

## SOLIDAR+ Input Paper on the Skills Portability Initiative

### Introduction

**SOLIDAR+** is the Learning Hub of SOLIDAR; a European network of NGOs working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide. SOLIDAR brings together over 50 member organisations based in 26 countries of which 21 are EU countries. We work together in Social Affairs, International Cooperation and Lifelong Learning.

SOLIDAR+ calls for an education agenda that is inclusive, participatory, and future-oriented. This includes prioritising inclusive education with increased public investment, promoting Global Citizenship Education to foster peace, critical thinking, digital literacy, and just transitions, and ensuring accessible digital education. SOLIDAR+ advocates for recognising non-formal and informal learning and supporting flexible, learner-centred pathways to empower communities, strengthen active citizenship, and help individuals adapt to rapid societal changes. For more info: [www.solidar.org](http://www.solidar.org)

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### Skills Portability Initiative

This contribution addresses all three actions of the call for evidence. From SOLIDAR+'s perspective, skills portability must serve both workers and learners across their life course. Mobility, inclusion, and lifelong learning are inseparable goals: people learn in many settings: formal, non-formal, informal, and their competences should be visible, trusted, and usable across borders and sectors.

#### 1. Advancing skills portability to support mobility and lifelong learning

SOLIDAR+ welcomes the Skills Portability Initiative as a step toward removing persistent barriers to mobility in the EU. If developed into binding measures, the Initiative could significantly improve the transparency and comparability of skills and qualifications, leveraging and strengthening validation systems, and facilitating cross-border recognition. However, a narrow focus on labour market mobility risks overlooking the Initiative's transformative potential for learning pathways, access to further education, and social inclusion. Skills portability must be designed to support both employment mobility and flexible learning pathways.

In practice, employers often struggle not only to identify what skills individuals possess but also to understand their level of competence. Existing EU tools such as qualification frameworks provide comparability of qualifications, yet there is no widely adopted system for comparing skill proficiency levels across sectors and countries. SOLIDAR+ sees clear value in developing common, quality-assured descriptors of competence levels to strengthen trust, improve recruitment, and enhance mobility. The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) are widely recognised as tools for promoting transparency, comparability, recognition of qualifications, and cross-border mobility. However, their focus remains primarily on formal qualifications rather than on skills, including those acquired through non-formal and informal learning. While NQFs incorporate learning

outcomes, it often remains unclear for learners, educators, and employers how these learning outcomes translate into concrete skills.

Certificates from non-formal education are not consistently reflected in NQFs, and practices vary across countries. More broadly, there is a low level of awareness among key stakeholders, including workers, jobseekers, learners, NGOs, employers, and non-formal training providers, about the existence of NQFs and how to navigate or use them. Studies show that workers, jobseekers, and learners are generally the least informed, compared to education providers or employers (Cedefop, 2025).

The SPI could help address this gap by providing a user-friendly, transparent way to present qualification levels and learning outcomes, while clearly linking them to concrete skills. By making the connection between learning, competence, and skills visible.

Among the sectors that can benefit the most from fostered mobility thanks to this Initiative are vocational education and training (VET), adult learning, and non-formal education, where mobility remains especially limited. Improving skills portability in these sectors would expand opportunities for workers and learners and notably those with vulnerable backgrounds, support participation in lifelong learning, and increase the EU's attractiveness for talent in strategic sectors, including digital and green transitions.

## **2. Focusing on the recognition and validation of prior learning and non-formal & informal learning**

SOLIDAR+ identifies the need to focus on the validation of prior learning to overcome barriers to skills portability, social inclusion, and lifelong learning across the EU. In a fast-changing labour market, learners of all ages acquire valuable competences through not only work but also non-formal learning experiences, such as volunteering, community engagement, etc. However, these competences often remain invisible or are unevenly understood and recognised across Member States, undermining both individual mobility and systemic innovation.

In this context, the Skills Portability Initiative represents a crucial opportunity to strengthen trust, transparency, and comparability of skills across borders and sectors. For the Initiative to succeed, SOLIDAR+ stresses the importance of embedding accessible validation of prior learning mechanisms that recognise competences acquired in both formal but also non-formal education pathways.

Recognition of prior learning and the validation of non-formal & informal learning empowers individuals to shape their career paths and plan their personal development. Validation particularly benefits those who have been outside the education system for an extended period, people without formal qualifications, adults returning to learning and training, and unemployed individuals seeking to demonstrate their competences to potential employers. It also supports those aiming to enhance existing qualifications or to gain recognition for non-formal learning acquired in the workplace.<sup>1</sup>

Cooperation with civil society organisations and non-formal learning providers is essential in this regard. These actors are at the forefront of delivering inclusive learning opportunities and are uniquely positioned to identify, document, and validate competences developed through

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<sup>1</sup> [ETF, Recognition of prior learning or validation of NFIL](#)

non-formal and informal learning, as the outcomes of plenty of Erasmus+ projects prove.<sup>2</sup> Their meaningful involvement is key to ensuring that validation systems are learner-centred, and socially inclusive. By making skills visible and recognised, validation fosters social inclusion and expands opportunities for disadvantaged groups, including the unemployed, early school leavers, low-skilled adults, and third-country nationals.

### **3. Harnessing digitalisation while ensuring inclusion**

Digitalisation has strong potential to improve portability by making credentials verifiable, interoperable, and easily shareable across borders. Digital credentials, interoperable skills portfolios, and connected learning accounts can reduce administrative burdens and improve access to recognition processes.

However, SOLIDAR stresses that digitalisation must be inclusive. Around half of adults in the EU still struggle with basic digital skills such as using email, filling online forms, or navigating digital learning platforms. For learners who already face social or economic barriers, such as migrants, low-qualified adults, people in precarious work, digital recognition systems that assume prior digital literacy can effectively exclude them from accessing validation opportunities. Without careful design, digital tools risk reinforcing existing inequalities.

Interoperability between digital systems must also be a core design principle. Existing EU tools and national platforms should be better integrated into a coherent ecosystem that allows individuals to document, store, and share their skills and learning outcomes throughout their lives.

### **4. Strengthening policy coherence and implementation**

EU policies and initiatives on skills, qualifications, and mobility remain fragmented. SOLIDAR considers the SPI a key opportunity to improve coherence across frameworks, tools, and national systems. Greater integration would enhance trust, usability, and effectiveness for end-users.

Implementation must be supported through sustained investment in guidance services, professional training, and awareness-raising. Public employment services, education providers, civil society organisations, and validation centres all require adequate resources to fulfil their role in enabling skills portability.

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<sup>2</sup> For example [VINCE \(2017-2019\)](#), [TRANSVAL-EU \(2021-2023\)](#), [IMAGES \(2021-2023\)](#)

## SOLIDAR+'s key recommendations

SOLIDAR+ calls for the Skills Portability Initiative to:

- Promote a comprehensive understanding of skills recognition that includes competences acquired through formal, non-formal, and informal learning.
- The SPI should make levels, learning outcomes, and their connection to skills transparent for all learners, workers, and stakeholders
- Develop a European framework supporting accessible, inclusive, and coordinated validation of prior learning across Member States.
- Strengthen cooperation with civil society organisations and non-formal learning providers as essential partners in mapping and providing recognition processes.
- Improve policy coherence by aligning European and national frameworks, tools, and databases.
- Ensure digital portability systems are interoperable, user-friendly, and inclusive for individuals with limited digital skills.
- Enhance awareness, guidance, and capacity building for professionals and end-users.
- Improve data collection and monitoring to support evidence-based policymaking and measurable progress.

## Conclusion

For SOLIDAR+, the Skills Portability Initiative represents a strategic opportunity to build a more inclusive, transparent, and trusted European skills ecosystem. By recognising all forms of learning, strengthening validation systems, and ensuring inclusive digitalisation, the Initiative can support mobility, lifelong learning, and social cohesion across the Union. Skills portability must ultimately empower individuals, not only to move across borders, but to learn, participate, and thrive throughout their lives.