

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE TO POLICIES

Quick overview for educators on important policies of social cohesion, employment, civic education and adult education



About this publication

The Educator's Guide to Policies provides a structured overview of the strategies of the European Union, the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in key social policy areas: social cohesion, employment, civic education and, more broadly, adult learning. It brings together the guiding principles, key policies and major programmes and provides a resource for understanding how these dimensions together promote more inclusive, educated and equitable societies in all Member States. This document is intended to serve as a basis for educators to navigate European and national policies.

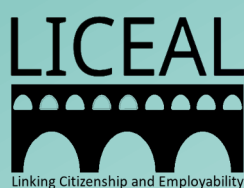
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Introduction

The Policy Box is an essential tool to provide a structured overview of the strategies of the European Union, the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in key social policy areas: **social cohesion, employment, civic education** and, more broadly, **adult learning**. It brings together the guiding principles, key policies and major programmes, and provides a resource for understanding how these dimensions together promote more inclusive, educated and equitable societies in all Member States. This document is intended to serve as a basis for educators to navigate European and national policies, enabling comparisons and promoting alignment with European objectives at the local level, with a particular focus on supporting vulnerable groups such as low-income populations, youth (in transition), migrants, and those facing discrimination or socio-economic exclusion.

These policy areas are the bedrock of a prosperous and resilient society, especially for individuals and groups at risk of marginalisation. Social cohesion and employment initiatives aim to bridge regional disparities, reduce poverty, and promote economic inclusion, thus providing greater stability and opportunity to all EU citizens, regardless of background. Citizenship education and adult learning further empower individuals to actively engage in democratic life, stay competitive in evolving labour markets, and adapt to societal changes, with tailored support for vulnerable groups. Together, these areas drive sustainable growth, social unity, and active civic participation, all essential for the EU's vision of a more cohesive, integrated, equitable, and progressive Europe where no one is left behind.

European policies and frameworks related to employment, citizenship, and social policies and adult learning are comprehensive and aim to promote social cohesion, equal opportunities, and economic growth across the continent. It is important to recognise that people in vulnerable conditions should directly benefit from these. Thus, it remains crucial to have sound support and expert structures able to connect the dots between policies designed to reach out and the individual capacities to accessing these.

European Union

Two important EU initiatives shed a different light on the various policy areas: the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) from the perspective of equality and rights and the European Education Area (EEA) from the perspective of education. The European Charter of Fundamental Rights is then linked to the equality, rights and values within the two frameworks. Policies are often implemented through:

- Regional and national operational programmes, most of them under the **Open Method of Cooperation (OMC)**, a soft governance approach that leaves the main responsibility for activities and implementation to the Member States;
- Partnerships between public institutions, NGOs, and the private sector;
- Targeted projects addressing specific needs of vulnerable groups;
- Support for adult education and vocational training;
- Initiatives to improve digital literacy and soft skills.

To access these programmes, individuals typically need to engage with local projects or institutions implementing EU-funded initiatives rather than applying directly. Local authorities, employment services, NGOs and CSOs often play a key role in connecting vulnerable groups with relevant opportunities. Thus accessing and making sound use of the frameworks relies on a capable public infrastructure.

To provide a structured overview of the European Union's policy framework across four key dimensions: Employment, Citizenship, Social Cohesion, and – transversally – Adult Education: Table 1 shows the main principles, policies and programmes. Each dimension reflects the EU's commitment to fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and resilient society, addressing both the immediate and long-term needs of its citizens. By articulating the underlying principles, targeted policies, and specific programmes for each dimension, this framework offers a comprehensive view of the EU's social policy landscape, designed to promote social cohesion, ensure equal opportunities, and empower individuals through education and employment. This table can serve as a foundational tool for analysing and comparing national policies across EU Member States, focusing on the alignment with EU goals and the support of vulnerable populations.

EMPLOYMENT DIMENSION

| Principles | Policies | Programmes |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Moving and Working in Europe: EU rules make it easy for citizens to work in another EU Country and protect the social security rights when moving within Europe. Free movement of</p> | <p>European Employment Strategy (EES): Part of the part of the Europe 2020 growth strategy, monitored by the EMCO Employment Committee: development of common guidelines, support of national</p> | <p>European Social Fund+ (ESF+): Programmes managed on National Levels.</p> <p>European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF): Assists workers affected by</p> |

| Principles | Policies | Programmes |
|---|---|---|
| <p>workers is a fundamental principle of the EU.</p> <p>Focus on Rights at Work: Fair employment practices, workers' rights, and safe working conditions.</p> <p>Flexicurity: Balances labour market flexibility with security.</p> <p>Skills Development: Emphasis on continuous improvement to meet labour market demands.</p> <p>Fair and just green and digital transition ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality and setting the frames for a fair digital transition</p> | <p>reform programmes, monitoring and reporting.</p> <p>The EU Employment Package (launched in April 2012) looks at how EU employment policies interact with a range of other policy areas to support smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It identifies the areas with the greatest job potential in the EU and the most effective ways for EU countries to create more jobs. Actions are proposed in the following areas:</p> <p>Supporting job creation, restoring labour market dynamism and improving EU governance.</p> <p>The European Skills Agenda focuses on vocational training and lifelong learning.</p> <p>Youth Employment Initiative (YEI): Targets youth unemployment in high-risk regions.</p> <p>EU Youth Guarantee: Ensures young people receive job, education, or training offers.</p> | <p>global trade shifts.</p> <p>EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI): Supports employment, social policy and labour mobility across the EU.</p> |

CITIZENSHIP DIMENSION

| Principles | Policies | Programmes |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Active Citizenship: Encourages democratic participation and EU values. Promotion of fundamental rights, equality and common values.</p> <p>Common Values: Reinforces European identity, human rights, and respect for diversity.</p> | <p>Citizenship, equality, rights and values policies</p> <p>Recommendations on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning: Promoting a key-competence approach and integrate a civic competence dimension.</p> <p>EU Youth Strategy: Empowers youth in democratic and EU engagement.</p> | <p>Erasmus+: Supports citizenship education and civic engagement in all ages.</p> <p>European Solidarity Corps: Provides volunteering projects to enhance active citizenship.</p> <p>Citizenship, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV): the majority of lines in CERV addresses fundamental rights, freedom and anti-discrimination policies, the Pillar Citizens Engagement</p> |

| Principles | Policies | Programmes |
|------------|----------|--|
| | | and Participation sets a specific focus on citizenship, also including understanding of EU and contributing to European identity. |

SOCIAL DIMENSION

| Principles | Policies | Programmes |
|--|---|---|
| <p>The European Union supports and complements the Member States' activities in the fields of social inclusion and social protection. This encompasses a broad range of policies to combat poverty and social exclusion, modernise social protection systems and promote the social inclusion of specific groups, including children, persons with disabilities and homeless people.</p> <p>Inclusive Growth: Reducing disparities among Member States, inclusive growth.</p> <p>Equal Opportunities: Ensures equal access to opportunities and resources.</p> <p>Solidarity: With marginalized or economically disadvantaged groups.</p> | <p>European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR): Improves social standards across all Member States.</p> <p>Cohesion Policy: Uses Structural Funds to reduce regional disparities.</p> <p>Anti-Discrimination Directives: Promotes equal treatment across the EU.</p> | <p>European Social Fund Plus (ESF+): Funds for job creation and social inclusion.</p> <p>EU Recovery and Resilience Facility: Focuses on post-COVID-19 recovery.</p> <p>Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD): Targets poverty and deprivation relief.</p> |

ADULT EDUCATION

| Principles | Policies | Programmes |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Lifelong Learning (LLL) und Key Competences: Recognises that competences should be developed throughout life.</p> <p>Inclusivity: Ensures accessibility for all, focusing on vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Adaptability to labour market needs: Aligns adult education with evolving labour market demands.</p> | <p>European Education Area is a strategic framework. Supports complementary to the EPSR employment, social policy and labour mobility with a specific Focus also in Adult Learning as vital part of Lifelong Learning</p> <p>New European Agenda for Adult Learning (NEAAL): Framework with focus on low-skilled adults.</p> | <p>Erasmus+: Funds also professional and personal development of adults.</p> <p>European Social Fund Plus (ESF+): Emphasizes reskilling and upskilling.</p> |

| Principles | Policies | Programmes |
|------------|--|------------|
| | <p>Upskilling Pathways Initiative: Provides pathways to literacy, numeracy.</p> <p>Digital Education Action Plan (DEAP) Promotes digital literacy of all. Equips adults with necessary digital skills.</p> | |

Employment Policies

The European Union has established several initiatives to promote employment and fair working conditions – they relate to both EPSR and EEA:

The **European Employment Strategy** (EES) is part of the part of the Europe 2020 growth strategy, monitored by the EMCO Employment Committee: development of common guidelines, support of national reform programmes, monitoring and reporting

[European Employment Strategy](#)

The **Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions** is a European Union policy aimed at improving the rights and protections of workers by ensuring fair, clear, and predictable working conditions. Adopted in 2019, the directive establishes minimum standards that all EU Member States must implement to enhance job security and transparency in employment relationships. Key provisions of the directive include:

CLEAR INFORMATION ON WORKING CONDITIONS: Employers are required to provide workers with essential information about their job roles, including job description, pay, working hours, contract duration, and notice periods. This information must be given in writing within the first week of employment, ensuring that workers fully understand their terms and conditions from the start.

PREDICTABLE WORKING SCHEDULES: The directive promotes stability by requiring more predictable and transparent work schedules, particularly for workers on variable-hour contracts. This includes notice of shifts and fair compensation if shifts are canceled last minute, improving work-life balance and reducing uncertainty.

LIMITS ON PROBATION PERIODS: Probation periods are limited to six months unless otherwise justified, to ensure that workers have a stable employment status and are not subject to unnecessarily prolonged probationary conditions.

PARALLEL EMPLOYMENT: Workers are granted the right to work for other employers without being penalized or restricted by exclusivity clauses, unless specific reasons justify such restrictions. This allows employees more freedom to pursue additional income and career opportunities.

PROTECTION AGAINST UNFAIR DISMISSAL: The directive includes measures to protect workers from unfair dismissal related to exercising their rights under this policy, ensuring they can safely assert their rights without fear of retribution.

The directive primarily benefits workers in non-standard or precarious employment, such as those on part-time, temporary, or on-demand contracts, by guaranteeing them clearer and more stable working conditions. By setting these standards, the EU aims to foster a fairer labour market, reduce job insecurity, and promote workers' rights across Member States, supporting a more inclusive and balanced European labour market.

The **Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)** is a European Union funding programme specifically designed to tackle high youth unemployment rates in regions where youth unemployment exceeds 25%. Launched in 2013, the YEI targets young people who are not in employment, education, or training (NEETs), offering them opportunities to gain skills and enter the labour market. The initiative supports a range of activities, including job placements, apprenticeships, traineeships, and continued education programmes. Through funding and partnerships with Member States, YEI provides financial support to regions most affected by youth unemployment, helping young people transition into stable employment and reduce socio-economic disparities across the EU. The YEI is part of the EU's broader commitment to reduce youth unemployment and foster inclusive economic growth.

Citizenship Policies

European citizenship policies focus on promoting free movement, equal treatment, and civic participation:

- **Freedom of Movement:** EU citizens have the right to move, work and reside freely within the EU, subject to certain conditions. After five years of legal residence, they are entitled to social assistance in the same way as nationals.
- **Equal Treatment:** The EU has established rules to prevent discrimination based on nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, and other factors. This includes legislation to promote gender equality in the workplace and ensure equal pay.

The **Citizenship, Equality, Rights and Values programme (CERV)** is designed to enhance citizens' knowledge of the European Union's history, values, and diversity, fostering a stronger sense of European identity. By supporting local and transnational projects, the programme encourages civic engagement, democratic participation, and dialogue on EU-related topics. It funds initiatives such as town twinning, networks of towns, and projects that commemorate significant European historical events. Through these activities, the programme aims to bridge the gap between citizens and EU institutions, promoting a sense of belonging and active participation in shaping Europe's future.

The **EU Recommendations on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning** describe eight essential competences that are vital for personal fulfillment, social inclusion, active citizenship, and employability. These competences include literacy, multilingualism, digital skills, social and civic responsibility, entrepreneurship, cultural awareness, and learning to learn. By setting a common standard, the EU encourages Member States to integrate these competences into their educational systems. The framework also promotes lifelong learning across all ages and helps prepare citizens to adapt to social and economic changes, enhancing skills that support participation in both local communities and broader EU democratic processes. Here the development of basic skills and transversal competences in gaining importance.

EU Youth Strategy: Spanning from 2019 to 2027, the strategy focuses on three core areas — engage, connect, and empower — to encourage youth participation in democratic life. The strategy promotes young people's social inclusion, civic engagement, and access to education and the labour market. By supporting youth organisations, volunteer programmes, and youth-led initiatives, it empowers young Europeans to take part in democratic decision-making processes at all levels. Through initiatives like the EU Youth Dialogue, the strategy facilitates direct communication

between young people and policymakers, ensuring that youth perspectives and concerns are considered in shaping EU policies. The strategy aligns with broader EU goals to foster a cohesive, inclusive society where young people play an active role in their communities and the future of Europe.

Social Policies

European social policies aim to ensure social protection, inclusion, and cohesion: The **European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)** was adopted in 2017, and sets out 20 key principles to ensure equal opportunities, fair working conditions, and social protection for EU citizens, thus aiming at supporting the realisation of Fundamental Rights as enshrined in the EU Fundamental Rights Charter. It aims to deliver new and more effective rights for people and support fair labour markets. For adult learners at the European level this framework includes the right to education, training and lifelong learning for adults. It sets a target that 60% of all adults should participate in training every year by 2030.

[European Pillar of Social Rights \(EPSR\)](#)

[European Skills Agenda](#)

The **European Skills Agenda** includes actions to help adults develop their skills throughout life. Two key initiatives under this are a proposal for individual learning accounts and a proposal for micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability. EPSR areas with specific focus on vulnerable groups are:

INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES:

- Ensures the right to income support for people with disabilities
- Provides services to enable participation in the labour market and society
- Promotes work environments adapted to their needs

CHILD-FOCUSED POLICIES:

- The Child Guarantee aims to prevent and combat social exclusion of children
- Children have the right to protection from poverty
- Specific measures to enhance equal opportunities for children from disadvantaged backgrounds

HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING ASSISTANCE:

- Access to social housing or housing assistance for those in need
- Protection against forced eviction for vulnerable people
- Adequate shelter and services to promote social inclusion of homeless people

LONG-TERM CARE:

- Right to affordable long-term care services of good quality
- Focus on home-care and community-based services

ACTIVE SUPPORT TO EMPLOYMENT:

- Tailored assistance for improving employment prospects
- Specific support for young people and long-term unemployed

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES:

- Fostering equal opportunities for under-represented groups
- Combating discrimination based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion, disability, age, or sexual orientation

SOCIAL PROTECTION:

- Ensuring adequate social protection for workers and self-employed individuals

ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL SERVICES:

Support for access to essential services (water, sanitation, energy, transport, financial services, digital communications) for those in need

The EU's **Cohesion Policy** aims to reduce economic, social, and territorial disparities across Member States by directing investments to regions in need. It is primarily funded through the **Structural Funds**, which include the **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** and the **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)**. These funds support projects that boost economic growth, improve infrastructure, create jobs, and enhance education and training in underdeveloped areas. The policy's main objectives are to foster balanced development, increase competitiveness, and promote social inclusion, ensuring that all regions have opportunities for sustainable development and that no region is left behind. Cohesion Policy plays a critical role in achieving EU-wide economic stability and equality, directly supporting efforts to integrate less developed regions into the broader EU economy.

EU **Anti-Discrimination Directives** refer to the EU **Charter of Fundamental Rights**. The Directives provide a legal framework to promote equal treatment and protect individuals from discrimination on the basis of factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, disability, age and sexual orientation. These directives include the **Racial Equality Directive** and the **Employment Equality Directive**, which provide protection against discrimination in areas such as employment, education and access to goods and services. By harmonising anti-discrimination standards across Member States, these Directives ensure that all citizens enjoy equal opportunities and protection, regardless of their background or personal characteristics. They reinforce the EU's commitment to upholding human rights and promoting inclusive societies where diversity is respected and everyone can participate fully in social and economic life.

The policies described below are aimed at the broader objective of the EPSR to reduce inequalities, improve living conditions and strengthen social protection systems across the EU, with a particular focus on supporting vulnerable groups

Social Security Coordination: EU regulations ensure that mobile EU citizens do not lose acquired social security rights when moving within the EU. This covers benefits such as pensions, disability benefits, and healthcare.

The **European Child Guarantee** was adopted in 2021. It aims to prevent and combat social exclusion of children in need by guaranteeing access to key services.

With the **Active Inclusion Strategies**, the EU supports member states in implementing integrated strategies to promote social inclusion, particularly for disadvantaged groups and mobile EU citizens.

The **Youth Guarantee**, launched in 2013, and connected to the EPSR, aims to tackle youth unemployment by ensuring that all young people under 25 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship, or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education, the Youth Guarantee initiative also has implications for adult learners, by combating social exclusion and fostering equal opportunities.

A Cross-cutting Dimension: Adult Education

While Adult Education is a more specialised area compared to Employment, Citizenship, and Social Cohesion, it is a distinct dimension due to its transversal role across all policy areas. Adult Education enables continuous skill development, empowering

[European Regional Development Fund \(ERDF\)](#)

[European Social Fund Plus \(ESF+\)](#)

[Charter of Fundamental Rights](#)

[European Child Guarantee](#)

[Active Inclusion Strategies](#)

[European Social Charter](#)

[Social Cohesion Strategy](#)

[The Youth Guarantee](#)

[New European Agenda for Adult Learning \(NEAAL\)](#)

citizens to actively participate in the labour market, engage fully in democratic life, and access social services effectively. By bridging skill gaps and promoting lifelong learning, Adult Education contributes to a more adaptable and resilient workforce, strengthens civic engagement, and enhances social inclusion, especially for vulnerable and marginalized groups.

This dimension highlights the interconnected nature of the EU's social policy framework and illustrates how learning opportunities for adults can reinforce the objectives of employment, citizenship and social cohesion policies. In addition, adult learning is essential to support the digital and green transitions, equipping individuals with the skills needed to navigate technological advances and contribute to a sustainable economy. This cross-cutting approach ensures that adult learning supports not only individual growth, but also the EU's wider socio-economic objectives.

The **New European Agenda for Adult Learning**, adopted in 2021, outlines a vision for adult learning development in Europe by 2030. The agenda aims to create a supportive, adaptable and inclusive environment for lifelong learning, aligning adult learning with wider social and economic changes in Europe. It focuses on:

GOVERNANCE of Adult Learning: Emphasizes effective policy-making and coordination among various stakeholders (governments, institutions, and organisations) to enhance adult learning systems. It advocates for clear roles and responsibilities to ensure sustainable adult education frameworks across Europe.

LIFELONG LEARNING PROVISION AND UPTAKE: Focuses on expanding accessible and diverse lifelong learning programmes to meet the evolving needs of the adult population. Encourages participation by providing flexible options for adult learners and promoting awareness of the benefits of continuous education.

ACCESSIBILITY AND FLEXIBILITY: Aims to remove barriers to adult learning by making programmes more adaptable to individual needs, especially for those with limited access or special requirements. This includes part-time, online, and modular learning options to accommodate various life circumstances.

QUALITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND SUCCESS in Adult Learning: Stresses the importance of high-quality educational standards, equitable access, and inclusive practices that address the needs of all individuals, including vulnerable groups. The goal is to enhance learning outcomes and personal development for a wide spectrum of adults.

TRANSITIONS TO THE GREEN AND DIGITAL ECONOMY AND RELATED SKILLS NEEDS: Recognizes the importance of equipping adults with skills for a sustainable future, with a strong focus on digital literacy and environmental awareness. This involves upskilling for jobs in emerging sectors, promoting green practices, and adapting to the digital economy.

The **Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways** is a policy aimed at helping adults with low levels of skills, knowledge and qualifications to improve their basic competences and become more employable. Adopted in 2016, the Recommendation provides a structured pathway to help individuals acquire the basic literacy, numeracy and digital skills that are increasingly needed to participate in the labour market and society. The Upskilling Pathways initiative is particularly important for marginalised groups such as older adults, the unemployed and the low-skilled, helping them to

[Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways](#)

access better job opportunities and improve their social inclusion. Funding from EU programmes such as the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) will support Member States in implementing this Recommendation, thereby contributing to the EU's objectives of promoting social inclusion, reducing inequalities and fostering a more resilient and adaptable workforce. The policy is structured around three key steps:

SKILLS ASSESSMENT: The first step involves assessing the current skills of individuals to identify any gaps. This helps in creating personalized learning plans that address specific needs, focusing on basic skills that can improve employability and social inclusion.

TAILORED LEARNING OFFERS: Based on the assessment, individuals are offered targeted and flexible learning opportunities that can range from basic education to vocational training. These learning programmes are designed to be accessible to working adults, making it easier for them to upskill while balancing other responsibilities.

VALIDATION AND RECOGNITION: Upon completion, the acquired skills are validated and recognized, allowing individuals to demonstrate their competencies in the job market and to pursue further education or employment opportunities.

The **Digital Education Action Plan (DEAP)** is an EU initiative aimed at enhancing digital literacy and fostering the development of digital skills across all ages, with a particular focus on adults. Recognizing the importance of digital skills for participation in the modern economy and society, this action plan seeks to equip individuals with the competencies needed to navigate digital tools, protect personal data, and engage with online platforms effectively. Key objectives of the plan include:

[Digital
Education
Action Plan](#)

IMPROVING DIGITAL LITERACY AND COMPETENCES: By offering educational resources, training programmes, and support for lifelong learning, the plan helps adults acquire essential digital skills, from basic computer literacy to advanced competencies in areas like cybersecurity and data management.

REDUCING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE: The plan addresses digital inequalities by making digital education accessible to everyone, especially targeting disadvantaged groups and those in rural or underserved areas.

SUPPORTING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN EDUCATION: It also encourages Member States to integrate digital technologies into teaching and learning processes across educational institutions, aiming to modernize education systems to better prepare citizens for the digital world.

Through partnerships, funding, and support for digital infrastructure, the Digital Education Action Plan plays a central role in ensuring that adults across the EU can develop the digital skills they need for both personal growth and professional success, thereby supporting the broader goals of digital transformation and economic resilience within the EU.

European Education Area

The European Education Area (EEA) is the EU framework developed to complement the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR). Education provides the basis for personal fulfilment, employability and active, responsible citizenship. It is essential for the vitality of

[European
Education
Area \(EEA\)](#)

European societies and economies. Access to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning is a right for all citizens, as enshrined in the EPSR. It is essential to prevent structural barriers to learning and skills development from affecting citizens' employment prospects and participation in society. The European Education Area thus works in synergy with the European Skills Agenda and the **European Research Area** to harness knowledge and make it the foundation of Europe's recovery and prosperity. The EEA includes, inter alia, several policies and initiatives specifically targeted at vulnerable groups to promote inclusive education and improve their access to learning opportunities.

These policies aim to ensuring that education systems are inclusive and accessible to all, with a particular focus on supporting those who face additional challenges or barriers to learning.

PATHWAYS TO SCHOOL SUCCESS INITIATIVE: Flagship initiative which aims to address the wellbeing challenges faced by young people and teachers; Provide support for vulnerable learners; Promote mental health in schools; Implement a whole-school approach to wellbeing and inclusion

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: Removing barriers (social, geographic, psychological) to access education; Adapting entry, progression, and recognition requirements; Complementing mainstream provisions with tailored measures for specific individual needs, especially for basic skills

EQUITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION: Providing equal access to education and training for all citizens; Taking care of the needs of vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities and learning difficulties; Supporting those living in rural/remote areas or struggling to balance work and family commitments.

LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES: Increase access for vulnerable groups; Quality lifelong learning opportunities; Prevent early school leaving; Promote smooth transitions from school to work.

DIGITAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: the EEA recognizes the importance of: Digital literacy and competences across all generations, including older learners; Addressing the digital divide that affects vulnerable groups.

SPECIFIC MEASURES: Include support for Young People: The Reinforced Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative (*see above*) support young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEETs). **ALMA (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve) initiative** is for disadvantaged young people, offering work experience in other EU countries.

TEACHER TRAINING AND SUPPORT: Adequate resources and training for teachers to support vulnerable learners; Promoting teacher autonomy and exchange of good practices.

EU Programmes on Social, Employment and Citizenship Policies

Several key European programmes and initiatives implement social, citizenship, and employment policies for Adults and in Adult Education. These programmes work together to implement the broader policy frameworks like the European Pillar of Social Rights and the EEA, addressing various aspects of employment, social protection, and citizenship across the EU. These programmes and initiatives demonstrate a concerted

effort at the European level to promote citizenship education and democracy learning, recognizing their importance for fostering active participation in democratic societies. They aim to develop critical thinking, awareness of rights and responsibilities, and engagement in civic and political processes among European citizens, particularly young people. The European Parliament has made citizenship education an education policy priority at the EU level.

Erasmus+ Programme (E+): although not exclusively focused on citizenship education support education, training, youth, and sport in Europe. It includes components that contribute to citizenship education and democracy learning through intercultural experiences and exchanges. In relation to citizenship Erasmus+ aims to enable young people to develop self-awareness as members of a social group and become active citizens. There's a focus on teaching values, democracy and tolerance. While adult learning in E+ tends to have a broader focus on lifelong learning and skills development rather than specifically on citizenship education. The citizenship education initiatives appear more focused on young people and formal school education systems.

There are also EU programmes and initiatives specifically aimed at supporting vulnerable groups in their employability and civic education:

The **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)** is the EU's main funding instrument for investing in people and supporting employability, with key features including a total budget of €99 billion for 2021-2027. It focuses on social inclusion, employment and education/training. Such it helps, in example, the long-term unemployed, migrants and disadvantaged youth. It supports up-skilling, retraining and lifelong learning initiatives.

The **Employment and Social Innovation Programme (EaSI)** promotes sustainable employment and social protection by supporting the modernisation of employment and social policies. It promotes job mobility, improves access to microfinance for vulnerable groups and tackles long-term unemployment and social exclusion.

The **Pact for Skills initiative** under the **European Skills Agenda** supports up-skilling and retraining. With public-private partnerships to promote skills development. Currently has 1,000 members and 14 large partnerships. Aims to upskill up to 6 million people.

Other relevant plans and policies are the **European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan** (sets targets for employment and participation in adult learning by 2030), the **Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training** focuses on adapting vocational education and training to labour market needs. The **Recovery and Resilience Facility** provides €723.8 billion to support reforms and investments, including in skills and jobs.

[Erasmus Plus](#)

[European Social Fund Plus](#)

[Employment and Social Innovation Programme \(EaSI\)](#)

[Pact for Skills initiative](#)

[European Skills Agenda](#)

[European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#)

[Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training](#)

RESPONSIBLE EU ENTITIES

European Commission: Proposes and enforces legislation and implements policies and the EU budget. Specifically, the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) is responsible for EU policy on employment, social affairs and inclusion. While DG EMPL is the primary DG for these policy areas, other DGs may also have some overlapping responsibilities or contribute to related policies

Council of the European Union: Adopts EU laws and coordinates EU policies. The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) configuration deals with employment and social policy issues. The Employment Committee (EMCO) is the main advisory body to EPSCO. The “Social Protection Committee” is the advisory body for the social protection issues in EPSCO.

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop): Supports the development of European vocational education and training (VET) policies, provides data and contributes to their implementation (EU Agency).

European Parliament: Passes EU laws together with the Council. Has committees focused on employment and social affairs

European Labour Authority: Helps enforce EU rules on labour mobility and social security coordination.

Member States: Have primary responsibility for implementing employment and social policies. Coordinate their policies through the Open Method of Coordination (OMC).

Social Partners (Trade Unions and Employers' Organisations): Involved in shaping policies through social dialogue. Can negotiate framework agreements on specific matters.

European Economic and Social Committee (EESC): Provides opinions on EU initiatives related to employment and social affairs.

Committee of the Regions (CoR): Provides input on how EU policies affect local and regional levels.

Council of Europe

The Council of Europe's policies and frameworks complement EU initiatives by providing additional legal instruments, monitoring mechanisms and policy guidance to promote social rights and cohesion in a wider European context, including non-EU Member States.

The Council of Europe pays particular attention to education and youth in its focus on democracy, human rights and the rule of law. With the **Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education**, the **Recommendation on Youth Work** and the Council of Europe **Reference Framework on Competences for Democratic Culture**, the Council of Europe has established comprehensive frameworks and instruments linked to the **European Cultural Convention**. These frameworks define standards, support Member States in educational reform, but also provide practical tools and approaches for learning about democracy and human rights.

EMPLOYMENT DIMENSION

| Principles | Policies | Programmes |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Right to fair working conditions with protections for vulnerable groups. Access to lifelong learning for marginalized populations.</p> | <p>European Social Charter: Rights specific to marginalized groups.</p> <p>Turin Process: Improves job access for disadvantaged populations.</p> | <p>European Qualifications Passport: Helps refugees validate skills.</p> <p>Employment Programmes: Target disadvantaged groups.</p> <p>Reference Framework of Competences for a Democratic Culture (RFCDC) in Vocational Education and Training: Underlines the importance of integrating Competences for Democratic Culture in VET to promote quality citizenship education</p> |

CITIZENSHIP DIMENSION

| Principles | Policies | Programmes |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Democratic participation for all, especially marginalized and vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Protection and promotion of human rights and freedoms for inclusive citizenship.</p> | <p>Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship: Prioritizes inclusion.</p> <p>Human Rights Education policies: Focuses on the social integration of vulnerable</p> | <p>Education for Democratic Citizenship: Focuses on vulnerable communities.</p> <p>Training Programmes: Foster social integration</p> |

| Principles | Policies | Programmes |
|------------|---|----------------|
| | groups. Education Strategy Learners First (2024-2030) aiming that learners will be able to fully exercise their rights as active citizens in European democratic societies. | and inclusion. |

SOCIAL DIMENSION

| Principles | Policies | Programmes |
|---|---|--|
| Social cohesion, inclusion of vulnerable groups: Right to inclusive education and social services. | Revised Social Charter: Protections for vulnerable populations. European Roma and Travellers Strategy: Addresses exclusion and discrimination. | Roma Education and Inclusion Programmes: Target Roma and marginalized groups. Social Cohesion Fund: Supports communities in need across Europe. |

ADULT EDUCATION

| Principles | Policies | Programmes |
|---|--|--|
| Right to Education: Especially access for vulnerable groups. Inclusivity: Focus on vulnerable and marginalised persons, including (young) adults. Adaptability: Aligns (adult) education also to labour market needs of disadvantaged groups. | Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the Context of Migration and Asylum in Europe (2021-2025) | Several action plans and recommendations with focus on vulnerable groups – (often young adults) Training Modules: Developed to support refugees and disadvantaged adults. |

The Council of Europe promotes democracy, human rights and the rule of law across Europe, also as objectives of education. It commits especially to improved access to education (including for adults). The Council of Europe underlines the essential role of education for personal development, employability, social inclusion (here the importance of intercultural understanding and language learning) and active citizenship - especially for people who may face barriers to traditional education systems: e.g. groups such as low-skilled workers, older adults, migrants and economically disadvantaged people. By emphasising the importance of accessible learning opportunities, the Council of Europe aims to bridge educational gaps, reduce inequalities and promote social cohesion, but its main focus is on youth empowerment and youth education for democratic citizenship and human rights education. Therefore, some of the concepts, materials and expertise developed in the Council of Europe's youth activities can be transferred to vocational education and training and adult learners (i.e. the Reference

Framework Competences for a Democratic Culture). Examples from Council of Europe policies are:

Turin Process for the European Social Charter (2014-present): The Turin Process is an initiative led by the Council of Europe to strengthen the implementation and impact of the **European Social Charter (ESC)**, particularly in the face of evolving social and economic challenges across Europe. The European Social Charter is one of the Council of Europe's most significant instruments for social and economic rights. It guarantees a broad range of everyday human rights related to Employment, Housing, Health, Education, Social protection, Welfare. The Charter lays out specific rights and freedoms and establishes a supervisory mechanism to ensure their implementation by member states. The Turin Process encourages also non-EU states to adopt the Charter's standards, promoting broader European solidarity on social rights.

The **Social Cohesion Strategy** focuses on access to social rights, employment, social protection, and housing. Of specific importance is the access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights, which is enshrined in a Council recommendation.

European Roma and Travellers Strategy (2020-2025): Focused on fostering social inclusion and combating discrimination, this strategy is aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of Roma and Traveller communities across Europe. The strategy outlines objectives in areas such as access to education, employment, healthcare, and housing, along with combating hate speech and discrimination. It provides guidance to member states on policies that promote social cohesion and inclusivity, addressing the specific needs of these marginalized groups in the broader context of human rights and social integration.

The European Space for Citizenship Education: This initiative by the Council of Europe aimed at promoting quality citizenship education and fostering commitment among member states. It focuses on promoting democratic values and principles through citizenship education. Key areas include codification of principles, accountability and quality assurance, and cooperation. The Space provides a frame for existing policy instruments such as the Council of Europe **Charter for Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education**, or the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competencies for Democratic Culture.

In this way, the Council of Europe reflects a commitment to social cohesion and inclusivity beyond the EU landscape, involving all member states.

[Competences for a Democratic Culture \(RFCDC\) in VET](#)

[European Social Charter](#)

[Social Cohesion Strategy](#)

[Roma and Travellers Division](#)

[European Space for Citizenship Education](#)

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

OECD has several policies and initiatives related to employment, social issues, citizenship and adult education which contribute to foster the social cohesion, employability and inclusion.

EMPLOYMENT DIMENSION

| Principles | Policies | Programmes |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Inclusive skills development, targeting labour market inclusion for vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Equal access to reskilling opportunities for marginalized populations.</p> | <p>Skills Strategies: Activities that support countries in reforms of their skills systems.</p> <p>Jobs Strategy: Address labour market challenges.</p> <p>Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) strategies to enhance employment opportunities.</p> | <p>Employment Programmes: Support workers affected by economic shifts.</p> <p>Employment Outlook: Highlights policies to support vulnerable groups.</p> |

CITIZENSHIP DIMENSION

| Principles | Policies | Programmes |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Thrive and share a better future, modernisation, development.</p> <p>Supports responsible citizenship and social responsibility.</p> | <p>Civic, entrepreneurial and social competences: Promoting educational reform, educational research and educational data.</p> | <p>Learning Compass 2030: Learning framework for the future of education.</p> <p>Social Responsibility Programmes: Promote civic engagement for disadvantaged groups.</p> |

SOCIAL DIMENSION

| Principles | Policies | Programmes |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Ensuring social inclusion, equality, and access for vulnerable adults.</p> <p>Quality education with focus on disadvantaged communities.</p> | <p>Inclusive Growth Initiative: Aims to bridge social gaps for vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Education 2030: Promotes inclusive education strategies.</p> | <p>Adult Learning Dashboard: Tracks access for vulnerable populations.</p> <p>Community Support Programmes: Strengthen access to social services.</p> |

ADULT EDUCATION

| Principles | Policies | Programmes |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Lifelong Learning: Encourages skills development for vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Inclusivity: Ensures access to adult education for marginalized populations.</p> <p>Adaptability: Aligns adult education with labour market needs for disadvantaged groups.</p> | <p>Inclusive Lifelong Learning Strategies: Targets low-skilled and vulnerable adults.</p> <p>Upskilling Strategies: Tailored to support disadvantaged populations.</p> <p>Ageing and Employment Policies: Includes also the aspects promoting better career choices for longer working lives and retaining talent at all ages.</p> | <p>PIAAC: International survey of adults' proficiency in literacy, numeracy and problem solving.</p> <p>Training and Upskilling Programmes: Focus on marginalized adults.</p> <p>Vocational Training Initiatives: Prepare vulnerable populations for labour markets.</p> |

OECD Jobs Strategy and Skills Strategies: The strategies provide policy recommendations to help countries address critical labour market challenges, such as inequality, sluggish productivity growth, and the impact of technological and demographic shifts. The skills strategy supports countries in building and updating skills systems for people to use their skills in economy and society.

Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs): ALMPs are strategies to enhance employment opportunities. These policies include job search assistance, training programmes, and support for entrepreneurship. ALMPs aim to increase employability by improving individuals' skills, helping employers meet skill needs, and offering direct job placement services. By fostering a proactive approach to labour market integration, ALMPs contribute to reducing unemployment, increasing productivity, and ensuring that labour markets are responsive to economic changes and local skill demands.

Local Employment: The OECD advocates for employment policies tailored to the specific needs of local economies. Recognizing that regional labour markets have unique characteristics, the OECD works with governments to adapt active labour market policies to local contexts and integrate them with other services, such as social support, education, and training. Local Employment Policies help align workforce skills with regional industry needs, foster entrepreneurship, and create job opportunities that resonate with local economic conditions, making employment systems more effective and responsive.

Ageing and Employment: The OECD has developed specific policies to support the employment of older workers and encourage active ageing. Key aspects of these policies include promoting better career choices for longer working lives, and education and training to help workers adapt to longer careers and avoid career stagnation, incentives for employers to retain older employees (i. e. adapting job roles, promoting lifelong learning, flexible working arrangements), or to combat age discrimination and promoting the health and well-being of older workers.

These initiatives support countries in addressing the economic and social impacts of ageing populations by keeping individuals productive and engaged for longer, reducing the strain on social systems, and ensuring that the valuable skills of experienced workers are retained within the labour market.

[Jobs Strategy](#)
[Skills Strategies](#)
[PIAAC](#)
[Learning Compass 2030](#)
[Employment Outlook](#)
[Ageing and Employment](#)

ACRONYMS

| | |
|---------|--|
| AE | Adult Education |
| ALMP | Active Labour Market Policies |
| CERV | Citizenship, Equality, Rights and Values Programme |
| CoE | Council of Europe |
| CoR | Committee of the Regions |
| DEAP | Digital Education Action Plan |
| DG | Directorate General (EU Commission) |
| DG EMPL | Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion |
| EC | European Commission |
| EEA | European Education Area |
| EES | European Employment Strategy |
| E+ | Erasmus Plus Programme |
| EDC | Education for Democratic Citizenship (CoE) |
| EESC | European Economic and Social Committee |
| EGF | European Globalisation Adjustment Fund |
| EMCO | Committee for Employment and Social Affairs Ministers in the EPSCO |
| EP | European Parliament |
| EPSCO | Employment and Social Affairs Council (EU) |
| EPSR | European Pillar of Social Rights |
| ERDF | European Regional Development Fund |
| ESC | European Social Charter (CoE) |
| ESF+ | European Social Fund Plus |
| ET | Education and Training |
| EU | European Union |
| EaSI | EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation |
| FEAD | Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived |
| HRE | Human Rights Education (CoE) |
| LLL | Lifelong Learning |
| NEAAL | New European Agenda for Adult Learning |
| NEET | People not in employment, education, or Training |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| OMC | Open Method of Cooperation |
| PIAAC | International survey of adults' proficiency in literacy, numeracy and problem solving (OECD) |
| RFCDL | Reference Framework of Competences for a Democratic Culture (CoE) |
| VET | Vocational Education and Training |
| YEI | Youth Employment Initiative |