

EU Lifelong Learning Policy Framework



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SOLIDAR is a European network of 52 NGOs
working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide.

SOLIDAR lobbies the EU and international institutions in
three primary areas: social affairs, international cooperation and education.

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OVERVIEW

SOLIDAR works to empower trade unionists, local activists and grassroots organisations through lifelong learning (education & training) in order to promote decent work, social cohesion and social inclusion for all. SOLIDAR's members provide lifelong learning and further education opportunities to socio-economic and culturally vulnerable groups such as young people, migrants, low skilled workers etc on a daily basis.

SOLIDAR's members are workers' education associations, trade union education institutes and popular education movements; powerful actors promoting learning for adults on local and national level and working together for socially cohesive Europe. To give examples ABF (Sweden) organised in 2009 alone over 90,000 study circles for more than 750,000 people; AUSER (Italy) has 260,000 members with 40,000 volunteers providing continuous learning through the Università Popolare (UNIAUSER); DGB Bildungswerk (Germany) has 30 years of experience in vocational training to trade unionists; and La Ligue de l'Enseignement has been working for over 140 years for everyone to be able to access education, encouraging popular education and permanent education all over France.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report entitled "The well-being of nations: The role of human and social capital", outlines the role of human and social capital. According to the report, human capital is the knowledge and skills derived from education, training and experience and considered a most valuable resource. In the recent decades, the contribution of human capital in economic and social development has been highlighted, as one of the main vehicles for innovation, competitiveness and social cohesion.

The EU's lifelong learning¹ programme, as a part of the education and training policy is not only sustaining human capital development but also endows people with skills, knowledge and competences that enhance their employability, improve their adaptability to a changing and flexible labour market, and foster the contribution to innovation. In light of the European Union key strategies adopted in the course of last 10 years, there is still a need to strengthen the social dimension of education as a public good to achieve decent work, social cohesion and social inclusion.

¹ Lifelong learning is defined as encompassing "all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences, within a personal, civic, social and or employment related perspective." Definition of the Communication from the Commission "Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality", 2001a.

The European Employment strategy definition of LLL reads: "all purposeful learning activities, whether formal or informal, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences".

I. STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Basis in European Treaties

The European Union has a supportive role in education and training policies. Member States are in charge of their own education and training systems, but they cooperate within the EU framework in order to achieve common goals.

In the Treaty of Rome in 1957, vocational training was identified as an area of Community action, but education formally was recognised as an area of European Union competency only in the Maastricht Treaty, establishing the European Community, in 1992.

The Treaty says: “the Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging co-operation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity”.

The Treaty of Lisbon², in force since 1 December 2009, did not change the provisions on the role of the EU in education and training.

OPEN METHOD OF COORDINATION

The Member States decide themselves how the objectives are to be met – voluntarism is a fundamental principle in the open method of coordination. The method means that countries report to each other on how they are working, stimulating each other towards further development and setting up common policy objectives. The essential aspect of this cooperation, apart from creating the synergy effect between different sectors, is to exchange information, experience and best practice that are spread among the Member States. The progress is measured by statistical indicators and benchmarks are set in the strategy.

The open method of coordination³ while fully respecting the responsibility of Member States for their own education systems and the voluntary nature of European cooperation on education should build on:

- The four strategic objectives for European cooperation (outlined below)
- Common reference tools and approaches
- Peer learning and the exchange of good practice, including the dissemination of outcomes
- Periodic monitoring and reporting
- Evidence and data from all relevant European agencies, European networks, and international organisations
- Making full use of the opportunities available under Community programmes, particularly in the field of lifelong learning

² Official Journal C 115/47 of 9.5.2008 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:115:0047:0199:EN:PDF>

³ http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc125_en.pdf

EU LIFELONG LEARNING POLICY FRAMEWORK - DIAGRAM

POLICY

	"1ST CYCLE" (2000-2010)	"2ND CYCLE" (2010-2020)
STRATEGY	LISBON AGENDA	EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY
COOPERATION FRAMEWORK	EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2010	EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2020
VET	COPENHAGEN PROCESS	COPENHAGEN PROCESS -> BRUGES COMMUNIQUE

INSTRUMENTS

EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF KEY COMPETENCES

EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER AND ACCUMULATION SYSTEM (ECTS)

EUROPASS

EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR LIFELONG LEARNING (EQF)

EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (EQAVET)

EUROPEAN CREDIT SYSTEM FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (ECVET)

CYCLE I: LISBON AGENDA (2000-2010)

The European Union's education and training policy has been given added impetus since the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000. It underlines that knowledge, and the innovation it sparks, are the EU's most valuable assets which set the strategic goal that Europe should "become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion".

EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2010

In Barcelona in 2002, the "Education and Training 2010" work programme established for the very first time a solid framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training, setting the following objectives:

- Improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the European Union;
- Making lifelong learning accessible to everyone;
- Making the education and training systems more outward-looking with regards to the rest of the world.

The detailed programme highlights the shift in the terminology from using the term "basic skills" to "key competences", which focuses on the needs of modern society when stressing the need for the assessment of "personal efforts" and "attitudes".

COPENHAGEN PROCESS

Education Ministers from 31 European countries and the European Commission signed a declaration⁴ in Copenhagen in 2002 on working towards creating a knowledge-based Europe and ensuring that the European labour market is open to everyone.

The Copenhagen Process has two main areas: to establish recognition and transparency in the standards and content of vocational qualifications, and compatibility between the qualifications framework of Member States; and to introduce measures for quality assurance with regards to mutually recognised qualifications.

The general aim is to improve the quality of vocational training and to encourage more

individuals to make wider use of vocational learning opportunities, whether at school, in higher education, in the workplace, or through private courses. The actions and tools developed aim to allow users to link and build on learning acquired at various times, in both formal and non-formal contexts.

The overall purpose of the Copenhagen Process is to facilitate the mobility of qualified workers between Member States of the European Union, and, to this end, the measures taken are aimed at making it possible for employers in any member country to understand clearly the level and scope of the qualifications possessed by a job applicant from any other country participating in this Process.

CYCLE II: EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY (2010-2020)

EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2020 (ET 2020)

In May 2009, the EU Heads of State and Government adopted a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, called Education and Training 2020⁵, a crucial part of a new strategy, Europe 2020.

Education has been perceived as an important tool to meet the socio-economic, demographic, environmental and technological challenges that Europe and its citizens are facing nowadays.

The main aim of the ET 2020 is to support Member States develop their own education and training systems in order to provide their citizens with all possible means to realize their

EU definition

Formal learning is typically provided by an education or training institution and leads to certification. It is structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and is intentional from the learner's perspective.

Non-formal learning is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, both structured and intentional.

Informal learning is not provided by education and training institutions, does not lead to certification and is not structured. It is the result of daily activities. It may be intentional but in most cases it is not (i.e. incidental/random).

⁵ Official Journal C 119 of 25.05.2009, [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52009XG0528\(01\):EN:NOT](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52009XG0528(01):EN:NOT)

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc125_en.pdf

potential as well as to ensure sustainable economic prosperity and employability. The framework looks at the whole spectrum of education and training systems from a lifelong learning perspective, covering all levels and contexts (including non-formal and informal learning).

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Education and Training 2020 sets four **strategic education objectives**:

- **Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality** – progress is needed in the implementation of lifelong learning strategies, the development of national qualifications framework linked to the European Qualification Framework and more flexible learning pathways. Mobility should be expanded and the European Quality Charter for Mobility should be applied.
- **Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training** – all citizens need to be able to acquire key competences and all levels of education and training need to be made more attractive and efficient
- **Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship** – education and training should enable all citizens to acquire and develop skills and competences needed for their employability and foster further learning, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue. Educational disadvantage should be addressed through high quality inclusive and early education
- **Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training** – the acquisition of transversal competences by all citizens should be promoted and the functioning of the knowledge triangle (education – research – innovation) should be ensured. Partnership between enterprises and educational institutions as well as broader learning communities with civil society and other stakeholders should be promoted.

COPENHAGEN PROCESS

The last revision of the Process took place in December 2010, when the European Ministers for Vocational Training, European social partners and the European Commission met in Bruges, to set priorities for the Copenhagen Process for 2011-2020, as well as to agree on an action plan for the first five years with concrete measures at national level and support at European level. The package of objectives and actions is known as the Bruges Communiqué⁶.

The Bruges Communiqué⁷ addresses:

- Attractive and inclusive VET
- High quality initial VET
- Easily accessible and career-oriented continuing VET
- Flexible systems of VET, based on learning outcomes approach
- Validation of non-formal and informal learning
- A European education and training area
- Substantially increased opportunities for transnational mobility
- Easily accessible and high-quality lifelong information, guidance and counseling services

⁶ The Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the period of 2011-2020 http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/vocational/bruges_en.pdf

⁷ The Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the period 2011-2020, 7 December 2010 http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/vocational/bruges_en.pdf

II. VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET)

In times of global economic crisis and intensified competition, Europe is faced with numerous challenges affecting its future competitiveness and innovation. The high number of low-skilled workers and an ageing population can be tackled by vocational education and training, providing the skills, knowledge and competences needed in the labour market.

The European Commission defines its work as acting together with Member States and other countries to strengthen VET across Europe since the Copenhagen Process gave the basis for such cooperation. A 10 year vision for the future of VET “A New Impetus for European cooperation in Vocational Education and Training to support the Europe 2020 Strategy”⁸ was presented by the European Commission in June 2010. Building on the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy: smart and inclusive growth, the Commission contributed with a 10-year programme of reforms under the Copenhagen Process on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training. The Commission wants to encourage more people to take up vocational education, improve the quality of offered training and to ease the process of moving between jobs and countries.

A new impetus for European cooperation includes:

- Ensuring that access to training and qualifications is flexible and open at all stages of life;
- Promoting mobility to make it easier to gain experience abroad, or in a different sector of economy;
- Ensuring the highest possible quality of education and training;
- Providing more opportunities for disadvantaged groups such as school drop-outs, the low-skilled and unemployed, people with migrant background and the disabled;
- Nurturing creative, innovative and entrepreneurial thinking in students.

⁸COM (2010) 296 of 9.6.2010 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0296:FIN:EN:PDF>

RECOGNITION

Currently, there are a number of initiatives under development to enhance the transparency, recognition and quality of competences and qualifications, facilitating the mobility of learners and workers. It includes: the European Qualification Framework (EQF), Europass, the European Credit System for VET (ECVET), and the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQAVET).

TRAINING

As one of the priorities is to increase the quality of the trainings on offer, a special initiative for teachers and trainers is being designed. The professional development of educators and their initial education are also a subject of quality assessment. To smooth the progress of this action the Commission brings together experts from different countries to the clusters⁹, to enhance the exchange of good practices and supporting the reform of national systems and has carried out studies about the evolving role of VET educators.

MOBILITY

One of the priority actions of the EU is to encourage learners to take part in vocational education and training in different countries. In order to foster mobility and fund work-related trainings abroad as well as large-scale cooperation efforts people can benefit from the Leonardo da Vinci Programme¹⁰.

Leonardo da Vinci enables organisations in the vocational education sector to work with partners from across Europe, exchange best practices, and increase their staff's expertise. It should make vocational education more attractive to young people and, by helping people to gain new skills, knowledge and qualifications, the programme also boosts the overall competitiveness of the European labour market.

⁹ Teachers and trainers in VET
<http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningClusters/ClusterDetails.cfm?id=11>

¹⁰ The Leonardo da Vinci Programme is part of the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme
http://ec.europa.eu/education/leonardo-da-vinci/doc1018_en.htm

III. MOBILITY AND LIFELONG LEARNING INSTRUMENTS

European Union countries are cooperating on several specific instruments aimed at facilitating mobility in Europe – for individuals, business and other organisations. Several related initiatives that intend to make qualifications, experiences and skills better appreciated and easier to recognise throughout the EU, while giving a greater access to learning and employment opportunities in different countries.

These instruments are being developed on behalf of the Ministries responsible for vocational education and training in 34 European countries and social partners at European level. The participating countries are the EU Member States, EEA/EFTA countries (Iceland, Norway, and Liechtenstein) and the candidate countries Croatia, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey.

This cooperation has, among other things, resulted in agreements on quality, guidance, and validation, on founding a **European Qualification Framework (EQF)**, the development of the **European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)** and the development of the **European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQAVET)**. These agreements mean that the participating countries commit themselves to continue their national implementation efforts.

EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF KEY COMPETENCES

The Key Competences for lifelong learning are a combination of knowledge, skills and competences appropriate to the context. They are essential for the personal fulfillment and development, social inclusion, active citizenship, and employment of European citizens.

Key competences are essential in a knowledge society and guarantee more flexibility in the labour force, enhancing a faster adaptation to the constant changes in an increasingly interconnected world. They are also a major force in innovation, productivity and competitiveness, and they contribute to the motivation and satisfaction of workers and the quality of work.

The acquisition of key competences is in a line with the principles of equity and access for all. This reference framework also applies in particular to vulnerable groups whose educational potential requires support. Such groups include people with low basic skills, early school leavers, the long-term unemployed or migrants, etc.

EIGHT KEY COMPETENCES

This framework defines key competences¹¹ and describes the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes related to each of those. The key competences are:

- **Communication in the mother tongue** which is the ability to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing), and to interact linguistically in an appropriate and creative way in a full range of societal and cultural contexts;
- **Communication in foreign languages** which involves, in addition to the main skill dimensions of communication in the mother tongue, mediation and intercultural understanding. The level of proficiency depends on several factors and the capacity for listening, speaking, reading and writing;
- **Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology**. Mathematical competence is the ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking in order to solve a range of problems in everyday situations, with the emphasis being placed on process, activity and knowledge. Basic competences in science and technology refer to the mastery, use and application of knowledge and methodologies which explain the natural world. These involve an understanding of the changes caused by human activity and the responsibility of each individual as a citizen;
- **Digital competence** involves the confident and critical use of information society technology (IST) and thus basic skills in information and communication technology (ICT);
- **Learning to learn** is related to learning, the ability to pursue and

¹¹ OJ 394/10 of 30.12.2006 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:394:0010:0018:EN:PDF>

organize one's own learning, either individually or in groups, in accordance with one's own needs, and awareness of methods and opportunities;

- **Social and civic competences.** Social competence refers to personal, interpersonal and intercultural competence and all forms of behavior that equips individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life. It is linked to personal and social well-being. An understanding of codes of conduct and customs in the different environments in which individuals operate is essential. Civic competence, and particularly knowledge of social and political concepts and structures (democracy, justice, equality, citizenship and civil rights) equips individuals to engage in active and democratic participation;
- **Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship** is the ability to turn ideas into action. It involves creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. The individual is aware of the context of their work and is able to seize opportunities which arise. It is the foundation for acquiring more specific skills and knowledge needed by those establishing or contributing to social or commercial activity. This should include awareness of ethical values and promote good governance;
- **Cultural awareness** and expression which involves appreciation of the importance of the creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions in a range of media (music, performing arts, literature, and the visual arts).

These key competences are all independent, and the emphasis in each case is on critical thinking, creativity, taking initiative, problem solving, risk assessment, decision taking, and constructive management of feelings. The transversal nature of key competences makes them essential, as they provide value for employment, social cohesion or young people.

EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER AND ACCUMULATION SYSTEM (ECTS)

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) was introduced as part of the Erasmus framework in 1989. It is the only credit system which has been

successfully used across Europe, and began life solely as a credit transfer system. In helping European countries to mutually recognise periods of study abroad, it assists student mobility.

It allocates credits to course components based in the student workload required to achieve the objectives of the particular course of study. The objectives are usually described in terms of the leading outcomes of the course and the competencies to be acquired. Each learning outcome is expressed in terms of credits, with a full-time student workload ranging from 1500 to 1800 hours for one academic year, and one credit generally corresponds to 25-30 hours of work.

ECTS has developed into a credit accumulation system to be implemented at institutional, regional, national and European level and ties in closely with the Bologna Process¹² objective of establishing a system of credits for the European Higher Education Area.

EUROPASS

In order to match people's skills with those needed in the labour market, the European Commission has developed several tools to make it easier. One tool to foster the transparency of qualifications and competences is Europass, an online Curriculum Vitae (CV) service¹³, helping individuals to make their professional experience and skills clearly and easily understood. The Europass CV draws attention to people's skills and abilities, including those acquired outside of formal education and training.

The webportal is run by the European Center for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) and is available in 26 languages, providing an interactive tool to complete the **Europass CV** and the **Europass Language Passport**. In addition three other documents are available:

- **Europass Mobility** – records a learning experience abroad, such as

¹² Bologna Process aims to create the European Higher Education Area by harmonizing academic degree standards and quality assurance standards throughout Europe for each faculty. The objectives are the introduction of undergraduate and postgraduate levels in all countries, with first degrees no shorter than 3 years; a European Credit Transfer System; the elimination of remaining obstacles to the mobility of students and teachers.

¹³ http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/europass/home/hornav/Introduction.csp?loc=en_GB

- an academic exchange or internship in a company or organisation;
- **Europass Diploma Supplement** – developed by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO, this describes in a standardised way the nature, level, context and status of any higher education course that an individual has successfully completed;
- **Europass Certificate Supplement** – explains vocational training certificates in terms of skills and abilities, enabling employers to better appreciate what their holders can do.

EUROPEAN QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORK FOR LIFELONG LEARNING (EQF) – UNDER DEVELOPMENT

A European reference framework for qualifications for lifelong learning (the European Qualification Framework, EQF) is a tool to enable qualification levels (course certificates, professional certificates, etc.) to be better understood and compared, both by individuals and employers, across different European countries. **The purpose of EQF is to make it easier to compare educational and professional qualifications by linking examination and educational levels in different European countries to a common European framework.** It serves also to increase, ease and stimulate the mobility and facilitate the lifelong learning. Greater awareness of the knowledge, skills and competences of a person with a specific qualification increases his or her opportunities to work and study in another country.

Agreed upon by the European institutions in 2008, the EQF is being put in practice across Europe. The countries are encouraged to relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF so that all new qualifications issues from 2012 onwards carry a reference to an appropriate EQF level. EQF national coordination points have been designated for this purpose in each country.

The EQF is divided into eight reference levels describing what a learner knows, understands, and is able to do – “learning outcomes”, where level one is the lowest and level eight the highest (equivalent to doctorate degree). Levels of National Qualifications Framework (NQF) should be placed at one of the central reference levels, in order to enable a much easier comparison between national qualifications and will mean also that people do

not have to repeat their learning if they move to another country. The EQF applies to all types of education, training and qualifications, from school education to academic, professional and vocational. The reference framework describes the expected results of learning – “learning outcomes”, i.e. what a person knows, understands and is able to do, not the length of a learning experience or what study programme etc. a person has completed. This approach shifts the focus from “learning inputs” to the “learning outcomes” when it encourages lifelong learning by promoting the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The aim is that in the future it will be simpler to acknowledge learning in other environments, such as in the workplace, and that the national systems will make it easier to determine the level of both formal study programmes and of knowledge gained during a person’s working life.

EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE REFERENCE FRAMEWORK FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (EQAVET) – UNDER DEVELOPMENT

To promote and monitor the improvement of national systems of vocational education and training, a European Quality Assurance Reference framework (EQAVET) was adopted by EU Member States in June 2009 as the reference tool for policy-makers. The system is based on a four-stage quality cycle that includes goal setting and planning, implementation, evaluation and review. When respecting the autonomy of national governments with regard to education, this voluntary system is meant to be used by public authorities and other bodies involved in quality assurance.

Member States are encouraged to use this instrument, and develop by mid-2011, a national approach to improving quality assurance systems that involve all relevant stakeholders. It should include funding the national reference points for quality assurance, as well as active participation in the European level network.

The European Commission supports the Member States in this process, especially through facilitating cooperation and providing information.

EUROPEAN CREDIT SYSTEM FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (ECVET) – UNDER DEVELOPMENT

A European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) is currently being developed along the lines of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

The various Copenhagen Process instruments do not define qualifications on the basis of learning input (duration of learning process,

type of institution) as it has traditionally been the case in the past, but rather on the basis of learning output (learning results such as knowledge, skills and competences). This enables training centers to adapt their training plans to the needs of the labour market. It also becomes easier to recognise non-formal and informal learning and encourages mobility between various countries and training systems. The various Copenhagen Process instruments thereby create favorable general conditions for lifelong learning.

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