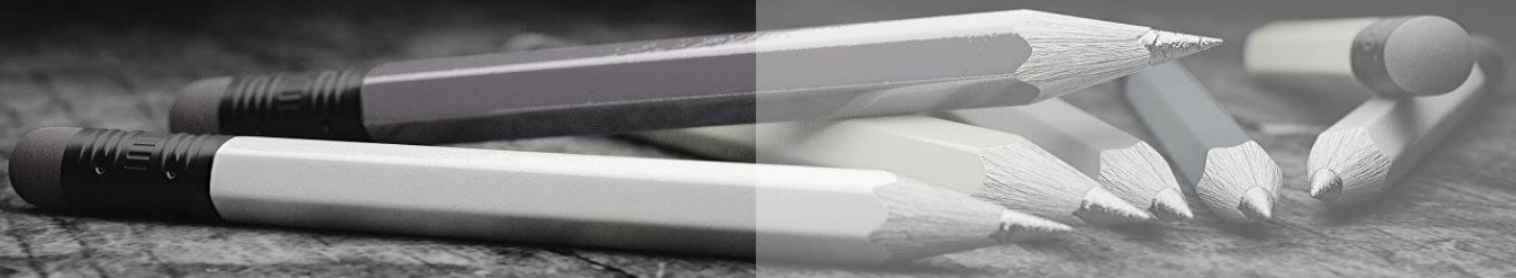




**REPORT**

# **LEAVING NOBODY BEHIND**

**PREVENTION AND  
REDUCTION OF POVERTY  
AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION  
THROUGH **EDUCATION,**  
**VOCATIONAL TRAINING**  
AND **LIFELONG LEARNING****



**MARCH 2020**



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# Leaving nobody behind – Ensuring education, vocational training and lifelong learning contributes to the prevention and reduction of poverty and social exclusion

## *EAPN Key Issues and Promising Practices Paper*

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Why are education, vocational training, and lifelong learning important for EAPN?

The **European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)** has a long-standing interest around the issue of education and its many aspects of access, affordability, quality and equal opportunities, which are crucial in the empowerment of people experiencing poverty and their integration in society. The links between education, training, lifelong learning and poverty and social exclusion are manifold. People on low incomes or experiencing exclusion often experience poor educational attainment and completion, while people with low levels of skills have a much greater statistical probability of experiencing hardship and deprivation. Educational attainment across the life course is not only a personal benefit but contributes to high levels of social and economic development. It can be deployed to support marginalised and excluded communities and to ensure all communities can benefit from the opportunities of major economic and environmental transitions.

EAPN advocates for the right to **universal, quality, affordable, accessible and inclusive public education throughout the life-course for all**. For EAPN and its members, **school and pre-school education, vocational education and training (VET) and lifelong learning (LLL) are key public services and goods (at EU level framed as Services of General (Economic) Interest)**.<sup>1</sup> In our view, the primary role of education is to empower and transform lives, allowing individual women and men to reach their full potential and to fulfil their aspirations. It should also provide people with the right skills and qualifications for the labour market, thus enabling them to secure good quality, stable jobs which effectively shield them and their families from poverty and social exclusion. Last but not least, education should equip individuals with soft, horizontal, and critical thinking skills, so that they can take full ownership of their own life plan and build a meaningful rapport with their community, helping to strengthen our democracies through participation and active citizenship. We therefore advocate for

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<sup>1</sup> Health care, social services, housing, education, water, energy and transport, amongst others, represent essential public infrastructures and services. Services of general interest (SGIs) or services of general economic interest (SGEIs) – also commonly known as public services - fulfil people's daily needs and are vital to their well-being. The quality of the life of people depends on their accessibility, affordability, quality and continuity. They are essential for sustainable economic and social development and regional cohesion in Europe and a Pillar of the European Social Model. For EAPN universal access to them is a fundamental right.

a learner-centred approach, which puts people and their potential and aspirations at the heart of any learning activity. **EAPN promotes lifelong learning (LLL) as a comprehensive, holistic vision of education, which should span throughout all the phases of the life cycle for personal and professional development** through formal, informal and non-formal services.

For EAPN the **provision of universal services is a vital element of social protection and welfare states**. They are crucial in preventing and tackling poverty and social exclusion and act as a lynchpin to the European Social Model. **Equal and affordable access to quality education, health, social and housing services is also one of the three main pillars** (in addition to income support and inclusive labour market) **of the Active Inclusion Strategy**<sup>2</sup> (2008) which could ensure greater social inclusion and participation for people who are currently excluded from the labour market. This was confirmed in the Social Investment Package<sup>3</sup> (2013) and is underpinned by the European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>4</sup>(2017).

EAPN affirms that equal and affordable access to quality services is a fundamental right and forms a key pillar of an integrated strategy to ensure an effective reduction of poverty in Europe, as reflected in the poverty target<sup>5</sup> set by the Europe 2020 Strategy. In setting future education and training policies for accessibility of services, affordability, coverage and quality must be key criteria. There is a need to ensure universality, guaranteeing the right for all as part of an essential social compact to ensure quality services for everybody, combined with targeted measures to ensure rights of access for vulnerable groups and antidiscrimination measures (targeted universalism).

**Ensuring the active participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and their NGOs in the design, delivery and evaluation of these services** is crucial if education policies and services are to play an effective role in preventing and tackling poverty and social exclusion.

## 1.2 Objectives, structure and methodology of this paper

### *Objectives*

**This EAPN Key Issues and Promising Practices Paper provides a grassroots assessment of the current state of play and new developments in the education field, from the perspective of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and from NGOs providing support, guidance and services to them.**

It proposes **key messages and policy recommendations** mainly to national policy makers, but also to European institutions in the context of EU policy initiatives relevant for education, VET and LLL.

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2 Communication from the Commission on a Commission Recommendation on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market, COM/2008/0639 final, 3 October 2008, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52008DC0639>, and Commission Recommendation on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market (2008/867/EC), 3 October 2008, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32008H0867>

3 Communication from the Commission on Social Investment for Growth and Cohesion, COM(2013) 83 final, 20 February 2013, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1044&newsId=1807&furtherNews=yes>

4 The European Pillar of Social Rights has been proclaimed by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on 17 November 2017. You can access the booklet with the preamble and the 20 principles here: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/european-pillar-social-rights-booklet\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/european-pillar-social-rights-booklet_en)

5 The target set in 2010 is to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by at least 20 million by 2020, according to 3 indicators: at risk of poverty, severe material deprivation and low work intensity.

## *Structure*

**Chapter 1** elaborates on the reasons for EAPN to deal with education, vocational training and lifelong learning, retracing EAPN's work on these topics in recent years and explaining the objectives, structure and methodology used to write up the paper.

**Chapter 2** contains the **"EAPN key messages on education and training"**.

**Chapter 3** sets out the **EU-level policy context for education, vocational training, and lifelong learning**, thereby indicating possible hooks for EAPN's advocacy work.

**Chapter 4** entitled **"Key issues for EAPN members and problem statements"** is the main part of the paper content-wise. It is organised around 10 thematic fiches which each deal with a particular topic or aspect in relation to education, VET and LLL of high relevance for EAPN. The information included in these thematic fiches draws on national realities and the experiences and/or initiatives of EAPN members. The ten sections also comprise **country illustrations** on issues covered (in boxes with continuous lines) and many **quotes from people experiencing poverty** (in boxes with dotted lines). In several cases boxes contains two or three quotes related to a particular point elaborated on in the text. They either stem from the exchanges at the [17th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty](#) organised by EAPN in November 2018 (in this case they are referred to as "PeP 2018") or were shared with the EAPN Secretariat by members (in this case the country of the person is added in brackets) when replying to two surveys run to collect information for the 10 thematic fiches (see paragraph below).

**Chapter 5** contains the **policy recommendations to national policy makers and European institutions**, particularly to the European Commission, which are intertwined with EAPN's key messages on education and training as presented in chapter 2. They were suggested by EAPN members or deduced from the thematic analysis in chapter 4. Key recommendations for EAPN feature first, other recommendations are listed in italics, with both "categories" following the structure of the 10 thematic fiches in chapter 4.

Annex 1 contains, again for all 10 topics, a big number of **good practice examples** identified and shared by the EAPN members.

## *Methodology*

**This paper comes out of and builds on the 2018 European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty focusing on education** and is part of a new approach implementing the EAPN's ongoing Strategic Review Process.

**It was developed together with EAPN's EU Inclusion Strategies Group (EU ISG)** through 3 exchange meetings (March, June and September) over the course of 2019. EAPN members have identified 10 topics in relation to education, VET and LLL to be looked into in more detail, with the aim of building common understanding and messages and to develop the capacity of members to meaningfully engage in public debates and policy making processes regarding education policy and its impact on poverty, social exclusion and inequality. The EAPN Key Issues and Promising Practices Paper **summarises the**

**main concerns expressed by EAPN members in two survey rounds** in July and November 2019 with the aim to collect relevant information on the main issues and problems, good practice examples and policy recommendations for the national and European level to which **a total of 16 EAPN members** – 14 national networks (AT, BE, CZ, DE, ES, HU, IE, LU, MT, NL, NO, PT, RO, UK) and 2 European organisations (AGE Platform, IFSW) – **have replied**.

It builds on earlier EAPN work on education in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy: the priorities highlighted by EAPN members between 2011 and 2018 in the framework of the monitoring of the education targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

It has been **substantially complemented with insights from the discussions at the 17th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty** (November 2018). Many quotes from people experiencing poverty at this event (see here for the [full report](#)) are integrated in chapter 4 “Key issues for EAPN members and problem statements”. Other quotes from people experiencing poverty included in this report have been directly provided by the EAPN members in the responses to the two surveys to collect information mentioned above.

### 1.3 Brief overview of EAPN’s work on education in recent years

EAPN has worked on education, training, and lifelong learning since its inception, in the framework of the **Social Open Method of Coordination** and the **Lisbon Strategy** (up to 2010), and since then primarily in the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the **European Semester**, the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, and more recently the **Sustainable Development Goals**.

Since 2011, EAPN and its members have actively engaged with the **National Reform Programmes** (NRPs) under **Europe 2020**, as well as having monitored, through yearly comprehensive reports, the social targets of the strategy: poverty-reduction, employment, and education. This means that each of these reports includes an ample chapter regarding the state of play of education, training, and lifelong learning policies in Member States, as well as efforts to reach the Europe 2020 educational objectives. This key issues and promising practices paper summarises the main concerns and key messages emerging from these chapters. You can read the EAPN analysis of the NRPs [here](#) (particularly Chapter 4 “Education and Lifelong Learning”, pp. 48-56).

EAPN has equally engaged every year with the **Country-Specific Recommendations** (CSRs), putting forward shadow proposals from the perspective of anti-poverty organisations on the ground, including on education, training, and lifelong learning, as well analysing the yearly Recommendations the European Commission which include a focus on educational aspects. The latest EAPN CSRs analysis, for 2018, can be read [here](#), while the education concerns are summarised above.

Still in the framework of the European Semester, EAPN has **provided detailed input - also on education and training** - to the **Country Reports** for many years (including through its very successful Poverty Watches<sup>6</sup>, an ongoing reporting exercise by EAPN members, to continue in 2020). EAPN has produced yearly reports on their contents, including on education, training, and lifelong learning. You can read the latest assessment of the Country Reports 2018 [here](#). Last but not least, EAPN has highlighted education and VET concerns in its yearly assessment of the **Annual Growth Survey** and the **Joint Employment Report** (read the latest one, for 2018, [here](#)).

In the framework of the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, our members have identified Principle 1 (Education, Training, and Life-long Learning) as one of the 5 priority principles of particular relevance to EAPN's anti-poverty work. For more information, see EAPN's position paper on the Social Pillar "[Make Social Rights the beating heart of Europe!](#)". EAPN welcomes that the principle speaks about education as a right, highlighting quality and inclusiveness, and not linking it exclusively to the labour market. Additionally, we feel that the principle could better emphasise and support the 'lifelong' aspect, through explicitly mentioning second chance education, as well as ensuring the necessary access to financial resources to pursue education at a later stage in life. The concept of 'inclusiveness' could also be better clarified, by ensuring equal access to education (i.e. including for disadvantaged groups, e.g. ethnic minorities - Roma children, migrants etc.), as well as by actively combatting segregation and discrimination in educational settings. **EAPN wishes to see a strong and ambitious take up of principle 1 in the Action Plan on the EPSR to be issued in early 2021** (see below).

The 17th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty was entitled "Let's Make Education a Way Out of Poverty!" and it brought together over a hundred people experiencing poverty from 30 European countries on 7 and 8 November 2018. At the event participative methodologies to discuss issues such as how to develop a broad and inclusive education policy, early-learning, early school-leaving, child poverty, lifelong learning beyond labour market needs, ensuring the participation of students and parents experiencing poverty in education schemes. [A full report](#) and a [short report](#) of the event have been published on 30 April 2019. The EAPN Key Issues and Promising Practices Paper on Education, Training, Lifelong Learning and their implications for poverty and social exclusion includes the main concerns and proposals that emerged from these rich debates and exchanges.

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<sup>6</sup> EAPN National Poverty Watch Reports. Summary of Main Findings and Recommendations (January 2019), <https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/EAPN-2018-Poverty-Watch-Summary-web-version-00.pdf>

## 2.EAPN key messages on education and training

This chapter presents the overall EAPN messages on education and training, which are further developed in detailed policy recommendations by area in chapter 5.

**1) Increase policy efforts towards ensuring universal, quality, inclusive, accessible and affordable education, vocational training and lifelong learning, going beyond the existing Europe 2020 targets**

Policy initiatives should be aimed at the continuous improvement of outcomes and at economic and social upward convergence across the EU for all, rather than being mere bureaucratic instruments aimed at the artificial achievement of numerical targets. The European Pillar of Social Rights and the related Action Plan expected for 2021 should provide for renewed energy for actions dealing with education and social policies in general, strengthening the rights-based approach throughout the life-course, tackling key barriers for poor and excluded groups and monitored by a social and sustainable European Semester process. More efforts should be made to close gaps between the Member States and to achieve upwards convergence.

**2) Promote inclusive and universal public education and lifelong learning across the life cycle, ending discrimination and segregation and ensuring nobody is left behind**

Break the cycle of disadvantage by tackling poverty of children and their families, as a prerequisite for better educational outcomes, and integrate anti-poverty goals in educational policies and budgets. Back equal opportunities to education and lifelong learning for all, by ensuring universal and inclusive public education services throughout the life course, rooted in a rights-based anti-poverty approach. Combat segregation, discrimination and bullying in the schooling system, by adopting pro-active measures to ensure equal opportunities and outcomes, the support of vulnerable groups (people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, Roma, migrants, people facing poverty) and gender equality.

**3) Tackle the root causes of poor educational performance, including early school-leaving, by looking at education, vocational training and lifelong learning in a holistic approach, and by defining education through the life course as a social right**

Look behind each child, adolescent and adult to understand their socio-economic background in order to challenge their complex reality of poverty, social exclusion and discrimination, and offer personalised accompaniment where needed. If rights-based and rolled out throughout the life course such an approach would better coordinate education and training policies with measures aiming at reducing income poverty, ensuring social inclusion and supporting equal opportunities, including for children and young people living in poverty.

**4) Remove financial and other obstacles faced by vulnerable groups and people in poverty in accessing education, vocational training, and lifelong learning at all stages**

There are complex social and economic obstacles people face in accessing educational opportunities. Backed up by policies to ensure adequate income and income support for all households, governments must do more to reduce cost-of-education and training-related direct and indirect costs (e.g. for school materials, meals, fees for VET and LLL) and to guarantee comprehensive outreach and provide wrap-around financial support for pupils, students, and families at risk of poverty, social exclusion and segregation.

**5) Education, vocational training and lifelong learning have to be organised in a way to lead to quality jobs and decent employment conditions and to support ways out of poverty and social exclusion**

Employers must ensure access for both workers and jobseekers to relevant upskilling that takes into account both personal and labour market needs and which leads to sustainable, quality jobs, and not to precarious forms of employment and/or low pay. Vocational training and education provided to jobseekers must be organised and designed in ways that lead to a real path out of poverty.

**6) Education is more than responding to labour market and employers' needs**

Adopt a comprehensive vision of school education, vocational education and training and lifelong learning that goes beyond the needs of the labour market only, and which also supports personal development and empowerment.

**7) Support people's right to access educational opportunities throughout the life cycle, by providing them with the necessary support and second-chance opportunities**

Ensure universal access to adult education, including second chance schools and other catch-up mechanisms, particularly those facing multiple obstacles. Reinforce quality and inclusive lifelong learning, aimed at personal and community development, and support informal or non-formal learning approaches and the recognition of informally acquired competences.

**8) Tackle the digital divide in access to education, to ensure that people in vulnerable situations can reap the full potential of the digital revolution**

Access to technology is a human right, which governments need to guarantee, and a basic need, given the increased use of online media in education, training and lifelong learning provision as well as other services. Improving both digital literacy as well as access is key. Invest in inclusive (digital) education to reduce poverty and social inequalities and to promote more inclusive and sustainable growth.

**9) Support ownership and participation in educational systems which promote human dignity, active citizenship, and strong democracies**

Put the learner at the heart of the educational experience, and support partnership approaches between learners, particularly those in poverty, their families, their communities, their NGOs, education providers, and governments, and support awareness and critical thinking in school curricula. Ensuring the active participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and their NGOs in the design, delivery and evaluation of these services is crucial if education policies and services are to play an effective role in preventing and tackling poverty and social exclusion.

**10) Reverse the cuts to education systems in the last decade and restore adequate funding for education and lifelong learning**

Since 2008 austerity and fiscal consolidation have significantly undermined the quality, availability, and affordability of education and other services, particularly those programmes reaching disadvantaged groups. There is broad and consistent evidence for the societal and economic benefits of social investment in pre-school and school education, vocational training and lifelong learning. Adequate and sustainable public funding as well as reversal of existing cuts is therefore needed to implement the right to quality and inclusive education for all.

### 3. The policy context for education, vocational training, and lifelong learning at the EU level

Education is a right, which in the EU context is clearly expressed in the [EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), a component of the EU Treaty since 2009:

#### Article 14

##### Right to education

1. Everyone has the right to education and to have access to vocational and continuing training.
2. This right includes the possibility to receive free compulsory education.
3. The freedom to found educational establishments with due respect for democratic principles and the right of parents to ensure the education and teaching of their children in conformity with their religious, philosophical and pedagogical convictions shall be respected, in accordance with the national laws governing the exercise of such freedom and right.

Traditionally, at EU policy level, education is dealt with in two ways: under an Open Method of Coordination organised by DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, focusing more on lifelong learning, and by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, focusing more on skills and labour market demand.

In **2010**, the European Union included education as one of the 5 headline targets of its comprehensive strategy for smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth for the current decade, [Europe 2020](#), implemented through an annual cycle called the **European Semester**. As the one headline target on education and training is two-fold this makes some headway on integrating education goals:

#### Education

- rates of early school leavers below 10%
- at least 40% of people aged 30 to 34 having completed higher education

The first aspect of the target, **early school leavers**, was set at 10% (it stood at 10.6% in 2018), the second, **“tertiary educational attainment”**, was set at at least 40% (attaining 40.7% as EU average in 2018).

**Two of the other targets of Europe 2020 are of particular relevance for this paper:** The first, **“early childhood education”** (operationalised as the share of children aged 4 to the age of compulsory primary education who are participating in education), was set at 95% in 2008 when the target was agreed and had attained on average 95.4% across the EU in 2018, building on the “Barcelona objectives for the development of childcare facilities for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth”<sup>7</sup> agreed in 2002. The second target, **“adult participation in learning”** (operationalised as the share of 25 to 64 year olds who received formal or non-formal education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey), was set at 15% in 2008 and had attained 11.1% in 2018.

<sup>7</sup> This EC “stocktaking” report <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/fb103a95-f680-4f6e-bd44-035fbb867e6a/language-en> contains more information on the 2002 EC childcare objectives and targets.

The delivery on the Europe 2020 Strategy is underpinned by the [Guidelines for the Employment Policies of the Member States](#), which include **Guideline 6, dealing with education, training, and lifelong learning** (selected content below):

**Employment Guidelines - Guideline 6:**  
**Enhancing labour supply and improving access to employment, skills and competences**

In the context of technological, environmental and demographic change, Member States should promote productivity and employability, in cooperation with the social partners, through an appropriate supply of relevant knowledge, skills and competences throughout people's working lives, responding to current and future labour market needs. Member States should make the necessary investment in both initial and continuing education and training (lifelong learning). They should work together with the social partners, education and training providers, enterprises and other stakeholders to address structural weaknesses in education and training systems, to provide quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning. They should seek to ensure the transfer of training entitlements during professional transitions. This should enable everyone to anticipate and better adapt to labour market needs, and to successfully manage transitions, thus strengthening the overall resilience of the economy to shocks.

Member States should foster equal opportunities for all in education, including early childhood education. They should raise overall education levels, particularly for the least qualified and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. They should ensure quality learning outcomes, reinforce basic skills, reduce the number of young people leaving school early, and increase adult participation in continuing education and training. Member States should strengthen work-based learning in their vocational education and training systems (including through quality and effective apprenticeships), enhance the labour-market relevance of tertiary education, improve skills monitoring and forecasting, make skills more visible and comparable, and increase opportunities for recognising and validating skills and competences acquired outside formal education and training. They should upgrade and increase the supply and take-up of flexible continuing vocational education and training. Member States should also support lowly skilled adults to maintain or develop their long term employability by boosting access to and take up of quality learning opportunities, through the establishment of Upskilling Pathways, including a skills assessment, an offer of education and training matching labour market opportunities, and the validation and recognition of the skills acquired.

However, education is routinely seen primarily as a labour market tool in the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy through the Semester, with only limited attention paid to inclusiveness and quality, or beyond its narrow focus on employment. For example, 14 Member States received Country Specific Recommendations from the European Commission in 2018, but in more than half the cases, the focus was on upskilling of workers, reforming the education system for better market relevance, and improving vocational training. Encouragingly, quality of education is mentioned in several countries, and there is some positive rhetoric about rendering education more inclusive for groups having a hard time accessing it or having poor educational outcomes, including Roma children, migrants, children in rural areas. Staggeringly, while the strong link between a disadvantaged socioeconomic background and poor educational outcomes is highlighted in the Preamble for 8 of the 14 Member States, this is never picked up in the actual Recommendations.

The [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), adopted in November 2017, took this integration one step further and proposed a more holistic approach, going beyond the labour market, through its Principle 1 (rooted in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights), which states:

### **1. Education, training and lifelong learning**

Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market.

The performance of Member States in the implementation of this and other principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights is monitored by the Social Scoreboard<sup>8</sup>, a set of indicators linked to several of its principles. As for **education, VET and LLL, the Social Scoreboard** provides five indicators: “early leavers from education and training”, “adult participation in learning”, “underachievement in education (young people neither in employment nor in education and training, age group 15-24)”, “tertiary educational attainment” and “children aged less than 3 years in formal childcare”, three of them with additional disaggregation by gender.

The European Commission on 14 January 2020 issued a Communication concretising its intention to elaborate an **Action Plan on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights**<sup>9</sup>, based on comprehensive consultation with EU MS, including with civil society organisations throughout 2020. This would also comprise initiatives and commitments **on principle 1 “Education, training and lifelong learning”**. The Communication underlines the importance of an improved access to quality and inclusive education and training and of effective policies to prevent early school leaving from the non-completion of upper secondary education. It also refers to the need to invest in upskilling and reskilling, but, looks at lifelong learning (LLL) too narrowly, with a quasi-exclusive focus on labour market inclusion.

Stemming from earlier initiatives in the framework of the OMC in Education and Training<sup>10</sup>, the **Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training 2020**<sup>11</sup> (ET 2020), covers outcomes from early childhood to adult vocational and higher education as well as learning in all contexts: formal, non-formal and informal. Launched in 2009, ET 2020 is linked to the overarching Europe 2020 Strategy and built around **four common EU objectives**:

- 1) Make lifelong learning and mobility a reality,
- 2) Improve the quality and efficiency of education and training,
- 3) Promote equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship and
- 4) Enhance creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

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<sup>8</sup> The Social Scoreboard monitors the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights by tracking trends and performances across EU countries in 12 areas. It feeds into the European Semester. <https://composite-indicators.jrc.ec.europa.eu/social-scoreboard/>

<sup>9</sup> Communication from the Commission “A strong Social Europe for just transitions, COM(2020) 14 final, 14 January 2020, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/fs\\_20\\_49](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/fs_20_49)

<sup>10</sup> This article gives a good overview on development, main fields and initiatives in the context of the OMC in Education and Training: Ralf Drachenberg (2011): The Open method of coordination in European Education and Training Policy: New forms of integration through soft policy-making, <http://aei.pitt.edu/52661/>

<sup>11</sup> More detailed information on the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020) and links to the various issues and key documents covered by the ET 2020 can be found here: [https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/et2020-framework\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/et2020-framework_en)

It is a relevant policy framework for EAPN's work on education, VET and LLL as it aims at **supporting the achievement of several benchmarks at European level by 2020**, including

- 1) at least 95% of children participating in early childhood education,
- 2) the rate of early leavers from education and training aged 18-24 below 10%,
- 3) at least 15% of adults participating in learning and
- 4) the rate of 40% of people aged 30-34 having completed some form of higher/tertiary education.

The analysis contained in the annual Education and Training Monitor – reporting on the EU MS' progress towards achieving the objectives and benchmarks set by ET 2020 – is **fed into the European Semester**. In the context of ET 2020 the European Commission in 2017 organised a **Peer Learning Activity (PLA) on inclusive education**<sup>12</sup> delivering key messages on “Fostering an inclusive and democratic learning environment”. The Council Recommendation 2018/C 195/01 on “promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching” (22 May 2018)<sup>13</sup> recommends to the EU MS to promote inclusive education for all learners “in quality education from early childhood and throughout life” (4. (a)) and “according to their particular needs, including from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, those from migrant background, those with special needs (...)” (4. (b)). Another Council Recommendation (2018/C 189/01) issued the same day - “key competences for lifelong learning”<sup>14</sup> - calls on the EU MS to raise the level of basic literacy, numeracy and digital skills (2.1).

Another policy and programme framework to address some of the challenges outlined in this paper is the **European Education Area**<sup>15</sup> where the European Commission in January 2018 adopted a first package of measures addressing key competences for lifelong learning (with a Council Recommendation), digital skills (with a Digital Education Action Plan) and common values and inclusive education. All these initiatives, however, lack a specific poverty or social exclusion dimension.

The United Nations' **Sustainable Development Goals**, to which Member States of the European Union have signed up, also include Goal 4 on Quality Education (“Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”) with seven sub-goals, i.e. on the guarantee and offer of free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes for all girls and boys by 2030 (4.1) and on access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education for all girls and boys by 2030 (4.2).

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<sup>12</sup> European Commission/ET 2020 Working Groups (2017): Inclusive Education as the most effective means for preventing social exclusion in today's diverse society. Key messages from the PLA, Malta, 10-12 May 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Access to text: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32018H0607%2801%29>

<sup>14</sup> Access to text: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)&from=EN)

<sup>15</sup> This [article](#) gives an overview about the broader programme and the first three concrete initiatives launched.

## 4. Key issues for EAPN members and problem statements

### 4.1 Inclusive education, combating segregation, discrimination, bullying

EAPN members report that in many countries **children facing learning or other difficulties are still often placed in segregated and exclusionary ‘special needs’ schools and classrooms**, even though **efforts to make inclusive education a reality have gained ground and successful examples exist**. Segregation can also be experienced by children who have a difficult situation at home, have been excluded from school and/or are in the child and youth welfare systems or who do not yet master well the country’s language.

EAPN Spain highlights that in Spain there are huge differences in educational outcomes as a result of socio-economic segregation between schools, with 1 out of 10 schools being a ghetto, i.e. more than half of the students enrolled in school have a low socio-economic profile (i.e. pupils with migrant background, needing linguistic support, having special educational needs, Roma).<sup>16</sup> At the same time the school segregation index in Spain has increased steadily in recent years, by 13% between 2008 and 2015, i.e. during the financial crisis. **The general negative impacts of separation of students are that it limits the benefits of the peer (learning) effect and has negative repercussion on the repetition rates**. Issues going beyond the Spanish case are that educational facilities with a high concentration of pupils with a low socio-economic profile tend to have more difficulties to recruit qualified teachers, less resources and offer less extracurricular activities.

**Families who live in poor or predominantly migrant areas are likely to not only be limited in their choice of school for their children but schools located in such neighbourhoods often become *de facto* segregated schools** when higher income families will move with their children to better-off neighbourhoods or have the financial means to pay for transport for their children to attend schools further away. Segregated schooling is very detrimental to both social inclusion and personal development, as well as the quality of school education received, as such schools often feature second-class material equipment, low-quality learning and also environments where both families and communities lack social capital, i.e. material and immaterial resources supportive of better educational outcomes for the pupils.

“Well, my mother says to study, to dedicate myself to that more than anything. They tell me “do not do like us who have not studied, now we are looking for a job and we cannot find one, if you study you will be able to have a good job and good money and live quietly and if not, then no, you cannot do all that; when you are older and have children and they ask you for things, you can buy them and if you don’t have studies you won’t be able. They also say “it’s better to work in an office, than to go to work picking oranges, where they treat you badly” ... I’m told to surpass my mother, who has studied the baccalaureate” (Spain; female migrant)

<sup>16</sup> Save the Children Spain (2018): Report “Mézclete conmigo. De la segregación socioeconómica a la educación inclusiva” (in English: “Mix with me. From socioeconomic segregation to inclusive education”), <https://www.savethechildren.es/publicaciones/mezclete-conmigo>

**Bullying and cyber-bullying are a growing phenomenon in schools and educational settings** all over Europe, with **long-lasting severe consequences for both personal development and educational performance**. Alongside race, disability, or sexual orientation, low socio-economic background is often a cause for bullying, as children from poor families often cannot afford school activities or are seen receiving free meals. Bullying has also been found to have a negative impact contributing to children's low basic reading and other skills, as it undermines their capacity to concentrate in class, as well as leading to poor self-esteem, low motivation, and distress.

EAPN Spain reports the high incidence of bullying and violence, including insults, beating and isolation, with more than one third of the pupils having experienced at least one of the forms.<sup>17</sup>

Teachers have also been reported by EAPN members to treat students and parents experiencing poverty with less personalised attention, with lower levels of expectations as to their potential educational attainment and/or social behaviour of the child, but also more dismissively.

"School is normative, and difference (clothing, accent, etc.) are grounds to be bullied." (PeP Meeting 2018).

"If only I had the right skills to surpass bullying, I would have never ended up hooked on heroin." (Malta).

**Roma children are perhaps the group facing the most discrimination, segregation, and bullying at school**, with a similar situation for Travellers (IE). **Children with disabilities and those with a migrant background closely follow**. We can witness an **undeniable correlation between children from poorer and/or socially excluded families and poor educational attainment and completion rates of pupils**, which translate to further social and professional exclusion later in life. This vicious circle can also lead to the belief by parents that education is a largely pointless investment, as it does not prevent future poverty, nor does it guarantee better quality of life for one's children.

"At school they tell me that I am a deadbeat and that burns me inside, because we are poor, they leave me aside, they turn their backs ..." (Spain; Roma boy)

**What is needed are measures to allow as many students as possible to attend mainstream education, providing accessibility of premises and equipment, as well as personalised assistance when needed within regular classrooms i.e. avoiding segregation**. Children from poor families should also benefit from extensive, accessible, free extra-curricular activities or after hours tutoring, including language lessons. Measures to promote inclusiveness and tolerance amongst pupils themselves as well as inter-cultural learning and awareness, should be introduced as an integral part of the curricula and well

<sup>17</sup> Cruz Roja Española (2016): Boletín sobre vulnerabilidad social. La situación de la infancia en vulnerabilidad social. Resumen ejecutivo (in English: "Bulletin on social vulnerability. The situation of socially vulnerable children. Executive Summary")  
<http://www.cruzroja.es/principal/documents/449219/1697460/RESUMEN+EJECUTIVO+vs+final.pdf/6c48e9c0-5e82-40e0-9f26-6040a270c73b>

resourced. Adequate funding, including reversing prior austerity cuts – visible in many European countries and hitting hard in the period 2008 to about 2015 – must support a **high quality training of sufficient teachers, support workers and other school personnel**, good pay and working conditions for them as well as the **adequate equipment of schools to make them accessible, safe, and inclusive for all children** and ready to prepare pupils for the ongoing and future digital transformation.

“A good school pays attention to my child's individuality: what does it need to develop, and does the school adapt itself to this in its practice?” (Belgium)

“It's wrong, this hopping from one school to the other just to get the right help you're actually entitled to. As a parent, you know your child best. You have to get the biggest voice in that story, don't you?” (Belgium)

“Give everyone the opportunity to get good education and a better life without poverty.”  
(Netherlands)

“We can't forget that a national strategy to fight poverty and social exclusion in which education is a key priority is fundamental.” (Portugal)

#### 4.2 Quality, accessibility and affordability of formal education systems

EAPN members were concerned that from their experience current education systems in many countries are failing to view pupils and students as individuals, each with their own strengths, talents, and dreams, but rather as test subjects in a one-size-fits-all approach, based on standardised testing. Such testing puts a premium on memorising large amounts of information, as opposed to fostering creative thinking and developing horizontal and life integration skills, including through ‘learning-by-doing’ approaches and collaborative work. This **model also fosters immense pressure to succeed academically, where competition to maximise grades leaves many children, but also parents and school staff, suffering from anxiety**. In a few countries, there are concerns for EAPN members regarding the low quality of teacher training, also connected with the fact that the sector is unattractive, since it provides low incomes and poor working conditions (e.g. CZ).

Systems in place for the attribution of teachers to all schools can lead to a situation that **schools located in rural areas or in disadvantaged neighbourhoods cannot recruit enough qualified teaching staff or other supporting professionals**. Underfunding and recent austerity cuts have led to many schools lacking needed school materials to optimally perform.

“If I had a grant to pay for my exams, I would probably make an effort to succeed in my exams and today I would have a much better job.” (Malta)

“Give everyone the opportunity to get a better education and a better life without poverty.”  
(Netherlands)

Much more effort is also needed to **ensure that schools and educational establishments are physically accessible**, as well as **endowed with the necessary equipment to facilitate the learning of pupils and students with disabilities**. Many families live at considerable distances from the nearest schools, which involves not only **transport costs which can be unaffordable for people in poverty**, but also great amounts of time spent commuting. In most countries cuts in public spending over the past decade have led to schools being closed or merged, further reducing accessibility and leading to overcrowded classrooms and insufficient teachers for the number and needs of pupils. The **unavailability of coordinated, affordable afterschool programmes**, means that (single) parents are often unable to work more than part-time, negatively impacting on family income and social support offers for their children.

**In some countries, education is only free up to a certain age<sup>18</sup>, or only part of the costs are covered<sup>19</sup>.** What needs, however, to be factored in – also when calculating and updating reference budgets – are **associated expenses for schools**, such as clothing, books, materials, transport, and other costs such as for extra-curricular activities or voluntary contributions. Where financial support for such costs does exist, it still features significant gaps in coverage, as well as low levels which are insufficient to cover actual schooling needs. Where they exist, high university fees, including for public universities, still act as a deterrent for young people in poverty to pursue higher education. Educational loans mean that students are forced to work while studying, or will be burdened by debt for many years, if not decades after graduation. While some costs of VET are subsidised, in some countries and for different professions, **those in VET are often asked to cover the full cost for training, materials, etc. upfront and then be reimbursed, which is not an option for many low-income workers or the unemployed.**

The student has a second chance to do things well and change his attitude: "This time I will do things right from the beginning" (Spain).

There are students who, despite their effort and daily work, are not able to achieve the objectives of the course, so the repetition creates frustration, helplessness and insecurity: "Strive has not helped me" (Spain)

<sup>18</sup> EAPN Spain reports that the big obstacle that restricts young people in continuing education and/or training over the age of 16 is that public education has very high fees for low-income families and scholarships are granted only to people living in extreme poverty.

<sup>19</sup> In Spain e.g. the basic grant for vocational training degrees is 200€ whereas the fees amount to about 400€.

### 4.3 Early childhood education and care

**Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is the third aspect of education, vocational training and lifelong learning for which objectives are defined in the EU Europe 2020 Strategy.** The target adopted in 2009 for the EU MS was 95% participation of children in ECED from the age of 4. **In 2017 15 EU countries had reached participation rates above 95%** while the EU average stood at 95.4%<sup>20</sup>. This rate, however, does not take into account the partly different opening hours and other provisions (e.g. for meals) which facilitate the take up of work for parents, including for those with irregular or unsocial working hours, in shift work or needing a lot of time to commute. For children below the age of 2 the rate, however, drops to below 10% in ECEC in 14 EU countries.

**“Comparing the young children (below 3 years of age) from AROPE households to children from non-AROE households, there is an average gap of 15 pps for the EU28,** leaving the children from disadvantaged homes with a participation rate of little over 20%. The 2019 Employment and Social Developments in Europe Report provides data which reveal huge differences in the use of childcare services when comparing families from the first with those from the fifth income quintiles are equal or above 100%, both for children under 3 as well as for those between 3 and compulsory school age in a number of EU MS. This suggests that poorer and more vulnerable families often also have more limited access to formal childcare”<sup>21</sup>. **The gap for children aged between 3 and the mandatory school age is smaller (11%), but still noteworthy.**

**Participation rates in early childhood education and care are unequal across countries<sup>22</sup>, depending on many issues such as availability, affordability, quality, legislative and regulatory provisions (whether or not it is compulsory), but also the socio-economic situation of households. Such inequalities so early in life have a strong impact on educational attainment and completion for children.** Many research studies confirm that ECEC improves children’s socioemotional development and cognitive competences<sup>23</sup>. For children with disabilities being in childcare can support the social and personal development of a child and reduce the risk of stigma or discrimination. Targeted policy action and funding is needed also in view of Roma children as they are amongst the most under-represented groups in pre-school childcare and education in Europe.

<sup>20</sup> European Commission (2019): Education and Training Monitor, Edition 1/2019, Part 2 “EU indicators and targets in education and training”, <https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/volume-1-2019-education-and-training-monitor.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Source as above, p. 48, but also European Commission (2019): Proposal for a Joint Employment Report 2020, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2019-european-semester-draft-joint-employment-report\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2019-european-semester-draft-joint-employment-report_en), p. 60 and European Commission (2019): Employment and Social Developments in Europe. Sustainable growth for all: choices for the future of Social Europe. Annual Review 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8219>, pp. 133-135: “In the EU there is considerable inequality in the use of childcare services, with low-income families more likely to forego childcare services than high-income families. This carries risks, as it reinforces existing inequalities and contributes to accumulating both serial and multiple disadvantages. While over time the use of formal childcare has increased among all income groups, both for children under 3 (...) and for those aged between 3 and compulsory school age (...), inequality in its use has not declined. (...) Inequality in childcare use is considerably higher for children under 3 than for older ones.” (p. 134). It is “is particularly high in some countries (...), such as Croatia, UK, France and Finland, where differences in the use of childcare services between families in the first and fifth quintiles are equal or above 100%, both for children under 3 (...) and for those between 3 and compulsory school age (...). Among very young children (under 3) the difference in childcare use between first and fifth quintiles is also very high in Bulgaria, Lithuania and the Netherlands.” (p. 134)

<sup>22</sup> For 2015 the EC in 2018 issued data are available on the participation of 3-, 4- and 5-year old children in ECEC, also differentiated by girls and boys for the enrolment in ECEC between the age of two and the start of primary school, cf. Proposal for a Council Recommendation on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems <https://www.expoo.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Commission%20staff%20working%20document-%20Proposal%20for%20a%20Council%20Recommendation%20on%20High%20Early%20Childhood%20Education%20and%20Care%20Systems.pdf>, SWD(2018)173 final, 22 May 2018. The document also highlights that “it is well documented that children from minority ethnic groups and low-income families are less likely to be enrolled in ECEC” (p. 33) and that “the availability of early childhood education and care provision which tends to be unequally distributed in urban and rural areas, in affluent and poor neighbourhoods, and across regions.” (p. 34)

<sup>23</sup> Source as above, p. 48. It is also important to note that while parents with a robust family system may be able to rely on informal childcare provided by relatives and save costs, it has been proven more beneficial for children to spend time in collective early education and care facilities, to improve their socialisation skills and to benefit from the support, education and attention provided by trained childcare “Equal opportunities for all children. Education should be free for all children.” (Netherlands) 17 professionals.

"Equal opportunities for all children. Education should be free for all children." (Netherlands)

" Early childhood shouldn't be education. Children must have to be a child and to play in/outside. There must be life/education balance. " (Netherlands).

**Affordability is the greatest deterrent for children for low-income families to participate in early childhood education and care programmes.** Having to spend important amounts of money on childcare also means that, within a poor household, resources may be diverted from other crucial expenses, such as housing, heating, food, clothing, health. Many countries differentiate the fees for ECEC according to family income and/or number of children. In some EU MS subsidies are available for parents who are in work, but not for the unemployed and/or children from parents in employment get preferential treatment when it comes to a place in an ECEC facility, which risks to disadvantage those families and children who would need more support and benefit most from ECEC.

**The availability of ECEC with adequate opening hours is a significant deterrent to parents, particularly women, taking up employment,** which leads to a gender employment gap as women still bear the main responsibility for childcare, as well as an increased incidence of part-time employment. However, availability of affordable childcare should not be seen only in the context of increasing labour market participation of women (and parents), but chiefly from the perspective of the rights and well-being of children, striving to ensure their personal development and social integration. For all the reasons set out above having reliable and quality care services for their children is particularly important for parents in low-income households.

There is a **need to invest in the creation of sufficient and affordable childcare facilities, ensuring their geographical coverage and good accessibility by public transport.** Such establishments must be adequately resourced, both in terms of infrastructure and provision of qualified staff, and to support the quality of the care and attention given to each child. The working conditions of employees in the sector need to be improved. Finally, early childhood education and care facilities need to be at least affordable, including for low-income workers, or ideally free of charge and fully state-subsidised, in order to ensure that parents and children in poverty enjoy equal access.

#### 4.4 Exploring the links between socio-economic background and educational attainment / completion

"I often experience parents who are living in poverty being ashamed of their situation not being able to provide their children with enough resources for school. Especially in rural areas we have the problem that society isn't willing to face poverty as a reality but prefers to keep silent towards it." (Austria)

In most countries, statistics show a **clear correlation between a low socio-economic background of children** (i.e. living in poverty and social exclusion) **and poor educational attainment and completion**. Such a situation which also stems from systematic failures to realise fair income distribution and redistribution in our societies only perpetuates the **intergenerational transmission of poverty**, not least as children born in poor families are more at risk of being denied equal opportunities in education from a very early stage in life. **The disadvantage often is further compounded for children who, in addition to facing poverty, belong to an ethnic minority, are migrants, or have a disability.**

Parents in poverty cannot afford fee-paying schools or to enrol their children in schools situated further away from their homes, which reduces access to quality educational providers, especially for those living in disadvantaged areas. The **inability to afford high-quality education materials and extra-curricular activities** means that poor children cannot take advantage of the full benefits school has to offer and miss out on diverse learning opportunities. EAPN members also consider **access to free or cheap school meals for everyone** important, as it guarantees at least one nutritious meal to all pupils, without stigma (PeP 2018). In several countries, schools are underfunded and/or have been hit by recent austerity cuts, and more and more expenses for materials and activities are passed on to parents. Furthermore, poverty often leads to poor housing (e.g. cold homes, as mentioned by EAPN Spain), living conditions (including the lack of space for studying), nutrition, and health, all acting as deterrents to educational success.

**Poverty not only directly impacts the pupils, but also their parents and their time resources.** EAPN members (e.g. ES) highlight the difficulties of parents in difficult socio-economic conditions to accompany the educational processes of their children, due either to lack of time or to non-familiarity with the subjects. The need to resolve daily problems of family subsistence reduces the resources that fathers and mothers living in poverty can devote to other aspects of their children's well-being. The scarcity of time e.g. due to shift work patterns of parents reduces the frequency and quality of opportunities for interaction between parents and children, including in early childhood.

**Furthermore, children coming from low-income families can face bullying and discrimination based on their socio-economic status.** Some are known to refuse free school meals when they are targeted and/or means tested, for fear of being ridiculed by their peers – much like non take-up of benefits among adults can often be motivated by fear of stigma. Their social inclusion and ability to socialise and build friendships is also impaired by not being able to afford the right clothing or popular pastimes with their fellow pupils. Poverty-related bullying and discrimination can contribute to a lack of faith in the education system and higher drop-out rates among poor pupils and the search for immediate income which in turn is more likely to come from low-paying and/or low-skilled jobs.

“The education system is the mirror of a society where there is still discrimination and it has a high monetary cost especially for those who want to take up higher education.” (Portugal)

**More awareness of socio-economic realities** which can constitute an objective deterrent to academic performance or even attendance as well as a reason for bullying and social exclusion **needs to be raised to support systemic solutions to tackle the problem.** Measures must not translate into further segregation and isolation of learners from vulnerable households in non-mainstream establishments.

Instead, **public education needs to be universal, free and accessible, with free materials and activities for all, as well as school meals, to realise a universal approach to education.** In countries where school materials and activities, but also school meals are not free, families with children from low-income families should be entitled to additional targeted support. A comprehensive, wrap-around support should be provided to families in need, through the provision of adequate income and in-kind support for education purposes, fostering better sensitivity and training on poverty and social exclusion among staff and pupils, and strengthening cooperation between the children, the parents and schools.

Several EAPN members report some **good practice when it comes to increased support for learners with special educational needs** (BE, CZ, DE, ES, IE). In Belgium, the French-speaking community adopted a Pact on Excellence, including inclusiveness and diversity as “quality criteria”, and the German-speaking community has identified “equality” as one main mission of their education system. In Ireland, the “Action Plan for Education 2016-2019” focuses on disadvantaged pupils. The Spanish NRP in 2018 refers to scholarships and study grants aimed at eliminating socio-economic obstacles to education “embedded” into the reform of the Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational Quality (LOMCE). “Quality – Inclusion – Advice – Development Projects” are being implemented in the Czech Republic to improve the inclusiveness and quality education in areas with socially excluded localities and children and pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

“I’m studying to be a hairdresser because that’s the only thing that’s offered in my neighbourhood in the special schooling system that interests me a bit. I would much rather do childcare because in the school holidays I am a monitor and I have learned there that it is much better for me. But that direction is not offered here, and then I would have to go to school 20 kilometres away and that is practically not feasible.” (Belgium)

#### 4.5 Lifelong learning: 2nd chance, formal and informal education

**Too often, lifelong learning (LLL) is “recognised” exclusively from the perspective of the labour market,** so it is not subsidised unless it is professional training meant to deliver on labour market needs. As a result, retired people receive much less financial support or incentives, if any, to continue their adult education, as well as adults who are unemployed, inactive or in precarious jobs. This perspective undermines a rights-based approach which would recognise that people of any age and of all walks of life are entitled to education. People experiencing poverty have a right to education and LLL as much as anybody else yet face additional difficulties in access. **A person-centred and rights- based approach is needed to lifelong learning.**

Across the different countries the bulk of offers and funding dedicated to Continuous Professional Development (CPD) – be it at the workplace or in courses – is actually going to the middle to upper end of the labour market, whereas both CPD and the broader **LLL programmes are underused for entry-level jobs and to support people progressing onto better jobs and employment opportunities.** In a rapidly changing world, people need access to LLL not only to be able to adapt to new challenges of the labour market, but also to participate and respond to new challenges in our societies. This requires a shift to the tax-funding of universal lifelong learning as a fundamental right and public good.

“People need to be empowered to have direct access to education.” (PeP 2018, France)

“I didn’t realise that I could do these sorts of things, to care about other people, advocacy, public speaking, and taking action together.” (PeP 2018, Denmark; unemployed homeless delegate, on the confidence he gained by volunteering)

“For me, it’s all about the education, you see. Twenty years ago, I wouldn’t have thought I was capable of doing what I’m doing now. I’m doing so many different things. I’m chairing meetings, I’m giving presentations, I’m giving people information. Years ago, I wouldn’t have dreamt I’d be capable of doing that.” (Ireland)

Juggling the responsibility of raising a family and working makes it impossible for many adults to find time for additional work-related or non-job-specific offers of adult education. The **direct or indirect cost of courses (e.g. for transport or childcare needed to participate in them) is often difficult to meet for people already in a vulnerable financial situation**. The lack of adequate educational facilities and training centres, particularly close to one’s home or workplace, can be a further deterrent. **People who wish to return to school to obtain a middle- or high-school diploma at a later stage in life are often confronted with a lack of adapted second chance schools and programmes**, as well as stigma for their situation. When and where such initiatives exist, they often feature rigid requirements or unfeasible time constraints (instead of offering night classes, weekend classes, or distance learning), or ask for fees which people experiencing poverty can’t afford. Younger students are sometimes given explicit priority in filling available places.

EAPN members have been underlining **the importance of non-formal and informal learning approaches, instead of formal ones, particularly for young people and adults who have had difficulties in the formal system**. Informal approaches are more often focussed on individual needs not only to acquire relevant skills for employment, but supporting their empowerment, and inclusion in the community. **Rigid formal learning and credentials are overwhelmingly prioritised on today’s labour market**, which leads to a severe overlooking and non-recognition of **a wealth of skills that people acquire through informal or non-formal methods and work experience**. It is important to **set up systems to codify and validate these skills in order to “value” and recognise them for employment**, including those obtained through activism, civic engagement, volunteering, community activities and organising or de facto social work towards peers.

“Non-formal education is important to fill the gap and help children transition into independent working lives.” (PeP 2018)

“I have a lot of skills but no little slip of paper, so basically I am screwed.” (PeP 2018, Denmark)

An example are experts by experience, people with direct experience of poverty and whose expertise in providing policy input in an evidence-based way is officially recognised in some countries (e.g. BE, PT<sup>24</sup>). Recognition of informally acquired skills and life experience is instrumental in empowering people and improving their confidence and sense of self-esteem.

“I want to get my secondary schooling diploma and follow the training to become an ‘expert by experience in poverty and social exclusion’. The centre where I went to ask for information said that the training to become an expert by experience is full for 4 years and that I can only start in 2020. For my secondary school diploma, I can’t start, too, because I must follow both together. Do I have to wait 4 years now? Surely, I could now perfectly take up my secondary education, and then when there is room to start the training as an expert by experience? At least then I have already done something instead of waiting for four years.” (Belgium)

What is needed is the **definition and use of explicit national (and where relevant regional) strategies for an inclusive universal education system**, delivering equal opportunities to all groups to ensure an inclusive pathway to both decent jobs and societal participation. Such strategies should go beyond professional training and employment, or workplace-related upskilling, tackling gaps for different ages and groups, and recognising informal and non-formal methods. Individual training grants should be made available for people to be able to pursue their dreams and fulfil their educational needs. LLL as a fundamental right and public good should be financed by taxes.

#### 4.6 Training and upskilling for the labour market (for the unemployed as well as on the job)

In many countries, **participation in specific training** is a **pre-condition to be entitled to benefits** (e.g. job seekers allowance), services and programmes for active labour market inclusion. Beneficiaries of minimum income schemes (e.g. Hartz IV in DE or Social Insertion Income in PT) are increasingly facing conditionalities. As the availability for labour market activation measures is compulsory they have to (provide proofs of initiatives to) actively search for a job, but as long as these persons do not yet have one they can be referred for socially useful work or training (e.g. in PT, this can be refused, but such a rejection has to be very well justified).

“When I became unemployed after I was 60, I had to do job application training and learn how to deal with colleagues. After my working life of 40 years. Daunting.” (The Netherlands)

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<sup>24</sup> In Portugal, in the scope of the National Strategy for Roma Integration 2013-2020 and the Strategic Plan for Migration 2015-2020, a programme was launched in 2018 for the establishment of Intercultural Mediation Teams to facilitate the integration of Migrant and Roma communities. One of the teams' main goals is to build a “bridge” between students, schools and families to fight school failure, absenteeism and dropout. The experts by experience, however, are not (yet) officially recognised in Portugal.

Shortly after having found a new job and having arranged for a kindergarten place for my children, I found out that I only had a “work performance agreement”. With the help of a social worker I managed to quit this job and sign a new “regular” contract which the social worker had checked beforehand. As a single mother living in a shelter, I should now be able to save some money to move with my children soon to a flat.” (Czech Republic)

**EAPN members have identified a number of more general problems** as to the access to services to facilitate labour market inclusion or re-insertion: poor quality of the courses, waiting time to get access **to those measures and programmes**, lack of relevance of the contents in line with changing labour market needs as they do not help them to acquire the skills needed to (re-)enter the labour market or lack of tailored and adapted support needed for specific groups outside or far from the labour market.

In countries where the provision of vocational education and training (VET) courses is outsourced and commissioned from private companies (e.g. CZ, LV), the **responsible government level or employment service often chooses the lowest bid which in turn, as a rule, also implies low service quality**. Such low-cost courses might also be outdated when it comes to their contents, the technology used and quickly changing qualification and skills demands of the labour markets. In their countries the **reputation of certain providers of VET is low** (e.g. PT), which in the eyes of the employers and the labour market in general devalues the certificates obtained when unemployed persons or persons in retraining measures successfully pass the courses offered by those providers.

“There is no match between the training and the needs” (PeP 2018, Portugal)

Another important barrier is the **costs (out-of-pocket payments) of continuing education and training (CET)** to be borne by the participants, also because of reduced public spending. In Germany, in 2016, 55% of the participants had to co-finance their CET. Given an average annual cost per person of 964€ this clearly disadvantages and will often exclude persons with low incomes from accessing CET – and this is what actually happens, with a share in CET participation being a third lower than the average for people at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Not-surprisingly **lower-skilled persons participated less than half as often in CET than higher-qualified persons** and those with a high proportion of routine tasks about a third less than those with few routine activities. All these discrepancies lead to a further widening of the CET gap. Policies that implied that young adult learners had to take out loans to cover (part of) the costs for advanced apprenticeships failed and set wrong incentives if the objective is to increase the participation in quality vocational training and upskilling for everybody as they set new financial barriers for low-income households<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> In the UK, such a measure introduced in 2013/14 was scrapped again the following year as the number of new starters had decreased by 88%. The rolling out of a new very structured apprenticeships system came to a halt after employers were required to bear more of the costs.

**Age also plays a role for participation in LLL**, with about half the rate for the age bracket 55-64 (8.5%) compared to the overall average (15,1%) in 2018<sup>26</sup>. Older workers risk being considered not “attractive enough” to invest in as the years with a potential return of the investment before achieving retirement age (although legally-defined age limits have been increased in a number of EU MS in recent years) are relatively short. There are **multiple barriers to participation in adult learning**, especially for low-income people, the unemployed or those in precarious jobs, and those under-represented in learning.

These include the lack of access for certain groups, the costs to be paid, the need for childcare for participants with smaller children and the lack of confidence, belief in and clear knowledge of the value of the outcomes of LLL. EAPN members (e.g. UK) inform about comprehensive strategies to promote the employment and training of older workers deployed by governments and other partners<sup>27</sup>. The responsibility of vocational training and LLL must be shared between governments (and the relevant employment services), employees and employers. LLL should be more broadly tax-funded to reflect its broader role and importance for all throughout the life course.

Low levels of basic education on average contribute to an increase in the risk of poverty and social exclusion<sup>28</sup>. In some European countries (such as in SI and SK) the unemployment rate is currently quite low, but the problem is **that most unemployed people also have rather low skills**<sup>29</sup>. This in turn means that it is difficult to upskill them to the level needed for a successful (re-)entry in the labour market and that jobs they might later get often will also be of poor quality, i.e. characterised by low pay and precarious employment and working conditions. Low unemployment rates can mislead adolescents in a way to short-sightedly undervalue the importance of school completion and the acquisition of VET certificates for professional careers. The lack of formal education/VET will at a later stage of their working life leave them without the knowledge base and formal requirements (to qualify) for retaining or upskilling.

EAPN members (e.g. CZ) witness **inadequately suitable labour market inclusion courses for long-term or repeatedly unemployed people who often have additional vulnerabilities** such as mental health problems or homelessness or living in shelters. Standardised group motivational courses for long-term unemployed – even more so if offered to increase participation in and to fulfil “output requirements” for this type of trainings set by governments or the labour administration for the local employment services – are not suitable for a target group which needs tailored support based on individual assessments of the particular hurdles and individualised case work accompanied by social workers or employment coaches to facilitate a successful reinsertion into the labour market.

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<sup>26</sup> The data are taken from the following Eurostat publication: “Adult participation in learning by sex” (2019):

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=sdg\\_04\\_60&plugin=1](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=sdg_04_60&plugin=1)

<sup>27</sup> Since 2017 the British government has a strategy for recruiting, retaining and retraining older workers, “Fuller working lives in partnership with businesses.”

<sup>28</sup> Recent data from Portugal illustrate this reality: 27.7% of the population with basic education is at risk of poverty or social exclusion, compared with 17.3% of the population with secondary education and 6.8% of the population with higher education. Source: *Observatório Nacional de Luta contra a Pobreza, Pobreza e Exclusão Social em Portugal. Análise dos Dados do ICOR/EU SILC 2018, EAPN Portugal, Outubro de 2019*

<sup>29</sup> EAPN IE reports that in Ireland people with no formal or primary education are more than three times more likely to be unemployed (14%) than those with a third level qualification (4%).

A good literacy level, the capacity to read and understand general and work-related texts and basic maths knowledge are preconditions for successful labour market inclusion<sup>30</sup>. **Adult literacy services, courses in the official language and one-to-one tuition in second-chance adult basic education** can help overcome these difficulties (IE). For such courses to be successful they need to be offered over a longer period and with sufficient tuition hours and they need to be “framed” by flanking measures such as quality childcare, at least partial coverage of travel costs and tax reliefs or other financial incentives to return to education paving the way for entry into VET or the labour market directly.

EAPN members highlight **other issues that go beyond the aspects of design, content, financing and accessibility of upskilling and retraining courses**: Training courses for long-term unemployed persons with care obligations for children (as with later regarding a job offer) can only be taken up if there is an **adapted offer of affordable childcare services**. Single parents are most in need of crèches, kindergartens and pre-schools with longer opening hours (and later of workplaces offering “family-friendly” working time and shift models). If the main forms of professional qualifications are short-term courses, workshops and most importantly informal learning on the job (as this is the case e.g. in the NL and NO, where participation levels in post-initial training activities has been relatively high in the last years), **particular problems in access to VET arise for people with mental health issues vulnerabilities or auditory impairment, for older employees and for those not entitled to labour market inclusion benefits**. **Debt collection regimes** where executors have access to the bank account of the overindebted person and where any income from employment would be immediately retained (as is the case e.g. in CZ) negatively impact on the motivation of long-term unemployed people to attend and successfully complete labour market insertion courses (and also favour employment in the “grey economy”).

In a number of countries (e.g. FR) **VET is mainly offered to people who are already in employment whereas VET should be more strongly geared to persons outside the labour market and towards offers of labour market entry jobs** to support a successful return to or entrance into the labour market and – through lifelong learning – into quality employment. EAPN members (e.g. in NO) also report that people from the most vulnerable groups – those with disabilities or suffering from mental illness or receiving health-related benefits or the beneficiaries of the minimum income scheme – have the least access to training and upskilling measures, for the very reason of the specific barrier they face (and even though training courses exist).

EAPN members state that the bulk of vocational training policies for vulnerable groups are designed with a labour market perspective, to improve productivity and reduce inactivity, rather than **pursuing the aim of implementing a holistic, rights-based approach to education and training, aimed also at personal development and at fostering social participation and inclusion**.

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<sup>30</sup> International Skills Surveys (such as the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies 2012) illustrate persistent difficulties with reading and understanding texts (e.g. one in six adults in Ireland) – but only 12% thereof are in literacy courses – and basic maths (e.g. one in four adults in Ireland).

#### 4.7 Young people, including NEETs and early school leaving

One of the headline targets of the Social Scoreboard in the first section dealing with “Equal opportunities and access to the labour market” is the percentage of **early school leavers**. According to the latest figures<sup>31</sup>, **this indicator stands at 10.6% in the EU28 (12.2% for boys/young men, 8.8% for girls/young women), only 0.5% shy of the headline target of 10% set by the Europe 2020 Strategy**. It, however, ranges from 3.1% in Croatia to 18.3% in Spain. The relative share of the male population aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary education<sup>32</sup> and who were not in further education or training during the four weeks preceding the EU Labour Force Survey (LFS), as a rule, is higher than for the female population. This was also the case for 2017, where it stood at 12.2%, compared to 8.9% for the female population. Again, for both sexes the differences between EU MS was rather pronounced, ranging from 3.8% in Croatia to 21.8% in Spain for men (2017) and from 2.2% in Croatia to 18.1% in Romania for women (2017). **Compared to the starting year of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the percentages of early school leavers, however, has gone down by about a quarter** for all early school leavers where the rate in 2010 was 13.9% in total (15.8% from the male and 11.9% from the female population). While these numbers may tell a success story, **great disparities persist, both between Member States (BE, DE, IE, IT, ES) as well as between specific groups (AT, BE, DE, NO, PL, SE, UK)**. E.g. in NO the highest rates of NEETs (and long persistence as NEETs) are found among recipients of health-related benefits such as work assessment allowance and disability benefit. A significant proportion are early school leavers. EAPN members report that early school leaving is still a problem for communities which can get very easily lost in mainstream provision e.g. Roma and Travellers. Some countries (e.g. ES, PT) also have high rates of pupils with **grade repetition** (even in primary schools) which mainly affects those from vulnerable family backgrounds.

Most EAPN members point out the **strong link between the social and economic situation children (and their families) are in and poor educational attendance and attainment** for a range of subjects (as e.g. reported in NO). They underline that family poverty and discrimination impacts on all aspects of a child’s and adolescent’s experience of school and policy interventions to improve educational outcomes need to be accompanied by far broader social policy initiatives to reduce poverty (IFSW). Which in turn means that adequate minimum income policies, but also targeted family and child benefits will help poorer parents to push their children to complete their school education and not to look for paid (low quality) employment when the school obligation ends. A number of EAPN members highlight that many education policies deal with the effects of early drop out and poor educational attainment too superficially, without sufficiently taking into account the **complex reasons behind a poor school performance** and without delving into an analysis of the structural, root causes of both issues.

EAPN members believe that the absence of an overarching approach to breaking the cycle of poverty and disadvantage in education is highly likely to undermine the efficacy of policies to combat drop-out and poor educational attainment among children and adolescents living in poverty. Poverty itself is also more complex and cannot be eradicated without structural changes to ensure a fairer distribution and redistribution of income, wealth and other resources. They also report that the **underlying poverty dimension and often related health and social care issues**<sup>33</sup> are not systematically considered when

<sup>31</sup> Eurostat 2018 provisional figures, retrieved on 12 December 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Lower secondary education refers to ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) 2011 level 0-2 for data from 2014 onwards and to ISCED 1997 level 0-3C short for data up to 2013.

<sup>33</sup> They can affect e.g. children living with domestic abuse or substance abuse, children and young people with mental and physical disabilities and

defining causes and proposing solutions, and that no social impact assessments are carried out on suggested policies.

My name is Radim, I am 15 years old and I didn't pass the exam from Czech language in ninth grade, so I didn't finish the school. When my mom talked to the social worker, I was there to ask if I can get driver's license, but I can only drive when I'm 18. I guess I'll try to pass the exam from Czech language again in September (...)" (Czech Republic)

"Make learning attractive, for free and realise that not everyone has the capacity to learn."  
(Netherlands)

**An important contextual factor can be the relative weight of private schools** in the educational system (with increasing numbers e.g. in SE and UK). By introducing, as a rule, financial barriers due to (higher) school fees to be paid, they favour less social mix in cities and regions and unfair advantage to already privileged children. Stronger social segregation also further increases the gap in the educational offer available to children from different social classes. **EAPN members see and defend education as a public good.** Its privatisation or marketisation undermines the commitment to universal public services and risks leaving behind pupils and students from households in less advantageous financial situations. In some cases, the quality of second-level education certificates of young people will neither facilitate their access to a decent job nor to third level education and training. This is a problem against the backdrop of higher academic levels needed to enter even apprenticeships (and consecutively pursue professional routes and careers with decent jobs). Participants at the 2018 PeP Meeting brought up additional personal causes or factors for early school leaving: hurdles and pressure perceived by and discrimination experienced by children with learning difficulties, lack of school counselling, lack of additional resources and staff for pupils needing specific support and the perception of irrelevance of educational efforts and attainment for social mobility.

"Yes, education could be a way out of poverty, but people don't believe in it!" (Portugal)

As starting points for Member States are very different, the same holds true for the level of **national ambition concerning efforts to reduce early school drop-out**. In countries that feel that they have reached the EU-level average target, governments seem to have stopped paying attention to the topic (e.g. PL) –lacking any reference to school dropouts in their NRP for 2018 – as targets are seen as guiding tools, whereas efforts to continue progress should be ongoing. Some EAPN members have also indicated administrative procedures to get NEETs out of the statistics without necessarily effectively addressing the related problems on the ground.

The Swedish case demonstrates that, even if countries have reached the EU target, that complacency is not the right choice, but rather continued efforts to keep the rate low are needed. The situation got worse again – with a continuous increased from 7.1% in 2014 to 9.3% (provisional data) in 2018 – and requires due monitoring.

**Promising examples follow a “no child left behind approach”** linked to innovative approaches to closely monitor and accompany early school leavers (e.g. in NO and FI) or to engage them again in education, e.g. in non-formal settings or second chance schools.

The other headline indicator in the field of education and vocational training, the **number of young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET)** in the age group 15 to 24 also slightly decreased between 2010 and 2018. NEETs are more likely to suffer detriments to their physical and mental health, to be unemployed, to have low wages and to have low quality work later in life. The total NEET rate was 10.5% in 2018 compared to 12.8% in 2010. For male adolescents and young men, the percentages were 10.1% in 2018 and 12.4% in 2010, and for female adolescents and young women 10.9% in 2018 and 13.2% 8 years earlier. These figures are probably under-estimates. **Key “ingredients” of policies and programmes for NEET to find sustained employment** are guarantees by governments or public agencies for young workers to obtain a suitable place in relevant education or VET, targeted and individualised job placement support, financial support to the expansion of apprenticeship schemes, reforms of technical education modules, improved careers advice and exemption of social insurance payments for the employers of young workers (e.g. in the UK). In several countries often ESF co-funded programmes aim at improving the educational outcomes for disadvantaged young people, of those with learning difficulties or with disabilities.

EAPN members indicate that **measures which help to reduce early school dropout and longer spells for young people outside employment and education (NEET)** can still be improved. One tool is career guidance<sup>34</sup>, another a more frequent and systematic use of work experiences from placements in enterprises and public administration, a third the strengthened coordination between young people, their parents, schools and local authorities. Such measures would need to be underpinned by joined up working between the young person, families, schools, local communities and employers and a more effective participation and empowerment of young people themselves in schools and outside. They also highlight that school and education systems are not always able to deal well with differences as to the level of intellectual development and maturity of pupils in the same class (of the same or older age, having repeated classes) as some pupils might be able to cope with the formal and theoretical requirements of the secondary school system only at a later age. They also report that practical knowledge needed in a lot of artisanal professions is not always valued as highly as theoretical-conceptual knowledge by the school system (e.g. NL and NO) and that many students feel pressure to study and to take the tertiary education pathway. EAPN members finally hinted to a possible higher risk for early school leavers when it comes to the abuse of alcohol and drugs.

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<sup>34</sup> This tool, however, is less effective if not standardised (as e.g. in CZ) and suffering from a fragmentation of responsibilities between secondary schools, the Labour Offices and other institutions that provide career guidance, whether private or established by the region.

#### 4.8 Digital divide, online learning, access to technology, digital skills

In today's world **digital skills** are **required in most jobs** (and the number of jobs where at least basic digital skills are indispensable is likely to grow in the coming years) and also in schools. They are **crucial also for finding information, for banking services and for citizen-oriented services offered by the municipalities, regions, national government, employment offices, social insurance bodies and national health services**. Digital inclusion can be measured by the extent to which people have basic digital skills to manage information, communicate, transact, solve problems and create content. EAPN members identify **unequal access to the internet (also via mobile phone) and computers** – not least for elderly people, people with disabilities<sup>35</sup>, unemployed and those with low education levels, but also those with low(er) income<sup>36</sup> – **as a key challenge to overcome the digital divide**.

At the 2018 PeP Meeting, **digital exclusion was identified as a great barrier to education**, as children nowadays are often expected to do homework or coursework in the classroom using new technology that they, however, don't own. This hinders learning and stigmatises children and parents, making them feel embarrassed about being poor. Participants demanded that the **recognition of access to digital technology as a basic right, be guaranteed by the state**. This should also include better network coverage in rural and remote areas, support to cover electricity costs and Internet subscriptions, as well as training and information about data privacy.

“Digital exclusion is a big barrier ... with children sometimes expected to do homework using new technology that they don't have at home.” (PeP 2018)

**According to recent Eurostat data in 2018, 87% of EU citizens have access to internet digital devices**, with only 6 out of the 28 EU MS (BG, GR, LT, PT, RO, SK) attaining rates of less than 80%<sup>37</sup>. Overcoming digital exclusion for the 1 out of 7 Europeans, largely living in poor and/or vulnerable households should be a priority for national policy makers and governments. Building on the right for everybody to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning as stipulated in principle 1 of the European Pillar of Social Rights and as upheld by Article 14 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights - **equal opportunities for education in digital skills in schools and access to training in digital skills and online learning for the unemployed are key**. This right should be “updated” and extended to a **right to access to the internet and to a computer, backed by free/affordable local education, and cultural and community facilities** including schools or libraries to guarantee this right also for those people with insufficient monetary resources. If we want to guarantee access to computers and the internet and the related education and training services for everybody, including those with lower incomes, baskets of goods and services allowing for an adequate minimum income need to be reworked and **reference** budgets have to be adapted.

<sup>35</sup> In the UK 56% of the non-users of the internet were disabled in 2017.

<sup>36</sup> In the UK e.g., in 2017 only about 50% of low-income households (under £10,000 per annum) had an internet connection, but almost every household with an income above £40,000 had a connection. (EAPN UK)

<sup>37</sup> See for detailed information this article by Eurostat (June 2019), [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Digital\\_economy\\_and\\_society\\_statistics\\_-\\_households\\_and\\_individuals#Internet\\_access](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Digital_economy_and_society_statistics_-_households_and_individuals#Internet_access)

“It is necessary to ensure continuing education for socially excluded people. (...) There is no financial means to (...) pay for education according to my wishes (...). The social worker told me that he has nothing to recommend if I want to educate myself and I am a mother with children staying in a shelter.” (Czech Republic)

“I am a human, not a robot.” (The Netherlands)

The **average access rates to the internet and digital devices fall for older people**, from 87% across the board to 78% in the age group 55-64 and to 51% for those aged 65 to 74. No data is available e.g. differentiated by income quintile. The aspect of non-access to digital devices and the internet is not directly included in the indicator on severe material deprivation as agreed by the Social Protection Committee and used by Eurostat in EU-SILC<sup>38</sup>. An underestimated factor for a **sustained generational digital divide** is the higher share of older people living in rural areas with low internet connectivity. Neither is the link to poverty and social exclusion much explored. These differences only increase when it comes to the impact of increasing digitalisation of public and banking services which in turn can contribute to people experiencing less autonomy at the same time as increasing their social isolation and exclusion.

In line with EAPN’s understanding **of education as a public good and a service in the general interest**, some countries have “defined” **libraries as crucial points of free access for digital use and support**. They can work with private sector partners to support basic digital skills and/or to develop a digital skill offer. However, library provision has been cut in austerity years (e.g. in the UK), opening times have been limited or they heavily rely on volunteer workers. EAPN members (CZ) highlight that digital skills stemming from the use of social media don’t necessarily correspond with the skills needed to enter and succeed in the labour market and that **the costs of online courses can exclude poorer people** if they are not entitled to financial support. They also underline the high hurdles and lower interest of people over 50, especially those with lower income and lower education to acquire digital skills (CZ). In this context it is a problem if national education and training strategies disregard this challenge and don’t foresee measures for adult education targeted to those groups (CZ).

“When my internet stops working, I see the following phrase: If you have a problem, please look at our website under FAQ. – How???” (The Netherlands)

EAPN members (e.g. in GR, HU, RO) highlight **specific challenges in relation to the use of digital devices, in particular smart phones, for certain groups of the population**. Smart phones are often the only tool for **many refugees and asylum seekers** to stay in touch with family members and friends from their countries of origin, but also with institutions and NGOs supporting them in their host countries. The fact that refugees or asylum seekers own and use a smart phone does not mean that these refugees or asylum seekers are rich or get overly generous benefits compared to the domestic

<sup>38</sup> See page [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Material\\_deprivation](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Material_deprivation) for the severe material deprivation indicator which gives the percentage of the population that cannot afford at least three out of nine items considered indispensable or at least desirable to financially be able to lead a decent life

population. EAPN members stress the need to highlight and communicate this reality better to the general public in order to counter disinformation or xenophobia by parties, organisations, media, etc. Misconceptions can also develop if Roma children and youth use smart phones and show living conditions and ways of living in a way which strengthens rather than reduces existing prejudices in the society or media against them.

#### 4.9 Specific barriers in accessing education, training and lifelong learning for key categories

Efforts to support educational completion and attainment to reach vulnerable, marginalised groups need to be continued and strengthened in most countries. EAPN members report that early school leaving is still a problem for communities who can get lost very easily in mainstream provision e.g. Roma and Travellers. It is no surprise that **indicators for specific groups such as migrants (BE, DE), ethnic minorities (UK)<sup>39</sup>, Travellers and Roma children (CZ, HU, IE) continue to indicate less favourable educational outcomes and important disparities compared to the national averages.** In order to make a difference in the lives of these people, transparent and **comprehensive strategies for inclusion and educational activities have to be developed and/or rolled out,** (combined with integrated inclusion strategies ensuring access to quality jobs, income support and other services).

EAPN members working with specific groups such as Roma or undocumented migrants and on the improvement of their access to and attainment in the education and training systems report that **segregation processes from the “mainstream education system” are increasing.** This is particularly the case where specific groups such as Roma children lack adequate access and/or face direct or indirect discrimination and where inclusive education approaches are not in place. Lack of legal status in European countries affects the educational entitlements migrants and asylum-seekers have in the receiving country, alongside receiving insufficient psychological support, or suffering various forms of direct or indirect discrimination and suffering from ineffective immigration systems.

Several national EAPN networks are involved in campaigns to get inclusive education systems, also **aiming to get a legal obligation to have “inclusion” as a core principle for education and VET systems.** Provisions exist for the local authorities stipulating the **duty to provide suitable education for all children resident in their area** in some countries. This includes children of undocumented migrants or asylum seekers, supported by the national EAPN networks.

“Make education free and accessible for all, so that all people have equal opportunities.” (The Netherlands)

“If politicians feel that education is so important, WHY is it not 100% FREE?” (The Netherlands)

<sup>39</sup> The UK has set diversity targets for new sorts of apprenticeships for black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) apprentices and by apprentices with a learning difficulty, disability or health problem, which have been achieved, but even the National Audit Office has stated that they lack ambition, a view shared by EAPN UK.

**EU and non-EU migrant workers are often trapped in low-skill and/or precarious jobs** in their host country, even though they have higher education certificates and/or formal qualifications and many years of professional experience in their home countries. In Germany e.g. this leads to an overrepresentation of migrant workers with EU citizenship in low-wage sectors – e.g. 41% in DE –, above average risks of poverty and a clear underrepresentation in the dual VET system. **Most refugees and asylum seekers are facing similar realities and challenges**, including the lack of recognition of their professional certificates and experiences for which no written proof is available and the difficulties with getting validation of informally acquired knowledge and competences<sup>40</sup>. For this group access to such procedures is often either blocked or delayed due to their residence status, i.e. due to hurdles that should be addressed to facilitate the economic and social integration of refugees and asylum seekers and to allow them to earn an own income, to reduce their dependency on social benefits and to feel a sense of recognition. One possible solution (for regulated professions) could be fast-track procedures (existing e.g. in SE). In addition, **in the education and VET system, many refugees and asylum seekers need psychological support to deal with the traumas they have experienced**.

Across countries the **capacity of mainstream structures needs to be enhanced to engage with specific groups such as migrants, Travellers and Roma** appropriately, to offer them good supports and services and to support them to progress on from education and/or VET into decent employment.

EAPN UK reports that although children from these groups are more likely to be identified as **having special educational needs, they are less likely to get support and their parents have difficulty in navigating the system to get the support they need**. For groups facing specific barriers in accessing education, VET and LLL, discrimination in the labour market and educational system must be addressed.

Wrongly implemented support measures for Roma children have resulted in more school segregation (e.g. in PT), i.e. by sending Roma children to special education schools or more indirectly by setting up Roma-only classes. **Segregation in schools further stigmatises pupils and lowers their self-esteem**. Participants in the 2018 PeP meeting highlighted the fear parents of children with disabilities have of being stigmatised, unfairly judged, rejected or excluded by teachers.

Some EAPN members (such as PT) are involved in the **development and realisation of ESF-funded projects to improve the professional and social inclusion of Roma communities through training and workplace practice**. However, severe challenges exist with low literacy levels. **These additional hurdles don't allow for the successful participation in any follow-up measures of labour market insertion**. EAPN members underline that even though Roma have the same access to education as all other pupils, general discrimination patterns come into play when they look for a job after successful graduation from secondary schools (CZ, PT). They, however, also highlight cultural-behavioural hurdles in mentioning that many Roma families traditionally consider that school attendance, at least beyond a certain age, is not so important or necessary for the economic activities they are going to develop, implying a devaluation of the school by parents and lacking efforts in the monitoring of the schooling of their children. Contractual arrangements in minimum income schemes i.e. conditionality (e.g. in PT in the Social Insertion Income) have had the effect of an increased attendance of Roma children in

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<sup>40</sup> EAPN Spain identifies lengthy proceedings (which can take several years) and high costs for the recognition of diploma and study certificates obtained abroad as an important barrier for migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers for entering the Spanish labour market. Frequently, the applicants are required to pass several exams at the Spanish educational centres and universities which add to the delays and complications

kindergartens and schools<sup>41</sup>. On the other hand, **several countries still show a high degree of exclusion of Roma communities from education and VET**, with 64% of Roma aged 16 to 24 not being in education, employment and training (NEET) in 2017<sup>42</sup>.

Some EAPN members underline the importance of and support in **integration courses for migrants** offered when they arrive in a country, with language courses as well as information on the political system, the society, the functioning of the labour market as mandatory components (e.g. NL). Although **migrants often experience discriminatory behaviour**, their lower educational level and lack of further education and training can additionally be a significant obstacle to achieving labour market integration and accessing decent jobs and employment conditions, independently of the fact of being a migrant worker. Several EAPN members report that **accessing education is not the problem, but getting a job after school remains difficult for ethnic minorities** (e.g. NO).

#### 4.10 Specific barriers in accessing education, training and lifelong learning for people with a disability or health issue

Despite the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities<sup>43</sup> and the right to education there are **still many barriers to education faced by many people with disabilities**. They include:

- 1) the lack of accessibility, both in terms of physically inaccessible buildings and unsuitable learning materials (e.g. for deaf people),
- 2) discrimination and prejudice which prevents people with disabilities from accessing education on equal terms to others,
- 3) exclusion or segregation from mainstream school and other learning settings and
- 4) an inferior quality of education, including in mainstream settings where children with disabilities have been 'integrated' into the existing non-inclusive system. **Other barriers people with difficulties face to education, VET and personal or professional progression** can include negative attitudes, lack of communication due to hearing, writing, speaking or understanding disabilities, social barriers and policy barriers related to lack of awareness or enforcement of unreasonable existing regulations.

**People with disabilities are at a higher risk of poverty** and are less likely to have higher qualifications and more likely to be low paid, even when they have good formal professional qualifications. Finding and sustaining work especially with fluctuating health conditions and medical appointments is very challenging. People with disabilities face higher costs for equipment, heating and transport, and social benefits do not fully cover these costs.

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<sup>41</sup> EAPN Portugal highlights that school has been gradually gaining greater importance with Roma families, providing them with hope and the possibility of their children having a future that is not guided by poverty, exclusion and discrimination. At the same time, the family and society itself need to be partners in building a better future for these children. However, for this relationship to work, it is necessary that the identity of Roma culture is not lost, its inclusion promoted and the biases and representations of Roma parents in relation to and against school are fought.

<sup>42</sup> Ergo Network 2018: The European Pillar of Social Rights and European Semester as tools for delivering Social Europe, <http://ergonetwork.org/2018/10/the-european-pillar-of-social-rights-and-european-semester-as-tools-for-delivering-social-europe/>

<sup>43</sup> It was adopted on 13 December 2006, entered into force on 3 May 2008 and is ratified by all 28 EU MS, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

Against the backdrop of these persisting challenges, EAPN members believe that a **human rights-based approach is crucial in accessing education, training and lifelong learning for people with disabilities and health issues**. They observe that the **principles of empowerment, participation and non-discrimination are still (at least partly) disregarded “on the ground”**. EAPN members advocate for a human rights-based approach to address physical and mental disabilities which implies empowerment, participation and non-discrimination of the people with disabilities. The **European Disability Strategy** considers some of the issues and problems of funding and access and is further developed in 2020.

**Barriers accessing formal or informal/non-formal education and vocational training exist for people with disabilities and health issues<sup>44</sup>**, in particular people with mental health or with drug misuse challenges. They need the time and space to be able to move in and out of provision, e.g. supported by modular education and VET learning offers. Poverty can often be a consequence of having a disability or health issue, facing the challenges of accessing appropriate education and training at various life stages which would facilitate access to quality jobs as well as lack of recognition of lifelong learning and inadequate income support.

**People with disabilities face all the barriers for people experiencing poverty plus overcoming discrimination related to disability as well as lack of funding and support services**. EAPN share the view that more qualified and well-paid staff support in classrooms would be needed to help students with mental disabilities individually. Indicators continue to show less favourable educational outcomes for people with special education needs due to disability (HU, IE) – very likely carried on into adulthood, with restricted access to lifelong learning, training or jobs. **The attainment gap between people with disabilities and those without** is therefore far exceeding the EU average (e.g. in BE or NO<sup>45</sup>). Where educational facilities still exist, the transition to the labour market might be hampered for people with disabilities or chronic diseases by **the lack of adapted workplaces (e.g. with assistive tools) or sheltered workplaces (e.g. in CZ and NO) as well as the non-refund or insufficient funding (by public or social insurance budgets) of personal assistance** (e.g. in NO). EAPN members also report that systems providing specific education for every child with additional needs disappeared because of austerity measures, which nowadays leaves these children in the regular school system but without additional time and support provided for them (NL).

“I am 35 years old and have a slight mental handicap. I come to the social service 'socio-therapeutic workshops. (...) But I do not get a job, I am very slow, and my employers refuse a job to me as I am unable to earn a minimum wage.” (Czech Republic)

The following **challenges** have been **identified as to older people’s needs and demands for education and training**:

- 1) lack of offers tailored to older people’s needs, resulting in pastime activities rather than courses where skills are transmitted;
- 2) low(er) number of educational offers in rural areas;

<sup>44</sup> EAPN Netherlands reports recent figures according to which 17% of the people who would like to follow further education can’t do so because of health issues. (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2019)

<sup>45</sup> EAPN Norway illustrates this problem with data showing that 64% of children with physical disabilities do not complete secondary education in their country, compared to only 17% of the general population.

- 3) higher probability of lower digital skills and access options and still reduced government spending on lifelong learning and education for older persons, not yet recovered from the levels before austerity policies in many countries, as reported for the years between 2011 and 2016 by EAPN members<sup>46</sup>.

These **reductions in public financial support often happened on top of already inadequate budgeting for educational services and reduced budgets for social services to support families with the range of issues that lead to social exclusion**. For them it is crucial that **migrant children with special needs get a person-oriented qualified support**, e.g. by means of a school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator.

Within EAPN members there is no uniform view about mainstreaming versus special schools for children and adolescents with disabilities. Human rights law, however, seeks to tackle these issues directly by **placing obligations on states to respect, protect, and fulfil the right to education of people with disabilities, through the implementation of "inclusive education"**. There is a large consensus amongst EAPN members that **inclusive schooling**<sup>47</sup>, not segregated schooling, must be the way forward and that policies and services need to be child/person centred focusing on inclusivity, overcoming barriers and discrimination. It is also felt that in general primary and some secondary schools are improving and working towards inclusiveness. In order to pursue this approach however, **additional support from social workers, psychologists or care assistants and targeted funding** from the health and social care system is needed. If the team around the child is not there it puts pressure on schools, blocks opportunities and affects access. **Placing pupils with disabilities within mainstream classes without also making structural changes to e.g. curriculum or teaching strategies does not constitute inclusion**<sup>48</sup>.

"Value every child and reward education according to ability. Also give children from special secondary education a recognised diploma." (Netherlands)

"Let the hands flutter." (sign language) (Netherlands)

There are also great benefits for all children learning together in order to overcome differences and discrimination and promote common understanding. While appropriate funding has been identified as the key condition by EAPN members, many countries were also hit by cuts in education budgets, e.g. affecting the assessment of special needs (which can take up to a year in NL or the UK) before pupils can attend inclusive schooling programmes (during the waiting time they stay excluded from the school system). For the most part, these cuts have not been recuperated.

<sup>46</sup> For 2017 some of our networks (BE, ES, IT, PT, RO, SE) signalled stepped up investment in education. E.g. in Sweden the government invested a total of SEK 11 billion (about 1.05 billion €) in schools in 2017, supporting smaller classrooms, more staff in the early years of compulsory school, a reading-writing-arithmetic guarantee, reinforced special needs education, leadership in the classroom, teacher training and teacher pay.

<sup>47</sup> There is a distinction between integration and inclusion of children and young people with disabilities in education and VET: The latter involves modifying content, teaching methods, and structures to provide all students with an equal and participatory learning experience which meets their individual requirements.

<sup>48</sup> Source: <https://www.right-to-education.org/issue-page/marginalised-groups/persons-disabilities>

The education systems also need good capacities to help identify and evaluate different levels and types of intellectual disabilities at an early stage. **Digital devices could be a great resource for people with disabilities**, but sufficient funding needs to be made available so that everybody, independent of the level of income, can actually use them.

## 5. EAPN policy recommendations on education and training

Given the broad range of topics covered by the EAPN Key Issues and Promising Practices Paper on education, VET and LLL and EAPN's main mission to promote a rights-based, social and sustainable development model tackling the causes of poverty, social exclusion and inequalities, the **policy recommendations identified in this chapter look at legislation, policies and initiatives from the angle of their direct relevance for the reduction of poverty, social exclusion, segregation and discrimination.**

They were suggested by EAPN members or deduced from the thematic analysis presented in chapter 4. Key recommendations for decision makers at the national level (or at other policy and government levels within EU MS) and at the EU level (for 7 of the 10 topics) are put first, other recommendations are listed in italics. This chapter with the policy recommendations on education and training follows the structure of the 10 thematic fiches of chapter 4.

**Annex 1 contains many examples of promising practice identified by EAPN members** to illustrate quite a lot of the policy recommendations below.

### 5.1 Inclusive education, combating segregation, discrimination, bullying

#### **National (and sub-national) level**

- Elaborate policies and an adequately resourced inclusive education system for all. This could consider including higher salaries for teachers who have done additional pedagogic and didactical training courses and/or modules to better support pupils with special needs or children from deprived backgrounds.
- Stipulate "inclusion" for children and young people with disabilities and other special needs as well as for children from deprived socio-economic backgrounds as a legal requirement for the education and training systems, countering segregation. In order to achieve this aim, provide the necessary funding, qualified teachers and other personnel and equipment and adapt schools and vocational training facilities to be fully accessible to all.
- Adapt baskets of goods and services as part of national reference budgets for adequate minimum income schemes to cover all costs, including computer equipment and internet access (and the related education and training services) also for low-income households.
- *Provide public policy measures, backed by adequate funding, to increase personalised attention and support within mainstream school settings for children with specific needs, including those with disabilities.*
- *Introduce, in the schooling curricula, lessons and activities aimed at promoting diversity and inter-cultural understanding, as well as life skills.*
- *Develop and implement effective antidiscrimination and anti-bullying policies in schools and better train teachers herein.*

- *Establish mechanisms for reporting and requesting help, easily accessible and clearly identified in each school or centre, at every educational level and establish a rapid response mechanism to detect, analyse and respond to each of the received complaints, integrated by interdisciplinary experts, and supervised by the competent education inspection authority.*
- *Put in place student admission policies that regulate concentration levels according to socio-economic criteria in a more systemic manner, e.g. by defining minimum and maximum quota or schooling zones that favour the reduction of socio-economic segregation.*
- *Design compensation and attraction policies which provide more resources and offer special incentives for teachers to help mitigate the effects of high socio-economic segregation levels.*
- *Put in place appropriate settings and mechanisms to support a broad consultation process, involving schools, parents, and pupils, to identify problems and find solutions together.*

### **European level**

- Implement the European Pillar of Social Rights by elaborating an ambitious Action Plan and by setting policy targets in a more comprehensive Europe 2030 Strategy and in the context of an overarching Anti-Poverty Strategy, particularly as to education policy and legislative action in relation to principles 1 (Education, training and lifelong learning), 3 (Equal opportunities), 11 (Childcare and support to children) and 17 (Inclusion of people with disabilities).
- Require systematic implementation through the European Semester, pressing for implementation of social rights and access to universal, quality and affordable education, VET and LLL and prioritising CSRs for those EU MS which have made low progress or have major problems with ensuring equal treatment for poor, or excluded groups.
- Include in the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) and more specifically in the ESF+ dedicated funding to support targeted investments in more inclusive education systems, in support of informal and non-formal education in particular for NEET and adult learners as well as accessibility, awareness raising and anti-discrimination measures.
- Introduce socio-economic background as grounds for discrimination in all European anti-discrimination legislation and support disaggregated data collection on educational attainment and completion to reflect all key groups.
- Encourage and ensure the active participation of children, youth and adults in educational systems and services as well as in dialogue processes to develop and monitor educational and training policies and outcomes.

## 5.2 Quality, accessibility and affordability of formal education systems

### **National (and sub-national) level**

- Invest in universal, free provision of education. In the short-term provide adequate financial support for families and students to be able to afford uniforms, books and other school materials, transport, nutritious and healthy meals either by general minimum income schemes or by additional top-up benefits.
- Step-up investment in both teacher training as well as schools, not least to help improve the quality of education and to guarantee inclusive education, by allocating higher per-pupil funding from state budgets (and also by opening new schools where needed). Impose maximum fees so that schools are not able to over-charge, thus resisting efforts to commodify

education and further deregulate its provision and reducing the incidence and amount of student loans.

- Promote a school curriculum which adequately incorporates creativity, critical thinking, life skills, and personal development.

### 5.3 Early childhood education and care

#### **National (and sub-national) level**

- Invest in the creation of quality, free or affordable, accessible early childhood education and care facilities for all children, to avoid overcrowding and ensure personalised care, education and support for each child, including those requiring accessibility infrastructure and equipment.
- Support low income parents to be able to access early childhood education and care through providing families with adequate income support and improving the affordability of childcare facilities and services.
- Fund and elaborate and/or enforce policies and measures to increase participation rates in early childhood education and care for children from lower-income households or from families facing particular risks of social exclusion, segregation or discrimination.
- *Improve the attractiveness and quality of the early childhood education and care system, by providing decent wages and working conditions for staff, as well as adequate training, including on how to deal with issues related to poverty and exclusion.*

#### **European level**

- Introduce a European Child Guarantee to ensure that every child in Europe, including those at risk of poverty and social exclusion, has access to free, quality early childhood education and care, as part of implementing an integrated Investing in Children Strategy – 3 pillars (access to resources, services and participation) and enable the targeted use of the European Social Fund/ESF+ to support the objectives of the Child Guarantee.
- Design EU-level policies, programmes and funding schemes in a way to be supportive and promote increased participation rates in early childhood education and care for children from lower-income households or from families facing particular risks of social exclusion, segregation or discrimination.
- Enable the targeted use of the appropriate EU funds to support better access to affordable, quality early childhood education and care in Member States and to support the Child Guarantee and overarching integrated strategies to tackle child poverty and promote child-well-being.
- Redefine higher numerical targets for the indicator “children in early childhood education and care” (in particular for those below 3 years) compared to those set in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy in order to stay politically ambitious and economically and socially sustainable, and set benchmarks for the quality and continuity of early childhood education as well as coverage by adequate opening hours. This should be done in the context of a comprehensive Europe 2030 Strategy, encompassing an Anti-Poverty Strategy, and when elaborating and implementing the Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

## 5.4 Exploring the links between socio-economic background and educational attainment / completion

### **National (and sub-national) level**

- There are no poor children in rich families! Tackle family poverty by ensuring adequate income and income support, including minimum income schemes and other subsidies, to ensure decent living standards (housing, nutrition, clothing, healthcare etc).
- Children from poor families should also benefit from extensive, accessible, free extra-curricular activities/trips or after hours tutoring, including language lessons.
- *Ensure sufficient funding for schools not to have to transfer substantial shares of the costs of materials and activities to parents.*
- *Provide more and better trained personnel, particularly social and outreach workers, to assist schools in liaising with low-income families and to foster better cooperation with parents in finding solutions.*
- *Raise awareness on socio-economic background as cause for bullying, discrimination and social exclusion, including by improving the awareness of teachers and other pupils of the realities of poverty and social exclusion.*

## 5.5 Lifelong learning: 2nd chance, formal and informal education

### **National (and sub-national) level**

- Invest in comprehensive lifelong learning systems, backed by adequate funding, to ensure that education is available, accessible, and affordable for all groups throughout the life cycle.
- Lifelong learning policies should promote personal training accounts and educational leave from work coupled with an adequate and affordable offer of formal, non-formal and informal learning, particularly for those not in formal employment.
- Develop creative and ambitious whole-government strategies for literacy, numeracy and digital skills for adults. All adults with low literacy, numeracy and digital skills should have access to high quality and relevant learning programmes with local education and training providers and completely free of charge.
- Ensure free or subsidised provision of education and training throughout the life cycle for older people, those on a low income, and people with disabilities, to facilitate independent living, healthy ageing, and social inclusion.
- Set up and improve national certification systems for the validation of non-formal education and life skills, i.e. competences acquired outside the formal education and VET system, in linewith the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>49</sup>.
- *Invest more strongly in non-formal/informal education provided by grassroots organisations – which is also key to reduce the number of young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET) as well as adults who have struggled to achieve inclusion through the formal education systems.*

<sup>49</sup> Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012/C 398/01), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF>

- *Encourage the cooperation between NGOs working with people in vulnerable situations, governments and employers to develop a common validation methodology for informally acquired skills, knowledge and competences, while simultaneously encouraging people-centred learning methods and labour market access rules which are more receptive to these type of skills, not only formal qualifications.*
- *Expand outreach work, particularly for young people, to make sure that they receive the support they need, including income support, to resume and complete their education, or to acquire new skills and competences.*

### **European level**

- Better target EU funds to support lifelong learning from a broader perspective than labour market needs, for example through conditionalities in the European Social Fund/ESF+.
- Prioritise in EU-funded lifelong learning programmes those with the lowest level of educational attainment, in adult literacy, as well as those from low income families or suffering from discrimination when it comes to access to programmes, and concrete support measures.
- Include action on non-formal education in the European Education Area.
- Make and regularly update an EU-wide inventory of existing systems and procedures to validate non-formal education, training and life skills<sup>50</sup>, as the basis to then elaborate recommendations to EU MS with non-existing or underdeveloped validation systems and arrangements, backed up by the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (see footnote 16).

## 5.6 Training and upskilling for the labour market (for the unemployed as well as on the job)

### **National (and sub-national) level**

- Ensure that quality VET and upskilling are free of charge and accessible to as many people as possible for those who have a job or are outside the labour market, not least to also address chronic labour market shortages in a number of professions (e.g. childcare and long-term care or in services to help support the shift to a carbon-neutral economy).
- Reduce to zero or financially support the cost for VET courses and/or materials for low-income workers and unemployed persons in order to not exclude them.
- VET and comprehensive follow-up measures after labour market insertion must be available for the most vulnerable groups furthest distant to the labour market.
- National governments should ensure that unemployed people, those at risk of unemployment, low skilled workers, people at risk of poverty and employees with a high proportion of routine activities have access to continued education and training (CET) measures. Access to CET as a personalised right should be defined as an entitlement, encompassing 1) the right to second chance VET (better financial support for training during unemployment), 2) a right to (part time) paid educational leave and 3) training of staff as company CET mentors.

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<sup>50</sup> This inventory endorsed by the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning works, together with the European guidelines, as a tool to support countries in developing and implementing validation arrangements and can be accessed here, <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory>

- *For retraining/requalification courses for persons with special needs (e.g. single parents with children below secondary school age or persons with mental health problems, substance abuse or partial disability for work) an approach and offers tailored to the needs of the individual learner are more successful in facilitating a successful reinsertion into the labour market. This implies the assessment of specific hurdles, supporting measures to maintain the participation and the completion of the course/programme/VET and case work accompanied by social workers or employment coaches to improve the situation and conditions of the unemployed person. Such retraining courses should also comprise practical work experiences on the job or in the future function aimed for.*
- *Promote the participation of older workers in continuing professional development and in lifelong learning programmes for jobseekers.*
- *Develop creative and ambitious whole-government strategies for literacy, numeracy and digital skills over the next 10 years, based on an implementation body with the task to develop, oversee and evaluate these strategies, consisting of government departments, state agencies and civil society and disposing of a budget.*
- *National governments should prioritise those with the lowest level of educational attainment in adult literacy in community and employee development programmes. These programmes should specifically target employees with literacy and numeracy needs in small medium enterprises (SMEs) and sectors with the highest levels of workers with low educational attainment. They should include paid learning leave/vocational literacy support programmes for employees in work with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital needs.*

#### **European level**

- Prioritise those with the lowest level of educational attainment in adult literacy in EU-funded lifelong learning programmes, as well as those from low income families or suffering from discrimination when it comes to access to them and concrete support measures.
- Continuation of the ESF Social Partner Initiative in the context of ESF+.

### 5.7 Young people, including NEETs and early school leaving

#### **National (and sub-national) level**

- Use a comprehensive approach when designing and implementing measures against early drop out and poor educational attainment by systematically also taking into account the underlying poverty dimension of these phenomena and by doing ex-ante and ex-post social impact assessments of the strategies, policies and measures to reduce the number of early school leavers.
- Define a government agency with an overall coordinating responsibility for young people at risk of NEET which can track their transitions and offer guidance and/or support to find quality and sustainable work and participation.
- Strengthen the link between education policies and poverty-reduction initiatives by designing policies in a way to support the reduction of poverty, social exclusion and segregation. A comprehensive assessment of the needs of those in education and training which also takes on board knowledge and the experiences of more vulnerable groups as well as personalised pathways with access to and support from a holistic range of services are needed to make these policies effective.

- Give more relative weight in curricula to topics and contents dealing with practical questions and which help empower the students for their later professional and personal life, e.g. by integrating knowledge about home economics and financial management as well as techniques for a more personal resilience in situations of stress, crises and problems – also with the support of trained professionals such as social workers – into the curricula of secondary and professional schools. Pupils should also be better prepared to take responsible and informed decisions for their own personal, their families' and the community well-being.
- Support joined-up working involving the young person and their family, the school, local communities and employers, through a 'person-centred case-management' approach to realise the empowerment and participation of the young people.
- *Accompany policy interventions to improve educational outcomes with social policy initiatives to reduce poverty and material deprivation as in family poverty – e.g. by increasing family allowances/child benefits by a supplement for children and adolescents living in households under the poverty line – and to overcome discriminatory impacts on all aspects of children and young people's experience in schools.*
- *Mobilise resources and roll out measures to do a targeted follow-up of children with learning difficulties from kindergarten/pre-school and throughout their education in order to prevent to a maximum dropout from secondary education.*
- *Return to a whole person-centred approach for NEET, i.e. overcome more market-oriented payments-by-results approaches which also encourage "quick-fix solutions" without necessarily addressing the root causes for the non-participation in education or VET systems. This means strengthening the participation and empowerment of young people in all policies, measures and initiatives.*

### **European level**

- Redefine higher numerical targets for the indicators "rate of early school leavers" and "number of young people neither in employment nor in education and training" (NEET) compared to those set in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy in order to stay politically ambitious and economically and socially sustainable and also set benchmarks for the quality of support for early school leavers. This should be done in the context of a comprehensive Europe 2030 Strategy, encompassing an Anti-Poverty Strategy, and when elaborating and implementing the Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Digital divide, online learning, access to technology, digital skills

### **National (and sub-national) level**

- Provide for computers with free access to the internet, support services to people and courses in media literacy in public libraries.
- Develop new and innovative ways to improve digital literacy and learning such as using blended and distance learning, with a focus on people from vulnerable groups.
- Adapt baskets of goods and services and reference budgets for minimum income schemes in a manner to cover costs in relation to computer equipment and internet access (and the related education and training services) also for low-income households.

- *Provide for a digital and paper option – and this also at no higher cost – regarding education, training and LLL offers (including the possibility to get information and to register) in order to not increase existing digital gaps affecting vulnerable groups and low-income persons and establish consumer protection regulation which allows those not well connected to the internet to continue using essential private (banking) and public services.*
- *Establish funding for intergenerational (learning) exchanges, that focus (not only) on digital skills, to support continued inclusion into society.*

## 5.8 Specific barriers in accessing education, training and lifelong learning for key categories

### **National (and sub-national) level**

- Stipulate “inclusion” as a legal requirement for the education systems and transform schools into an effective instrument for inclusion and personal development for all. To achieve this aim, provide the necessary funding, qualified teachers and other personnel and equipment and adapt schools and vocational training facilities in a manner to be fully accessible.
- Introduce sub-targets in national action plans or strategies on education, VET or LLL for educational completion and attainment for specific groups to foster the inclusion and access to education for all, ensuring that measures do not only favour those easy to reach. Implement subsequent policy measures based on group-specific targets (and where relevant also on regional targets), with a focus on the efforts and funding of disadvantaged groups and regions.
- Design, offer and finance tailored supports to help more vulnerable groups to progress and to successfully complete school education, VET and LLL. Vulnerable groups include Roma and Travellers, migrants, lone parents, those with literacy difficulties, with poor knowledge of the official language, with no work experience or with a history of time in prison.
- Increase the use of wage subsidies to employers targeted at the groups furthest away from the labour market, combined with follow-up training on validation of skills in order to facilitate the labour market integration of those who lack formal qualifications.
- Speed up procedures to get recognised professional qualifications for immigrants with high formal (or also general academic) qualifications and certificates and provide information on the procedure to obtain this recognition, including by means of fast-track procedures. *Provide specific VET programmes and offers for parents in one-income households staying at home to improve their possibilities of labour market (re-)entry.*
- *Include content that contemplates different cultures and the understanding of concepts about different ethnic and cultural perspectives in curricula, and allow for curricular adaptations to take account of cultural differences.*
- *Support Roma cultural mediators working in cooperation with the school and families institutionally and financially.*
- *Sustain the offer and funding of language courses, VET and CET for EU and non-EU migrant workers (regardless of the prospects for residence permits or coverage by the social insurance systems).*
- *Offer refugees in education, skilled employment or searching for a job a residence permit upon successful completion of vocational training (independently of the result of the assessment of their demand for political asylum).*

- *Provide more clarity to employers on funding support available to them to pursue diversity targets for new sorts of apprenticeships including for black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) apprentices.*

#### **European level**

- Continue and expand the use of EU funding from ESF+ to co-finance language and integration courses for migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers and to improve the information on a range of issues in relation to their economic and social integration and rights.
- Continue and expand the use of EU funding from ESF+ to co-finance support measures for the educational attainment and social inclusion of Roma children and to overcome segregation and discrimination in the school and vocational training system.

### 5.9 Specific barriers in accessing education, training and lifelong learning for people with a disability or health issue

#### **National (and sub-national) level**

- Establish obligatory employment quotas for people with disabilities (underpinned by financial sanctions in case of non-compliance), with the public sector as pacesetter and good example.
- Design, offer and finance tailored supports to help individuals at risk of poverty and social exclusion – e.g. people with a disability, chronic diseases or a history of addiction, homeless persons, single parents, migrants or Roma – to progress and to successfully complete school education, VET and LLL. Vulnerable groups amongst others.
- Set entitlements for people with disabilities and health issues in their adulthood to be able to access opportunities for lifelong learning and to get their skills recognised and valued in the workplace.
- Provide increased wage subsidies for the most vulnerable groups furthest from the labour market, combined with follow-up measures after labour market insertion and training to support the updating of skills once in employment
- Improve the cooperation of social care and health care system and provide integrated services for persons with a disability in school education and VET.
- Encourage and ensure the active participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and their NGOs in the design, delivery and evaluation of these services. This is crucial if education policies and services are to play an effective role in preventing and tackling poverty and social exclusion.
- Provide funding for the use of assistive tools at the workplace and in education by the responsible employment or welfare administration/institutions.
- Use technology to open new opportunities for people with disabilities to access education and VET, but also work on overcoming the digital divide and other barriers to access.
- Design and promote a modular learning offer for people with mental health or with drug misuse challenges as they need the time and space to be able to move in and out of education and VET provision.

- Introduce a graded disability benefit with a health-adjusted salary to support the labour market inclusion of people on disability benefit who have some capacity to work. The employer pays an hourly wage based on an ordinary salary, adjusted for an estimate of the reduction in productivity per hour. The disability benefit is then given as a compensation for reduced productivity and / or reduced working hours.
- Provide more clarity to employers on funding support available to them to pursue diversity targets for new sorts of apprenticeships for apprentices with a learning difficulty, disability or health problem.
- Better train and adequately pay teachers and assistant professions involved in the school education and VET of persons with a disability.
- *Support awareness raising initiatives on inclusive education and accessibility issues, including on the role that everyone can play in productive societies.*

### **European level**

- Continue the European Disability Strategy after 2020, and give special consideration to children and young people, women, older people, people with a migration and/or refugee background and LGBTI people

## 6. Annex 1: Compilation of promising practice examples

### 6.1 Inclusive education, combating segregation, discrimination, bullying

**BELGIUM – *School Gate Workings*:** People with direct experience of poverty who have received special education stand daily at the school gate. In a very accessible way, parents can come and ask them questions or help regarding their children or the school. On the other hand, they can also help the school to contextualise certain behaviour and help them contact parents who are sometimes more difficult to reach.

**HUNGARY – The *School of Tomorrow*** study group from September 2018, and from 2020 operating as an inclusive school, coordinated by STEP BY STEP! ASSOCIATION). Opportunities on a national level for a new, smaller (3-6 children) homey institution type (**CSAFNA**) – operating as an experimental model, the project of VÖLGYZUGOLYHÁZ Foundation. ***Opportunities on a national level for social integration*** (a school with a group/class for children with disabilities in a regular school, launched in September 2019 by VENI VIDI VICI Foundation). Reform of day-care centres: creation of ***day-care institutions*** that truly support independent life (day care centres reformed based on real needs and supporting quality life – Kagyemo Foundation).

**IRELAND –** There are over 15,000 ***Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)*** working in mainstream schools in Ireland to help classroom teachers to support students with special educational needs who have significant care needs. This programme plays a very important role in supporting the retention and progression of these children.

**LUXEMBOURG – Observation procedures enable the targeted holistic perception of the addressees of a social intervention as an individual in society.** Based on various observation procedures, which respect the child in its development, concrete impulses for the development of a child can be implemented. A **sociogram** makes it possible to “locate” the individual in the system, to identify all addressees to be included in the educational institution which helps to identify the position of each person in the group, including those not in the core group. The sociogram can be confirmed or evaluated through methods of “empowerment” of children in the system. At the same time, the data obtained with this method are eminent for the formal and non-formal educational institutions and their qualitative work. This inclusive conceptual approach makes it possible for every child in the system to understand their position and to initiate targeted activities and projects against discrimination, mobbing or segregation. It can also be used for a “fairer” distribution of resources. Such an inclusive approach to take appropriate action will become relevant as an “early warning system” and as a basis to implement a continuous solidary and respectful approach to all children supportive of their social inclusion. (Maison Relais Schengen)

**MALTA –** The National Maltese Youth Agency in cooperation with the No Hate Speech Movement, aims to **raise awareness about the direct link between hate speech and hate crimes**, to provide arguments for addressing hate speech and hate crime in the current Internet policy context and to emphasize the responsibility of all different stakeholders (from the individual to the organisational) in relation to hate speech and hate crimes. The organisers of the **action day** call for posters that can address these above objectives and promote acting against hate speech and/or commemorating hate crimes with educational purpose and with the motto “No Hate speech = less hate crimes!”.

**NETHERLANDS** – In Amsterdam, to stop segregation the council spends 11 million euro to stimulate the reform of first year secondary school classes to **“broad classes”**, where students from different backgrounds and school districts learn together. Besides that, money is given to the so called ‘all in one school’ where (following the example of a Danish model) crèche, kindergarten, preschool and school overlap. The positive fact is that municipalities are putting pressure on schools to lower the voluntary contribution and is taking over extra costs, like school trips. In Amsterdam the municipality pays the parent contribution for parents with low income. In Amsterdam people with low income (up to 120 % social benefit) have a so called ‘stadpas’ (city pass). When they show this pass, the municipality pays 50 € to the school as contribution. The school must also limit the parent contribution: no more than 225 € a month is allowed. This is a local good practice: municipalities can make their own policy on poverty reduction so opportunities like this depend on where you live.

**PORTUGAL** – In the *National Strategy for the Integration of Roma Communities* – setting clear aims for education and lifelong learning – EAPN Portugal developed a national campaign in partnership with the Secretariat of State for Citizenship and Equality entitled **#direitoaseremoquequiserem** (#righttobewhatevertheywant). (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeMy1e82aL8>)

**SPAIN** – The **“ONCE Educational Model”** is carried out with students with blindness or severe visual impairment making their total academic and social inclusion possible. The ONCE Foundations signs cooperation agreements in educational matters with all the regional educational administrations. Through these agreements, students have all the resources of the ordinary system and, in addition, those specific to ONCE through their Educational Resource Centres which provide direct care and complementary services. Currently, more than 99% of students with visual disabilities are enrolled in regular schools, in their town, neighbourhood or city of residence, following the official school curriculum. These students receive complementary attention according to their specific needs related to visual impairment (braille teaching, new technologies, personal autonomy, orientation and mobility or social competence, among others), which is provided by specialized professionals from the Specific Teams of educational attention to the visually disabled.

**SPAIN** – The **awareness campaign “As I grow up, I want to be ...”** back in 2012 made use of a photo van and an itinerant photo studio travelling 15.000 km through 38 cities to show to Roma families and children the importance of completing compulsory secondary education. In parallel, the Secretariat of the Roma Foundation (*Secretariado Gitano Foundation*) created debate in awareness raising meetings with families. It was selected by the European Commission as “Good Practice” in the fight against discrimination in the educational field.

**SPAIN** – **Save the Children Project “Break the Silence”** (*Romper el silencio del acoso escolar*) with the Community of Madrid initiated a process to set up a complaint mechanism at schools that allows children who are bullied and attacked to break the spiral of school bullying.

## 6.2 Quality, accessibility and affordability of formal education systems

**GERMANY** – The **child supplement (“Kinderzuschlag”) low-income families receive has been increased and improved**: the “school starter package” was increased and the parents’ shares of the fees for each lunch at school were abolished for those entitled to minimum income benefits. However, increases of the child allowances have not been passed on to this category of families.

**IRELAND** – **Book loans schemes** operate successfully in numerous schools throughout Ireland. There are guidelines from the Department of Education on operating a book loan scheme and funding is made available to establish book loans schemes in schools where no such scheme exists. However, the implementation of book loan schemes is not mandatory.

**LUXEMBOURG** – Collaborative projects at the crossroads of formal and non-formal education provide qualitative development in both educational fields. One example is the **“time-out office”** for pupils who are currently unable to take part in “regular” school lessons in order to realise their right to education. They get the necessary space to learn and to later participate in the class again. Individual “problems” are no longer treated in the class in front of everyone, but in collaboration with a pedagogical companion. Also, the formal educational institution can provide relevant impulses in supportive units in the non-formal educational everyday life, by topics, techniques or similar (Day Care Centre Schengen).

**MALTA** – Families are saving around €200 through **free MATSEC and SEC examinations**. If a family has two children and one is still at primary or secondary school, they will be provided free school transport, saving over €700 a year for such families. These are funds which families can spend on their children to provide them a better life. In 2019 the Government took on the €1.5 million expenses for around 9,200 students that are sitting for their SEC and MATSEC examinations. This measure was also a means to push students to work harder and take on more responsibility towards their studies, whilst also providing everyone with a second chance.

**NETHERLANDS** – The best example of good practice is the system we had, before the student loan was introduced. The government was paying the bigger part of the costs as a scholarship.

**PORTUGAL** – The Government introduced the distribution of **vouchers for school manuals** (provided until 11<sup>th</sup> grade), a measure recently extended in order to cover more school grades.

**SPAIN** – **Second Chance Schools (E2O)**: They provide young people between 15 and 29 years of age, without employment and/or training, with an original pedagogical model based on innovative training through personalized itineraries, a reinforcement of basic and labour competencies, practical experiences in connection with the business world, and support in social demands with special attention to the most vulnerable. The Spanish Association of Second Chance Schools which runs these schools brings together the relevant actors from the business, educational, academic and social sectors and the young people themselves. Their actions are always developed in complementarity with national, regional and municipal policies, and reinforce cooperation at the Euro-Mediterranean level. There are currently 39 Second Chance Schools in Spain with more than 7,500 young people enrolled and about 750 professionals to teach, support and accompany them. More information (in Spanish) is available here: <https://www.e2oespana.org/un-modelo-de-exito-una-asociacion-nacional/#more-90>.

**SWEDEN** – In Sweden, for all families with children, child support and study grants are raised by SEK 200 (about 20€). In addition, the **social welfare assistance for children and students in high school is raised by SEK 200 (about 20€) per month for the most vulnerable families with children.**

### 6.3 Early childhood education and care

**HUNGARY** – Between 2016 and 2019 Step by Step! Association has organised **trainings on AAC tools**, including eye-tracking digital devices for teachers, special education educators, parents and children with disabilities in specialised schools. With this programme called *Digital Chance* they provided opportunities for the children to develop their communication (e.g. one of the participants, a girl, was able to write down 'Hi, my name is Petra' with an eye-tracking communication device for the first time) and for the educators and parents to learn the use of these tools.

**IRELAND** – The **Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme** provides early childhood care and education for children of pre-school age. The scheme is offered in early years settings (pre-schools, Montessori's, crèches, playgroups) for 3 hours a day, 5 days a week, 38 weeks of the year. All children are entitled to 2 full academic years on the ECCE scheme.

**NETHERLANDS** – The preschool care system is working quite well. But **in certain groups the children are not taken to a nursery, but are brought to a member of the family or a friend.** For example, within the Aruban groups children are brought to a "grandma". She looks after a group of children. Officially this is not allowed, given the fact that a nursery has to follow strict rules (hygiene, etc.), but the group is very happy with this system. The rules for day care are very strict and of a very high level. This however makes it also difficult to have other options when working and makes day care expensive.

### 6.4 Exploring the links between socio-economic background and educational attainment / completion

**PORTUGAL** – **Escolhas Program (Choices Programme).** This is a national government programme, established in 2001, promoted by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and integrated in the High Commissioner for Migration (ACM, IP), whose mission is to promote the social inclusion of children and youth from vulnerable socio-economic contexts, with a view to equal opportunities and the reinforcement of social cohesion. The Escolhas Program is now in its 7th generation. Recently there were approved: 103 projects (93 applied for measure I (education, training and qualification); 50 to measure II (employment and entrepreneurship) and 95 to measure III (community dynamization, participation and citizenship).

## 6.5 Lifelong learning: 2nd chance, formal and informal education

**NETHERLANDS** – The central government makes money available to MBO institutions, knowledge centres and the Foundation for Vocational Education and Training Business (SBB). With this money, these organisations can provide **extra internships for students who are difficult to place in vocational education**. Intensive internship supervision is also possible. This is regulated in the Regulations for the vocational training placement box. More information is available (in Dutch) here: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/middelbaar-beroepsonderwijs/vraag-en-antwoord/zijn-er-subsidies-en-fiscale-regelingen-voor-het-combineren-van-werken-en-leren>

**UNITED KINGDOM** – In Rochdale a local project called *“Citizens Curriculum”* has been successful in redressing the deficit in adult education. It has helped people to get jobs and overcome serious challenges such as bereavement and homelessness. The starting point in this project is the complex situations of people rather than pre-set courses or targets. More information in an article in the Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/oct/29/how-rochdale-launched-fightback-sex-abuse-poverty-adult-education>

## 6.6 Training and upskilling for the labour market (for the unemployed as well as on the job)

**BELGIUM** – In the context of the *Project “Road 67”*, public employment agencies in Flanders worked with an outplacement agency to train older jobseekers towards jobs, mainly in the service sector, they initially have not been qualified for. This allowed many older workers to re-enter and stay in employment for many years up to the statutory retirement age.

**CZECH REPUBLIC** – **Retraining course for persons in employment planning to become self-employed.** A “job seeker retraining course” is available to those planning to change their job or to become self-employed and start their own business. The Labour Office signs a contract with an educational institution offering the training needed. If the candidate successfully completes 80% of course, passes the final exam and obtains a certificate, the costs for the retraining are covered by the Labour Office. In all other cases the retraining candidate has to cover her/his costs, even if the course could not be completed or there is non-admission to the exam due to illness.

**FRANCE** – The *Territoire zéro chômeurs de longue durée* is a new project where the participants receive a good job with a salary and get work experience. With this new approach co-funded by the ESF any long-term unemployed person who wishes it is offered a job of indefinite time and with variable weekly working time which develops jobs to meet the needs of the various actors of the territory – inhabitants, companies and institutions – without additional cost for the municipality and not competing with existing jobs. Based on the skills of the unemployed and jobseekers in a given territory and in collaboration with all the local actors, useful activities to the local actors have to be identified which have not yet been performed as they were not profitable, but which are also complementary to the local economy. The creation of these complementary activities makes it possible to build a wider offer on the territory. The project also assesses the long-term economic viability for companies contracted to *Territoire zéro chômeurs de longue durée*. Supported by a scientific committee, the Fund for Territorial Experimentation will assess the effects and costs of this approach to determine if it can be extended and under which conditions to other regions. More information can be found here <https://www.tzcl.fr/>.

**FRANCE** – From 2010 to 2012 larger employers had to elaborate **age management plans** for their staff, taking into account their demographic composition, a regulation that boosted the setting up of lifelong learning strategies in the interest of both workers and companies

**FRANCE** – **Personal training accounts** give employees points which they can use for their education and training, while being employed or outside of the labour market. This provision introduced lifelong learning as an employee's right.

**GERMANY** – In June 2019 a **National Skills Strategy**<sup>51</sup> was adopted, involving federal ministries, federal states, social partners and the public employment agencies. They have agreed on 10 objectives and 70 commitments. A permanent committee of the partners will meet every six months to monitor and coordinate implementation activities, with a joint report and review of the state of play planned for 2021. Legislative measures are planned for 2019 and 2020, including on publicly subsidised paid (part time) educational leave. The OECD<sup>52</sup> will issue a country report on CET in Germany. The strategy is expected to

- increase the transparency of continuing education and training (CET) programmes;
- expand and better coordination of counselling structures, including internet platforms;
- give entitlements for second chance vocational training (with improved conditions for unemployed still under discussion) and for training to upgrade VET and CET;
- further develop the short-time work allowance linked to CET;
- improve working and employment conditions for CET staff.

**IRELAND** – **Skills for Work** (<http://dublinadulthoodeducation.ie/skills-for-work-programme/>) is a part-time education and training initiative for employees who may have left school early or whose skills may be out of date. The yearly fund is €3 million and approximately 3,000 employees attend the programme. Programmes are delivered by tutors in the local Education and Training Boards and there are 8 Skills for Work regions around Ireland.

**MALTA** – The **Youth.inc programme** with the National Youth Agency is a tailor-made programme for young people to re-integrate back into the education system or in the labour market. Youth.inc has three different levels of entry in accordance with the Malta Qualifications Framework. The programme is based on assisting the young person to gain key competences, sectoral skills and underpinning knowledge at the different levels. Included in the learning are skills that are transferable to the next stages of education and training: Applying theory to work-related challenges; Acquiring knowledge; Gaining basic skills; Embracing values; Working in a team; Being creative and innovative. Nora (a fictitious name), a young person 16 years old with disabilities opted to start this Youth.inc (a programme with the National Youth Agency) inclusive educational programme, based on applied tailored learning. Nora, with the right mentor, had the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills through training not only to get the right qualifications but also to have the adequate abilities to work in various jobs. Today this student has successfully got the qualifications to access the workforce and is independent and works as in an administrative environment. This shows that with the right education, someone can change their disabilities into abilities and be free to work and have a decent

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<sup>51</sup> Source: <https://www.bmas.de/EN/Our-Topics/Initial-and-Continuing-Training/national-skills-strategy.html>

<sup>52</sup> The OECD Skills Strategy, updated in 2019, provides a strategic and comprehensive approach for ensuring that people and countries have the skills to thrive in a complex, interconnected and rapidly changing world. See as source [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/oecd-skills-strategy-2019\\_9789264313835-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/oecd-skills-strategy-2019_9789264313835-en) for details.

income to escape from poverty.

**NETHERLANDS** – Municipalities can offer the opportunity to personally develop to allow labour market integration if NGOs, including those in EAPN Netherlands, help guide people towards local organisations in a first step prepare them for training courses and VET. **Circular economic enterprises very often provide employment opportunities for people with a disadvantage on the labour market.**

**NORWAY** – *Stormberg*, a brand producing outdoor clothing, has for several years **provided VET and then a job for vulnerable people with gaps in their CV** in the context of their Corporate Social Responsibility activities. They and other businesses who work actively for inclusion of vulnerable groups provide people with a second chance to have the dignity and freedom that comes with paid work.

**PORTUGAL** – The *Click Project* (<http://click.eapn.pt/>) is developed based on an agreement between EAPN Portugal and the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP). It has a double aim, on the one hand the improved employability of vulnerable target groups and initiating requalification processes, in particular by developing soft skills of unemployed persons and on the other to build up capacity for realising the social responsibility of employers and involves an adaptation process for both parties. The project concretely consists of coaching sessions in order to activate communication and social skills which can improve the employability of vulnerable target groups by means of an individualised and participatory management of the job searching process, including tools such as sample CVs and cover letters and simulations of job interviews which are adapted to and with the specific target groups. With the help of the local IEFP professional training and adaptation to the qualification needs of the local employers are developed. But the initiative does not end in the preparatory phase, but continues into employment by providing “professional mentoring”, workplace-based training and post-training follow-up measures to the formerly unemployed persons, thereby supporting their effective socio-economic integration. For the local employers the project offers marketing tools for an improved employability of unemployed persons and to show social responsibility. The Click Project was implemented in the context of the Social Impact Programme 2015 which offered support to entities of the social economy for them to analyse and show the societal and economic benefit by using the social Return on Investment (SROI) methodology. After evaluation the social value generated was 1:2.18, meaning that for each euro invested a social return of 2.18€ is obtained, benefitting to about 55% directly the formerly unemployed persons (and attributable to a higher level of efficiency and a stronger proactivity of the job searching process and increased self-esteem and social well-being) and to about 40% the employers (mainly due to an improved efficiency of recruitment processes).

**UNITED KINGDOM** – The government provides **additional funds targeted at younger apprentices**: To employers with fewer than 50 employees, the government pays all the training costs of apprenticeships for young people aged 18-24 who have been in care or have a Local Authority Education, Health and Care Plan for Small Employers. It also **aims to maintain the proportion of apprentices from the most disadvantaged areas at 25%.**

**UNITED KINGDOM** – In order to address the multiple barriers to participation in adult learning, especially for low-income people and those under-represented in learning, a **new service specifically for low-skilled adults** was launched in November 2019. Disposing of a £100 million government-

funded budget it is based on a partnership approach involving the main employers' organisation (CBI) and the Trades Union Congress (TU).

**UNITED KINGDOM** – Co-funded by ESF and started in 2017 and 2018, the ***Work and Health Programme*** focuses on the long-term (i.e. more than 2 years) unemployed for whom it is mandatory. It offers personalised support for job search, health management and training. It operates with “work coaches” who, however, are responsible both for support and sanctions, which can weaken the relationship with the client. If after 456 days a participant in the programme is not in sustained employment it is stopped.

For other disadvantaged groups, including those suffering from substance misuse or from domestic violence as well as for people with health and disability barriers to paid work it is more voluntary. However, participants in the Work and Health Programme still have to undertake the “Standard Work Focussed Interviews” and those with health issues still must undertake “Fit for work tests”.

#### 6.7 Young people, including NEETs and early school leaving

**CZECH REPUBLIC** – ***Save Arrival Programme of prevention of early school leavers***: The Regional Authority of the Zlín Regio implemented a programme comprehensively focusing on the retention of high-risk young people in schools.

**CZECH REPUBLIC** – The ***company Grafia*** distributes free copies of a guide on career options and development to secondary school graduates (***PLAV!***) and to technical university graduates (***SKOC!***)

**IRELAND** – The “***Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Strategy***” has been important in targeting resources at schools in disadvantaged areas, with the aim of improving outcomes, including retention rates at second level in DEIS schools, from their current rate of 82.7% to the national average, currently 91.2%, by 2025.

**NETHERLANDS** – There is a regional approach to early school leaving in the Netherlands which is divided into 39 regions. Within such a region, schools and municipalities make **agreements together on measures to prevent early school leaving and to also easily return back to school**. Also on counselling young people in a vulnerable position. Each region has a contact municipality for the Regional Reporting and Coordination Function (RMC) early school leaving. Each region also has a contact school, which represents the other schools. More information (in Dutch) is available here: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/vsv/regionaal-samenwerken-tegen-schooluitval>

**NORWAY** – In parts of Norway a **project targeted at pupils with the most absence** (over 12 % absence) during primary school **aimed at ensuring that pupils received close follow-up from their school** was set up and led to significantly fewer school leavers in this group. The pupils were summoned to individual meetings with a counsellor attributed to them at the beginning of their first year of secondary education. The causes of the absence were mapped based on creating trust and dialogue and follow-up measures agreed. The counsellor and the pupils jointly set up a plan with measures to reduce times of absence and make a social contract for accepted absence.

**SWEDEN** – The school law includes the **task for headmasters of pre-schools and of primary and secondary schools to actively promote social mixity** of the children in their education institutions.

**UNITED KINGDOM** – There are **several local good practice examples successfully rolled out in cities which are members of the Local Government Association (LGA)**:

- 1) Medway Council has a specialist team which provides 1-2-1 support for young people who are NEET, youth offenders or those with special educational needs. This contributed to a reduction by 20% of NEET;
- 2) In Blackpool, the local authority works closely with local further education colleges and sixth forms to reach young people who are NEET. They offer a pre-apprenticeship programme and have commissioned a local provider who offers key employment support, and four weeks 'personal development' opportunities to develop employability skills;
- 3) Southwark has engaged with NEET by offering impartial information, advice and guidance, through a twice weekly drop-in service. All NEET or at risk of NEET young people have a named advisor to support them into education and training.

#### 6.8 Digital divide, online learning, access to technology, digital skills

**GERMANY – Older people/retired people's homes offer digital tools to their residents** which allow them to stay connected with their families, visit places in virtual reality and learn digital skills through exchanges with younger persons.

**IRELAND** – The National Adult Literacy Agency has developed a **unique online learning platform**, [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie), for people who wish to develop their literacy and numeracy as well as a range of other skills, all set against the National Qualifications Framework at levels 1-4. This platform has evolved over the years to provide significant curricular support and a blended learning solution for those working at these levels. It also provides Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), the only consistently available national option that is highly efficient as managed online with the associated reduction in administration costs.

**NETHERLANDS** – Provision of **learning modules to obtain vocational (workplace-specific or general) training at different paces** in both the private and public sector.

**NETHERLANDS (and in a similar way NORWAY)** – **Provision of computers with free access to the internet and support services to people** – especially a web-senior support for older people, to learn how to use the computer and programmes – **in public libraries**.

#### 6.9 Specific barriers in accessing education, training and lifelong learning for key categories

**NORWAY** – NGOs (like Likestilling, Inkluderende og Nettverk, an equality inclusion network) provide **free of charge training programmes for job searching**. They also offer a **mentor programme for immigrants with university degrees**, where the candidate is paired with an established Norwegian employee with the same professional background.

**PORTUGAL – Escolhas Program (Choices Programme) and Program ROMA Educa (Roma Education)**. Through the Escolhas Program the Program ROMA Educa (ROMA Education) which aims to allocate 100 scholarships for support to attend and stay in secondary education for students from the Roma communities for the 2019/2020 school year was recently presented by the High Commissioner for

Migration (ACM, IP). Students from Roma communities who are enrolled and attending the 10th, 11th and 12th years of schooling can access this programme, preferably in territories covered by the local projects funded by the Escolhas Program.

**PORTUGAL** – The training and deployment of **Roma cultural mediators working in cooperation with the school and families** has helped to launch and support broader strategies to transform the schools into effective instruments of development and social inclusion. They comprise, along with other elements, the integration of contents that contemplates different cultures to facilitate a better understanding of different ethnic and cultural perspectives and curricular adaptations according to cultural differences.

6.10        Specific barriers in accessing education, training and lifelong learning for people with a disability or health issue

**NORWAY – Individual job support programme for people with health problems:** In this individually tailored programme a job specialist is involved in the treatment relationship between the patient and the therapist to support a quick return into normally paid work. Both the therapist and the job specialist provide long-time support and follow up for the non-healthy job seekers. An evaluation showed that the programme not only contributed to significantly better quality of life, a better self-perceived health status, lower symptom levels of depression, but also increased the probability of labour market insertion of people in the programme compared to other patients not covered.

**UNITED KINGDOM** – The **AdvanceHE Programme** provides advice, guidance on policies and sources of funding and training packs to support higher education institutions to be disability aware and inclusive. Its operating principles include the active involvement of disabled students and staff and staff with expertise in support and knowledge of barriers.

## 7. Annex 2: Status of the document

This EAPN Report is issued on behalf of the EU Inclusion Strategies Group (EUISG) which has delegated powers within EAPN to develop EAPN Policy Position papers and reports. The report was drafted by Mathias Maucher (EAPN Policy Team) in November and December 2019, building on a discussion paper and a draft for the thematic fiches 1 to 5 by Amana Ferro (EAPN Policy Team until July 2019). The report comes out of and builds on the 2018 European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty focusing on education. It was developed together with EAPN's EU Inclusion Strategies Group (EU ISG) through 3 exchange meetings (March, June and September) over the course of 2019 and two rounds of written input to ten thematic fiches as agreed by the EU ISG. The draft was circulated to the entire membership on 20 December 2019 with 4 weeks for inputs. Feedback and inputs were received from EAPN AT, FI, LV, NL, NO and PT and AGE. All inputs were incorporated in the final text which was finalised on 2 March 2020.

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The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) is an independent network of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and groups involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion in the Member States of the European Union, established in 1990.



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