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CITIZENSHIP AND LIFELONG LEARNING MONITOR 2019

SERBIA
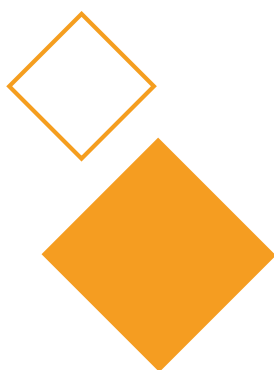
CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The following report represents one of eight national case studies feeding into the SOLIDAR Foundation's annual Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor 2019. The purpose of the Monitor is to take stock of the developments at European and national level in terms of citizenship education policies and lifelong learning policies. The Serbian report is focused on the general three main themes: digital citizenship, citizenship education and intercultural dialogue. It accounts for challenges, governmental approaches to them, and civil society approaches to them for each of the three themes. The Serbian government diverts resources towards e-government development, but has a fractured approach on promoting digital skills. The implementation of digital skills in schools remains a cross-curricular topic, while NGOs and businesses cover much of the ground for digital skills training. The governmental neglect of digital skills is replicated on citizenship education, given that the curricular content has not been updated since 2001, containing many outdated entries. This becomes more complicated to address in a climate of media freedom suppression. The country has had to take action on intercultural education given its position on the migration route, but given its limited resources and the fact that migrants and refugees view it as a transit country it is difficult to implement long-term education measures for children with a migrant background. These continuity issues associated also with the country's financial situation are making difficult to implement a whole-school approach that would care for the needs of each student, but the efforts done by public authorities are encouraging. This is compensated by extensive efforts of SOLIDAR Foundation members and other CSOs that are filling the gaps in terms of citizenship education provision and extracurricular activities for promoting intercultural dialogue and combatting cultural stereotypes.

INTRODUCTION

The EU opened accession negotiation with Serbia in 2014[1]. The country has been on path to implement the EU acquis with mixed success[2]. SOLIDAR Foundation members report that reforms have been designed but that they tend to copy EU initiatives without adapting them to Serbia's context or dedicating enough effort to implement them. Our members report issues related to media freedom and to the government's willingness to cooperate with CSOs. In this climate, citizenship education is hard to develop successfully and to be more than just a token action for EU membership.

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1 European Commission (2019). European Neighbourhood Policy And Enlargement Negotiations – Serbia [online]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/serbia_en. Last accessed: 26 November 2019.
2 European Commission (2019). Serbia 2019 report. Accompanying the document 2019 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-serbia-report.pdf. Last accessed: 26 November 2019.

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

There is currently no digital strategy for Serbia, as only in October 2019 public consultations for a Proposal for a Strategy for development of digital skills have been organised. SOLIDAR Foundation members report that CSOs have been excluded from the design of the Proposal, and that they are not seen as legitimate stakeholders. **The main issue with the Strategy is, however, the fact that it does not take into consideration secluded rural areas or the older generation, virtually increasing the digital skills gap and promoting unequal regional development.** The digital approach so far has been to build up the e-governance infrastructure and to promote the interaction between government and citizens online. This has been reinforced in April 2018 with the adoption of a new law on e-government which simplifies and makes more efficient and transparent electronic public services. It will facilitate communication among citizens and the administration[3]. Therefore, the topic of digital citizenship is indirectly approached even if it is not defined, yet, at national level.

Piecemeal reforming was used to introduce digitalization in education, but this has not been a priority for the government until recently. In its efforts to align with the EU, the Serbian government has been using the European definition of digital competence, while developing a national one based on that[4]. SOLIDAR Foundation members report that ICT classes were included in the curriculum as elective courses until upper secondary level when they become mandatory. They also state that, by 2021, it is envisioned that these courses will become mandatory for all. Given this, a digital competence framework for teachers has been developed, to map their essential digital competences. Moreover, the Serbian framework has a very strong component for teachers to assess their skill level and to develop personal learning practices to improve digital skills[5]. Though the framework is encouraging, it is not mandatory to be used, raising questions about its implementation, especially as digital skills remain mostly a cross-curricular topic[6].

VET schools benefit from the fact that that ICT and computing has been made a mandatory subject for all, but there is still no systematic strategy to measure student's progress. Furthermore, VET teachers report insufficient training for digital skills, while hardware components are old and the maintenance is lacking. Only 47% of VET schools provide WiFi access in class and 66% of all schools have extremely slow internet[7].

3 European Commission. Serbia 2019 report. P. 50

4 European Commission (2019). Digital Education at School in Europe. Eurydice report. Pp. 9, 26. Available at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/en_digital_education_n.pdf. Last accessed: 26 November 2019.

5 European Commission. Digital Education at School in Europe. Pp.: 11, 47-48.

6 European Commission. Digital Education at School in Europe. P.48.

7 European Training Foundation (2017). Digital Skills and Online Learning in Serbia. Digital Factsheet October 2017. Available at: https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/m/0EB8BDBBAE763C9DC1258227003BBBE0_Digital%20factsheet_Serbia.pdf. Last accessed: 26 November 2019.

CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member, Initiative for Development and Cooperation (IDC) Serbia is a service provider for social assistance, support with re-training and active job search-ing, community social services, support for young entrepre-neurs, seminars and training. It is focused on the topics of social and economic develop-ment, equal rights for all and volunteering, doing tremen-dous work in assisting the in-tegration of migrants and inter-nally displaced people (IDPs) in society. In line with their mis-sion, they have been constant-ly boosting the level of digital skills of young entrepreneurs or of people searching for jobs. Starting from July 2018 until December 2019, IDC has ran a large scale initiative to support the reintegration of IDPs, titled *LSG 4 LAP – Durable solu-tions for IDPs and returnees through partnership*. This in-cluded assistance for housing and participation in education, but specifically for digital skills, they have been providing start-up workshops which include digital skills modules. Their aim is to ensure that IDPs can run their own business in a digital landscape.

The introduction of media literacy and digital skills in the curriculum is essential, but this must be accompanied by sufficient prepara-tion for teachers, by investment in the digital infrastructure, by a strategy to monitor imple-mentation of digitalization in schools.

The inadequate national approach is comple-mented by CSOs and by multinational compa-nies (MNCs). Microsoft, Nordeus, PWC, Ring-ier Axel Springer, Telenor, Google and others have joined forces in 2017 to create the Digital Serbia Initiative, a non-profit private partner-ship aimed at improving the digital ecosystem in Serbia. Their manifesto and strategy look into education as well, as they provide tools and investment to ensure adequate training in digital skills for teachers and to promote digital literacy[8]. NGOs, such as The Serbian Moodle Network, are further filling the gap by creating collaborative networks for digitally competent teachers to develop training in digital compe-tences for other teachers[9]. **The government must acknowledge the need to better fo-cus on digital skills and to collaborate with organisations already involved in this.**

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8 Digital Serbia Initiative (2017). Manifesto. Available at: https://www.dsi.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Manifest-ENG.pdf. Last accessed: 26 November 2019.
9 European Training Foundation (2017). Digital Skills and Online Learning in Serbia.
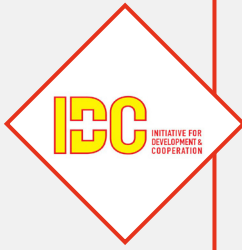
CASE STUDY

IDC Serbia, in partnership with SOLIDAR Foundation, organizations from Croatia, Hungary, France, and Italy have just joined an Erasmus+ project coordinated by [Forum for International Cooperation (FIC)](#) from Denmark, on combatting cyberbullying. The #YouthAgainstCyberbullying project aims to raise awareness on cyberbullying, to train young Internet users to protect themselves against it, but also to inform parents, authorities, and other stakeholders on how to assist victims of it. The objectives are to be achieved by developing an online platform, an app and an e-brochure to disseminate information about cyberbullying, to create a community that can support victims of cyberbullying, and to provide a port of call for combatting this crime. Each of the national project partners will train five frontrunners – young people – on responsible usage of the online environment and on how to detect and act against cyberbullying. These young trainers will further disseminate their knowledge by organizing national trainings for, mainly, secondary school pupils. In doing so, IDC and its partners will create a trickle-down effect of responsibility in the online environment, training pupils to be good citizens online. The project will conclude in 2021 after the series of aforementioned trainings.

CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

SOLIDAR Foundation members report that citizenship education is taught as a separate subject in the curriculum but that it adopts a civic education model, prioritizing hard skills over soft ones, namely the transmission of knowledge related to the country's history, geography, system of governance and constitution. Moreover, the curricular reform of 2000/2001 was the last one in which citizenship education was addressed. Therefore, the current approach is outdated, with topics such as gender violence, cyberbullying, rights of and discrimination of LGBT+ community, workers' rights and citizen action not being part of the conversation. CSOs, including SOLIDAR Foundation member IDC Serbia, have participated in the 2000/2001 reform, but, since then, their evaluation of the reform implementation and adjacent recommendations have been ignored by the government. CSOs were involved in developing the civic education competence framework, but similarly they report it being outdated and inadequate for current realities. Furthermore, SOLIDAR Foundation members report that the European dimension is not approached in the school curriculum, a striking information given the EU accession procedure. The biggest danger to the acquisition of civic competences is the fact that though citizenship education is a separate topic, pupils are entitled to choose whether they pursue this topic or religion classes[10]. Reducing the broad topic of citizenship education to history of religion or to moral frameworks promoted by certain religious is a dangerous feature, leaving out competences which citizens need to successfully participate in society.

The piecemeal approach exhibited by the government in relation to digital citizenship is replicated on broader topics of citizenship education. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development is promoting media literacy as a cross-curricular topic[11] and the Ministry of Culture and Media even created a working group to develop a manual to this aim. However, how exactly this is being implemented in pre-university education is not adequately assessed [12].

Similarly, the National Youth Strategy 2015-2025 refers to encouraging young people to join representative bodies within their educational units, to boosting participation in volunteering, to instill active participation in youngsters – by promoting solidarity, tolerance, gender equality – and to boost participation in electoral processes for the youth[13]. However, this approach to citizenship education is not being monitored appropriately. SOLIDAR Foundation members report that the Strategy is unsystematically implemented, delayed, and the evaluation of achieving its targets is lacking.

The tokenism in the design of reforms is seen in the recent silencing of the media in Serbia. Though the president and the government are taking a pro-European stance it seems that the European values are not exactly reflected in their work. Journalists and CSOs have been under attack by smear campaigns ran by pro-government media outlets, while attacks on the integrity of journalists have been insufficiently investigated by the government[14].

10 Eurydice (2019). Teaching and Learning in General Upper Secondary Education – Serbia [online]. Available at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/teaching-and-learning-general-upper-secondary-education-51_en. Last accessed: 26 November 2019.

11 Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia. (2012). Strategy for Education Development in Serbia 2020. Pp. 65, 84. Available at: http://erasmusplus.rs/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Strategy-for-Education-Development-in-Serbia-2020.pdf. Last accessed: 26 November 2019.

12 European Commission. Serbia 2019 report. P.: 67

13 Ministry of Youth and Sport of the Republic of Serbia (2015). National Youth Strategy 2015-2025. Available at: http://www.mos.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/download-manager-files/Nacionalna%20strategija%20za%20mlade%20-%20ENG.pdf. Last accessed: 26 November 2019.

14 Reporters Without Borders (2019). Serbia [online]. Available at: https://rsf.org/en/serbia. Last accessed: 26 November 2019.

The freedom of independent media was curtailed since Aleksandar Vučić's appointment as Prime Minister in 2014. The situation is still continuing, despite changes in governance, with numerous cyberattacks rendering independent media outlets out of business[15]. The 2019 World Press Freedom Index places Serbia on the 90th place out of 180 countries, falling 14 position since last year[16]. The curtailment of media freedom has a negative impact on media literacy and citizenship education in Serbia.

Source: IDC Serbia

CASE STUDY

Complementing the work of the government, SOLIDAR Foundation member, IDC Serbia, promoted media literacy with its 7-month project *School of Journalism for Children and Youth: a step towards competencies for modern societies* that ran from February until August 2019. Under supervision from a professional journalist, 20 secondary school children from the municipality of Čačak attended workshops on journalism, ICT, ecology, human rights, cooperation, and then they developed an online and printed magazine accompanied by media content collected through interviews, opinion polls, reportage. The project aims to encourage youth activism, develop digital, collaborative, social, civic and communication skills. Fighting fake news and ensuring media literacy are essential needs for citizens in current societies, and IDC has been providing this through its project. The project benefitted from donations from the Serbian diaspora, and from the support of journalists that previously worked with schools for extra-curricular activities related to media literacy. However, such a project seems to be unsustainable as it relies on the willingness of donations and individual actors. More support is needed to expand such initiatives nationally, and allow pupils to work with practitioners in understanding the toxic climate developing around the media.

15 Amnesty International (2018). Serbia: Still Failing to Deliver on Human Rights. Available at: https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/EUR7069532017ENGLISH.PDF. Last accessed: 26 November 2019.
16 Reporters Without Borders (2019). Serbia [online]. Available at: https://rsf.org/en/serbia. Last accessed: 26 November 2019.

INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

Learner-centred approaches and intercultural dialogue received more attention from authorities given the importance of the Balkan route during the migration crisis. Serbia confronted with large number of migrants that had to be integrated in society. The approach to this has been more systematized than the curricular approaches aforementioned. The schools and local authorities currently guide themselves by official governmental guidelines on how to integrate asylum seekers in education[17]. Serbia boasts one of Europe's top systems of monitoring the integration of migrants in education, as it monitors the implementation of policies in: language provision for migrant students, access of migrants to schools, learning support for migrants, psycho-social support for migrant students and teacher training on integrating migrant students[18]. The mere existence of such policies is an impressive achievement, but the data collection allows the government to address shortcomings in the system. Migrant students benefit from preparatory classes as they are included in mainstream classes

as well[19]. In this way, they do not lose contact with fellow native pupils while remedial classes assist them with catching up. There is a clear placing of migrant students in the centre of the learning process, and data is being collected on grade retention, early school leaving and test scores[20] to troubleshoot their needs and how the education system can better integrate them.

Though the integration measures are encouraging, it must be noted that Serbia remains a transit country for migrants and refugees, with many remarking the limited employment opportunities they would have in Serbia, the difficulties in acquiring the Serbian language, the functionality of the Serbian language in the event of leaving the country, and the fact that they wish to be reunited with their family in other European countries. Therefore, Serbia confronts with the issue of providing a long-term integration strategy for groups of people who have no intention of remaining in the coun-

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17 Bunar, Nihad (2019). Promoting Effective Integration of Migrants and Refugees in Education. Brussels: European Trade Union Committee for Education. Available at: https://www.csee-etuce.org/images/attachments/SD_Mig_REPORT_Online.pdf. Last accessed: 26 November 2019.

18 European Commission (2019). Integrating Students from Migrant Background into Schools in Europe: National Policies and Measures. Eurydice report. Pp.: 65-66. Available at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/integrating_students_from_migrant_backgrounds_into_schools_in_europe_national_policies_and_measures.pdf. Last accessed: 26 November 2019.

19 Ibid. Pp.: 83-84.

20 Ibid. P.64.

try, implicitly confronting with a temporality[21] which is not conducive to developing the skills needed for the successful societal integration of all learners.

The support offered to migrant pupils has the risk of creating a feeling of 'othering' especially as intercultural education is seen only as a general aspect of school life or the focus of special days/projects. This is not a policy which schools have to abide by and it does not include native pupils in intercultural education[22]. This runs the risk of being less of an empowerment for migrants and of neglecting the needs of native pupils in terms of being able to adapt to multicultural environments. Though native pupils are not immersed in intercultural education, they benefit from the same learner-centred approach that migrant pupils enjoy. Based on the Strategy for Development of Education in Serbia 2020, **inclusion of all pupils in education and preventing early school leaving (ESL) are priorities of the Serbian government since 2012**. In partnership with UNICEF and the Centre for Education Policy, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development Republic of Serbia developed an early warning and intervention system (EWIS) to limit the amount of pupils leaving education. Parental engagement, peer support, models for remedial teaching have been set up to work with the data collected by EWIS and to ensure that the educational experience is tailored on pupils' needs, while relevant actors in a pupil's life are included. Training packages to ensure schools are operating under a whole-school methodology were developed, ensuring that each school has a drop-out prevention team and an action plan for this[23]. The ESL rate decreased from 7.4% in 2015 to 6.2% in 2017, but more effort is needed in combating drop-out rates[24].

To cater for students' needs, the Serbian government, in partnership with the World Bank and UNICEF, set up a Network for Support of Inclusive Education in 2010. Inclusive education models were established in the schools in which this was piloted. This entailed the presence of trained professional to provide Continuous Professional Development (CPD), direct coaching, consulting and supervision in schools, while capacity building for inclusive education in pre-primary and primary education has been promoted. By 2014, 2000 education practitioners were immersed in this, while 150000 children benefitted from this approach[25]. **Serbia is on track to ensure a learner focused educational system that brings all stakeholders in to contribute to pupils' learning experience** as a result of the external funding but also as a result of the involvement of the private sector, CSOs and the international organisations in the provision of education.

However, the governmental approach to and efforts for intercultural dialogue and education is lacking, with CSOs covering the gap.
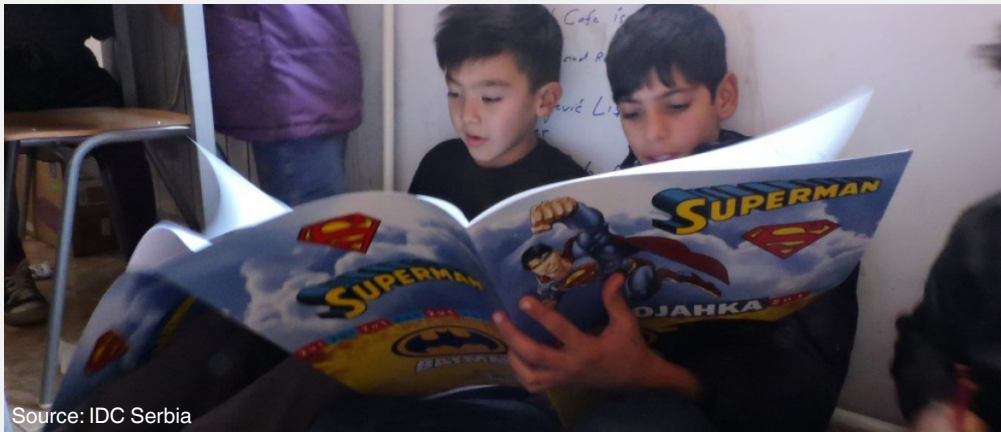
21 Bunar, Nihad. Promoting Effective Integration of Migrants and Refugees in Education. Pp 57-58.
22 Ibid. P.109.
23 School Education Gateway (2019). Combating drop-out and early school leaving (ESL) in Serbia [online]. European Toolkit for Schools. Available at: https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/resources/toolkitsforschools/detail.cfm?n=338. Last accessed: 26 November 2019.
24 European Commission. Serbia 2019 Report. Pp.83-84.
25 UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2015). Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All: Findings from the Global Initiative on Out-Of-School Children. P.84. Available at: http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fixing-broken-promise-efa-findings-global-initiative-oosc-education-2015-en.pdf. Last accessed: 26 November 2019.

Source: IDC Serbia

CASE STUDY

IDC works with reception centres and refugee camps, providing much needed donations, including food, clothes, school supplies, but most importantly contributing with volunteers to assist the asylum seekers and refugees in their daily life, as well as medical teams. However, beyond providing the basic needs for migrants and refugees, IDC assisted with building bridges between migrants and the local community, creating an environment of intercultural dialogue. IDC organized exchanges between native and migrant youth on sports, encouraging them to teach the other their preferred sport, it has organized public exhibitions for natives with artwork from the migrant community, it has organized informational campaigns to debunk myths on the incoming populations, and it has developed a series of documentaries disseminating the experience of incoming populations, shedding a light on their stories. IDC offered a humane dimension to the humanitarian crisis and has facilitated the intercultural education of both native and migrant populations, filling in a gap left by the government.

Source: IDC Serbia

CASE STUDY

IDC is a member of the [IRIS Network](#), a regional network connecting CSOs providing social services in South East Europe, ensuring that its 140 members are recognized as equal partners by the public sector. The IRIS Network organised, in the framework of its EU-funded project *IRIS NETWORKing CSOs for protection sensitive migration management*, a [Balkan Media Caravan](#) at the beginning of November 2019 for young journalists in North Macedonia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. IDC has been one of the organisations implementing the Caravan. The aim of the project was to tackle the negative narratives surrounding migrant populations, and to inform sensitive media reporting on them to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes. The countries involved in the project grappled with fake news on migration, and the initiative of CSOs is to offer training to journalists on reporting in a sensitive manner, while bringing them on the field for 6 days to experience the stories of the migrant population. The journalists received training on defining the various migration statuses, on ethical journalism, on human rights, on story creation related to migrant experiences, and on reinforcing freedom of expression in the media before producing 15 reports on migrant topics during their 6-days travelling. The reports were published in official media outlets in North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. Providing media literacy, ethical journalism and intercultural dialogue has been again promoted by CSOs, complementing the government's work. The project united both CSOs and media organisations in addressing media literacy and stereotypes on multicultural environments.

Source: IDC Serbia

Source: IDC Serbia

FUNDING

In 2015, Serbia was spending 3.8% of its GDP on education[26], revealing a serious underinvestment, especially given the need to catch up with other European countries for accession, but also because of the migration crisis that put pressure on the educational system. SOLIDAR Foundation members report that inadequate funding from the government to CSOs on citizenship education, digital skills or intercultural dialogue. Such organisations depending on donations or on EU funding, which creates an unsustainable climate for implementing long-term actions such as the acquisition of civic and digital competences. It has been pointed out that Serbia has made no progress establishing an enabling environment for the development and financing of civil society[27].

RECOMMENDATIONS

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

- Development of a national strategy for digitalization in education, coupled with an adequate action plan and a continuous process of monitoring its implementation;
- Governmental cooperation with private companies and CSOs that are already engaged in the topic of promotion of digital skills and digital citizenship;

CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

- Recognition of CSOs as equal partners in policymaking and the development of a strong civil dialogue culture;
- Introduction of citizenship education as a stand-alone topic with no possibility to choose between it or religion classes;

INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

- Development of intercultural education as school policy, and efforts to include the entire student body in intercultural education;

FUNDING

- More support offered to CSOs providing NFIL, including financial support, given the inconsistent reforming in the Serbian system and the need to complement the government's approach.

26 Eurostat (2018). Educational expenditure statistics [online]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Educational_expenditure_statistics#Overall_educational_expenditure. Last accessed: 26 November 2019.
27 European Commission. Serbia 2019 report

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