

Building learning societies:

Prioritise non-formal and informal
(adult) learning



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SOLIDAR is a European network of 59 NGOs
working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide.

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MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

SOLIDAR Members have a long-standing tradition in the empowerment of people through lifelong learning, and actively promote social cohesion, active inclusion and participation in society. The network brings together 28 workers' education associations, trade union education institutes and popular education movements from 19 EU Member States.

Together, our members are witnessing that recent budgetary cuts and austerity measures are undermining the opportunities for people to participate in society, and undermine social cohesion and active inclusion throughout Europe. Currently, more than 120 million people are living in poverty or at the threat of falling into poverty within the European Union. Approximately 25 million people are unemployed, of which 5.5 million young people, while 77 million Europeans still have at most lower secondary education.

Against this backdrop, SOLIDAR actively supports the Europe 2020 strategy and calls upon the fulfillment of the agreed social targets: at least 20 million fewer people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion, 75% of the 20-64 year-olds should be employed and a reduction of school drop-out rates below 10%. Furthermore, SOLIDAR advocates for **prioritising non-formal and informal (adult) learning** within EU programs after 2013, including the European Social Fund (ESF), new EU programme for social change and innovation (EPSCI) and the Lifelong learning Programme (i.e. Erasmus for All).

In order to promote social cohesion, active inclusion and participation through lifelong learning SOLIDAR recommends strengthening the following aspects:

- Following Europe 2020, develop a strategy to **actively support the creation of learning societies and learning workplaces**.
- **Recognize the added value of non-formal and informal learning** for developing skills, needed to bridge the gap between labour market needs and available qualifications.
- Promote the **validation of skills, competences and knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning** within society and at the workplace.
- Make lifelong learning a reality and **foster participation of people in education and training**, especially those who are far from formal education and have weak income position and young adults who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs).

- **Promote social engagement, such as volunteering**, within the approach to stimulate the modernization of one's skills portfolio and stimulate the utilization of skills acquired in everyday life.
- Develop policies that **prevent skills obsolescence, stimulate continuous education** and training opportunities to upgrade skills, knowledge and competences in order to keep up with changing demands.
- **Strengthen evidence-based policy making**, promote the participation of (adult) education providers in decision making processes on Member State and EU levels, in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination in Education.

PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION, ACTIVE INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION

In the framework of the Education and Training Program 2020 (ET2020) EU Member States have agreed on 12 May 2009 that European cooperation in the field of education and training should be aimed, first and foremost, at ensuring (a) the personal, social and professional fulfilment of all citizens; (b) sustainable economic prosperity and employability, whilst promoting democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship, and intercultural dialogue.

Member States and European Commission recognise in the ET2020 program that education and training plays an essential role in overcoming the challenges of today. Currently, more than **120 million people are living in poverty or at the threat of falling into poverty** within the European Union. In order to tackle this, one could build upon the principles formulated by the European Commission in the Active Inclusion recommendation¹ (2008):

- *Inclusive labour markets*, Member States should provide assistance for those who can work to enter or re-enter and stay in employment that best relates to their capacity to work;
- *Sufficient income support*, Member States should recognise and implement the right of individuals to adequate resources and social assistance as part of consistent and comprehensive efforts to fight social exclusion;
- *Access to quality services*, Member States should ensure that proper social support is given to those that require it, in order to promote social and economic inclusion.

However, the above mentioned active inclusion principles should go hand in hand with policy measures to prevent the raise of the inequalities in the society. Poverty is not limited to insufficient income, but also reflects in development deficits, reduced social competences, undersupply, material deprivation, and isolation, an important loss in terms of health gains and nutritional well-being as well as in hampered social cohesion.² The reduction of poverty, thus, requires a holistic, comprehensive and coherent strategy that includes – besides economic policies, labour market measures, minimum income schemes, healthcare provisions and quality social services – lifelong learning opportunities.

Recent statistics show that the proportion of population who took part in lifelong learning activities in 2010 was 9.1% and in comparison with 2005 has decreased by 0.7 percent. Given the results of the adult education survey (AES)³ a majority of participants took part in non-formal education and training activities,

¹ More information:

http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/employment_and_social_policy/social_inclusion_fight_against_poverty/em0009_en.htm

² AWO-ISS long-term study "Life dimensions, life course and future prospects of (poor) children". Part IV: Poverty in adolescence

³ [The adult education survey](#) (AES) was carried out as a pilot survey between 2005 and 2008 in 29 countries in the EU, EFTA and candidate countries. The reference year is set at 2007. Adult Education Surveys are planned to be conducted every 5 years (see Regulation (EC) N° 452/2008 of the European Parliament and of the European Council of 23/4/2008 concerning the production and development of statistics on education and lifelong learning, domain 2).

and most of the undertaken education and training was job-related, with the intention at first to improve their job-related skills and improve future career prospects, and later to get the useful skills for a daily life.

Lifelong learning takes place in different contexts, and in a variety of environments, inside and outside of the education and training systems. As such, lifelong learning is much more than just an educational process happening across the individual's lifespan; it is a mindset transforming and personal development process, important both for human life and for the society at the same time. In modern-day society, more and more skills, competences and knowledge are required and many individuals are engaged in learning, which is happening in non-formal and informal environments. Effective strategies that promote social cohesion, active inclusion and participation through lifelong learning⁴ prioritises both personal and professional fulfilment and, hence, should be seen as equal pillars of targeted education and training approaches, along with the active citizenship, adaptability and employability. Moreover, in regards to the priorities set in the EU's growth strategy for the coming decade (Europe 2020), an increase of investment in human capital is needed and can be ensured by strengthening education and training.

SOLIDAR members in their education and training activities follow the four pillars of learning developed by UNESCO 1) *learning to live together*, 2) *learning to know*, 3) *learning to do* and 4) *learning to be*. Through their non-formal and informal learning practices members empower people that are often far from formal education and have a weak income position and young adults who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs), by strengthening their skills, competences, knowledge, values and attitudes, to fully participate in society and have better access to the labour market.

In order to promote social cohesion, active inclusion and participation SOLIDAR recommends strengthening the following aspects:

- Reiterate the value of accessible and high quality (adult) education and training for social cohesion, active inclusion and participation, following the ET2020 objectives.
- Promote the cooperation between the EU Member States to strengthen national lifelong learning programs aimed at the personal, social and professional fulfilment of all citizens, whilst promoting democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship, and intercultural dialogue.
- Enable exchange of good practices and mutual learning between adult education, training and service providers from EU Member States with the objective of promoting non-formal and informal learning opportunities for people facing poverty and social exclusion.
- Increase the mobility of volunteers, youth and social workers between EU Member States, with the objective of promoting social cohesion, active citizenship, and intercultural dialogue.

⁴ Council resolution of 15 November 2007 on the new skills for new jobs (2007/C 290/01) <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2007:290:0001:0003:EN:PDF>

- Strengthen evidence-based policy making, promote the participation of (adult) education providers in decision making processes on Member State and EU levels, in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination in Education.

Box 1: Types of Learning⁵

Formal learning is purposive learning that takes place in a distinct and institutionalised environment specifically designed for teaching/training and learning, which is staffed by learning facilitators who are specifically qualified for the sector, level and subject concerned and which usually serves a specified category of learners (defined by age, level and specialism). Learning aims are almost always externally set, learning progress is usually monitored and assessed, and learning outcomes are usually recognised by certificates or diplomas. Much formal learning provision is compulsory (school education).

Non-formal learning is purposive but voluntary learning that takes place in a diverse range of environments and situations for which teaching/training and learning is not necessarily their sole or main activity. These environments and situations may be intermittent or transitory, and the activities or courses that take place may be staffed by professional learning facilitators (such as youth trainers) or by volunteers (such as youth leaders). The activities and courses are planned, but are seldom structured by conventional rhythms or curriculum subjects. They usually address specific target groups, but rarely document or assess learning outcomes or achievements in conventionally visible ways.

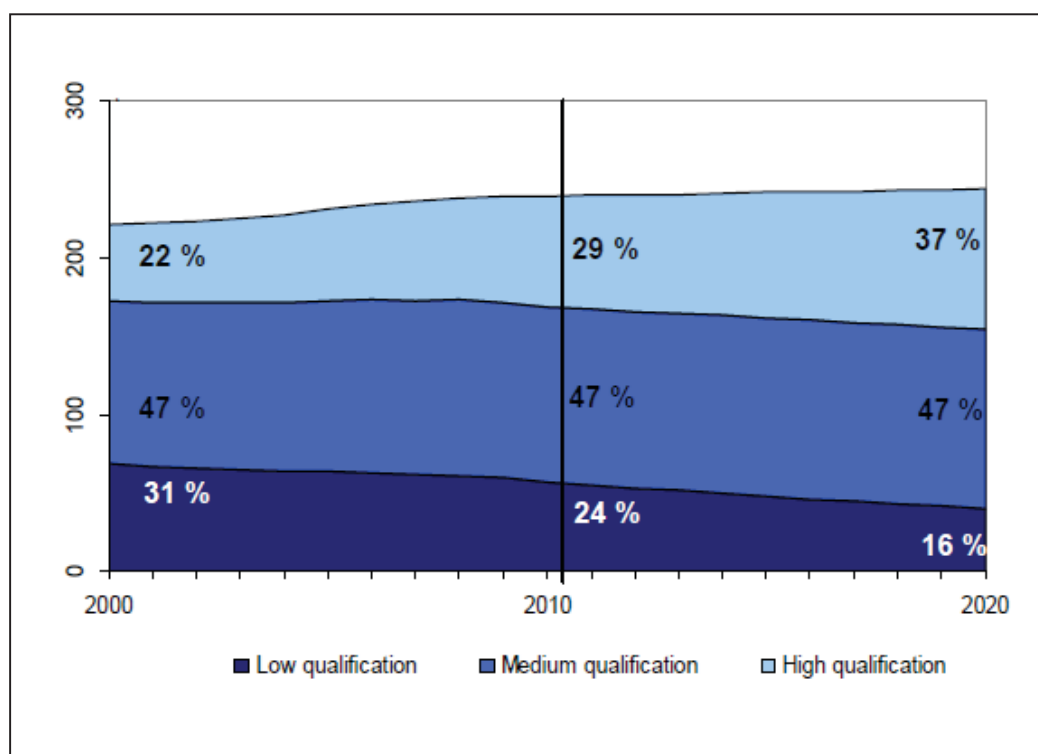
Informal learning: from the learner's standpoint at least, this is non-purposive learning which takes place in everyday life contexts in the family, at work, during leisure and in the community. It does have outcomes, but these are seldom recorded, virtually never certified and are typically neither immediately visible for the learner nor do they count in themselves for education, training or employment purposes. APEL systems are one way in which the outcomes of such learning can be made more visible and hence open to greater recognition.

⁵ Source: Terminology cheat sheet, Bridges for recognition (2005), SALTO, Univ. Prof. Dr. Lynne Chrisholm

DEVELOPING SKILLS, COMPETENCES AND KNOWLEDGE

The unemployment rate in the European Union in May 2012 was 10.3%. This means that approximately **25 million men and women in the EU are unemployed, of which are 5.5 million young people**, and this number is growing swiftly (EUROSTAT)⁶. Furthermore, **77 million Europeans aged 25-64 still have at most lower secondary education** and those with low qualifications are much less likely to participate in up-skilling and lifelong learning⁷.

Until 2020 the number of skill-intensive jobs will continue to increase while the number of many traditional manual or routine jobs will decline⁸, the Skills Forecast of CEDEFOP predicts. Even those occupations that used to require mostly low-level skills are increasingly requiring medium or even high-level qualifications. This means that people with low (or no) formal qualifications will find it more difficult to find a job in the future. To effectively accommodate these economic trends, skills development has to become a central aspect in education and training throughout Europe.



Labour force by qualifications 2000-2020 (millions)

Source: Europe's skills challenge, CEDEFOP, March 2012

⁶ EUROSTAT news release, Euroindicators 101/2012, 2 July 2012

⁷ More information: http://www.solidar.org/IMG/pdf/12_report_education_march2012.pdf

⁸ Europe's skills challenge, CEDEFOP, Briefing note, March 2012

To master this projections, the European Union has pledged⁹ that by 2020 at least 15% of adults (between 25 to 64 years) should participate in education and training activities (ET2020). This ‘benchmark’ has to be reached with the purpose to update and develop skills and competences in line with the changing economic and social circumstances and to enhance people's employability and adaptability. The European Union will pay specific attention to raising the level of basic skills such as literacy and numeracy, making mathematics, science and technology more attractive and strengthening linguistic competences.

Furthermore, the Agenda for new skills and jobs has been developed by the European Commission, which seeks to promote a skilled workforce as an essential asset to develop a competitive, sustainable and innovative economy in line with Europe 2020 goals¹⁰. This agenda proposes – amongst others – to develop an EU Skills PanoramaEuropean Skills; Competences and Occupations classification (ESCO), reform of the systems for the recognition of professional qualifications Knowledge Alliances, European Skills Passport and other measures to ‘equip people with the right skills for employment’. Additionally, it proposes that the European Social Fund (ESF) can invest in the forecasting and development of qualifications and competences, and support the reform of education and training systems to strengthen their labour market relevance.

These initiatives of the European Commission mostly focus on ‘equipping people with the right skills for employment’, but a broader approach could be adopted: *“We must have workforce development strategies that improve the ways skills are used. Too many people say that their skills and talents are not being used fully in their job”* (DfEE, 2011)¹¹. The demographic developments (i.e. ageing population) influences the structure of the labour market and necessitates making full use of the existing employment potential. Besides equipping people with skills, strategies could be developed that focus on ‘skills utilization’ enabling people to make an immediate positive difference to the workplace by applying the skills, competences and knowledge acquired in personal and professional life.

In other words, non-formal and informal learning is next to (professional) skills development needed to increase the employability of people in future labour markets; to modernize and professionalize ones skills portfolio¹². Nowadays people are expected to remain longer active on the labour market and policies are being developed to enable this. However, the participation of people within society should be enhanced, through policies promoting participation, volunteering and other forms of social engagement, to even further develop a person's skills portfolio.

⁹ Council Conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a [strategic framework for European Cooperation in education and training \(ET2020\)](#) [Official Journal C 119 of 28.05.2009]

¹⁰ More information: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0682:FIN:EN:PDF>

¹¹ Skills Utilisation Literature Review, Scottish Government Social Research, 2008

¹² The future of the labour market in Europe – in search of an effective response to demographic trends. Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee drawn up on the request of the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, SOC/400, 13 July 2011

The current skills gap between labour market needs and available qualifications in the workforce is largest amongst vulnerable people, especially those who are far from formal education and have a weak income position and young adults who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs). They are exposed to atypical and precarious employment and often live in vulnerable conditions. With economic developments influencing the job market, these vulnerable groups are especially at risk of losing their job. This may lead to an increase of poverty and socio-economic exclusion. Therefore particular attention must be given to those people, to elevate their chances to be fully part of both, the job market and society.

While the discussion on skills development is a priority in the current European agenda, it has to be mentioned that this is focused solely on the assumption that developing skills, competences and knowledge will improve one's employment conditions and career prospects, and to effectively reduce the fast growing number of unemployed people. Nevertheless, a large number of people is exposed to the risk of skills deterioration (skill obsolescence), either due to atrophy, 'wear and tear' or that skills previously utilised in a job are no longer required or have diminished in importance¹³.

In order to develop skills, competences and knowledge to match future labour market demands, SOLIDAR recommends strengthening the following aspects:

- Recognise the added value of non-formal and informal learning for developing skills, competences and knowledge for bridging gaps between labour market needs and available qualifications by the workforce.
- Make lifelong learning a reality and foster participation of people in education and training, especially those who are far from formal education and have a weak income position and young adults who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs).
- Promote social engagement, such as volunteering, as part of the approach to stimulate the modernisation of one's skills portfolio and stimulate the utilization of skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning at the work place.
- Develop policies that prevent skills obsolescence, promote continuous education and training opportunities to upgrade skills, knowledge and competences in order to keep up with changing demand for skills such as problem-solving, information and communication skills.
- Enable the mapping of skills shortages, and promote (social) innovative approaches to bridging the gap between labour market needs and available qualifications. Furthermore develop tailored education curricula to enhance the necessary skills, competences and knowledge.

¹³ More information: [Preventing skill obsolescence](#) CEDEFOP July 2012

BOX 2: Recognising skills on EU level

Education, training and employability were recognised by the European Council in Lisbon March 2000 as an integral part of the economic and social policies needed to attain the strategic goal of Europe becoming the world's most dynamic knowledge-based economy by 2010. In the aftermath of setting this objective, the following policy documents were developed, covering the principles of learning throughout life as well as the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Available policy toolbox:

- European education and training systems priorities (March 2001)
- Detailed work programme adopted by Council (14 June 2002) calling for the development of ways to officially validate non-formal learning experiences.
- The Commission White Paper “A new impetus for European Youth” (21 November 2001), stressing the importance of non-formal learning and education.
- The Council Resolution on Lifelong learning (27 June 2002) inviting Member States to encourage cooperation and effective measures to validate learning outcomes.
- The European Social Partners “Framework of action for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications” (14 March 2002) calling for the recognition and validation of competences and qualifications on European level.
- The Copenhagen Declaration (30 November 2002) and the Council Resolution (19 December 2002) on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training.
- The Council and Commission Joint Interim Report (26 February 2004) to the Spring Council “Education and Training 2010”: development of common European references and principles, including principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.
- To support the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy the European Qualification Framework for Lifelong learning (September 2006).
- Council resolution on the new skills for new jobs (15 November 2007) invites Member States and the Commission to work towards equipping people for new jobs within the knowledge society with a forward-looking set of skills and competences
- As a part of Europe 2020 Strategy, the “Agenda for New Skills and Jobs” (November 2010).
- The Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the period 2011-2020 (7 December 2010).
- The Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (18 April 2012) “Towards a job-rich recovery” calling for developing lifelong learning as a key to security in employment, investment in skills and recognition of skills and qualifications.
- Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, (5 September 2012)

BUILDING LEARNING SOCIETIES, LEARNING WORKPLACES

Education and training plays a significant role in promoting and improving social cohesion, active inclusion and participation, according to the synthesis report¹⁴ of the OECD Social Outcomes of Learning project. **Currently one can see a profound raise in inequalities within the society**, caused by different and often broad and far reaching reasons. **These inequalities are aggravated by austerity measures** imposing budgetary cuts that limit the access to education, health care, quality housing and social services, and leads to deteriorations in the quality of life. The further strengthening of lifelong learning is needed as it plays an essential role in overcoming the challenges of today, and actively contributes to building just and equal societies.

The Lifelong Learning Programme for Community Action in the field of Lifelong Learning¹⁵ aims at the development of advanced knowledge societies and considers lifelong learning - alongside with sustainable economic development, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion - as a tool to reinforce social cohesion, active citizenship, intercultural dialogue, gender equality and personal fulfilment. In other words, education and training is a powerful tool to combat social inequalities and exclusion, and reaches beyond economic participation and development towards promoting civic engagement.

In order to diminish inequalities and to promote the well-being of the society at large, the inner potential of societies has to be unlocked. Learning societies have to be promoted in which each member's personal contribution is being utilized, and knowledge, skills and competences are both shared and developed. In order to do so, people have to be stimulated to seek learning opportunities outside of the formal education system and have to be encouraged to actively participate in non-formal and informal learning activities organised in their local community centres, leisure and culture clubs and at the workplace.

Furthermore, learning workplaces can contribute to diminishing inequalities, as it would provide workers with more opportunities to learn and develop their skills, competences and knowledge so they can grow at work and access better life chances. This concept raises the interest in training and personal development of workers with poor self-confidence, low level of basic skills, and lack of awareness of education and training provisions that are available. It includes offering career guidance to employees and stimulates them to take up more learning opportunities.

For learning societies and learning workplaces to contribute to tackling demographic challenges and bridging skills mismatches, the validation of non-formal and informal learning is of crucial importance. This raises the awareness of an individual about the actual set of skills and competences developed in the

¹⁴ Improving Health and Social Cohesion through Education, OECD, 2010

¹⁵ Decision No 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on 15 November 2006 establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning

course of his or her life and at large it would allow the valorisation of experiences gained through work-, family-, leisure-related activities.

The Special Eurobarometer survey from September 2011, entitled Attitudes towards vocational education and training states that *“People who see themselves as being low down on the social scale have less belief that VET [Vocation Education and Training] can improve their job prospects than people higher up the scale. This represents a major challenge: one of the EU’s main objectives is to open up opportunities to disadvantaged groups, but these results show that these groups, which have the lowest aspirations in general, have the least faith in the ability of vocational training to change and improve their circumstances”*.

In addition, CEDEFOP sees¹⁶ the recognition of competences on two levels: formal and social. Formal recognition is a process of granting an official status to the competences an individual has, either through awarding with a certificate or through the grant of equivalence, credit units, and validation of gained competences; while social recognition foresees the acknowledgement of the value of competences by economic and social stakeholders.

While addressing the issue of social cohesion through lifelong learning¹⁷, both personal and professional fulfilment should be equally important targets of educational practices, along with active citizenship, adaptability and employability. Consequently, in regards to the Europe 2020 priorities, they can be greatly achieved by an increase of investment in human capital through better education and the development of skills and competences. On the road to the objective of reaching 75% of full employment there is a need to attract and retain more people in employment in order to increase the labour force supply.

In order to develop learning societies and learning workplaces, SOLIDAR recommends strengthening the following aspects:

- Following Europe 2020, actively support the creation of learning societies and learning workplaces.
- Stimulate work-based learning and volunteering as a way of promoting employability especially for those who are far from formal education and have a weak income position and young adults who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs).
- Promote the recognition and validation of skills, competences and knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning within society and at the workplace.
- Support the development of sector skills alliances bringing together (adult) education and training providers, the world of business and other relevant stakeholders and through this support and stimulate EU-wide recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

¹⁶ European Inventory: Validation of non-formal and informal learning carried by ECORYS in early 2000s, <http://www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory/>

¹⁷ Council resolution of 15 November 2007 on the new skills for new jobs (2007/C 290/01) <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2007:290:0001:0003:EN:PDF>

- Promote the creation of active support measures to enhance workplace and society learning and enable the exchange of good practices between various stakeholders, as (adult) education and training providers, service providers, local authorities, social partners, etc.

BOX 3: Building equal societies in practice

The “Learning Societies” example

This concept puts an emphasis on the importance of lifelong learning, especially beyond the formal learning environment as the impetus for societal developments. It embraces the concept that learning empowers individuals to deal with the challenges of modern-day life and fosters resilience as well as a sense of civic and social responsibility.

The “Dialogue-to-change” example

This is an innovative approach to tackling integration issues in the local community through small-group deliberation and exchange to facilitate intercultural learning and social inclusion at the local level. To ensure an inclusive and community-wide face-to-face dialogue, it is necessary to ensure that diverse community representation, which embraces individuals with different backgrounds and life experiences, are engaged in community-building cooperation.

ANNEX: EDUCATION EXPERTS' NETWORK

	Organisation	Country
1	BBRZ Vocational Training and Rehabilitation Centre	Austria
2	Institute for Social Integration	Bulgaria
3	AOF Denmark	Denmark
4	Fagligt Internationalt Center (FIC)	Denmark
5	Havnar Arbeiðskvinnufelag	Denmark/Faroe Islands
6	SIK, Greenland	Denmark/Greenland
7	Johannes Mihkelsoni Keskus (JMK)	Estonia
8	TSL - Workers Educational Association	Finland
9	Centres d'Entraînement aux Méthodes d'Education Active (CEMEA)	France
10	Ligue de l'enseignement	France
11	Arbeiterwohlfahrt (AWO)	Germany
12	DGB-Bildungswerk	Germany
13	European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training (EVBB)	Germany
14	Vocational Training Center - Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen and Merchants (KEK GSEVEE)	Greece
15	Magyar Szakszervezetek Országos Szövetsége / MSZOSZ	Hungary
16	Peoples College	Ireland
17	ARCI	Italy
18	Auser	Italy
19	Latvian Education and Science Employees' Trade Union	Latvia
20	Lithuanian Labour Education Society (LLES)	Lithuania
21	Ligue luxembourgeoise	Luxembourg
22	AOF Norway	Norway
23	União Geral de Trabalhadores	Portugal
24	ADO SAH ROM	Romania
25	La Liga Española	Spain
26	Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund (ABF)	Sweden
27	General Federation of Trade Unions, Educational Trust	United Kingdom
28	Workers' Education Association	United Kingdom

SOLIDAR is a member of European Networks:

- EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY ON LIFELONG LEARNING <http://www.eucis-III.eu/>
- SOCIAL PLATFORM <http://www.socialplatform.org/>