



# **Investment in Education and Training: A Public Good for All**

**28 November - 2 December 2022**



# CALENDAR



MONDAY 28.11	TUESDAY 29.11	WEDNESDAY 30.11	THURSDAY 1.12	FRIDAY 2.12
<p><b>15.00 - 17.30   LLLP</b> LLLWeek Launch Event, Civil Society Forum «Investment in education and training: a public good for all»</p> <p><b>18.00 - 20.00   LLLP</b> LLLWeek Reception</p>	<p><b>10.00 - 11.30   OBESSU, EFIL</b> Inclusive International Mobility for the future of young Europeans</p> <p><b>12.00 - 13.30   ECSWE, ECNAIS, OIDEL</b> Implementing the Right to parental school choice: The role of public funding</p> <p><b>13.30 - 14.30   EVTA</b> VIP- NET Coffee Break: Investing in Environment &amp; Fight Against Climate Change</p> <p><b>14.00 - 17.30   LLLP</b> CHOICE: Investing in People and STEM</p> <p><b>16.00 - 17.30   LLLP, EAEA</b> Lifelong Learning Interest Group: Investment in education and training transnational cooperation</p>	<p><b>10.00 - 11.00   ESU</b> The RRF and the EU Semester: A new dimension of investments?</p> <p><b>12.00 - 13.30   LLLP, FREREF</b> Investing Lifelong Learning in EU Regions</p> <p><b>12.00 - 14.00   ECSWE, Alliance for Childhood</b> Media Maturity and how to build it</p> <p><b>13.30 - 14.30   EVTA</b> VIP- NET Coffee Break: Investing in Digital Transition</p> <p><b>14.30 - 16.00   SOLIDAR, FICEMEA</b> Citizens, learners, workers: Investing in the whole person</p> <p><b>14.00 - 16.00   EPA</b> Investing in Creative Thinking for Parents</p> <p><b>14.00 - 16.00   EFVET</b> Micro-Credentials: Challenges and ways to go</p> <p><b>17.00 - 19.00   EAEA</b> The «Forgotten» of Digitalisation</p>	<p><b>09.30 - 18.00   EUROPEAN COMMISSION</b> European Education Summit</p> <p><b>09.00 - 16.30   AEGEE</b> Welcoming Third-Country Nationals in Higher Education in Europe</p> <p><b>12.00 - 14.00   EFVET, UNITO</b> Financing the Implementation of the Green Deal</p> <p><b>13.30 - 14.30   EVTA</b> VIP- NET Coffee Break: Investing in Social Inclusion and Diversity</p>	<p><b>10.00 - 11.00   SIRIUS</b> Why fund migrant and refugee education?</p> <p><b>13.30 - 14.30   EVTA</b> VIP- NET Coffee Break: Investing in Participation in Democratic Life</p> <p><b>15.00 - 16.30   OBESSU</b> Free education? Only if you can afford it! The real costs of schools</p>
			<p> #LLLWeek</p> <p> Co-funded by the Erasmus Programme of the European Union</p>	

The LLLWeek 2022 is organised by the LLLPlatform and its members



With the support of the Lifelong Learning Interest Group of the European Parliament



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# WORDS FROM THE HOST



**MEP  
MILAN ZVER**

“The LLLWeek has deservedly become a much-anticipated event that is bringing together stakeholders and policy makers to exchange ideas and proposals on how to tackle educational challenges of today. I am honoured by the invitation of the LLLPlatform to be a host for this year LLLWeek. This year’s theme debate of the LLLWeek on the importance of investment in education and training is very timely.

Europe is facing several challenges, most difficult since the end of the World War II. The Russian Federation’s illegal invasion into Ukraine has changed our world overnight. Not only has Ukraine been attacked but our European values have been put at stake. Economic and energy crisis, the coronavirus pandemic, technological advancements are all drastically changing our way of life. At the same time, demographic trends and other factors require a later retirement age. These and other developments are resulting in an increasing need for quality lifelong education and training, likely to require additional human and financial resources.

However, in response to the past and current crisis, a number of countries have cut their education, training, culture, research and development budgets in the last decade. Especially critical is the public under-investment in lifelong learning for adults. According to Cedefop’s latest estimates, 46% of the adult population in the EU-28 area will need to be

upskilled or reskilled but at present only around 11% of adults benefit from adult learning.

**We need to be aware that if we fail to sufficiently invest in human resources and adopt a lifelong learning approach there will be no sustainable, long-lasting development.** Just for instance, at the core of some East Asian countries’ superior performance in technology and science there are quality educational systems that are adopting the lifelong learning approach much faster than EU. They are already the ones dictating development trends and thus profiting from them. Evidence demonstrates that public funding in education and training opportunities enhance the competitiveness of business and economies. Furthermore, **appropriate level of public expenditure also improves social cohesion and promotes active citizenship.**

The benefits of education and training can be enhanced in various ways. One of them is certainly through Erasmus+ Programme, which offers many opportunities for the educational, professional and personal development of people in education, training, youth and sport. As a Standing rapporteur for Erasmus + Programme, I am proud that we were able to secure additional funds for the period of 2021-27 to improve access for people who had fewer opportunities in previous programmes with a special focus on a lifelong learning. **There is a need for continuous learning to be available to all persons.**

In general, the changes in employment are increasing and changing the skill levels required. Governments have a crucial role to play in ensuring financial resources for learning and training. Member states with the help of the EU should smartly invest in these vital areas, so that they can emerge stronger from the health, social, economic and financial consequences of the current situation.

**This is a challenge that involves all of us, policy makers, stakeholders from all sectors and citizens.** To achieve a successful economic, digital and green transformation, a common effort and respect for each other and our differences are required. We must do all in our power to make it happen. In this sense, I warmly welcome the contribution of LLLPlatform, which highlights the need for the investment in quality education and training.”



# LLLWeek Launch Event and Civil Society Forum



28 November | LLLP

Giuseppina Tucci, President LLLP, opened the discussion by challenging the notion of ‘systemic crises’, highlighting that they are long-term challenges in need of holistic and structural responses. **Education as a public good can mitigate the challenges, while a true European Education Area cannot be achieved without public investment in education & training, from cradle to grave.**

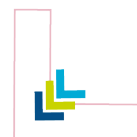
MEP Milan Zver officially launched the LLLWeek reflecting on education & training’s mission to promote European values in times of technological changes, war, economic and energy crises, as well as pandemics and demographic changes across the continent. Therefore, the quality of education & training must be increased, while equitable participation of learners must be boosted, especially in adult learning. He called for increased funding in education & training, targeted towards sustainable long-lasting development, equipping learners with competences to thrive in multicultural societies while ensuring access to learning and mobility is provided to those with fewer opportunities. He concluded by envisioning an exciting future shaped by education & training with LLLP and its members at the forefront.

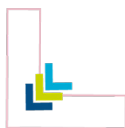
Sikunder Ali, Associate Professor at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, reflected on the need for societies to be built on common understanding and values which depend on education being a public good. **Education is the conduit for ample actual possibilities for people to interpret meanings of their lives and live their life as fully realised as possible with utmost care for their own and others’ welfare and well-being.**

He concluded that situations like the pandemic, environmental disasters, but most importantly the master narrative of markets led by economic interests prevent the chance to ensure full provision of education as a public good. He cautioned the reduction of sustenance of life simply to economic gains, as well as the reliance on prioritising economic competition at the expense of the SDGs and of ensuring that all have access to public goods.

Stefaan Hermans, Director of Policy Strategy and Evaluation in DG EAC, acknowledged the need for adequate funding in education & training but insisted that access to quality education & training depends on the investment’s quality. An increased share of GDP spending on the sector is irrelevant if GDP is decreasing or if investment in the sector as a percentage of total public expenditure is decreasing. He credited the European Commission’s long-term strategy on training, targeting curricula and teacher training.

He explained that a culture of evaluation should follow any investment, and, to this end,





the Commission's new initiative, the Learning Labs, will be a voluntary instrument to help Member States and education & training stakeholders determine how to qualitatively invest in learning, building up a Community of Practice.

Ann Branch, Head of Unit Skills Agenda DG EMPL, framed lifelong learning and the Skills Agenda within the broader European Commission agenda of the European Pillar of Social Rights and of achieving the SDGs. She insisted that reaching the SDGs, given the green and digital transitions, the demographic challenges and the EU's dependency on partners for healthcare, energy security, requires reskilling and upskilling the Europeans for tackling the shortages in 28 occupations across the EU. Any quality investment must be policy-driven and strategic.

She provided the example of the Individual Learning Accounts as a model of strategic investment considering how it aims to develop a long-term culture of learning, while looking forward to the collaboration of 22 European Commission DGs for the European Year of Skills and the possibility to boost collaboration through lifelong learning stakeholders through opportunities such as the Pact for Skills.

Giuseppina Tucci, Secretary General OBESSU and President LLLP, insisted

that no policy-driven investment can be done without overhauling the rigid education & training systems in Europe. The extent of the COVID-19's impact on our societies could have been mitigated had governments only invested in the previous decades in the sector, rather than doubling down on austerity measures. She underlined that the overhauling systems can be done only if governmental priorities change. As economic ventures stayed open during the pandemic, schools closed. **The currently ingrained culture that learners benefit from learning only inasmuch as it contributes to their chances to employment and economic gains must be challenged.**

Gina Ebner, Secretary General EAEA, expressed disappointment that investment decisions rely mostly with Finance Ministries, rather than the education & training representatives. She explained that the investment should be guided towards people with low skills, or those in need to adapt to the digital transition. However, all is dependent on creating low-threshold offers to bring people into learning, building learning environments and a culture of learning through leisure courses. At the same time, she suggested that any initiative, such as the Individual Learning Accounts, should be accompanied by a lifelong learning system build around, with people benefiting from guidance and counselling as well as from the learning offer.

Horia Onița, Vice-President ESU, stated that not all funding models are desirable ones, denormalising this view to prevent having a commodification-based funding model being accepted as positive. He mentioned the need for policymakers to go beyond the acknowledgement of the need for investment and take actions, as even if education is foreseen at the top of various EU agendas for tackling challenges or adapting to transition, the sector remains the first to be affected by cuts in the event of austerity measures. He concluded with the fact that education should be better included in the European Semester process, with an increased stakeholder engagement in all the Semester steps.



# Inclusive International Mobility for the future of young Europeans



29 November | OBESSU & EFIL

The keynote presentation focused on a study conducted as part of the [project Erasmus in schools](#). In this context an 'International mobility experience' is considered as either part of studies or work experience and fully supported by a public programme (Erasmus+, ESC, etc). The main aspects considered in this study were perception and attitudes towards international mobility opportunities, the needs of students and the sources of information in which students rely. Of over a thousand answers from 16 countries, over half of them were not aware of international mobility opportunities.

**Among the main challenges and/or barriers for students to embark on an international mobility experience are financial barriers, information barriers and linguistic competences.** Regarding the information barriers: schools have a crucial role to play followed by family settings. Informal networks and exchanges of experiences are important to create stimuli for young students. Peer interventions are an important tool for motivating young students: as part of the project guidelines and trainings have been developed to train ambassadors so they can effectively implement them in formal and informal settings.

Elisa Briga, Secretary from the European Federation for Intercultural Learning (EFIL) discussed EFIL's work on Individual pupil mobility and shared what opportunities exist with the participants. As part of their work, researchers looked at the definitions and variables that make part of international pupil mobility defined as a set of educational programmes that provide international physical mobility. The variables take into account: duration, type, content of activities, living arrangements, organiser, etc

**The main types of mobilities are group mobility (accompanied by the teacher, short term normally) and individual mobility (from over 1 month to the whole year).** The sources of funding for pupil mobility range from governmental, bilateral or multilateral programmes (i.e. Erasmus+) to school to school partnerships, non-profit pupil exchange organisations and private agencies.

Through their research they found that today in the EU there are around 60 000 pupils that go on mobility. From this number on 21% of students experience intra EU mobility and 80% make use of private agencies. From the different types of private agencies, 63% of learners that go on mobility have done it through a for profit agency which brings about concerns regarding accessibility for mobility opportunities.

EFIL underlined the issue that only a few Erasmus+ national agencies allow non-profit organisations to join schools to work on pupil mobility. Another focus of their work is supporting the recognition of learning



periods abroad including providing information to families and teachers (i.e. information packs per country).

Audrey Frith from Eurodesk shared the work from Eurodesk which is focused on youth mobility and their role as awareness raisers on youth mobility to encourage active citizenship. Eurodesk is present in 37 countries and has over 2000 multipliers. The Eurodesk opportunity finder is one of their main tools: a database with more than 200 programmes for youth. Their latest survey was conducted to inquire about the perceptions youth have of mobility, the impact of Covid and youth's information needs.

From the results it was found that **schools and families are the main sources of information and motivation when it comes to mobility**. In terms of perception, 90% of respondents were open to the idea of mobility with youth from rural areas or in unfavourable financial situations being less keen than the rest. A total of 25% of respondents also consider that now it is less realistic to go abroad than it was before the pandemic. Following the effects of Covid, only 12% feel that they have not missed out on opportunities due to the pandemic.

Eurodesk developed a set of recommendations to address the gaps observed from the latest survey results. It will be important to better segment the audience through a combination of digital and local outreach, and build bridges between youth information providers and youth directly. In terms of policy, more awareness needs to be raised about obstacles faced by youth. Moreover, it will be very important to ensure quality versus quantity and invest in youth information services.

Jacqueline Pacaud from the European Commission spoke about the different formats in which the Commission supports mobility in the school sector were highlighted: for pupils (individual and groups) and for teachers. An important focus is given to partnerships between schools to work together in

projects: schools can send teachers and pupils to a partner school. An accreditation system has been developed for schools so they benefit from easier access to mobility opportunities.

This accreditation process is managed by the National Agencies: schools can present a plan explaining why and how they would like to develop themselves through EU mobility. A Handbook is available at the National Agencies to help beneficiaries navigate the administrative measures and the organisational and strategic thinking necessary to embark in EU mobility projects.

The event closed with reflections around how to better cooperate to implement pupil mobility. It is paramount to get to know each other better in order to work better together at local level: schools, learners, parents, NGOs, etc.

Another important point is to foster cooperation over competition which does not mean there are not specific interests and goals to pursue but that our common goals and principles should guide the joint work on education, to defend it as a public good.

All together non-profit organisations and public institutions need to reach out to the local level and show them we move towards the same goals in order to prevent the closing of walls around the school environment.

Furthermore, there needs to be more support to schools, training centres and educators: relieve some of the pressure without taking responsibility from them, foster ownership of mobility programmes.



# Implementing the right to parental choice: The role of public funding



29 November | ECSWE, ECNAIS, OIDEL

The words of welcome set the scene, bringing the education perspective with-in families.

Benedicte Colin stressed the important role of parents in implementing the rights of the child, including the freedom of choice. She stressed the relevant idea of “co-responsibility” when it comes to the education of children: supporting parents is important, but it is not enough.

MEP Isabel Benjumea sent a video message to greet participants. She highlighted the importance of values, passed on to children from parents.

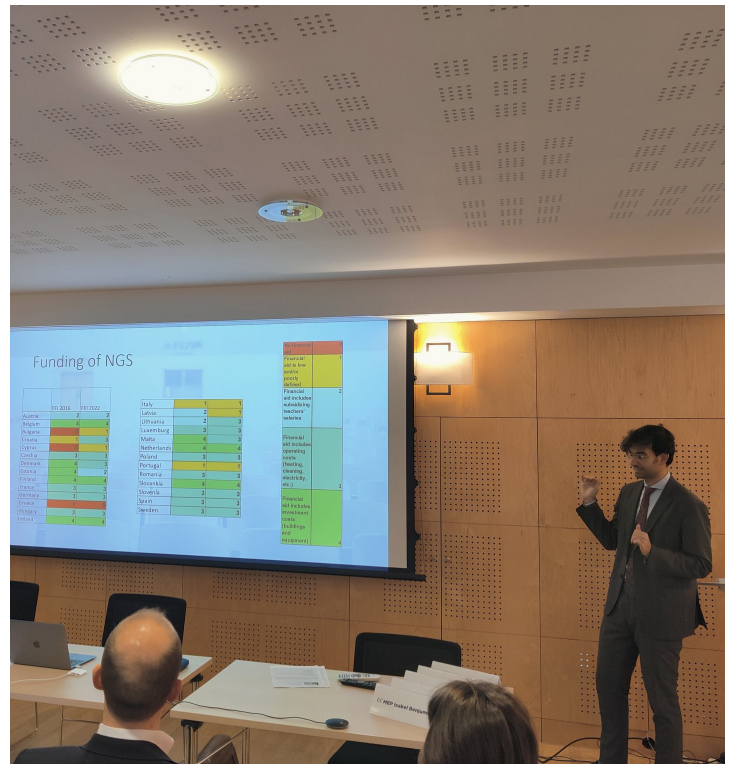
Article 14 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights states the freedom of parents to bring up their children in the values they esteem fundamental; it is a fundamental fight to remind us all of such a right, that it is not to be taken from granted.

Ignasi Grau, OIDEL, shared some practices on why public funding is important to ensure education pluralism in Europe.

Education pluralism rhymes with freedom, and especially the freedom to found educational establishments, considered to be a fundamental human right in the EU Charter.

22 out of 27 EU Member States ensure educational pluralism, including two explicit mentions in constitutions (Netherlands and Slovenia); those that do not explicitly recognise include France and Malta, whose constitutions still have provisions ensuring freedom of education.

The hope, and ask, is that there are more transparent frameworks so that non-governmental schools can also access public



funding; some mechanisms are very foggy in individual Member States, and funding still follows national curricula priorities.

**Education pluralism is an essential tool to European democracy,** said Markku Moisa-la, representing ECNAIS. Because it is a fundamental right, **it is essential to ensure that public investments are made to fund this diversity, as by doing so we are actively upholding democratic principles.**

Independent education providers are part of the same path towards a common goal: providing quality education to children, in all educational settings and environments.

A country that neglects the freedom of education, is actively jeopardising its own future. Allowing families to choose the education that best fits their own values is a principle of democracy.

National cases were also presented. In Germany, Georg Jurgens, ECSWE, explained, school



funding and parental school choice is a growing sector. Pupils enrolled in independent schools are growing and, at the same time, pupils enrolled in public schools are decreasing.

Croatia paints a different picture: funding has not changed a lot, and crucial funding only covers 8% of the needs of independent schools. These needs only account for 0,11% of ministerial funding, slightly above 1 million euros.

Public advocacy is in contact with the Ministry through a working group that has been active since 2021, and some more civil society mobilisation is foreseen to change a law reform path in 2021-2023.

The panel discussion stressed the need to abandon the dichotomy between public and private funding of education. For instance, deconstructing the myth of “private” education as profitmerks would help the case of independent schools.

Non-governmental schools, for example, have a public function not only for forming professionals of tomorrow, but ensuring the democratic principle of pluralism.

The event closed with acclaim that a strong distinction between for-profit and non-for-profit schools should be made apparent in legal frameworks throughout Europe to ensure the right to parental school choice.





# CHOICE: Investing in people and STEM



29 November | CHOICE

Monica Verzola, vice-president of the Lifelong Learning Platform, gave a welcoming speech highlighting how the project at hand, “CHOICE”, is a concrete contribution to the world of STEM education, and reiterating the topic and importance of this year’s LLLWeek: “investment in education and training”.

Following Monica’s opening words, Irene Pizzo, from CESIE, presented the project “CHOICE”: a two year-long KA3 Erasmus+ project, started in 2020, concerning the field of education and training. The project’s partnership is composed of 9 organisations: CESIE (Italy), Liceo Scientifico Statale Benedetto Croce (Italy), LLLP (Belgium), EUROTraining (Greece), Regional Directorate of Education of Western Greece (Greece), Blue Room Innovation (Spain), Institut de Maçanet de la Selva (Spain), GrantXpert Consulting (Cyprus), and Grammar School Nicosia (Cyprus).

The aim of the project is to increase young people’s motivation to choose STEM careers, by promoting the STEAM approach. The project’s primary research phase showed that Europe lacks STEAM approaches within traditional curricula. The outcomes are: collection of good practice tools on existing STEAM approaches; Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on STEAM approaches; policy recommendation document. **The project adopted a co-creation methodology which allowed for students to be actively involved within the project phases, and, thereby, for students, teachers, and external experts to collaboratively work with one another.**

The explanation of STEM and STEAM approaches, and conclusions drawn from the project’s state-of-the-art analysis, were given by Ester Maria Kalogeroudi,



EUROTraining. Essentially, STEM education encompasses Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, while STEAM education is an extension to STEM, which connects the scientific world with the arts and other relevant academic subjects such as the languages, social sciences, and so on.

The state-of-the-art analysis is a collection of existing initiatives and good practice examples regarding STEAM education in Europe, which includes student and teacher attitudes towards STEAM. As Ester Maria described, the analysis revealed a lack of STEM/STEAM educational initiatives in traditional curricula, and a lack of teacher training and resources on the matter.

Denisa Gibovic, from Blue Room Innovation, outlined the modules and aims of the project’s Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). The MOOC is an e-learning platform consisting of five modules which each connect the STEM disciplines with the arts and other related disciplines such as the languages.

For every module there are a variety of open-educational resources, which include materials for both teachers and students. A vantage point is that the course is accessible to anyone who is interested, regardless of one's location: whether one be in Europe or beyond.

A second vantage point, which Denisa particularly cared to point out, is that the course is not only a space which collects educational resources, but is one intended for connection purposes. Indeed, users can here see who is in the network, and, like any other social network, can interact both publicly and privately with one another. Denisa concluded her intervention by inviting the audience to explore the MOOC and its functions and resources.

Estel Guillames, Blue Room Innovation, summarized "CHOICE"'s impact on students and teachers. She started by saying that what was of interest to the project were young individuals' and teachers' students on STEAM education, and proceeded with the analysis.

She concluded that "CHOICE" had a positive impact, as, after the project, student and teachers' attitudes towards STEAM increased. However, after six months, their interests decreased a little. Estel emphasized that, to extend the project's short-term impacts in the long-run, STEAM educational initiatives must continue to be shared and implemented.

The interactive panel discussion with experts "Innovative approaches on the promotion and improvement of STE(A)M education at school" addressed challenges and solutions regarding STEAM education in Europe.

Some highlights of the interventions given by the panelists include MEP Victor Negrescu from the European Parliament, who regreted that even though the Recovery and Resilience plans foresee initiatives related to STEAM



in some Member States, those initiatives are not inter-linked. Romania is investing in STEAM but this is not connected to Italy or Spain. It is important to learn from each other. Then, the MEP recommends to the audience to highlight different initiatives throughout Europe and share them with the support of the institutions.

On the other hand, Leonie Bultynck from the European Commission, DG EAC supported the need for more cooperation in the European Union. One of the 14 EU digital education action plan priorities is about the setup of a digital education ecosystem.

One of the central issues in STEAM is gender equality. In ICT studies, 19% are women. But STE(A)M will be increasingly important for the future professionals in the context of the digital and green transition.

The event concluded with an opportunity for participants to share their questions and thoughts with the panelists.

# Lifelong Interest Group: Investment in education & training transnational cooperation

29 November | LLLP & EAEA

MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen, Chair of the European Parliament Lifelong Learning Interest Group, launched the meeting highlighting that **education, as a human right, cannot be reduced to specific skills or geographic boundaries.**

Therefore, she stated that the European Education Area (EEA) must better integrate teaching and learning, ensuring actions are in place and tying all developments in the sector from each Member State. Mobility is one such aspect, as this has to be enhanced while educators and teachers should themselves engage in mobilities for professional and personal development, and for ensuring that they can mentor learners to take up mobility opportunities.

However, she concluded that for mobility to be a reality, funding needs to be available for certifications, recognition, validation and all ancillary services. Participants agreed that **mobility can contribute to building democratic societies, effectively reverting current extremist trends.**

Ute Haller-Block, Head of Unit Erasmus+ Coordination DG EAC, offered reflections on the topic of choice given that mobility is not a straightforward issue and people actually need to be convinced to engage, also in light of financial reasons. She reminded participants that education is a Member State competence but that the long-term education programmes and peer learning led to progress in learning mobility. The real recognition of mobility as a learning experience is a victory, even if progress is slow.

She highlighted that mobility remains high on the EU political agenda, as part of the EEA and financed mainly through Erasmus+.



The demand for mobility remains high post-pandemic, as mobilities might have decreased by 60% in 2020 but have returned to pre-crisis levels.

EU initiatives such as the European Universities, the Teacher Academies, the Centres for VET Excellence can all contribute to facilitating a more organic implementation of mobilities. Similarly, the Learning Mobility Framework, and its upcoming 2023 update, or the Youth on the Move initiative, greatly contribute to mobility but more follow-up is required seeing how new challenges, linked to digital learning or greening have emerged. Teachers and educators, people with fewer opportunities and younger learners are target groups that need to be better included in mobility.

She concluded by mentioning the opportunity that the European Year of Skills is for mobility, seeing how multiple EU DGs (GROW, EMPL, EAC) will collaborate on this, and considering that the automatic recognition of learning period abroad is a high priority for the coming years, making a reality at least for higher education by 2025.

Participants hoped to see increased collaboration among the different bodies of the EU seeing how training, education, culture,

research and skills require joint cooperation and the recognition of all lifelong learning stakeholders. Increased amounts of mobilities, as well as funding for this, have been requested by citizens through the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE), and DG EAC will continue dialogues with citizens on learning mobility in 2023, as a legacy of CoFoE, therefore, a conversation on long-term investment on mobility is to be had.

Wim Gabriels, Director ESN, recalled that less than half of Europeans surveyed were aware of the different Erasmus+ opportunities, while countries are still a long way to reaching the 2020 mobility targets of at least 14.5% of young learners engaged in mobilities. The programme is in need of new targets, while the content of learning provided by mobilities should be adapted to reasons why learners choose to go on a mobility.

He insisted on the myriad of barriers to asking the programme for many which can be classified as institutional, environmental or attitudinal. The first include the lack of transparent information on what is financed during the mobility as well as the initial pre-funding required to launch a mobility. The second include barriers such as learners' lower-income background or their belonging to the rural area which could influence their access to information on the programme. The third refers to internalised barriers that impact a learner's perception of being able to go on an exchange.

Elisa Briga, Interim Secretary General EFIL, reminded participants that the automatic recognition of learning periods abroad is the least developed element of the EEA. As a co-leader the European Parliament Preparatory Action-funded Expert Network on Recognition (2020-2021), EFIL collected data which revealed that 60.000 pupils are mobile annually, with only 21% as part of intra-EU mobilities and with 80% engaging in this action

with private mobility providers (out of which 63% are for-profit providers).

The research revealed a lack of data on the volumes of mobility, but also on the recognition of learning outcomes, as well as a lack of legislation on recognition, a scattered approach with unclear guidelines for the enrollment of exchange pupils in sending and host countries. Lastly, the multitude of providers which cooperate insufficiently leads to the situation that allows for such a huge percentage of for-profit organisations to facilitate mobilities.

Christin Cieslak, Head of Programmes & Stakeholder Engagement EAEA, discussed the apparent equal access to education for all, considering how in the past decades the terminology in EU funded programmes has changed to pre-define what low skilled learners are and which conditions would be applicable to them.

Accessibility is limited due to such stigmatisation. At the same time, any funding available for individuals should also be extended to supporting the structures around the individuals, namely, amongst others, the learning providers.



For mobility to truly be mainstreamed, Erasmus+ must address its own structural issues and the structural issues of organisations that provide learning.

João Pinto, from the University of Minho, addressed the role played by Erasmus+ in EU foreign policy. As the programme has expanded towards third countries, as a budget for mobilities was added from the European External Action Service, from DG NEAR, it has become clear how the scope of the programme has expanded from the European identity mechanism that it used to be.

The investment in the E+ programme brings the capacity to change perceptions via student engagement. Considering the sanctions imposed by the EU on Russia, even if collaboration was reduced, mobilities were on an ascending path at least until the beginning of Russia's war of aggression.

Therefore, **investment in mobilities and Erasmus+ can become an effective foreign policy tool for changing perception which can build up intercultural and peace competences** that can prevent situations as the one currently in Ukraine from occurring again.

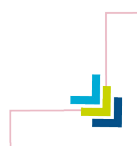
Monica Verzola, Board Member EVTA, considered the spillover of positive effects caused by mobility in the VET sector. However, professionals need to be re-trained to facilitate the internationalisation of VET mobilities.

Currently, mobility is not mainstreamed across the VET curricula while further coordinated effort is needed among VET providers, civil society and policymakers at national and EU level. The challenge is also that VET mobility has a strong work-based approach and is in need of an improvement of its cultural side. All is compounded by the cuts to VET mobility during the pandemic which have still not returned to pre-COVID-19 levels.

Within LLLP, a dedicated Internationalisation Working Group which promotes internationalisation as a tool for living up to social inclusion and innovation, to providing a life changing chance to disadvantaged learners but also to activate learners and train professionals so that they can learn from each other. The Internationalisation Working Group serves as a capacity building opportunity for LLLP members on advocacy and good practices related to the meaningful internationalisation of the mobility experiences.

Participants discussed the existing opportunities for virtual mobility or hybrid mobility, acknowledging that hybrid mobility can be complementary, that virtual pre-mobility exchanges are desirable but that performing entire mobilities online is undesirable for preventing learners to experience a new environment which what mobilities are about.

The virtual side of mobility can contribute, however, to the greening of the Erasmus+, though alternatives to transport modes, such as the usage of trains and buses, should also be considered while acknowledging that the bulk of environmental pollution is not necessarily caused by the education sector per se.



# The RRF & the European Semester: A new dimension of investments & reforms on education?

30 November | ESU

Matteo Vespa, President of the European Students' Union, opened the policy conversation posing the question on how the reforms and investments included as part of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) connect with the European Semester and how such European programmes can lead to structural reforms and investments.

Tonka Matic, European Commission, Policy Officer Recovery and Resilience Task Force, presented the current RRF investments of which 14% have been directed towards education & training (over €70 billion). The funding was disbursed already to 9 Member States for 36 measures in the sector, while 67 other measures are under assessment. The investment is directly connected to reforms which can come in the form of strategies, laws, projects, etc. She insisted on RRF being reform-led while embedding all CSRs of the European Semester.

To give a sense of the variety of reforms, she discussed the adult skills plans/strategies funded by RRF, the strategies on early childhood education and care as well as the efforts to compensate learning losses, boost digitalisation in education & training institutions, facilitate green upskilling and reskilling and better prepare educators. In all these stages she reminded participants that the Commission requires a summary of stakeholder consultations for any RRF reform as well as an explanatory note on how their views were taken on board before any reform is deemed as fulfilled.

Anders Lindholm, Councillor for Educational Affairs, Swedish Representation to the EU, called for a reflection process in the aftermath of the EEA Progress Report and its connection to the European Semester and the RRF. The Education, Youth, Culture and Sports meetings of the Council (7 March and 15-16 May) will be dedicated to the reflection on the next steps for



the EEA and of the formats of collaboration following 2025, with an effort to also connect labour, finance and education ministries as such coordination is crucial in the Semester process. He explained that the Swedish Presidency will also be responsible for the launch of the Learning Lab initiative and the upcoming ministerial declarations of the Bologna Process.

Bruna Bandula, President of the Croatian Student Council, warned that stakeholders have been irregularly consulted on National Recovery and Resilience Plans' drafting, leading to goals that are too vague for meaningful reforms and to moments where reforms directly contradicted processes for which student representatives fought in previous decades. She called for the higher education community to be more actively included in stakeholder negotiations on reforms while for the EU to better assess the satisfaction that stakeholders have with existing consultations.

**The fast-paced reforms of the pandemic need to be replaced by well-planned consultations,** a thought echoed by Matteo Vespa who also called for the importance of education & training stakeholders' participation in the EEA's informal governance body, the High Level Group.

Martina Darmanin, Vice President of the Lifelong Learning Platform, closed the meeting with a final plea for structured dialogue with stakeholders to be established in order to empower all stakeholders to take ownership and responsibility over reform-implementation.



# Media Maturity and how to build it



30 November | ECSWE & Alliance for Childhood

Christopher Clouder, Alliance for Childhood, opened the debate. He stated that **technology has entered our cultures, languages, and even consciousness. Now it is time to understand it, and education is the only big player in this endeavour.**

MEP Victor Negrescu further reflected on the opening words: he agreed with the previous statements, and said that while engaging with his own son, the language is strongly rooted in the social media jargon.

This is a good example of changing times, but also a reminder that developing media literacy and media education is of crucial, practical applications. When looking at numbers, MS have allocated around 10% of NRRPs for education; a large part of this sum (30%) goes for digital education, which is roughly 30 billion euros.

This is of course a splendid opportunity, but it should also be a memento foreflection to understand where to better direct this money, for what scopes and for which target groups.

This opportunity should also be used to harmonise progress throughout Europe, and to make sure that rural areas are at the same level as more advanced, urbanised areas.

Another challenge is to identify the right actors and facilitators for those tasks: often times it is local NGOs and associations that, together with schools, carry out relevant activities in a scattered manner and on a voluntary basis. MEP Negrescu therefore proposed a network of “activators” that carry our harmonised work on the local level - financed and



trained through the same NRRPs funds. This goal could benefit from active and systematic monitoring, which is important to keep Member States accountable.

Usually, paradigm changes require pedagogical improvements. But such changes can only be brought about if teachers are on board. Reason why teachers and educators need to be supported; most of the time, they volunteer their own time for training, but this is not realistic anymore. Bridges and partnerships shall be built, especially with families and parents.

Professor Bleckmann highlighted some of these points in her keynote, presenting some of the findings from a German study on media maturity and continuous evaluation.

She highlighted that children are not as supported in the use of digital media as they should be: unsurprisingly, this support wavers over time.

She claimed that **most of the skills needed to understand digital tools and media complexity actually rely on transversal competences and skills, such as: produce and present, operate and apply, problem-solving, analyse and reflect,** etc.



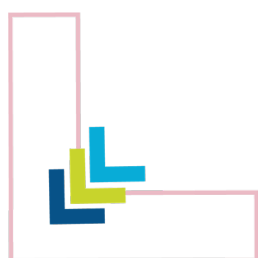
She also highlighted how Negrescu's words are very relevant: **partnerships with other actors, such as parents, are essential to prevent and avoid digital risks.** Media Maturity, in fact, starts with training and empowering the guardians of children: do they know how to install time protection tools? Do they know how to keep children away from adverse media experiences?

She also explained how the pandemic has exacerbated the need for a look at media maturity. It certainly accelerated digitalisation processes, but these processes come with risks: for instance, it is estimated that children 'unlearned' more than they learned during the pandemic. Screen time doubled, and was three times higher than the medical recommendations.

She proceeded to highlight the three principles of Media Maturity Education: 1) Analogue (or screen free media) before digital media; 2) Producing before consuming and 3) Graspability before black box (the pattern input - processing - output).

Márti Domokos presented the results of the HERMMES project, which looked into media maturity for all children and whose results, hopefully, could inspire future policy actions.

To wrap-up the event, Simona Petkova, from the EU Commission, presented the latest development in European policies, including the Digital Education Action Plan and the Council recommendations on wellbeing in schools; both look at the topic of media maturity, providing guidelines to EU Member States.





# Investing Lifelong Learning in EU Regions



30 November | LLLP & FREREF

The Lifelong Learning Platform opened the sessions by highlighting the potential and the importance for the EU level of working in close cooperation with regions. Results from the Regional and Local Barometer indicate that 89% of Europeans consider regions and cities should have a bigger say in EU policies. It was stressed that there is a huge potential to involve regions beyond where they are currently involved: there have already been attempts to improve their involvement for example in education and training through the Joint Action Plan between CoR and DG EAC.

LLLP introduced to the participants in the workshop the Comorelp project (2020 - 2023). **The project aims to deliver guidelines based on regional reviews of lifelong learning policies in partner regions:** Wales (UK), Malopolska (PL), Rhône-Alpes Auvergne - AURA (FR), Istanbul (TR) as well as exchanges with stakeholders within and between regions (EU and beyond). Other aims of the project include developing a benchmarking tool for monitoring lifelong learning policies at regional level, the creation of a Policy Lab Platform to implement the cooperation among regions and developing policy recommendations targets at EU, national and regional level. An advocacy campaign and a final multiplier event are planned for May 2023 in Brussels.

As part of the event, best practices at different levels were shared, starting with DG Reform: Technical Support Instrument. The speaker explained the goals of the instrument which focuses on providing tailor-made technical expertise to EU Member States to design and implement reform. This instrument is demand driven and does not require any co-financing from Member States.



This support can be provided at national or regional level as well as multi-country support. A concrete example has been developed in Estonia: Enhancing data-informed strategic governance in education. They have used 22 indicators (developed in partnership with OECD) and are conducting the monitoring following principles aligned with the Estonian Education Strategy 2035.

The monitoring covers from kindergarten to upper secondary education, including upper secondary VET with different focus levels such as national, local, school and individual. Key recommendations were developed to support the goal of improving the quality assurance mechanisms for the provision of education and for a more effective governance system.

The recommendations include: i) the development of a shared vision and definition of a monitoring system, ii) agree and discuss the priorities and goals with the key stakeholders iii) ensure the adequate financial, technical and time resources, iv) identify priority areas and related indicators, v) identify key data and analyse its quality, availability, interoperability, vi) agree on data collection approach and vii) use the results for future policy actions.

Another example is the IDEE project: Innovations, Data and Experiments in education. The project (2021-2029) focuses on promoting experimental research and evidence use in the French education system.

IDEE was conceived as a long-term investment to develop the infrastructure for experimental research in the French education system - and promote the use of evidence produced by such research. The project has three main strands of activities: i) Improve access to administrative data, ii) Develop and share innovative tools and protocols for experimental research and iii) Build partnership and strengthen capacity for experimental research.

Participants underlined the different perspective this project brings about, whereas at EU level there is constant talk of civil society presenting policy makers with data, this project works with data collected from the government to bring it in a transparent way also to stakeholders. In this way civil society is aware of the data collected by the ministries and regional levels which then policy makers use to inform their decisions.

The Lifelong Learning Dashboard in Flanders was the following case presented. The [dashboard](#) monitors 4 main areas: participation in lifelong learning, training efforts of actors, competences and impact of lifelong learning (this area is the least developed).

Some of the bottlenecks encountered refer to the transversal perspective on lifelong learning and the different definitions of the term in the different policy domains within the region.

Another issue is the fragmentation of the data. In the case of Flanders, different partners have lots of data and it is often not shared.

The goal of the future dashboard will be to monitor the evolution of learning culture in Flanders and the broader impact of learning on Flemish society (with a particular attention to target groups and obstacles to learning). A roadmap will be designed and include targets, future governance, timing and budget.

An important part of their future work will be to pay attention to agreement and mobilisation of different actors in policy domains, mainly employment and education.

In the following part of the workshop, participants were asked to comment on the benchmarking tool (its dimensions, added-value and usability) developed within the Comorelp project. Participants were also asked questions regarding what can regional and national stakeholders learn from each other? and how can national and regional stakeholders collaborate?

A participant from the OECD underlined that **an issue with education research currently is the lack of relevance of the research vis-a-vis policy making** and the big challenge is how to improve this situation. One way forward is to **better contextualise the research done**. Another issue is the lack of systemic monitoring and tools such as the one presented by COMORELP can support this work, particularly as it simplifies the monitoring through 5 clear dimensions. A point of reflection for this type of tool is to determine the purpose and the type of engagement one envisions to create by the usage of this tool.



A participant from the European Commission shared the work of the unit on evidence-based policy and evaluation.

This unit looks into indicator development to monitor progress on the policy objectives and among other tasks they work on knowledge brokerage: meaning how do we translate, use the knowledge from international organisations as well as on how to bridge the gap between policy and research. One of the new initiatives of the Commission is the [Learning Lab](#).

The Lab is conceived to promote evidence based approach when it comes to design and implementation, improve evidence and analysis so that public resources that go to education are efficiently and effectively invested.

The main focus of the Lab will be teachers and trainers, digital, educational infrastructure (learning environments, renovating buildings, equity and inclusion).

Finally, LLLP presented the EU policy lab platform which will be implemented as part of the COMORELP project. LLLP will use the JRC policy lab approach to develop this community.

In the case of Interreg, given its territorial approach there is scope to work on education and lifelong learning. Regarding cooperation on governance: this includes legal and administrative cooperation and people to people focus.

This is another area where education and lifelong learning can be tackled by looking for cross border solutions, recognition of certificates, etc.

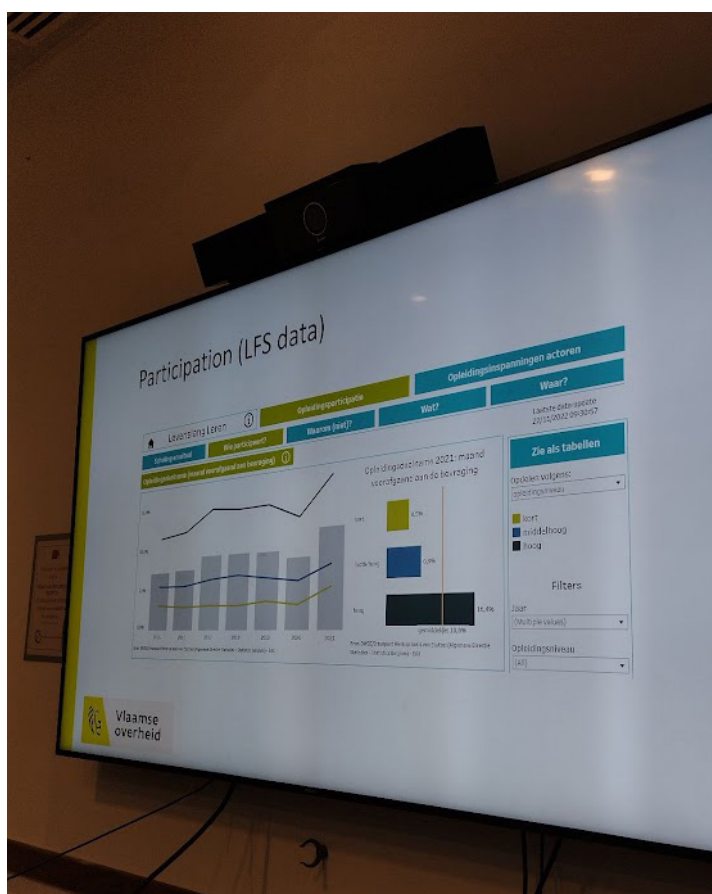
A representative of the DG EAC highlighted that around recognition, it has been found that borders or close-by regions is where this process of recognition has started more clearly and where the role of regions is crucial.

The policy for recognition exists and what it is needed now are these key stakeholders working together and receiving funding.

An important success factor for the implementation of these policies is the trust among regions.

Regarding the COMORELP benchmarking tool presented, the speaker underlined that it can be a tool to foster exchange, to be able to compare with a more standardised approach to support the design, implementation and evaluation of policy interventions.

The representative from DG Reform noted that so far the opportunities for regions are not very clear and a good toll would be to put all of them together so that they are easily accessible by all regions.





# Investing in Creative Thinking for Parents



30 November | EPA

Arja Krauchenberg, LLLP & EPA, and Victor Petuya, EPA, welcomed participants. The main opening statement was that **creativity helps to look at problems from different perspectives.** Creativity and related skills are embedded in most European and international instruments, from the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning to UNESCO enabling frameworks. Since COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an acceleration in the way the education community looks at creative skills. And since parents are the first educators in our lives, it is essential to make sure that they can pass on creativity as a way of thinking, learning and living.

Arja Krauchenberg passed on to present the project “Creative Thinking”, its outcomes and the rationale behind it. It was stressed how most people do not believe that they are living up to their own potential in terms of creativity; but creativity is a habit that needs nurturing and development. Interactive exercises promoted a hands-on approach, where creativity is experienced rather than theorised. These exercises also told us that everyone is able to “be creative”, and at the same time that practice makes habits. After all, it is not by chance that companies invest massively in creativity habits for their employees: it is because it can unlock human potential.

But why are we so interested in creativity? It is related to the recent and accelerated re-discover of soft skills. **Most EU policy frameworks address the development of soft skills as transversal competences for life. Creativity, in particular, is one of the most sought-after competences.** skills, communication, and so forth. But also digital skills are more and more centred on creativity and

creative thinking - gamification is another prominent example. It was also argued that creativity encompasses all other soft skills, because precisely by allowing lateral thinking, it precedes problem-solving, interpersonal skills, communication, and so forth. But also digital skills are more and more centred on creativity and creative thinking - gamification is another prominent example.

Creativity was singled out as of great help to tackle modern challenges, such as climate change, environmental crises, COVID-19 pandemic, wars, but also extremism and terrorism. It was indicated as the most important transversal skill. All of these points are touched upon the outcomes of the projects, and especially in the Guides for Parents.

Arja Krauchenberg proceeded to give a practical demonstration about the web app for parents, outlining its many functions: instructive, and at the same time a great stimulus to fostering creativity in the busy lives of parents.





# Citizens, learners, workers: investing in the whole person



30 November | SOLIDAR Foundation & FICEMEA

Marta Concepción Mederos, Vice President of the Lifelong Learning Platform, introduced the event by highlighting the importance of seeing people as people and not resources, which includes the link between education and not seeing learners as only future workers but active participants in society.

Mikael Leyi, Secretary General from the SOLIDAR Foundation, began the opening remarks by mentioning the upcoming European Year of Skills, to contrast a simplified notion of education as a means in contraposition of a more holistic approach that conceives education as a public good.

On this matter, **public funding is key to go beyond education as a way to answer the needs of the market.** Instead, perspectives like global citizenship education can be a tool for people to be aware of their rights and their agency. Other perspectives such as popular education focus on the whole person and well being in contraposition of a functional conception of education.

Yvette Lecomte Secretary General from CEMEA Belgique emphasised the need for **education with a social dimension, as a fundamental investment in the future of our societies** alongside the idea of focusing on societal profit instead of individual profit; more collective benefit instead of an individual focused one. The challenges and transitions of the current context require a behavioural change.

She then posed the question of how can we answer the challenges of today? By recognizing different points of view, incorporating imagination and cooperation, alongside education. Everyone regardless of the level of education or skills



that they have must be included in all educational programs.

The panel discussion started with the intervention of Jean Baptiste Clerico from CEMEA France who focused on commodification of education in two levels: commodification of education itself and the marketing of students as targets of what they will become. In the process of commodification of education, children are also subjects of being commodified.

Afterwards, he used the metaphor of the architecture and the foundations of a building. The foundations of education have been defined in terms of literacy and numbers, and they should be thought of in terms of the whole building and not just the basis of it. In this matter, it is relevant to ask why literacy and numbers are the foundations of education? **Are citizens viewed as projects or are we collectively creating society as a project?**

Related again to the metaphor of the building, he pointed out that in education there should always have accompaniment throughout the whole process, for example, when funding the use of digital tools and technologies, it is not about just providing access to the tools but incorporating those tools into access to

better learning experiences and opportunities.

Giuseppina Tuci from OBESSU, tackled the topic of commodification in vocational education and training by pointing out that VET is most commonly associated as a competency for the Ministry of Labour and not the Ministry of Education, which reveals a particular view on VET that is more related to the labour market.

**The lack of funding in education pushes the socially excluded populations to certain forms of sectorization** that also create an uncritical workforce that is only market oriented. She posed the question of **why can't the purpose be learning for the sake of learning? Why does it have to be learning to acquire a skill, to perform?**

Learning should also be linked to building active citizenship, due to the fact that there is a lack of critical behaviour and “democratically illiterate populations” that are not involved or engaged in their political or social context. When thinking about “building the Europe we want”, do we want to build the Europe of workers? In which conditions are those workers? Do they have rights, access to a pension, or underpaid? These questions were raised to link the way they have been used as an argument to justify the privatisation of VET, as a response to the rising cost of living, or in the context of the twin transition. The intervention finalised by advocating for putting learners in the centre to achieve a sustainable future.

Leonardo Ebner from ETUCE started his intervention with a small overview of how education policies are analysed at a national level. The education related policies are mostly viewed from a market oriented view and labour market performances. An important issue raised was the lack of data on privatisation, related to the fact that the feedback received on the impact of privatisation in education

doesn't necessarily translate into data and figures, which is called soft privatisation.

There is a mismatch between the discourse and the policies and actions taken, the discourse is towards public investment in education but the measures go in the opposite direction. For example, the training aspect of teachers, and how attractive the teaching profession is (lack of retention, salaries, up-skilling and reskilling, difficulties in recruitment) speaks of ways of soft privatisation as well.

Agatha Luczynska, BEST Project Representative, gave the project's perspective from working with practitioners and young people from vulnerable communities. The main outcomes were related to allowing ownership of young people's voice, and making space for them to raise their concerns by providing flexible but long lasting programmes that can build on sustainability and the skills that were fostered during the project.

MEP João Albuquerque, made the final remarks of the panel discussion. There is a need to deeply change the proposal for the European Year of Skills 2023. We always assume work is in the centre of everything but we should push for a post-work society where citizenship, peace education, social and soft skills are more important.





# Micro-Credentials: Challenges and ways to go



30 November | EfVET

MEP Ilana Cicurel addressed participants via video-message on the urgency to make microcredentials a reality. She identified two required revolutions: one for mainstreaming a culture of lifelong learning and one for broadening the skills needed by citizens to cover critical thinking, learning to learn and 21st century competences. **The European Year of Skills serves as an opportunity to collectively build microcredentials as a tool recognising soft skills obtained through mobility or solidarity engagements.** She called for an EU framework guiding educators on using microcredentials.

Chiara Rioldino, European Commission, DG EMPL, Head of Unit for Vocational Education and Training, presented the Council Recommendation on a European approach to microcredentials for lifelong learning and employability which are not foreseen to replace formal qualifications but rather provide easy access, according to needs, time and resources for the development of needed competences.

She connected microcredentials' flexibility with adding-on new competences for the digital and green transition, with the possibility for Member States to use them in their active labour market policies. She illustrated as next steps the ambition to upscale Europass for the easy uploading of credentials while generally stimulating awareness on microcredentials' implementation.

Xavier Matheu, European Training Foundation, Director ad Interim, presented the findings of the 2021 ETF Survey on Microcredentials, which have identified similar reasons in the ETF countries as in the EU states for the usefulness of this approach: the relevance to labour market, the recognition of competences, the

ability to save cost and time, the support for individual learning, etc. He presented the successful pilot of the ETF with Ukraine, collaborating with local authorities to bring microcredentials in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast in 4 sectors that based on a needs-analysis required upskilling and reskilling of workers.

The pilot included the development of national guidelines and having courses available for VET learners. The guidelines will be published in March and their dissemination would occur through the ETF Network of Excellence.

Stefano Tirati, EfVET Vice President & CEO of Learning Digital, detailed EfVET's research on VET's future, revealing a declining perception on formal degrees' values and a desire of learners to invest less financial and time resources, pursuing bite-sized courses. He shared his assent for the EU definition of microcredentials but reminded participants that not all providers take this approach, while quality assurance and establishing transparent criteria for assessment remain challenges.

He called for promoting microcredentials' crucial standards: quality, transparency, relevance, valid assessment, learning pathways, recognition, portability, learner-centredness, authenticity and information and guidance opportunities.

He concluded with a good practice example, the Digital Twinning Academy project which provides modules on virtual prototyping and maintenance so learners could virtually implement a production line before more efficiently implementing it in reality. Micro e-learning and blended learning are provided, coupled with evidence-based assessment and industry-led validation, leading to issued microcredentials as NFTs in blockchain. The digital solution provides interoperability and security so learners use microcredentials flexibly while their trustworthiness is not compromised.



Liisa Metsola, Director of Development, Ammattiopisto Live, explained that the special-needs VET provider she represents offers rehabilitation, coaching and employment services.

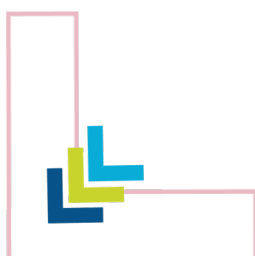
Their novelty is a non-stop admittance policy allowing learners to commence learning at any point, matching the flexibility needed to bring adults with a lower educational background back into learning.

She mentioned that Live is providing two microcredentials, one for the social and healthcare sector and one for the restaurant and catering sector, aiming to provide basic vocational skills but also soft skills such as interpersonal and customer service competences.

This is occurring at the same time as their Erasmus+ project, OnTheMIC which offers user-friendly tools to help adult learners with special needs assess their skills and competences, rounding up a learner-centred solution.

Participants discussed microcredentials for the banking sector and the need for more research on micro-credentials. They wished to engage in more Peer Learning Activities organised by the European Commission and were informed by the Commission that there is expectation of Member States to converge on micro-credentials like on the EQF though this will take time and acknowledgement that different terminology will still exist.

Arja Flinkman, EfVET Vice President & CEO in ESEDU, summarised the main discussions of the meeting calling for vertical and horizontal cooperation and hoping for the spearheading work done by the EU on microcredentials to have an impact on how UNESCO will be defining micro-credentials.





# The “Forgotten” of Digitalisation



30 November | EAEA

The event gathered together representatives from different adult education sectors with various professional backgrounds to discuss the EU objectives for digital transition. The concept of the event was that the EU’s ambitious goals for digital literacy by 2025 are possible to achieve.

Who are the forgotten populations in the digital age, and what can be done to help them? A recent survey by Lire et Écrire found that adults who struggle with reading and writing in Belgium are particularly at risk of being left out of society; the increasing digitalisation of public services makes it even more difficult for them to participate. During the event, we explored powerful advocacy campaigns and inclusive teaching practices that bring forward the voices of those who tend to be left behind.

Gina Ebner, Secretary General of the European Association for the Education of Adults, welcomed the participants to the event and asked them about their digital usage and skill levels. The main objectives of the organisation were presented, as well as a brief summary of the work that is being done surrounding digitalisation and basic skills. She handed the word to the panel of experts, representing different levels of adult education.

At the beginning of the presentations, Veronique De Leener discussed the digital methodologies used by Moks vzw in Brussels, Belgium, that aim to empower (young) adults. They mainly work with digital storytelling and digital design for change in marginalised neighbourhoods of the European capital. They test the basic digital literacy with the help of Tosa test, which provides a certificate that the learners are able to use in their CV’s. With



the help of digital production, they are able to work on their fears, wellbeing and advancement in life. The programme provides them a structure to improve digital inclusion, self-esteem and makes their voices heard. The learners also receive help to recognise the dangers of digital environment and prevent them.

Moving forward, Louise Culot presented the work of Lire et Écrire, a literacy provider active in Brussels and Wallonia (French-speaking region of Belgium). Their mission is to transform, train and advocate, as 46% of Belgian are digitally vulnerable and 70% of people with literacy needs do not master basic digital skills. She presented practical examples of their day to day practices and their priorities: to solve inclusion and accessibility issues, train basic skills and keep efficient human desks.

Last, but not least, we were joined by Jon Harding, who presented the work that the Lifelong Learning Platform does when it comes to the digital skills gap, with their Digital Education Action Plan as the main instrument that they developed. They use a comprehensive approach to reduce inequalities, which firstly tackles barriers and secondly, enables opportunities for learners

that face this. The upcoming EU Year of Skills, he said, will be particularly relevant to boost the Digital Transition. But being rooted in a labour market perspective, it risks leaving behind those that are already struggling.

To close the event and initiate the networking session, Tina Mavrič presented the outcomes of Guidance for Low-skilled Adults towards Skills Assessment and Validation (GLAS). The main aim of it was to develop methodology for assessment and validation of ICT, numeracy and language skills for adult education and guidance service practitioners. The main objectives were to improve skills identification and validation in Europe and thus help adults access and complete upskilling pathways and to increase professional competences of adult education and guidance professionals.

Results:

- [IO1: Glas Platform](#)
- [IO2: Methodology for assesment and validation of digital, numeracy and literacy skills for adult education and counsellors.](#)
- [IO3: Implementation guidelines for adult education and guidance service practitioners.](#)
- [IO3: Directrices de aplicación para los profesionales de los servicios de educación y orientación de adultos.](#)
- [IO3: Smernice za svetovalce za izvajanje vrednotenja predhodno prodobljenega znanja pri odraslih nizko razvitimi osnovnimi spretnostmi.](#)
- [IO4: Recommendations for mainstreaming of methodology into European Adult Education system and Guidance Services.](#)





# Welcoming Third-Country Nationals in Higher Education in Europe



1 December | AEGEE & Partners

The speakers introduced the main topic of the conference which, as the name suggests, centers around third country nationals in European higher education, and posed questions on the EU's role in welcoming these students. It was mentioned that the E.U. has to promote legal and safe European pathways, not only to migrant students but to third country students, too, and that one of the main issues faced is that third country students' skills and/or qualifications are not recognized upon their entrance in the E.U.

To attract students to the E.U. and deal with competition from, for example, the U.S., India, or Canada, the E.U. must improve their instruments for regular migration, and adopt positive attitudes towards migration. Kamilla Solieva mentioned how the EESC strives to attract talents to the union and the importance of adopting preventive measures to avoid the brain drain. There is a lot of space for progress concerning creating partnerships with third countries, and migration could never be a unilateral process.

The Erasmus+ project 'Maximising Previously Acquired Competences at European Universities' (MaxiPAC) presents a uniform procedure for third country nationals' previously acquired competencies to be recognized and maximized within higher education. The project's partners are five: Thomas More (Belgium); Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro (Italy); AEGEE Europe (Belgium); Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece); Lapin Yliopisto University of Lapland (Finland). Though each partner was involved in all project outcomes, each also had their own responsibilities within the project. Dr. Aleidis Devillé walked through MaxiPAC's four steps.



In the first step, 'European Qualification Scan', an overview of who the third-country national is and which qualifications, competencies, experiences they possess is made and gathered into the scan. The second step, 'multiple short cases to guide people', is where higher education institutions submit short term cases to the to-be student to answer. In the third step, 'portfolio and assessment', the portfolio is made and assessed.

Lastly, the fourth step, 'follow-up of broad economic and psycho-social situation', is where the third country national's psycho-social and economic situation are evaluated, to consider if and what additional support they might need in their studies. Dr. Devillé mentioned that the MaxiPAC was designed in such a way as to make it as aligned with standing university procedures as possible, and concluded that there still is a lot of work to be done with validation procedures, for third country nationals to have better access to education across Europe.

The university rector's panel discussion centred around how to make universities more international, and on the role of universities in European higher education. Each rector drew onto their universities when answering the questions.

Sofie Mols opened the discussion by saying that the Thomas More university, being a university of applied sciences, strives towards internationalization by offering practice-oriented education. Mara Nikolaidou, instead, highlighted how her university, the University of Athens, is trying to become more internationalised. Whereas for graduate studies the issue does not hold, for undergraduate studies, studies are free but are only offered in Greek. Besides bearing the language issue, the aforementioned issue also affects one's social network, as it decreases student's points of references. The University of Lapland also faces a similar issue, and is trying to increase its international staff and students. Lastly, Teodoro Miano, from the University of Aldo Moro, reported how, although they are a very open minded institute, the administration behind it is challenging and close minded.

During the stakeholders panel discussion, all speakers agree that experiences and good practices must be shared, and that regulations are not the same for everybody and that the only way forward is to recognize skills, rather than certificates. In Finland, for example, skills from a varied array of life aspects are recognized.

**Universities must take responsibility for third country national students, including refugees, to have their skills recognized.** The stakeholders' panel discussion also highlighted how we need more of a universal system to recognize skills, as there are a lot of cross-country differences within skills recognition. The challenges that migrant students face when coming to Europe are many and go beyond the recognition of skills, including VISA processes and having access to information and resources when studying. Again, the emphasis of the panel's discussion is to recognize the person behind the qualification, and to appreciate the diversity of qualifications.

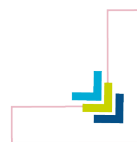
Some highlights of the groups discussions

are: if the study program is only offered in English, students should be offered the possibility to learn English; the same applies for local level languages.

However, it was brought up by some group members that it is important for the students to learn local languages, otherwise they will have difficulties entering the labour market. Lastly, it was mentioned that stakeholder involvement is needed and is necessary.

When designing learning tools to support access to education, the needs and diversity of migrants and refugees should be taken into account. It was discussed that NGOs and other platforms should work collaboratively to spread the message on the existing e-learning support tools available for third country nationals, including refugees.

Martina Darmanin, vice-president of the Lifelong Learning group, gave the concluding remarks, highlighting the importance of the topic and of combining efforts for more universal competence-recognizing systems for third country nationals.



# Financing the Implementation of the Green Deal: Skills for the agri-food sector

1 December | LLLP, EfVET & Partners

The event was focused on the valuable results stemming from the implementation of the [FIELDS project](#). A blueprint project under the Sector Skills Alliances for implementing a new strategic approach to sectoral cooperation on skills. **The project aims to address the current and future skills needs for sustainability, digitalisation and the bioeconomy in the agri-food and forestry sectors.**

**FIELDS' results are important evidence of how public investment in education and training, in this case in the VET sector, can support the achievement of environmental goals as well as economic and social ones.** One of the main take-aways of the skill needs assessment was that soft and entrepreneurship skills were just as valued as more sector specific skills related to sustainability, digitalisation and the bioeconomy. This led to a mainstreaming of soft and entrepreneurship skills throughout all the occupational profiles, developed as part of the project, for the agriculture, food and forestry sectors. Exchange on the different and common needs of partner countries is a good basis to ensure the transferability of learning outcomes.

Working together also improved each other's knowledge of the different education and training systems needs in terms of public investment. It was clear from the analysis that the level of funding is not enough if VET providers are to adapt to the needs of the sector both in terms of sector-specific skills as well as transversal skills. The consortium has embarked on the I-RESTART project to upscale the results of the FIELDS project and ensure - through the Pact for Skills - upskilling and reskilling are done in an inclusive way.



With this presentation as the basis for reflections, **participants coming from the European Commission (DG AGRI), the bio-energy sector, VET providers, regional stakeholders and civil society organisations, engaged in discussions around the issues of (public) investment in the VET sector.** One of the topics discussed was the implementation of sustainable crops (techniques). Among the main issues for VET providers is that on one side the curricula needs to be approved, with many students resorting to going abroad to learn new techniques and then bringing them back to their schools. On the other side, the financial sustainability of the farmer also needs to be taken into account.

Unless sustainability is looked at from the environmental, economic and social perspective, alternative ways of growing crops cannot be fully implemented. Another reflection came from the Commission underlining the low levels of communication between the agriculture sector and the VET sector. This issue is expected to be addressed moving forward to be able to implement a systemic approach: establishing agriculture and knowledge innovation systems including all types of stakeholders with a strong presence of the education sector.

Regarding the main funding tool in this sector

which is linked to the CAP, it was underlined that around 2% of funding goes to knowledge and innovation. Despite this low percentage, Member States don't rely only on CAP funding so there is more in the picture that needs to be considered. One of the first activities aiming at getting together the Agriculture and VET sectors was the Farming got talent event.

The event was an opportunity to discuss with VET teachers and students. It was acknowledged that the right frameworks exist and it is a matter of moving forward in cooperation so that more linkages can be made with the VET sector in general. The vision is for agricultural schools and colleges to act as knowledge centres - rooted in the local community - and great facilitators of knowledge and networking - bringing together farmers, teachers, students, businesses and public authorities.

A key topic of discussion referred to the attractiveness of the agriculture sector with participants underlining that simply investing in digitalisation is not enough. Motivating young people to join the sector is a big task, a big gap is expected as an important number of farmers are reaching retirement age.

Agriculture schools need to deal with this situation but cannot do the task alone: appropriate working conditions are necessary. The issue at the moment is that education and training is actually divided in different ministries, while formal education is normally under the Ministry of Education, other sectors of Education go under different policy envelopes, including agriculture. In order to achieve good results, better coordination will need to take place between the education, employment and agriculture sectors to be able to tackle common problems.

Participants noted the trend of Higher Education graduates moving towards VET related jobs, creating new business

models, working collectively and moving to live in the rural areas. It is an interesting change of mindsets from food producer to service provider while keeping the environment in mind. If this is accompanied by stable income that allows them to make a living, then the sector can increase its appeal to more people. **Another aspect that needs to be changed is the old image of farming as purely manual labour. Given the technological advances this image has changed and it should be communicated in order to attract young people to this sector.** In terms of environmental concerns, work needs to be done to be able to have space for different types of farming. Young people are interested in techniques such as permaculture, but unless it is a financially solid option, it will not be possible to maintain the motivation of current and future farmers.

The discussion closed with reflections around crucial aspects in terms of competence development and changes in educational approaches. Entrepreneurial, financial and communication skills are key and investment in this sector needs to go to these types of skills too. Finally, the reflection closed with the importance of public investment in educators. In order to make agricultural work more attractive, VET schools need to become more attractive as well. **This process implies not only investing in the best technology and equipment but ensuring adequate support to teachers, both in terms of working conditions as well as ensuring they have the necessary learning opportunities available to stay up-to-date with sectoral as well as pedagogical advances.**





# Why fund migrant and refugee education?



2 December | SIRIUS Network

The panel included interventions from Noemi Casone, ENABEL Project Officer on Human Mobility Issues and Paola Alvarez, OM Senior Regional Thematic Specialist Labour Mobility and Social Inclusion.

The speakers addressed the international legal frameworks related to migration, such as the Global Compact on Migration and the UN Declaration of Human Rights. These legal frameworks shape how we engage with the right to education for migrant and refugee students arriving in Europe.

One of the main challenges of the national systems is to create quality education that is also inclusive, in order to change the view upon migrants, and highlight their contribution to European society.

Noemi Casone pointed out some examples from practices in Uganda, where ENABEL funds refugee education and how these experiences from developing country systems that have hosted refugees for a long time have not been taken into account as practices that can be implemented in other countries as successful measures and examples.

During the discussion, the topic of the value of formal and informal systems and their relationship with migrant students was addressed. Particularly, if migrant students may need informal or non formal systems to help them bridge into more formal ones, whether taking one approach of the other can be viewed as segregation or just a “band-aid” while there are more structural changes to the formal system.

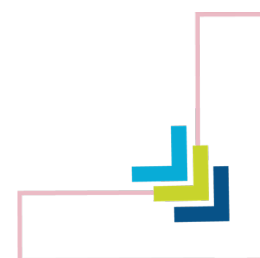
Paola Alvarez pointed out that the national systems are underfunded and



struggling even without any new arrivals, however, it is important to think of non-funding solutions that allow for more autonomy in national systems, that can contribute to help teachers and directors to have better responses to different dynamics.

The panel was followed by a workshop where participants looked at the quality of successful funding campaigns in the past and brainstormed ways of attracting more funding into migrant education projects in Europe.

Legitimacy of campaign actors, finding a way to connect emotionally with audiences and bringing a sense of urgency were highlighted as necessary for campaigns to be successful.







# Free education? Only if you can afford it! -The real cost of schools



2 December | OBESSU

A representative of the Organising Bureau of European School Students Unions (OBESSU) opened the event with a reflection around the narrative of free education across the EU. **It is widely spread the idea that education should be free, accessible and of high quality, however, in reality many hidden costs exist which render accessing formal education and training costly for an important part of the student population.**

Among the main ancillary costs is the prices for transportation to school, school materials and meals. Another point for reflection revolved around the tendency to speak about inclusion in excluded places and it should be a joint cause to work against such situations to ensure the most affected by these hidden costs have a stage to share the challenges and barriers they face.

A representative of the European Students Union underlined how **this situation which starts in school education moves to higher education** and how policies have not yet addressed it. ESU is at the moment working on this topic as part of the Bologna process through the Working Group on the Social dimension. As part of their work, they are taking an in-depth look into what happens in secondary schools in terms of hidden costs for learners.

OBESSU's representative elucidated the approach necessary to combat this pernicious circle. **A combination of broadband and centred approaches is key: on one hand, a universal policy is needed to reach out to all learners and on the other hand, a centred approach is crucial to support learners from lower socio economic backgrounds and marginalised groups.**



Among the main ancillary costs to tackle through a centred approach are: transportation, accommodation and tools. In terms of transportation, ideally this service should be free for all learners and when universal access is not possible, then targeted measures should be applied. These measures must take different variables into account simultaneously, as policies which only address specific characteristics tend to leave learners behind (i.e. free public transport based on type of school: public vs. private).

When it comes to accommodation, the end goal is to provide decent housing for all, starting with targeted measures to families and learners most in need. On the side of tangible and intangible tools, the fear of parents of having to pay for tools either because they can be damaged by or are not fit for the needs of their children needs to be addressed and ensure these tools can be freely accessible and suitable for the learners.

In the second part of the event, the updated [Declaration of school students rights](#) was presented by OBESSU representatives. **Among the main principles of the updated Declaration is that there should be no fees of any kind, upfront or hidden: public secondary education should be funded by the State.**

A member of OBESSU from Flanders (Belgium) shared the experience lived by Flemish students in relation to the rising costs of meals and school materials (i.e. books). There is a demand for clear regulations for what schools are allowed to ask for money and a clear framework on digital and physical tools: how to make sure learners don't buy things they don't need. The representative from ESU shared more in-depth information on the current situation higher education students across the EU are facing due to high energy prices. **While the rise of university fees takes up the attention of the media, it is the indirect costs that present a higher risk for student's budgets** (housing represents around 40% of students income).

Even on the side of learning providers, the effects are being felt with some universities announcing they have considered closing for the winter due to energy costs. Given that education remains a competence of Member States, ESU is conducting campaigns at national level such as around RePowerEU: building the capacity of their members to engage in the implementation of this policy aimed at supporting the energy transition in order to make buildings more energy efficient and in this way help lower the costs of housing.

A similar campaign is being implemented around the recovery and resilience facility. It is encouraging that the funding is available through these channels, however close monitoring is needed given the examples of promoting harmful changes in education and training policies with the use of this money (i.e. affecting stakeholder involvement in decision making).

A representative of the DG EAC provided the perspective of the Commission regarding the support the EU can provide to Member States in terms of facilitating the debate around public investment in education and training as well as

providing direct funding to close inequality gaps. At the moment the Commission is running an initiative on data collection, in which a number of Member States are looking at the different situation of students in their countries: including accommodation and combination of work and studies. Moreover, blended mobility is also being considered in terms of inclusion of students with special needs. The initiatives from the Commission are anchored on the dimensions of the European Education Area which include 'inclusive, accessible and quality education'.

**An important takeaway from the event was to treat education institutions at the same level as health institutions in times of crises.** They should be considered together as the last ones to be negatively affected by emergency measures. Moreover, the narrative needs to change and go beyond the discussion around fees to also include indirect costs which makes learning possible for students. Policymakers need to realise that the decisions around public investment and the use of EU funds have to consider these hidden costs in order to create truly inclusive education systems. **Civil society is ready to cooperate with national governments to support the goal of education as a public good.**



# LIFELONG LEARNING PLATFORM

EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY FOR EDUCATION



The Lifelong Learning Platform is an umbrella that gathers 42 European organisations active in the field of education, training and youth. Currently these networks represent more than 50 000 educational institutions and associations covering all sectors of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Their members reach out to several millions of beneficiaries.

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