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Young Europeans: an urgent educational challenge

Report[1]
Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media
Rapporteur: Ms Polonca KOMAR, Slovenia, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

Summary

Education is fundamental to youth empowerment and personal fulfilment. It must be aimed at employability, but also at nurturing talent, creativity, and the capacity to get involved in the sustainable development of society.

The report asks member States to adopt a comprehensive approach to education and take action to set the right policy frameworks, create new learning opportunities and enhance the existing ones, ensuring inclusion and getting more young people engaged in their own learning and development.

Specific measures should be taken at European level, in particular to improve access to education for young people from disadvantaged groups, as well as to encourage non-formal education and ensure greater recognition of competences acquired through non-formal learning, building on the proposals put forward by the "Strasbourg Process" – a joint Council of Europe–European Commission initiative.

1. Reference to committee: Doc. 12256, Reference 3688 of 21 June 2010.

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A. Draft resolution[2]

1. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls that education is a pillar of youth empowerment and a prerequisite for personal fulfilment, social inclusion, active citizenship, employability and entrepreneurship. It welcomes the recently adopted Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)13 on ensuring quality education, which calls for educational provision that develops each pupil's and student's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.

2. The Assembly regrets the current very high rates of youth unemployment. It notes the mismatch between the skills of the unemployed and those required for the available jobs, which questions the capability of the education and training systems across Europe to provide pupils and students with the necessary skills for them to access the job market.

3. Bearing in mind the principle of lifelong learning, the Assembly notes that non-formal and informal education are in general undervalued in comparison with the higher status given to formal education. There is a need to recognise the contribution that all learning experiences can bring to personal development. The validation of competences acquired through non-formal learning and youth work should be considered as important elements for the promotion of young people's autonomy.

4. Education, however, is not only about preparing pupils and students to become part of a highly skilled workforce, but has a value in itself. It must be aimed at nurturing human talent and creativity, and at contributing to personal development, including the capacity to appreciate culture and to get involved in cultural life, as well as to sustainable cultural, socio-economic and political development of society at large.

5. The Assembly calls on member States to adopt a more holistic approach to education, to secure the provision of adequate resources for education – not below 6% of the gross domestic product – and to take action to:

5.1. enhance the traditional formal education setting, and in particular to:

5.1.1. invest in effective guidance and counselling for all pupils and students, helping them to get an overview of different learning and career opportunities and supporting them in finding an educational and/or career pathway suitable for them;

5.1.2. develop policies in youth mobility – including mobility through international student exchange programmes at European level – out-of-school education/learning, voluntary service and youth information and participation;

5.1.3. integrate education for democratic citizenship and human rights in national curricula and ensure that schools promote mutual respect and develop anti-violence and anti-discrimination policies, to combat different forms of violence, bullying, intolerant behaviour and self-harm;

5.1.4. establish attractive conditions for and explore ways of enhancing the status of the teaching profession;

5.2. improve recognition of and support for new learning settings, and in particular to:

5.2.1. intensify efforts aimed at the recognition of youth work and non-formal and informal learning, taking into account the proposals put forward by the "Strasbourg Process" on the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning;

5.2.2. support the use of formal education facilities by civil society organisations providing both students and teachers with additional opportunities for non-formal and lifelong learning;

5.2.3. encourage different forms of practical occupational experiences which allow pupils and students to apply what they have learned and to familiarise themselves with different career paths and opportunities;

5.2.4. promote entrepreneurship education and value the role that youth organisations can play in supporting the development of self-employment prospects for young people;

5.2.5. encourage the development of youth workers' leadership competences by promoting the use of the European Portfolio for Youth Leaders and Youth Workers;

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 12 March 2013.

5.3. ensure inclusion, and in particular to:

5.3.1. facilitate access to education for children and young people from disadvantaged groups;

5.3.2. ensure proper information to parents about the educational system and its different pathways and help them support adolescents in their educational choices;

5.3.3. provide teacher training to equip teachers with intercultural competences, and the capability to deal with ethnic, cultural and religious diversity;

5.3.4. create conditions to prevent young people from disadvantaged groups from leaving school early, including through targeted financial support for secondary students to enable them to stay in full-time education.

B. Draft recommendation[3]

1. The Parliamentary Assembly, referring to its Resolution … (2013) on young Europeans: an urgent educational challenge, and its Resolution … (2013) and Recommendation … (2013) on culture and education through national parliaments: European policies, recommends that the Committee of Ministers urge the Steering Committee for Education Policy and Practice (CDPPE), in co-operation with the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) and the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) to:

1.1. prepare a policy instrument defining principles for the recognition and validation of non-formal education, taking due account of the proposals put forward by the "Strasbourg Process" on the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning;

1.2. collect and analyse good practices and develop on this basis policy guidelines on how to:

1.2.1. foster the spirit of entrepreneurship in education;

1.2.2. offset inequalities in access to education and prevent early school leaving;

1.2.3. combat bullying and all forms of violence at school.

2. The Assembly also recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite the Joint Council on Youth to develop policy measures aimed at reducing the risk of self-harm among young people.

3. Draft recommendation adopted unanimously by the committee on 12 March 2013

C. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Komar, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. On 11 May 2010, Mr Luca Volontè and others tabled a motion for a recommendation on "Young Europeans: an urgent educational challenge", which was referred to the committee for report on 21 June 2010. The committee appointed Ms Elvira Kovács rapporteur on this subject at its meeting on 22 June 2010.[4] I replaced her on 2 October 2012. I would like to thank Ms Kovács for her contribution to the preparation of the preliminary draft report. A hearing was held on 27 June 2012 in the framework of the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Council of Europe Youth Sector, with the participation of Mr Jean-Claude Mignon, President of the Parliamentary Assembly, Ms Snežana Samardžić-Marković, Director General for Democracy of the Council of Europe, Ms Maria Paschou, Chairperson of the Advisory Council on Youth, Ms Hranush Shahnazaryan, President of Loesje, and Mr Alberto Cottica, Moderator of the "Edgeryders" project, contributing to the preparation of this report.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly has acknowledged on numerous occasions that young people in today's Europe are growing up facing an increasingly uncertain future. Unsolved questions about the necessary evolutions in Europe's democratic, demographic and economic make-up, and ever more austere approaches to public spending, are directly affecting the educational and professional opportunities available to European youth. The transition from formal education to employment is proving increasingly difficult and the high rates of youth unemployment across Europe naturally cast a shadow over formal education, posing the question of whether the current system is good enough. Even if many countries have sought to address these challenges by introducing organisational and structural reforms, current formal education systems struggle to meet the new demands.

3. This report identifies policy responses that can allow young people to get – through formal, non-formal and informal education, and other forms of learning – all the necessary competences and skills for them to face the challenges of 21st-century Europe and to enjoy active citizenship and full participation in society. The report seeks to outline proposals of possible ways forward for education policies across Europe.[5] However, education, even though very important, is still only one of the aspects of policies across Europe aimed at lowering unemployment rates. These are not necessarily directly linked to the quality of the school systems.

2. Young people's expectations of education

4. Young people are in a phase of their lives which is characterised by the transition from childhood to adulthood. This is a challenging period during which, in a relatively short time, they have to take a lot of important decisions which may determine their future life. Education is expected to help young people take the right decisions.

5. Over recent decades, conditions on the labour market have changed radically, undermining job stability or security, while the availability of support mechanisms has decreased. These changes have not only increased the challenges that young people are now facing, but they are also contributing to their marginalisation and to feelings of insecurity in relation to the future. I am deeply alarmed by the fact that youth unemployment has reached an historic average of 22.4% in the European Union countries. Among the youth at work, nearly half (42%) are employed on temporary contracts in comparison to 11% for 25 to 59-year-olds.

6. It is to be noted that the youth situation across Europe is very uneven and significant differences between European countries have to be taken into account. Thus, whereas youth unemployment has risen sharply since 2007, it remains below 10% in Germany, the Netherlands, Austria and Norway. However, most European countries, especially in the south, report youth unemployment rates which are much higher: youth

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4. The rapporteur wishes to express her gratitude to Ms Antonia Wulff (Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU)) for the preparation of the background study, and to Ms Nadia El-Imam ("Edgeryders" project), who co-ordinated the debate and edited the specific proposals put forward by the members of the "Edgeryders" community: Ms Ksenia Serova, Mr Eimhin David, Mr Jorge Couchet, Mr Luke Devlin, Mr Bembo Davies and Mr Ola Möller, as well as Ms Prudencia Gutiérrez-Esteban and Mr Piotr Mikiewicz through their report "Learning on the Edge. Edgeryders' learning and educational experiences".

5. Due to the lack of statistics and research covering all the member States of the Council of Europe, this report is to a large extent based on the work of some of the main stakeholders in the field of youth and education at European level, notably OBESSU, the European Students Union (ESU), the European Youth Forum, the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE), the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE), the European Youth Parliament (EYP) and Education International (EI).

unemployment levels are particularly worrying in Spain and in the Balkan States, where they are above 50%.[6] Taking this into consideration, it is obvious that differences in the employment rates throughout Europe are also a consequence of past economic orientation in certain States (namely the focus on labour intensive branches).

7. I am also deeply concerned by the increase in the rates of teenage suicides and deliberate self-harm amongst young people. At least 100 000 young people kill themselves every year worldwide and in most European countries, youth suicide rates have been increasing.[7] Many adolescent suicides are related to a fear of failure. In adolescents, substance abuse plays a role in up to 70% of suicides. Young people threatened with peer violence and bullying are 3.3 times more likely to have suicidal thoughts, and a previous history of depression increases by five the risk of a youth suicide attempt. Every year, an average of 16 children in the United Kingdom commit suicide as a result of being bullied in school.

8. All of this is challenging the notion of education as a guarantee for a decent life,[8] and challenging long-held ideas and truths about what constitutes quality education. Recent years have seen a new emphasis on the role of education in fostering lifelong learning, active citizenship and entrepreneurship, and the recognition that learning happens throughout the life of an individual, within and outside formal education. These concepts rely to a large extent on people taking responsibility for their own learning, which in turn demands an effective formal education of high quality that "provides people with the critical knowledge, abilities and skills that are needed to conceptualise, question and solve problems that occur both locally and globally".[9] For many young people, these are competences that so far they have acquired and developed through non-formal education and youth work, phenomena that have played an important role in compensating for the shortcomings of formal education.

2.1. Learning opportunities: why traditional formal educational offers are losing attractiveness

9. Being able to influence one's education and daily life leads to a greater sense of ownership, which in turn leads to a greater interest and engagement, a deeper motivation for and, in the end, more effective learning. Yet it is still difficult for students in Europe to influence their own education. Schools have to recognise the expertise and the active role of students by considering them as partners in decision-making and allowing them to influence the methods and materials used in the classroom, as well as other matters concerning daily life in school.

10. OBESSU[10] identifies the failure of formal education to cater for the needs of different learners as one of the system's most crucial shortcomings. In many schools, the pedagogical methods applied are old-fashioned and outdated. Tuition centres on the written word, despite the fact that many students would need a greater mixture of theoretical, creative and practical subjects, allowing and encouraging them to explore different skills and to employ different ways of learning during the school day. Moreover, when the focus is on giving students correct answers to remember, rather than problems to solve, students are being reduced to passive recipients of information. They should rather take an active role in the classroom and in their own learning processes.

11. There may also be a gap between the expectations of students and the reality of formal education, especially higher education, which might lead to students dropping out. The individual financial cost of tertiary study and of completion of secondary education, and the uncertainty about their benefit to future employment, must be considered as possible factors in young peoples' decisions about formal education. Hence, guidance is an important tool to use to inform school students about their possibilities within both formal and non-formal education. Easily accessible and objective counselling from professionals, providing neutral information and guidance in an educational context, is a way of motivating and fostering learning in a lifelong perspective and reducing early school leaving.

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6. Eurostat news release 31/2012 of 1 March 2012. Data for the Balkan countries is based on the information from national statistics agencies on the situation in 2010-2011 – as reflected in the Assembly report on "The young generation sacrificed: social, economic and political implications of the financial crisis" (Rapporteur: Mr Luca Volontè, Italy, EPP/CD) (Doc. 12951), p. 9.
7. According to the WHO Mortality Database, a comparison of the most recent data up to 2004 from 90 countries including the European region showed that in the 15 to 19 age group, suicide was the 4th leading cause of death among young males, and the 3rd leading cause among females, and accounts for 9.1% of all fatalities in this age group. See www.childsafetyeurope.org/publications/info/factsheets/youth-suicide.pdf.
8. European Union Council conclusions on the employability of graduates from education and training, p. 4: www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/130142.pdf.
9. Policy Paper on Education, Education International, July 2011, p. 2
10. Political Platform, OBESSU, May 2012, p. 12.

2.2. Learning environment: why the social climate in schools is deteriorating

12. The educational environment is paramount to the students' experience of education and, for many, determines their level of schooling far more than academic curricula.[11] A positive learning environment includes safe and well-functioning school buildings, allowing for a variety of classes and pedagogical methods, reasonable group sizes and schedules, good teacher-student and peer relationships, and active prevention of bullying, violence and discrimination.

13. Of the factors jeopardising this environment, much attention has been devoted to violence in schools over recent decades, in part due to high-profile instances of extreme violence (for example the school shootings in Finland in 2007 and 2008). However, practitioners, policy makers and academics are increasingly concerned about the violence that takes place in schools on a daily basis, notably bullying in all its forms.[12] While levels of physical violence have remained largely stable, there has been an increase in non-physical violence, such as verbal harassment. These minor forms of violence are often considered to be manifestations of a "lack of discipline" rather than expressions of violence, but can, as research shows, escalate and develop into serious acts of violence.[13] The "need for significance in the face of non-recognition can lead to bullying, violence being the fast track to significance".[14] It seems that "isolation and despair and lack of encouragement toward personal communication lead to empathic shut down and suicide in worst case scenarios, lack of connection to welcoming and mutually involved communities leads to drug abuse (false sense of union) and youth pregnancy".[15]

14. Violence and bullying tend to mirror and reproduce the hierarchies and norms of society at large.[16] Schools have to combat actively these structures by developing anti-violence and anti-discrimination policies and strategies, aiming at a culture of mutual respect. In addition to discrimination, research highlights the lack of participation in decision-making at school, the number of students in a school, and the level of adult supervision and support, as well as the neighbourhood of the school, as determinants of violence manifesting itself in the school setting.[17]

15. A recent PISA study on learning outcomes included a few questions centred around the learning environment. The study is in fact identifying improvements in the social climate in schools, with less disorder and better teacher-student relationships. This includes results showing that a larger percentage of students feel that their teachers listen to them, treat them fairly and support them when needed.[18] Good relations with teachers generally have a positive effect on learning outcomes, but research shows that particularly socio-economically disadvantaged students learn more and have fewer disciplinary problems when they feel that their teachers take them seriously,[19] which supports the importance of working to secure a culture of mutual respect in the school and among all members of the school community.

2.3. Learning outcomes: why young people feel they do not get what they need to prepare for life

16. The question of whether young people acquire the right competences in formal education has become ever more topical as figures for youth unemployment in Europe are growing. What is challenging in this regard is that learning outcomes tend to be evaluated only once a formal education qualification has been obtained, and usually with reference to employment prospects or opportunities that are, to a large extent, determined by external factors, such as labour market policy and the economic situation.

17. According to Business Europe, "four million jobs are vacant in the European Union due to a mismatch between the skills of the unemployed and the skills required for the available jobs", and this is mainly due to shortcomings in education and training systems across Europe failing to provide companies with the necessary skills in ICT, science, technology, engineering and mathematics.[20] Jobs in Europe are becoming

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11. Safe, Healthy and Sustainable Educational Environments: Designing the Schools of tomorrow, OBESSU, January 2011, p. 1.
12. School Violence in OECD Countries, Karen Moore, Nicola Jones and Emma Broadbent, Plan Limited (Plan International), May 2008, p. 7.
13. Violence and school, June Kane, DAPHNE Booklet 8, European Commission, August 2008, p. 7.
14. Comment by @Involute Conduit on Edgeryders website. See also footnote 4.
15. Ibid.
16. School Violence in OECD Countries, ibid., p. 7.
17. Ibid., p. 9.
18. PISA 2009 at a Glance, OECD, OECD Publishing, 2010, p. 94.
19. Ibid.
20. Educate for Employment, Business Europe, 2012.

more skills-intensive. According to CEDEFOP (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training), almost 90% of the jobs that are expected to be created or become vacant by 2020 will require medium or high qualifications.[21] Approximately 40% of young people in Europe are expected to have a university degree or equivalent by 2020.

18. However, education is not only about teaching students to become part of a highly skilled workforce, but has a value in itself; "quality education nurtures human talent and creativity, thereby contributing to the personal and professional development of the individual person, as well as to social, cultural, economic, political and environmental development of society at large".[22] Our committee underscored this in its report on "Culture and education through national parliaments: European policies",[23] referring also to the importance of teaching humanities, "humanities being the basis of democracy".

19. Furthermore, formal education fails to recognise that some young people do not necessarily want to follow the path of previous generations, but are considering new ways and, in fact, new goals. Some of them are freedom, self-actualisation and satisfaction in work and personal lives.[24] Education is also essential for teaching healthy habits (eating, exercise, etc.), discipline, reflection, introspection, solidarity, etc. This is precisely the kind of education that nowadays is hardly taught anywhere, and that enables the individual to seek and enjoy "doing activities which help centre him/her".

2.4. Equality in education: why everyone does not have the same opportunities

20. While certain groups are still excluded from education because of discrimination and negative stereotyping, "free [provision of] schooling may be the single most important policy measure that has had a dramatic, transforming impact on school enrolment so far".[25] Many children and young people are currently excluded from education because their families cannot afford the tuition fees or the hidden costs of so-called "free" education, such as pencils, handbooks, books and other materials, uniforms or services such as public transport to and from school. Other aspects regarding access to learning include access to cultural institutions and to media, as well as new information and communication technologies. The latter, in particular, should be seen as a fundamental learning resource and should be better used as a tool for a proactive learning process. In this respect, member States' educational policies should help bridge the "digital divide" if they want to succeed in ensuring equal opportunities in education.

21. Education policy is crucial to fostering intergenerational social mobility[26] and reducing the effect of social inequalities upon educational success. However, the socio-economic background of a student often has a direct impact on their learning outcomes. Schools with students from more advantaged backgrounds generally have more full-time teachers with university degrees. Despite several countries aiming to support disadvantaged schools by ensuring that they have a higher teacher–student ratio, these teachers are often less qualified than those working in advantaged schools.[27]

22. Formal education systems are also, to a large extent, still designed for rather homogeneous groups of students, and are hence often unprepared for their diversity. While the European Union considers communication in the mother tongue as one of the eight key competences for lifelong learning, current systems are unable to deal with the broad range of mother tongues spoken in schools across Europe. Where a student's mother tongue differs from the main language of instruction in their school, there are obvious barriers to successful learning. As one's mother tongue forms the basis for all other learning, it would thus be important to offer these students language courses in their mother tongue.

23. In order to overcome the obvious challenge of resources, creative solutions could be found, for example through partnering with local communities to support this language provision. On average, students with a migrant background (including second generation immigrants), and especially those who speak another language at home, perform considerably worse at school than their non-migrant peers.[28] These results did not change between 2000 and 2009[29] and hence underline the importance of formal education systems across

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21. www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/articles/19710.aspx.
22. Policy Paper on Education, Education International, July 2011, p. 2.
23. See Doc. 13142 (Rapporteur: Ms Anne Brasseur, Luxembourg, ALDE).
24. Edgeryders.
25. www.unicef.org/education/bege_61665.html.
26. Intergenerational Social Mobility in OECD Countries, Orsetta Causa and Åsa Johansson, OECD Journal: Economic Studies, 2010, p. 2.
27. PISA 2009 at a Glance, op. cit., p. 58.
28. Ibid., p. 54.
29. Ibid., p. 62.

Europe doing their utmost to bridge this gap. Another gap can be identified between urban and rural areas; students in cities perform better than those living in rural areas and this is particularly the case in Hungary and Bulgaria.[30]

24. Even if the PISA study highlights some positive developments, Europe suffers from an educational divide and the "potential of schools to reduce inequalities during the youth period is underused".[31] It is not only a consequence of a lack of supportive policy measures to facilitate social inclusion and access to education, but a matter of many countries having formal education systems which structurally and systematically marginalise young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is particularly the case in countries where students have to choose between academic and vocational educational pathways at an early age, resulting in already disadvantaged students ending up in disadvantaged segments of the education system.[32]

25. Moreover, a great number of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are part of the so-called "Not in Education, Employment or Training" – NEET – group.[33] Some young people are at greater risk of becoming NEET, for example those with few or no qualifications and those with a health problem, disability or low aspirations. Immediate policy responses are therefore required to support this group of young people.

26. All students should have access to high-quality schools, without discrimination, fostering equality, tolerance and respect for diversity. Also, contrary to what might be expected, grouping students according to ability in different subjects does not seem to have a positive impact on performance.[34]

3. The rise of new education and learning settings

3.1. Lifelong learning

27. The prevailing discourse on education policy in Europe takes the transformation from an industrial economy to a knowledge-based and globalised economy as its starting point. Lifelong learning constitutes one of the pillars contributing to this aim, and is the tool with which both States and individuals are supposed to be able to adapt to a rapidly changing world and labour market. The economic focus of the Lisbon Strategy (for the European Union to become the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world) – and the current economic crisis – has meant that lifelong learning has been largely approached in terms of its contribution to economic growth, and hence that its role in relation to social cohesion and democracy has been downplayed.

28. While the emphasis is currently on providing the labour market with a highly skilled pool of possible workers, it is also through lifelong learning that citizens find their place in society and exercise active citizenship. These aspects of lifelong learning require more policy attention and measures than they have received so far, and are crucial for equality, democracy and social cohesion. Lifelong learning should therefore be recognised as a way of preventing marginalisation and social exclusion, which means that measures have to be taken to provide young people with a broad range of learning strategies and opportunities, recognising that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have more difficulties in accessing lifelong learning.[35]

29. "Learning to learn" is one of the key competences for lifelong learning and is considered a prerequisite for both employment and social inclusion;[36] it could be described as an awareness of how one learns, knowledge about available learning opportunities, and an ability to organise and control one's own learning. It includes the ability to search for and select information, to critically analyse it and its sources, and to apply and present it in new contexts. This requires a shift in both the curriculum and the classroom, where the focus on

30. Ibid., p. 56.
31. Social Inclusion of Socially Excluded Youth: More Opportunities, Better Access, and Higher Solidarity – Policy Review of the Youth Research Cluster on Social Inclusion, Dagmar Kutsar and Helena Helve, European Commission, 2011, p. 29.
32. Ibid., p. 28; PISA 2009 at a Glance, op. cit., p. 80.
33. For example, at the end of 2011, 154 900 (8.1%) 16- to 18-year-olds were NEET in the United Kingdom. Rates varied considerably with age (2.8% of 16-year-olds, 6.7% of 17-year-olds and 14.5% of 18-year-olds). For most young people, being NEET is a temporary outcome as they move between different education and training options. See www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/youngpeople/participation/neet.
34. PISA 2009 at a Glance, op. cit., p. 80.
35. Political Platform, OBESSU, May 2012, p. 16.
36. "Learning to Learn: What is it and can it be measured?", Bryony Hoskins and Ulf Johansson, European Commission, 2008, p. 5.

facts is replaced by process-oriented and skills-focused tuition and assessments, and where the students take greater responsibility and engage in continuous reflection on their own learning, including self-evaluation, throughout the learning process.

30. The actual implementation of lifelong learning strategies has, however, remained a challenge,[37] which means that it is currently the responsibility of the individual to manage and update their learning continuously. This requires a broad understanding not only of one's own learning needs and methods, but also of the learning opportunities and sources of information available in society at large.[38]

31. The current framework for lifelong learning lacks a coherent and sustainable funding model, which hinders implementation and the possibilities to reach out to more disadvantaged groups of learners. In order to encourage further education and make lifelong learning a reality, measures have to be taken to facilitate and encourage the transition between different levels and forms of education, notably the transitions from vocational training to higher education, from formal education to employment, and from the labour market back to education and training.

3.2. Non-formal and informal learning

32. In accordance with the concept of lifelong learning, there are calls to have a more holistic approach to education in Europe, and that recognition be given not only to learning that takes place in formal institutions but also non-formal and informal learning.[39] However, both non-formal and informal learning still suffer from a lack of understanding of both their nature and their impact, for individuals and for society as a whole.

33. "Non-formal education means any planned programme of education designed to improve a range of skills and competences, outside the formal education setting",[40] and the European Youth Forum highlights the importance of skills and competences such as problem solving and conflict management, planning, organising and leadership, teamwork and interpersonal as well as intercultural competences.[41] Its methodology places the learner at the centre, which fosters an increased self-awareness of learning strategies and processes. Hence, the methodology of non-formal learning can be used and integrated into formal education, provided that teachers have the appropriate training.

34. There is a clear need for a better validation and recognition of skills acquired by young people through non-formal education, considering it a complement to formal education. This was stressed at the symposium on the "Recognition of Youth work and non-formal learning/education in the Youth field", which was organised jointly by the Council of Europe and the European Commission in Strasbourg on 14-16 November 2011, and led to the adoption of a Statement accompanied by a Plan of Action.[42] This process is now referred to as "The Strasbourg Process" – a European level political process comparable to those that influence and steer strategies in education and training, such as the Bologna Process in higher education or the Bruges/ Copenhagen Process in vocational education and training.

35. OBESSU[43] proposes that higher education institutions recognise non-formal education alongside academic achievements, both in their recruitment and as an integrated part of the education they offer, which could be an important tool in enabling people to access further education opportunities, particularly disadvantaged groups that might not have formal qualifications.[44]

36. Youth organisations have long demanded a Europe-wide system for the promotion and recognition of non-formal learning, and so far there have been many different initiatives at both national and European level, such as the Council of Europe's Portfolio for Youth Leaders and Youth Workers[45] (which helps to identify,

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37. Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation, Joint Council/Commission. Report on the implementation of the Education & Training 2010 work programme, February 2008.
38. Involving Education Stakeholders in Trans-Regional Cooperation: The Challenge of Implementing Lifelong Learning Strategies, ETUCE, OBESSU and EFEE, 2010, p. 10.
39. See Recommendation Rec(2003)8 of the Committee of Ministers on the promotion and recognition of non-formal education/learning of young people.
40. Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education.
41. Recognition of non-formal education: Confirming the real competencies of young, European Youth Forum, November 2005, p. 2.
42. http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/documents/EKCYP/Youth_Policy/docs/Youth_Work/Policy/STATEMENT_Symposium_participants_160312.pdf.
43. The School Students view: why is non-formal education and informal learning important to us?, OBESSU, 2011.
44. Involving Education Stakeholders in Trans-Regional Cooperation: The Challenge of Implementing Lifelong Learning Strategies, ETUCE, OBESSU and EFEE, 2010, p. 11.
45. www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/resources/portfolio/portfolio_EN.asp.

assess and describe competences based on European quality standards) and the Youthpass of the European Union's Youth in Action Programme. However, while playing an important role in relation to lifelong learning strategies. These initiatives are yet to be formally recognised and to find their place in the recruitment policies of formal education institutions and employers.

37. Informal education, on the other hand, is understood as "the lifelong process where every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from the educational influences and resources in his or her own environment and from daily experience (family, peer group, neighbours, encounters, library, mass media, work, play, etc.)",[46] which means that it does not necessarily require or benefit from formal recognition to the same extent as non-formal education.

38. Education, cultivating relationships and developing a sense of purpose do not happen overnight, however. They need a space to be seeded and to grow. There should be specific spaces for young people to start learning new skills and to develop meaningful and lasting relationships, those that enable them to transcend themselves and become involved in something bigger than them, something that gives purpose to their life, hope and joy, and therefore a reason to be attached to it. This is why policies supporting the creation of such spaces must be promoted, like, for example, the proposal to establish a network of facilities[47] – urban or rural houses (in order to establish different types of contexts) – where young people (particularly those at risk) can go for a while to learn new skills and participate in volunteer activities (for example the "UnMonastery" projects[48]).

3.3. Education for democratic citizenship and human rights

39. Education for democratic citizenship and human rights[49] aims to give people the knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes that will help them to play an effective role in their community – be it at local, national or international level. It shows people how to become informed about their rights, responsibilities[50] and duties and helps them realise that they can have influence and make a difference. This new emphasis from the side of policy makers should therefore also be seen as a reaction to the democratic deficit and growing sentiments of racism and intolerance across Europe; it is through education that citizens become full and active members of society.

40. Within the Council of Europe framework, education is recognised as playing a crucial role in promoting democracy and human rights, and a Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education was adopted,[51] stating that teaching and learning practices should be based on these fundamental values, and recommending that member States promote democratic governance in all formal education institutions, encouraging and facilitating the active participation of the whole school community. The charter also underlines the importance of non-formal education, and especially the role of youth organisations and civil society in human rights education. Member States should intensify their efforts regarding the implementation of the charter, notably the recommendation to member States to integrate education for democratic citizenship and human rights in national curricula at pre-, primary and secondary school level as well as in vocational and higher education. They should also strive to promote democratic governance in schools allowing young people to acquire the skills and competences necessary for engaging in democratic processes. This will enhance young people's capacity to solve societal conflicts through dialogue with public authorities and through other democratic means.

41. The implementation of the charter was reviewed at the international conference held on 29 and 30 November 2012 in Strasbourg in the framework of the Andorran Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers.[52] Participants called for a new review in five years' time to assess the impact of the charter and to

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46. Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education.
47. By Edgeryders.
48. These houses may be abandoned facilities which are recycled by the young people themselves and thus, in addition to providing this much needed space, the process of recycling and converting the place into a social centre would help rehabilitate the area. See http://edgeryders.ppa.coe.int/mine-becomes-ours/mission_case/unmonastery-some-design-issues.
49. www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/edc/Who/Whatis_EN.asp.
50. As regards citizens' responsibilities, see Appendix III to the Budapest Declaration and Programme on education for democratic citizenship based on the rights and responsibilities of citizens adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 7 May 1999: https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=Decl-07.05.99/1&Language=lanEnglish.
51. Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 of the Committee of Ministers on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, adopted on 11 May 2010.
52. See the Report on the implementation of the Charter in the Council of Europe member States, David Kerr, Citizenship Foundation, United Kingdom:

define future action. Finally, the recently adopted United Nations Resolution on "Education for Democracy"[53] will bring a new momentum to the reform processes aimed at implementing education for democratic citizenship and human rights in our member States.

3.4. Peer-to-peer learning

42. Traditionally, students work independently and often even compete with each other to get high grades and recognition from the teacher. Peer-to-peer learning is about students listening to each other, recognising different views and perspectives, and working together to get a better understanding of a topic or an issue. Hence, students are encouraged to engage with each other in a meaningful way, share their knowledge with each other and agree on how to organise their common exchange and learning process. Peer-to-peer learning as a method can be used to prevent bullying, including cyber-bullying, and violence as well as early school leaving, and to support lessons in particular subjects. Mentoring and tutoring of different kinds are common examples.

3.5. Entrepreneurship and self-employment prospects

43. Entrepreneurship education is receiving ever more policy attention, as "the current complex and insecure economic environment requires individuals with capabilities for solving new problems through independent and responsible action",[54] and a "sense of initiative and entrepreneurship" is one of the eight key competences for lifelong learning.

44. Entrepreneurship refers to an individual's ability to turn ideas into action. It includes creativity, innovation, showing initiative and risk taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives.[55] The aim is not for all young Europeans to become entrepreneurs, but to foster a more entrepreneurial spirit.[56] Hence, entrepreneurship education is not about transmitting education but rather about fostering a culture of entrepreneurship, which in turn requires changes in the teaching and learning practices of formal education.[57] A major challenge in this regard is that teachers feel that they themselves lack the competences and the support of the school to apply more "creative and innovative approaches to learning".[58]

45. The European Youth Forum underlines that "young people should be in a position to consider self-employment or entrepreneurship" and proposes that entrepreneurship skills are integrated into formal education, but also identifies this as an issue where youth organisations could play a role.[59] It is indeed the case that many entrepreneurship skills can be acquired through non-formal education, by taking an active part in youth organisations and civil society. Partnership opportunities between civil society and formal education institutions thus need to be supported by policy measures, allowing for provision of entrepreneurship education to students, but also to facilitate the transmission of necessary skills to education professionals.

4. Policy responses

4.1. Enhancing the traditional formal education setting

46. Governments should develop their policies in youth mobility,[60] out-of-school education/learning, voluntary service and youth information and participation. They have to support young people on their way to becoming adults who are in a position to take responsibility for their own decisions and choices.

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www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/edc/conference2012/Source/DGIIEDUCDPPE_BU201217_ITEM8.pdf.

53. www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/67/L.25&referer=http://www.un.org/News/fr-press/docs/2012/AG11316.doc.htm&Lang=E.

54. Guidance Supporting Europe's Aspiring Entrepreneurs, Research Paper, CEDEFOP, 2011, p. 10.

55. Entrepreneurship Education: Enabling Teachers as a Critical Success Factor, European Commission, November 2011, p. 7.

56. Guidance Supporting Europe's Aspiring Entrepreneurs, op. cit., p. 20.

57. Entrepreneurship Education: Enabling Teachers as a Critical Success Factor, op. cit.

58. Ibid., p. 8.

59. Policy Paper on Employment, European Youth Forum, May 2008, p. 10.

60. Student mobility programmes, such as the European Union's Erasmus (European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students), Comenius (aimed at improving and increasing the mobility of pupils and educational staff at school level across the European Union) and Leonardo da Vinci Programmes (funding practical projects in the field of vocational education and training, with initiatives ranging from those giving individuals work-related training abroad to large-scale co-operation efforts).

47. Stakeholders in the field of education have long advocated the direct investment of no less than 6% of a country's gross domestic product (GDP) in education and training, guaranteeing that all levels and types of education and training have sufficient funding to provide all students with high-quality education.[61] Measures have to be taken to enhance the status and quality of vocational education, ensuring that it is equivalent to its academic counterparts.[62]

48. There are as many ways of learning as there are students in a classroom. Measures have to be taken for there to be a paradigm shift from the transmission of facts to a process- and skills-oriented education that places the learner at the centre and encourages active involvement, critical reflection and a broad range of learning strategies. Teachers have to be trained to deal with this diversity and encouraged to use a broad range of teaching methods and materials, allowing and encouraging students to employ and explore new ways of learning. Teachers should also be encouraged to actively discuss learning methods and strategies with their students, and involve them in decisions on what methods to use.

49. Measures should be taken to ensure that all schools are provided with anti-violence and anti-discrimination policies, clearly defining how to prevent and deal with different forms of violence, bullying and discrimination, and outlining a strategy for building a school culture of mutual respect. This should be a central element of teacher education and teachers should be offered continuous training in these matters.

50. To ensure that formal education allows young people to pursue their interests and fulfil their personal potential, investment is needed in effective guidance and counselling for all students, helping them to get an overview of different learning and career opportunities and supporting them in finding an educational and/or career path suitable for them. These services are especially important for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who might need additional information and encouragement to even consider further studies, or indeed complete current studies. Another important group to consider are the young people who are currently outside education and training, and might be hard to reach with current policies and measures.

51. Urgent measures must also be taken to stop teenage suicide and self-harm. Awareness raising, education and counselling[63] can play a major role. The most important thing is to give youth a sense of purpose. The social structure to which a person belongs is a key determinant in their attachment to life and the meaning they give to it. A lack of stable and valuable relationships with others makes it almost impossible to embark them on projects that transcend their own individuality, thus feeding the feeling of purposelessness.[64] One of the best ways to create lasting relationships with positive emotional values is through service to others, namely “helping others”. Young people could benefit greatly from embarking on projects that transcend individuality, a key step to getting an enduring and satisfactory sense of purpose, where the person feels that “he/she is not alone anymore”. Finally, media guidelines which restrict sensationalistic reporting of youth suicides or celebrity suicides helps reduce the risk of “copycat” or cluster suicides for young people.[65]

52. Many countries are expecting a shortage of qualified teachers in the near future, with many teachers retiring at the first opportunity, and a decreasing number of young people aspiring to become teachers themselves.[66] This requires urgent policy attention and public authorities must ensure attractive conditions as well as explore ways of enhancing the status of the teaching profession. Investment in the salaries of teachers has a direct impact on the results of students.[67] When allocating extra funding to formal education, public authorities tend to favour either teachers’ salaries or reductions in class sizes, but class size does not impact on students’ performance to the same extent. However, research indicates that overcrowded schools are among the causes of school violence,[68] and it is therefore recommended that regulations be introduced establishing a maximum number of students per class for primary and secondary education.[69]

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61. Policy Paper on Education, Education International, July 2011, p. 1; Political Platform, OBESSU, op. cit., p. 28.
62. See OBESSU’s Claim your voice! Campaign, www.obessu.org/vet/.
63. www.yourlifeyourvoice.org/AskIt/Pages/default.aspx.
64. www.yourlifeyourvoice.org/AskIt/Lists/Hotline%20Discusion%20Suicide/Online.aspx?RootFolder=%2FAskIt%2FLists%2FHotline%20Discusion%20Suicide%2FCan%27t%20Take%20Life%20Anymore&FolderCTID=0x0120020065912FC47D755548926B24AE569C2B53.
65. In an Austrian study of subway suicides, after the implementation of media guidelines for suicide coverage, suicides, especially subway suicides (the focus of the guidelines) decreased dramatically. See Etzersdorfer E, Voracek M, Sonneck G. A dose response relationship between imitational suicides and newspaper distribution. Archives of Suicidal Research 2004; 8(2): pp. 137-145.
66. Key Data on Education in Europe 2012, EURYDICE, February 2012, p. 113.
67. PISA 2009 at a Glance, op. cit., p. 88.
68. School Violence in OECD Countries, op. cit., p. 9.
69. Key Data on Education in Europe 2012, op. cit., p. 153.

4.2. Recognition of and support to new learning settings

53. It is important to make a distinction between different forms of recognition of the non-formal and informal learning of that takes place in youth work, depending on who recognises learning and for what purpose. The forms of recognition are formal, social and political recognition, as well as self-recognition.

54. Formal recognition means the "validation" of learning outcomes and the "certification" of a learning process and/or these outcomes by issuing certificates or diplomas which formally recognise the achievements of an individual. Political recognition means the recognition of non-formal education in legislation and/or the inclusion of non-formal learning/education in political strategies; Social recognition means that social players acknowledge the value of competences acquired in non-formal settings and the work done within these activities. Self-recognition means the assessment by the individual of learning outcomes and of the ability to use these learning outcomes in other fields. All of these aspects must be taken into account when validating non-formal and informal learning.[70]

55. Efforts to recognise non-formal and informal learning must therefore be intensified. This requires a more holistic approach to education and learning outcomes. The "Strasbourg Process",[71] a joint effort of all the main stakeholders in the field, symbolises the start of a common European effort to move forward on the issue of recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, and should be recognised and supported by all member States. Efforts should be intensified to implement the Recognition of Prior Learning of the Bologna Process. Co-operation with employers also has to be intensified in order to raise their awareness of the benefits and added value of non-formal learning.

56. Support should be put in place to enable formal education facilities to be used by civil society organisations to assist with providing both students and teachers with additional opportunities for non-formal and lifelong learning. Different forms of practical occupational experiences should also be further encouraged, as they allow students to apply what they have learned and to familiarise themselves with different career paths and opportunities.

4.3. Ensuring inclusion

57. Educational programmes should be structured so as to maximize the inclusion of vulnerable groups, including young people with disabilities, pregnant women, young people from ethnic groups, young parents and young workers. Special measures have to be taken to guarantee access to education and inclusion of children of refugees, internally displaced people and illegal migrants. This includes, in particular, measures to reach out to young people of non-sedentary groups, including undocumented Roma families. The education of children and young people in care has to be given special attention.

58. Inequality in access to education and educational opportunities should be considered a violation of the right to education. Policy measures have to be introduced to facilitate access to education for all children and young people, especially those living in disadvantaged circumstances, as well as to guarantee the quality of education provided. Access to education has to be understood within as broad a context as possible, recognising not only access to a particular educational pathway, but also access to those elements necessary to a successful education experience, such as relevant teaching materials and the Internet.

59. Access to culture and to creative activities should also be enhanced. Arts are "especially important for young people, in particular those aged between 15 and 25 years who are at a critical time in their lives when they are building a future for themselves as adult citizens. Introducing them to cultural resources is a process that draws on their subjective sensitivity and creative imagination, and gives them considerable freedom of initiative (of a kind not sufficiently accorded to members of this age group)".[72]

60. The concept of equal opportunities requires all families to have knowledge about the educational system and its different pathways; measures should therefore be taken to educate parents and help them support adolescents in their educational choices. This is particularly important for the families of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Extra-curricular classes should also be offered to overcome differences in prior knowledge and support from the family.

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70. See also Assembly Recommendation 1978 (2011) "Towards a European framework convention on youth rights".
71. http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/documents/Publications/Coyote/Coyote18/Strasbourg.pdf; See "Processing the Strasbourg Process" – article published in Coyote, June 2012.
72. Recommendation 1990 (2012) on the right of everyone to take part in cultural life (paragraph 7).

61. Multicultural societies require measures to guarantee that schools have the tools to deal with ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. Teacher training has to equip teachers with intercultural competences and a readiness to work in a diverse environment.

4.4. Prevention of early school leaving

62. While the decision to leave school early can be a conscious choice of the individual, the high numbers of early school leavers have to be analysed in terms of social and economic factors. Many countries have decided to prolong compulsory education, either by beginning schooling a year earlier, or by prolonging it by a year or two, in order to reduce and prevent early school leaving.[73] However, prolonging compulsory education requires the necessary financial means to provide all students with high quality free education.

63. Measures have to be taken to prevent early school leaving and help disadvantaged groups of young people to stay in education, especially after its compulsory stage, including the possible introduction of a maintenance allowance for secondary students to enable them to stay in full-time education.

64. The failure to cater for the needs of different learners risks marginalising the students that would require different methods or extra support. Teachers need to be trained for the diversity of learners and encourage different ways of learning and working. The democratic participation of students is crucial also in this regard, as being able to influence their education and daily school life leads to a greater ownership. Different forms of peer-to-peer learning and mentoring should also be considered as measures to prevent early school leaving. Finally, efforts have to be intensified to reduce and prevent different forms of violence and discrimination in schools, ensuring the well-being of all school students.

5. Conclusions

65. Europe needs a renewed commitment to education, recognising education as a prerequisite for personal fulfilment, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment, as well as its crucial role in equipping young people with the competences they need for lives in autonomy and dignity. Formal education must continue to represent the backbone of the education system; however, it is true that models for the recognition of formal, non-formal and informal education will need to be developed more intensively in the future. A renewed commitment encompasses the following:

66. *Continuous development and appropriate funding* – Being responsible for the provision and regulation of formal education, public authorities should aim to constantly improve its quality, recognising that it is the most powerful tool that Europe has to overcome the ongoing economic crisis, and that appropriate resources and funding need to be allocated to the education sector. This includes appropriate and sustained investment in the continuing professional development of teachers and school staff.

67. *Intensified efforts for social inclusion* – The formal education system plays a crucial role in supporting and fostering social mobility and social cohesion for young people with different starting points in life, but currently it is failing to do this adequately. Measures have to be taken to reach out to disadvantaged groups of young people and to support and facilitate their educational attainment. Access to primary and secondary education has to be guaranteed for all young people, and further studies should be encouraged and facilitated. These measures include the abolition of tuition fees as well as the reduction of all hidden costs of education.

68. *Prevention of youth suicide and deliberate self-harm* – Adequate prevention and treatment of depression, psychological disorders, and substance abuse helps reduce the risk of suicide and self-harm. School-based programmes against bullying, and related to coping skills and problem solving, as well as the existence of in-school counselling services have all proven more effective than direct suicidal awareness programmes. Media guidelines for suicide coverage need to be developed in order to prevent “copycat” cases. Post-care treatment in which young people receive counselling and mental health care immediately after a suicide attempt, is shown to reduce the likelihood of another attempt.

69. *Participatory learning in a democratic school environment* – A paradigm shift has to take place in formal education, moving from solely the transmission of facts to a more process- and skills-oriented education that places the learner in the centre. It has to encourage students to reflect on and shape their own learning, in order for them to develop a broad range of learning strategies and the competence of learning to learn.

73. Key Data on Education in Europe 2012, op cit., p. 29.

Moreover, schools play a crucial role in fostering active citizenship and human rights, and should integrate these elements into their curricula accordingly. All of this requires changes in curricula and teaching methods, as well as in the training of teachers.

70. *A rights-based approach to lifelong learning* – Efforts have to be intensified to make lifelong learning a reality for all, recognising its role in relation to active citizenship, democracy and social cohesion. Lifelong learning strategies have to be developed at both national and European level, including a comprehensive and sustainable funding model. Special measures have to be introduced to guarantee access to lifelong learning opportunities for disadvantaged groups. These measures should be developed in partnership with stakeholders and representatives of the groups concerned. The European institutions play an important role in encouraging and providing opportunities for peer learning.

71. *A holistic approach to education* – In accordance with the concept of lifelong learning, member States have to adopt a more holistic approach to education, recognising that learning takes place all the time and that all learning experiences in life contribute to personal growth and a better understanding of the surrounding society. Measures have to be taken to further the validation and recognition of non-formal learning. Active participation of young people in all stages of youth work is an important element that contributes substantially to the promotion of young people's autonomy.

72. *Continuous dialogue with stakeholders* – The broader question of quality in formal education can only be addressed through continuous dialogue with and intensified co-operation amongst all stakeholders in the field, namely the students, the teachers, the parents and the employers. The stakeholders should be consulted in the development of new policy, throughout its implementation and at the stage of evaluation, thus encouraging a comprehensive and integrated approach to the different processes.

73. *Better employment prospects for young people* – We should urge our member States to increase the availability of career counselling through the educational system, counselling offices and an online counselling platform to reach out to young people, by improving its quality and the quality of education in general. We should recommend that member States increase the number of training programmes for the unemployed, according to the needs of the current labour market.