in curriculum and extra-curricular activities. It provides a network for the exchange of knowledge and information on environmental education as well as training and networking opportunities, allowing for a multistakeholder and cooperative approach for the provision of ESD among formal, non-formal and informal education organisations.

The changes that the education systems are undergoing now cannot yet be evaluated, but, for the moment, the situation in Scotland and Northern Ireland is commendable for the multitude of initiatives as well as for the involvement of a wide variety of education stakeholders in the topic. Scotland seems to be more advanced in terms of mainstreaming the topic and ensuring that the cross-curricular approach is a reality, but it still remains worrisome to see that learners across the UK develop their green competences at different paces. The devolved system is important, and the diversity in the education options provides for a cultural richness that respects the local needs, but it must be highlighted that the climate crisis will hit all learners and the entire UK should approach this topic with a concerted tactic in mind considering the importance of working beyond any type of borders and in manner that is conducive towards solidarity if the learners are to be equipped with the tools needed to tackle

the climate crisis. The Education and Training Foundation reports<sup>12</sup> that despite the enormous potential reach of ESD in the education and training sector, progress to date has been fragmented and slow, with ESD not yet seen as a central pillar of the sector and its work. Despite strong learner demand for ESD<sup>13</sup>, exposure to ESD teaching, even on courses traditionally associated with sustainability (geography, the sciences etc.), is reported as low<sup>14</sup>.

The urgency within the UK seems to still be more connected to the labour market rather than to the importance of educating all learners to have a different relationship with the environment. An example for this is the approach taken by the [Climate Change Committee](#), an independent, statutory body established under the Climate Change Act 2008 to advise the UK public authorities and report to the Parliament on developments linked to adapting to the climate change, has recommended that the Department for Education uses education to support the transition to a net-zero economy and ensures a Just Transition for workers



12 Education and Training Foundation (2021). *Experiences of Education for Sustainable Development in the Further Education and Training Sector: A Workforce Survey Report*. Pp.2-3. Available at : <https://www.et-foundation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/20210824-Experiences-of-ESD-in-FE-Report-August-2021.pdf>. Last accessed: 25 February 2022.

13 Students Organising for Sustainability UK (2021). *Sustainability Skills Survey 2020-2021: Research into Students' Experiences of Teaching and Learning Sustainable Development*; Higher Education Report. Available at: [https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/6008334066c47be740656954/60f6908f10bfcc10d2c87d55\\_20210716\\_SOS-UK%20Sustainability%20Skills%202020-21\\_FINAL.pdf](https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/6008334066c47be740656954/60f6908f10bfcc10d2c87d55_20210716_SOS-UK%20Sustainability%20Skills%202020-21_FINAL.pdf). Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

14 Education and Training Foundation (2021). *Experiences of Education for Sustainable Development in the Further Education and Training Sector: A Workforce Survey Report*.

transitioning from high-carbon to low-carbon or climate resilient jobs. These recommendations have led to the establishment of the [Green Jobs Taskforce](#) to set the direction for the job market through transition to a low-carbon economy. During the COP26, the UK Government announced that from December 2021, all Further Education teachers trained via an apprenticeship will be required to integrate sustainability into their teaching, through modelling sustainable practices and promoting sustainable development principles in relation to their subject specialism. These measures, brought together in the [Draft Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy](#), will be built on over the next 6 months before the final publication of the strategy, in April 2022. It remains to be seen how much will the strategy focus on preparing learners for a greener labour market compared to actually preparing them for a greener society.

While it is positive to see commitments to ESD and GCE, the overall mainstreaming of ESD would benefit from an overall strategic framework which puts it firmly at the core of the education policy agenda in all the UK's countries, thus providing coherence and direction to existing initiatives and promoting the scaling up of existing good practices. Furthermore, long-term, adequate funding must be at the core of the efforts to mainstream ESD in formal education to unlock the full potential of ESD. The UK government has stated that education recovery is central to its "build back better" agenda and has committed £1.7bn in short-term catch-up funding to support learners in England, launching a long-term [Education Recovery Plan](#). The Plan, however, does not encompass any reference to ESD or GCE, even though both topics are key for future generations and to root the recovery in the United Nations Agenda 2030.

## EES IN INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

In England, CSOs work extensively in support of schools and in relation to adult, community, youth and voluntary activities, however, there often appears to be a lack of connection and little synergy between learning experiences in formal education and those in community involvement and third sector capacity-building<sup>15</sup>. SOLIDAR Foundation member, [Volunteering Matters](#), reports that better integration of complementary competences that CSOs can support teachers to develop requires the set-up of avenues for cooperation such as the possibility for civil society to organize workshops to foster their capacity to mainstream ESD. **In order to foster the mainstreaming of ESD and EES, cooperation among stakeholders needs to be facilitated through the application of a whole-institution approach.** In Scotland, for instance, a range of initiatives has been established to encourage local communities to engage with Sustainable Development, through non-formal education. The [Climate Challenge Fund \(CCF\)](#) made funding of £37.7 million available to communities in the period 2008-2012, supporting 345 communities across Scotland to take action on climate change. Additionally, existing schemes to build sustainable communities have been increased over the years, such as those supported through Conservation and Development in Sparsely Populated Areas ([CADISPA](#)). Since its establishment in 1987, CADISPA has supported grassroots community-led initiatives across rural Scotland and offered guidance on how to address sustainability issues in local areas through a focus on experiential and non-formal learning through place-based action research<sup>16</sup>.

15 Kruesmann, Monika (2015). *Challenge and Change: Global Citizenship Education in UK Schools*. Think Global UK. Pp. Available at: [https://think-global.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Symposium-Research-Paper\\_Kruesmann\\_Think-Global\\_FINAL.pdf](https://think-global.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Symposium-Research-Paper_Kruesmann_Think-Global_FINAL.pdf). Last accessed: 24 February 2022.

16 United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO (2013). *Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the UK – Current status, best practice and opportunities for the future*. Pp.7-9.



SOLIDAR Foundation member, Volunteering Matters, encompasses the provision of ESD and EES through youth social action projects and employees volunteering activities as part of Corporate Social Responsibility projects. More specifically, they support the development of environmentally friendly community spaces, whose custodianship is handed to the participants. When designing their project, they employ a co-creation method, so that through collaborative mechanisms, participants can develop the frameworks in which the project takes place, enabling people to feel ownership of the project in which they take part, as well as fostering the longevity of the project beyond the initial lifecycle facilitated by Volunteering

Matters. To this end, the organisation aims to make the focus, content and delivery of the project participant-led so that the outcomes and impacts are tangible and meaningful to them and the communities they are undertaken in, alike. Volunteering Matters' experience is a testimony to the importance of co-designing for such projects and especially for effective legacy to be planned since the onset in order to develop learners' and participants' ownership of the learning outcomes, as opposed to the perception that the learning environment is tokenistic, transient or relies upon passive learners that simply receive knowledge. The case study below exemplifies the co-creation process that is central to the work of Volunteering Matters.



## CASE STUDY

The [Action Earth](#) initiative, founded by SOLIDAR Foundation member, [Volunteering Matters](#), offers volunteering opportunities in environmentally focused projects. The project, funded by [Scotland's Nature Agency](#), offers grants to help local communities to respond to climate change. The grants support volunteers of all ages, backgrounds and abilities in practical outdoor activities. Any group of volunteers are able to apply for Volunteering Matters Action Earth grants of between £50-250 to run environmental activities in Scotland's green spaces. This could include creating or improving community gardens, wildflower meadows, ponds, woodlands or other wildlife habitats. Further, they offer a limited number of [Action Earth Enhanced Grants](#) up to £500 for projects which can demonstrate a significant health

impact through working with people who have defined health or social needs. These grants are available to projects where a minimum of 50% of the volunteers involved will have defined health issues. Within the Action Earth initiative, [Volunteering Matters](#), delivers several youth social action projects, employee volunteer & activities which encompass the promotion of community sustainability.

Such an initiative makes learners put in practice what they learned but more importantly creates ownership of these actions and a sense of responsibility that is essential for tackling the climate crisis. Such informal and non-formal education programmes should be upscaled to create more opportunities for learners to exert their ownership on projects promoting the green transition.

# SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE

## SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PANDEMIC

The civic space can be employed to empower learners with the tools to understand global phenomena and solve global challenges. Given the opportunities to actualise knowledge on GCE and EES in the civic space, its narrowing is even more worrying in times of emergency, such as the current public health crisis, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Amidst the pandemic, the UK government introduced measures which limited freedom of movement and prevented large numbers of people gathering in public spaces, affecting the right to assembly and protest<sup>17</sup>. **The decline in the freedom of assembly has been highlighted as one of the main elements of concern for civil society in the UK, since the start of the pandemic.** During the pandemic, the UK government and authorities have been cracking down on the right to peaceful assembly, with senior government officials labelling environmental and racial justice movements as ‘criminals’<sup>18</sup>. Due to the worrying developments in the limitation of civic space, the country has been added to the [CIVICUS watchlist](#), especially considering its rapid decline in fundamental civic freedoms. A particularly concerning development has been the introduction of the controversial [Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing](#) bill which contains several clauses that give police more powers to restrict the right to protest and will have serious repercussions on minority groups, including Traveller communities, Black people and people of colour<sup>19</sup>.

The bill, initially proposed in March 2021 and currently under consideration in the House of Lords, [was announced](#) as part of plans to “strengthen police powers to tackle non-violent protests that have a significant disruptive effect on the public or on access to Parliament”. The new law grants police greater powers to crack down on protests, including outlawing protests that are noisy or cause “serious annoyance”, single person protests and protests outside the UK parliament<sup>20</sup>. The proposal caused concern within the Civil Society, with more than 150 organisations [warning ministers](#) that the bill is “an attack on some of the most fundamental rights of citizens”. They also argued that the bill was being rushed through parliament before people had “been able to fully understand its profound implications”. [Liberty UK](#) further reports<sup>21</sup> that the bill also creates new stop and search powers and a ‘Serious Violence duty’ that health and social care professionals say



17 International Centre for Not-For-Profit Law (2022). COVID-19 Civic Freedom Tracker: UK. Available at: <https://www.icnl.org/covid19tracker/?location=133&issue=&date=&type=>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

18 CIVICUS (2020). *Peaceful Assembly Under Threat: Crackdown on Environmental and BLM Protesters*. Available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2020/12/15/peaceful-assembly-under-threat-crackdown-environmental-and-blm-protesters/>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

19 CIVICUS (2021). UK added to human rights watchlist over threats to peaceful assembly. *CIVICUS Monitor*. Available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/UnitedKingdom/>. Last accessed: 25 February 2022.

20 Civic Space Watch (2021). *UK: Calls For #KillTheBill as the UK Government Seeks to Stifle Protests Even Further*. Available at: <https://civicspacewatch.eu/uk-calls-for-killthebill-as-the-uk-government-seeks-to-stifle-protests-even-further/>. Last accessed: 24 February 2022.

21 Liberty Human Rights (2021). *Policing Bill Amendments are a Dangerous Power Grab*. Available at: <https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/issue/policing-bill-amendments-are-a-dangerous-power-grab/>. Last accessed: 24 February 2022.

would breach their professional duty of confidentiality and put young people at risk. It also includes provisions that could criminalise the way of life of Gypsy and Traveller communities<sup>22</sup>. The developments are seriously biased towards disadvantaged communities and racial minorities, representing an unacceptable development especially as they have been groups more deeply affected by the pandemic due to structural discrimination that is common across the UK<sup>23</sup>.

Beyond this, CIVICUS reports<sup>24</sup> on several other legislative developments, such as the proposed changes to the Administrative Law, which aim to weaken democratic checks and balances which hold the government and public bodies accountable. The Elections Bill, introduced in July 2021, which would be introducing mandatory photo ID requirements at polling stations, effectively disenfranchising



3.5 million voters without access to photo IDs and the 11 million without a passport or driver's license<sup>25</sup>. At the same time, the government published its response to the public consultation on their 'New Plan for Immigration'. Even if 75% of respondents opposed most of the elements foreseen in the plan, the government decided to move ahead with it, prompting criticisms from the Refugee Council and the British Red Cross. Beyond the clear violation of human rights of migrants and refugees, there is a tremendously problematic due process involved as the public consultation counted for nothing and the views of the people and the civil society are completely bypassed<sup>26</sup>. These are just a few other examples among many other legislative initiatives from 2021 that have led to the UK having a narrowed civic space<sup>27</sup>.

This shrinking of the civic space comes as SOLIDAR Foundation member, [Volunteering Matters](#), remarked something else, which is that the governmental support to civil society is often contingent upon the role of the latter in providing services and resources that have been cut or ended by government. **As civic space shrinks, often due to decrease in funding or over subscription and a reduction in accessibility, CSOs provision offers innovation to create new spaces or platforms and acquire additional resources from community groups, third and corporate sectors.** For example, many of [Volunteering Matters](#) wellbeing social action projects sit alongside oversubscribed statutory public health providers to support those waiting on clinical or statutory care.

22 Ibid.

23 Frank, Andrei (2021). *Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor 2020: European Overview*. SOLIDAR Foundation. Available at: [https://www.solidar.org/system/downloads/attachments/000/001/310/original/CLLL\\_Monitor\\_2020\\_EuroOverview\\_SOLIDAR\\_Foundation\\_online.pdf?1617695521](https://www.solidar.org/system/downloads/attachments/000/001/310/original/CLLL_Monitor_2020_EuroOverview_SOLIDAR_Foundation_online.pdf?1617695521). Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

24 CIVICUS (2021). *United Kingdom: CIVICUS Monitor Watchlist: Overview of recent restrictions to civic freedoms*. Available at: [https://civicus.contentfiles.net/media/assets/file/WL\\_UKBrief.23September.pdf](https://civicus.contentfiles.net/media/assets/file/WL_UKBrief.23September.pdf). Last accessed: 24 February 2022.

25 CIVICUS (2021). *Heavy-Handed Policing as Hundreds Arrested at Extinction Rebellion Protests*. Available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2021/09/03/heavy-handed-policing-hundreds-arrested-extinction-rebellion-protests/>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

## SPOTLIGHT: POVERTY AS A POLITICAL CHOICE



Since 2010, austerity, primarily in the form of deep spending cuts with comparatively small increases in tax, has been the UK government's dominant fiscal policy, with far fewer measures to stimulate the economy<sup>28</sup>. Oxfam reports that economic stagnation, the rising cost of living, cuts to social security and public services and rising unemployment have combined to create a deeply damaging situation in which millions were struggling to make ends meet<sup>29</sup>. Such deep cuts in the welfare system have had a disastrous impact on poor families' living standards and in particular in regard to their access to adequate food<sup>30</sup>. At the time, Philip Alston, the UN's rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, [reported](#) on the situation stating that, in the UK, "poverty is a political choice"<sup>31</sup>. Another particularly harmful policy has been the transition to the Universal Credit system, the government's signature welfare policy that began in 2012 to replace a complex set of six

"legacy" social security benefits. Food aid providers, academic researchers and nongovernmental welfare advice providers have established clear links between the restructuring of the welfare system and a marked increase in food poverty among low-income families who receive such support<sup>32</sup>. Years of austerity, together with the subsequent reduction of financing for social policies, led to precariousness amongst the most marginalised, which progressively worsened with the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The years of austerity have had a significant impact on CSOs too, which have seen their resources reduced, leading to performing their work with less money and shorter-term agreements in place. Civil Society has found itself mitigating the impacts of austerity and de facto substituting the government in provision of certain social services. SOLIDAR Foundation member, [Volunteering Matters](#), remarked that civil society has been given more responsibilities by the authorities in terms of service provision, despite resources and platforms being reduced significantly due to continued austerity. They reported being invited to provide proposals for socio-community renewal initiatives as delivery partners but not to provide insight on policy-making geared towards national policies.



The political choice for poverty and the way funding is cut from CSOs has roots in the way governmental officials understand the role of CSOs. CSOs do not become mere service providers as a result of certain cuts, but rather they are actively reduced to this role through the cuts that are made strategically. Oliver Dowden, at the time when he was the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), expressed views of bringing charities 'back on

28 Johnson, Paul (2013). *Post-spending review analysis*. Institute for Fiscal Studies UK. Available at: [http://www.ifs.org.uk/budgets/sr2013/paul\\_johnson.pdf](http://www.ifs.org.uk/budgets/sr2013/paul_johnson.pdf). Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

29 Oxfam (2013). *The True Cost of Austerity and Inequality: UK Case Study*. Available at: [https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file\\_attachments/cs-true-cost-austerity-inequality-uk-120913-en\\_0.pdf](https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/cs-true-cost-austerity-inequality-uk-120913-en_0.pdf). Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

30 Human Rights Watch (2019). *Nothing Left in the Cupboards: Austerity, Welfare Cuts, and the Right to Food in the UK*. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/05/20/nothing-left-cupboards/austerity-welfare-cuts-and-right-food-uk>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

31 Booth, Robert and Butler, Patrick (2018). *UK austerity has inflicted 'great misery' on citizens, UN says*. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/nov/16/uk-austerity-has-inflicted-great-misery-on-citizens-un-says>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

32 Human Rights Watch (2019). *Nothing Left in the Cupboards: Austerity, Welfare Cuts, and the Right to Food in the UK*.

track<sup>33</sup>. In his view, CSOs engaging with complex social and cultural issues was abnormal, being branded as ‘woke’<sup>34</sup>, a term which he has taken out of the African American Vernacular English<sup>35</sup> and transformed it into something pejorative. Beyond a clear lack of awareness of the situation experienced by many minorities in the UK, and the world at large, Oliver Dowden, while being a governmental representative, criticised NGOs and CSOs for taking a political stance and for not focusing on simply exacting ‘positive change’<sup>36</sup>. This attitude of fixing visible shortcomings while not engaging at all with the structural causes to these shortcomings cannot come from a government that is supposed to represent all British people, and

it clearly shows how CSOs and NGOs are being stripped away of their identity and history. This discussion prompted responses from the Good Law Project, and 20 other charity leaders who co-signed an open letter in response to such comments to ensure that they will not steer the selection of a new Charity Commission Chair in a direction which would muzzle charities<sup>37</sup>. That being said, the need to do both, meaningful actions in the community and to address structural challenges, remains valid. For this reason, below there is a case study on an action that SOLIDAR Foundation member, Volunteering Matters, implemented as part of the actions to provide meaningful change in communities.

VOLUNTEERING MATTERS

## CASE STUDY

With [Journey Makers](#), SOLIDAR Foundation member, [Volunteering Matters](#), worked as a delivery partner for the UK government supporting joint initiatives across Scotland, Wales & England. The project, born during the pandemic, serves as a public health transport project during the restrictions on movement imposed by the authorities. The project was funded by the [Department for Transport \(DfT\)](#) which commissioned Volunteering Matters, on behalf of the [Voluntary](#)

[and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership](#), to co-ordinate a nationwide volunteer support programme to assist travellers at transport hubs. Journey Makers assisted travellers, providing guidance, advice and supporting them to help keep people at participating safely within transport hubs. Journey Makers provided support and guidance for the public at participating transport hubs across the UK and providing a welcome environment for people returning to work.

33 CIVICUS (2021). *New Proposals for Restrictive #PolicingBill Aim to curb Protests Further*. Available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2021/11/02/new-proposals-added-restrictive-policingbill-curb-protests/>. Last accessed: 25 February 2022.

34 Ibid.

35 Merriam Webster Dictionary (2017). Stay Woke. *Words We're Watching Series*. Available at : <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/woke-meaning-origin>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

36 CIVICUS (2021). *New Proposals for Restrictive #PolicingBill Aim to curb Protests Further*.

37 Ibid.

## CIVIL SOCIETY STRIKES BACK

To counter the closing of the civic space, the lack of inclusion in policy-making and this perspective of CSOs, the exchange of good practices and the training of trainers are fundamental aspects of intersectoral coordination. The strengthening of civil society and capacity building activities have been at the core of the pandemic recovery for many organisations. Community-level cooperation particularly plays a key role for the effective operation of CSOs, as it enhances mutual learning and knowledge sharing among CSOs with various levels of expertise in the implementation of projects on the ground. Beyond this, CSOs must support each other and act in a concerted manner considering how they are vilified and diminished. The response of CSOs and of people coming out to protest has been significant in the UK and has contributed to showing the importance of activism at a time when the civic space is under attack. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill which was heavily protested against was defeated in the House of Lords in January 2022. This is by no means the end, as the Ministers will probably continue the process of back and forth between the House of Commons and the House of Lords<sup>38</sup>, but the fact that the Labour Party acknowledged the protests of the people and the huge impact that this law would have on the civic space, shows signs of encouragement for continuing the fight against the clampdown on protests.

At the same time, this edition of the SOLIDAR Foundation Monitor insists on the importance of cross-border solidarity to weather the recent crises through which people all over the world have experienced. This is clearly applicable to showing solidarity towards the British civic space considering the fights on multiple fronts that they are maintaining. However, it



must be highlighted that the British government has further showed an isolationist strategy by putting an end to many initiatives to show solidarity with countries and peoples from the world. This comes on the backdrop of cuts occurring in the aftermath of Brexit, a reduction of £4 billion to aid spending that was announced in April 2021 is sending a disappointing message during the years of the pandemic and climate crisis. Cutting 40% of the funding for worldwide girl's education, cutting by over 80% water and sanitation funding in developing countries, cutting 85% of the sexual and reproductive health funding<sup>39</sup>, cutting by 50% the funding to its network for organisations working in humanitarian assistance and international development<sup>40</sup>, are just a few of the examples of where the UK is now showing less cross-border solidarity than before. The lack of access to certain funding lines from the EU in the aftermath of Brexit is also a way in which less solidarity will be shown towards the UK. **There is a need continue backing the British CSOs and people so that they can push their government to turn back towards values that are essential during the global challenges experienced that require a common response.**

38 BBC News (2022). *Crime bill: Lords defeats for government's protest clamp-down plans*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-60032465>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

39 Wintour, Patrick (2021). *Britain's aid cuts: what's been announced so far*. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/apr/30/britains-aid-cuts-whats-been-announced-so-far>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

40 Bond (2021). *Government cuts 50% of its funding to Bond, the UK network for organisations working in humanitarian assistance and international development*. Available at: <https://www.bond.org.uk/press-releases/2021/05/government-cuts-50-of-its-funding-to-bond-the-uk-network-for-organisations>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

Ultimately, the needed transformation of education to support learners towards the twin transition can only be achieved through concerted actions among all education stakeholders but in the context of a vibrant civic space. Despite the urgency of the climate crisis, there is still more to be done in making people aware of the need for common approaches, which could be filled by education and lifelong learning. Lifelong learning in particular as a spectrum of

formal, informal and non-formal learning, offers a framework to embrace different forms of learning people gain in various spaces across their lifespan and further becomes a pathway to participate more fully in society and contribute towards solving social and environmental issues. Therefore, an active, free and vibrant civic space can be a key tool to foster climate-aware actions and to help people understand and take action on sustainability.

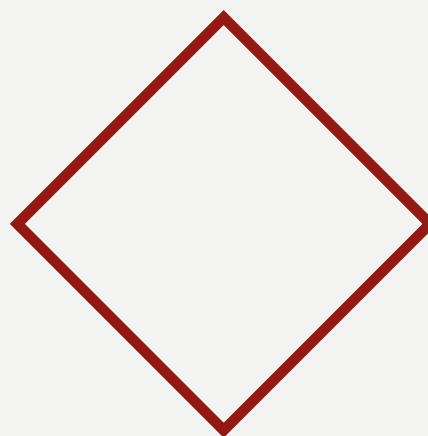
## CONCLUSION

The UK presents a case which already has made developments in terms of the implementation of EES in education and which has a well-developed network of CSOs, or charities, that are providing numerous opportunities for people to engage in EES in non-formal and informal ways. However, the topic is still not sufficiently mainstreamed in formal education, with clearer legislative and policy processes emerging only as of recently, and the topic suffers from slightly different approaches between the countries of the UK. The Scottish model is the most encouraging one, but the fact remains that in the face of the global crises which the world is facing, all countries should work together on providing a better presence of EES in formal education. At the same time, the co-creation and practical elements of the non-formal and informal learning providers must be better mainstreamed and connected with the formal education sector. The recent reductions in funding for CSOs, in light of austerity measures, have had an impact on their capacity to deliver EES outside of formal education and to set up partnerships in a structural way with formal education providers. This needs to be addressed as EES, ESD, and GCE must be further prioritised. The challenge in achieving this also lies on ensuring a vibrant civic space

in which all learners can actualise their green competences and can have the opportunity to push the public officials for more efforts in this direction. Addressing global challenges is all about participation, involvement, and ownership for people in the processes foreseen by the government. A narrowed British civic space cannot allow for this, and the recent developments in 2021 in terms of legislative acts, such as the ones on policing, on elections, on administration, and on migration, show to extent to which people in the UK, CSOs and the civil society at large have had to fight over the past year. This all comes on the backdrop of austerity induces cutting of funds for the past decade towards welfare programmes and towards CSOs, while an intensification in the policing used by CSOs and in their political stances has started to occur. In such a situation, there are many alarming questions on how the UK will manage to weather crises ahead and in how it will manage to equip all learners with the 21<sup>st</sup> century competences needed to adapt to the green and digital transitions, but also to be sufficiently active citizens in society to be able to participate in the efforts to address the crises. Below you can find the recommendations provided by SOLIDAR Foundation with regards to the above findings and the identified hurdles.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ Develop an overall strategic framework which puts Education for Environmental Sustainability and Education for Sustainable Development firmly at the core of the education policy agenda in all the UK's countries, whilst respecting their jurisdictional policy remits
- ◆ Allocate adequate, long-term funding to the provision of ESD and EES, particularly through the Education Recovery funds
- ◆ Increase investment in the efforts of non-formal and informal education providers to provide ESD and EES at community level
- ◆ Provide more avenues for CSOs to foster the capacity building of teachers through the provision of comprehensive training and awareness-raising workshops
- ◆ Step up efforts to integrate the protection of freedom of assembly and right to protest, in face of negative trends such as the criminalisation of protesting
- ◆ Completely repeal the Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing bill
- ◆ Increase the oversight that CSOs have on the development of new policies and laws, while enforcing a more clear mechanism for fairly considering the responses to public consultations
- ◆ Involve civil society in all phases of policy-making not only as delivery partners for the implementation of policies and services
- ◆ Revert back the aid funding that was slashed in 2021





# BIBLIOGRAPHY

BBC News (2022). *Crime bill: Lords defeats for government's protest clamp-down plans*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-60032465>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

Bond (2021). *Government cuts 50% of its funding to Bond, the UK network for organisations working in humanitarian assistance and international development*. Available at: <https://www.bond.org.uk/press-releases/2021/05/government-cuts-50-of-its-funding-to-bond-the-uk-network-for-organisations>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

Booth, Robert and Butler, Patrick (2018). *UK austerity has inflicted 'great misery' on citizens, UN says*. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/nov/16/uk-austerity-has-inflicted-great-misery-on-citizens-un-says>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

Civic Space Watch (2021). *UK: Calls For #KillTheBill as the UK Government Seeks to Stifle Protests Even Further*. Available at: <https://civicspacewatch.eu/uk-calls-for-killthebill-as-the-uk-government-seeks-to-stifle-protests-even-further/>. Last accessed: 24 February 2022.

CIVICUS (2020). *Peaceful Assembly Under Threat: Crackdown on Environmental and BLM Protesters*. Available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2020/12/15/peaceful-assembly-under-threat-crackdown-environmental-and-blm-protesters/>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

CIVICUS (2021). *Heavy-Handed Policing as Hundreds Arrested at Extinction Rebellion Protests*. Available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2021/09/03/heavy-handed-policing-hundreds-arrested-extinction-rebellion-protests/>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

CIVICUS (2021). *New Proposals for Restrictive #PolicingBill Aim to curb Protests Further*. Available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2021/11/02/new-proposals-added-restrictive-policing-bill-curb-protests/>. Last accessed: 25 February 2022.

CIVICUS (2021). *UK added to human rights watchlist over threats to peaceful assembly*. CIVICUS Monitor. Available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/UnitedKingdom/>. Last accessed: 25 February 2022.

CIVICUS (2021). *United Kingdom: CIVICUS Monitor Watchlist: Overview of recent restrictions to civic freedoms*. Available at: [https://civicus.content-files.net/media/assets/file/WL\\_UKBrief.23September.pdf](https://civicus.content-files.net/media/assets/file/WL_UKBrief.23September.pdf). Last accessed: 24 February 2022.

Education and Training Foundation (2021). *Experiences of Education for Sustainable Development in the Further Education and Training Sector: A Workforce Survey Report*. Available at: <https://www.et-foundation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/20210824-Experiences-of-ESD-in-FE-Report-August-2021.pdf>. Last accessed: 25 February 2022.

Evennett, Heather (2021). *Education (Environment and Sustainable Citizenship) Bill [HL]*. House of Lords Library. Available at: <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/education-environment-and-sustainable-citizenship-bill-hl/>. Last accessed: 25 February 2022.

Frank, Andrei (2021). *Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor 2020: European Overview*. SOLIDAR Foundation. Available at: [https://www.solidar.org/system/downloads/attachments/000/001/310/original/CLLL\\_Monitor\\_2020\\_EuroOverview\\_SOLIDAR\\_Foundation\\_online.pdf?1617695521](https://www.solidar.org/system/downloads/attachments/000/001/310/original/CLLL_Monitor_2020_EuroOverview_SOLIDAR_Foundation_online.pdf?1617695521). Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

Human Rights Watch (2019). *Nothing Left in the Cupboards: Austerity, Welfare Cuts, and the Right to Food in the UK*. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/05/20/nothing-left-cupboards/austerity-welfare-cuts-and-right-food-uk>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

International Centre for Not-For-Profit Law (2022). *COVID-19 Civic Freedom Tracker: UK*. Available at: <https://www.icnl.org/covid19tracker/?location=133&issue=&date=&type=>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

Johnson, Paul (2013). *Post-spending review analysis*. Institute for Fiscal Studies UK. Available at: [http://www.ifs.org.uk/budgets/sr2013/paul\\_johnson.pdf](http://www.ifs.org.uk/budgets/sr2013/paul_johnson.pdf). Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

Kruesmann, Monika (2015). *Challenge and Change: Global Citizenship Education in UK Schools*. Think Global UK. Available at: [https://think-global.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Symposium-Research-Paper\\_Kruesmann\\_Think-Global\\_FINAL.pdf](https://think-global.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Symposium-Research-Paper_Kruesmann_Think-Global_FINAL.pdf). Last accessed: 24 February 2022.

Liberty Human Rights (2021). *Policing Bill Amendments are a Dangerous Power Grab*. Available at: <https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/issue/policing-bill-amendments-are-a-dangerous-power-grab/>. Last accessed: 24 February 2022.

Merriam Webster Dictionary (2017). *Stay Woke. Words We're Watching Series*. Available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/woke-meaning-origin>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

Oxfam (2013). *The True Cost of Austerity and Inequality: UK Case Study*. Available at: [https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file\\_attachments/cs-true-cost-austerity-inequality-uk-120913-en\\_0.pdf](https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/cs-true-cost-austerity-inequality-uk-120913-en_0.pdf). Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

Students Organising for Sustainability UK (2021). *Sustainability Skills Survey 2020-2021: Research into Students' Experiences of Teaching and Learning Sustainable Development*; Higher Education Report. Available at: [https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/6008334066c47be740656954/60f6908f10bfcc10d2c87d55\\_20210716\\_SOS-UK%20Sustainability%20Skills%202020-21\\_FINAL.pdf](https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/6008334066c47be740656954/60f6908f10bfcc10d2c87d55_20210716_SOS-UK%20Sustainability%20Skills%202020-21_FINAL.pdf). Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

UK Department of Education (2021). *Sustainability & Climate Change: A draft strategy for the education & children's services systems*. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1031454/SCC\\_DRAFT\\_Strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1031454/SCC_DRAFT_Strategy.pdf). Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

UK Government (2022). *Devolution: detailed information*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/topic/government/devolution>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

UK Parliament (2022). *Devolved Parliaments and Assemblies*. Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/how/role/relations-with-other-institutions/devolved/>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO (2013). *Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the UK – Current status, best practice and opportunities for the future*. Pp.3-4. Available at: <https://unesco.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/UKNC-ESD-Policy-Brief.pdf>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

United Nations (2022). Indicator 4.7.1. *Sustainable Development Goals Data for UK*. Available at: <https://sdgdata.gov.uk/4-7-1/>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

Wintour, Patrick (2021). *Britain's aid cuts: what's been announced so far*. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/apr/30/britains-aid-cuts-whats-been-announced-so-far>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

**Responsible editors:**  
Mikael Leyi, Elisa Gambardella

**Author:**  
Andrei Frank

**With assistance from:**  
Myriam Ciza Gambini

**Coordination of publication:**  
Andrei Frank

**Graphic Design:**  
Maximilian Fischer

**Contributions from:**



Avenue des Arts, 50  
1000 Brussels - Belgium  
+32 2 500 10 20  
[www.solidar.org](http://www.solidar.org)  
@SOLIDAR\_EU

**SOLIDAR Foundation** for progressive education and democratic participation is a European network of 23 members gathering several millions of citizens throughout Europe. The Foundation advances both the external policy work and the internal learning needs of its members, shaping itself as a learning house for the membership.



The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

© SOLIDAR 2022

