



# SOLIDinEDU

*Fostering Solidarity through Education*

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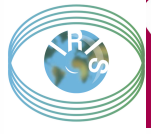
## Booklet of the policy recommendations

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Athens , Greece

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# INTRODUCTION

**SOLIDinEDU (Fostering Solidarity through Education)** is an initiative concerning educational establishments and policies on social inclusion and active participation enhancement, through the strengthening of solidarity and empathy amongst both communities and individuals. The project addressed young people from 5 different countries: Bulgaria, Egypt, Greece, Netherlands, and Sweden. The international meeting took place in Athens, Greece on November 22-26, 2021.

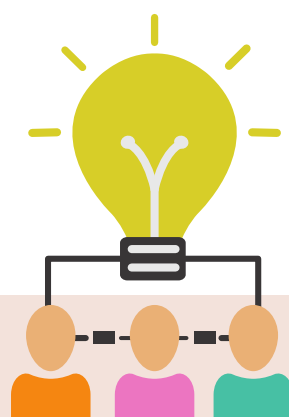
**The main objectives of the project were the following:**

- To promote equality, social cohesion, active citizenship, following Educational and Training Framework 2020,
- To investigate how diversity and inclusion, solidarity, social identity and reflection, and volunteerism is fostered in the formal education framework,
- To provide useful recommendations to local authorities and educational institutions, through country-specific analysis and the exchange of best practices, in accordance with evidence-based policy-making,
- To connect EU with Youth, through quality information and constructive dialogue - inspired by the EU Youth Strategy.

## METHODS

The methodology of this project included structured dialogue and a participatory approach, in order to develop a connection and a dialogue between youth and policymakers. This booklet is the result of the simulation of the policy creation process in the format of round-table discussions.

Participants were provided with various inputs through the presentations of relevant topics by experts and non-formal education learning activities.



# ACTORS

The project was a joint effort of:

- EKO - Entrepreneurship and Social Economy Group – Greece (the leading partner)
- INSTITUTE PERSPECTIVES – Bulgaria
- MAAT – Egypt
- yEUth - theNetherlands
- Iris Sustainable Development - Sweden

Each country was represented by a team of 6 young participants (18-30 years old) and 2 decision-makers/experts in the field of youth. All team members participated in all phases of the project, including the transnational meeting in Athens. The decision-makers/experts facilitated the round-tables sessions during the international meeting in Athens.



# TOPICS

Four main topics in the field of education and training have been selected for this project:

- Diversity and Inclusion
- Solidarity
- Social identity and Reflection
- Voluntarism

The project's Implementation generated a positive impact on local, national, European and international levels by improving youth participation in the policy-making process and contributing to a more democratic society that attends to the needs of all citizens.





# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

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# SOLIDARITY

## **Introduction:**

The main issue identified in the context of Solidarity is the lack of empathy in human interactions. It affects the core communication process and understanding. More specifically, people are prone to communicate with one another, but without usually considering another point of view. Many people lack the opportunities to connect with people from vulnerable social groups (refugees, people with special needs, LGBTQ+, etc). As a result, there is no opportunity to learn about their perspective and experiences.

Concerning this problem, there is an evident difficulty strictly linked to cooperation, especially to the competitive mentality linked to grading in the current educational system, which often includes limited teamwork projects, and consequently, the development of social and soft skill

## **Research and data about the problems and gaps:**

*"It is the university's responsibility (and not only at compulsory education levels) to educate students to exercise their civic responsibility and to be committed to the community, based on their university knowledge". Learning is a priority for the 21st-century university as a place not only for acquiring knowledge and intellectual skills but also where you acquire and modify values and attitudes through positive or negative experiences, in the interaction with teachers and peers" (Rodriguez, 2013).*

*"Legendre (2007), Martínez and Esteban (2005), and Roegiers (2006) stress the urgent need for higher education to prepare competent people who have solidarity competencies, are able to analyze the current challenges and ready to commit themselves to help others. They state that only well-delivered competence training can really equip students to become citizens capable of acting in the direction of their own values".*

*"In the current European convergence process, emphasizing the promotion of social and civic skills in college,... we are all discovering the importance of evaluating these variables related to solidarity and social justice by providing a potential optimization to face a more harmonious coexistence, and an adjusted and preventive mental health value to the particular person, under strong pressure from society, not always easy to stand, and the promotion of spontaneous and healthy behaviors" (Rodriguez, 2013).*



## **RECOMMENDATION NR. 1: EMPATHY TRAINING**

Educational formal and nonformal systems should focus on the organization of games/workshops and other kinds of activities, dedicated to enhancing open communication and the empathy skills of the participants. Students must develop a sense of community and work in a team before the end of their studies.

The following examples could be a useful source of information, to better explain how these activities would benefit the students:

1. Game "Secret Friend". It is a game, where an older or more experienced individual is "adopting" a younger or less experienced individual by becoming its mentor. It could increase the bonding between all the involved participants. It would foster empathy and would help to understand each other's perspectives.
2. Debates. It could be a tool to create an environment of constructive dialogue. All the participants (students) would be invited to share their opinions in a context of respect, listening, and understanding.
3. Promotion of a collective competition. Enriching school/universities curricula with more sports activities could help to foster a strong sense of solidarity, teamwork, and loyalty between the student team

## **RECOMMENDATION NR. 2: COOPERATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS/UNIVERSITIES AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS**

The students must be exposed to different perspectives. A practical way to achieve this is to organize field trips to vulnerable communities. They would have the chance to interact and discuss with people from other social groups and understand their daily life experiences. Schools and universities should be encouraged to create a network and establish connections with local organizations/associations. It would help to promote volunteering opportunities to their school's units, teachers, professors, and the students. In such a context the volunteering service would be established and agreed upon clearer terms, thus protecting both the volunteers and those benefited by such services.

## **RECOMMENDATION NR. 3: GUESTS VISITS**

Schools/university departments would benefit by collaborating with organizations working with minority groups. It would be useful to invite guest speakers from these groups. Such meetings could also be held online (virtual exchange programs). Students would have the opportunity to learn from people of minority groups, learn about their situations and life experiences and empathize with them. In other words, it is important to give the voice back to the minorities that have usually been "stolen" by other people speaking for them. These activities aim at combatting ignorance, self-centrism, xenophobia and emphasize a productive, sympathetic helping behavior. Thus, fostering empathy could be cultivated through book readings or documentary screenings.

## **REFERENCES USED AND RESOURCES**

- Legendre, M. (2007). The Evaluation of Professional Competences. In L. Bélair, D. Laveault, & C. Lebel (Dir.), *Les compétences professionnelles en enseignement et leur évaluation* [Professional competences in teaching and assessment] (pp. 169-179). Ottawa: Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa.
- Martínez, M., & Esteban, F. (2005) A proposal for civic education in the EHEA. *Revista Española de Pedagogía*, 230, 63-84.
- Rodríguez, F. M. M. (2013). Cross-curricular education for solidarity in the training of psychologists and educators. *Psicología educativa*, 19(1), 45-51.



# SOCIAL IDENTITY AND REFLECTION

## Introduction:

Every individual in the community comprises an important part. The more content and self-aware each individual is, the more motivation they would have to contribute to society.

The European Union and its values focus on the creation of an inclusive society. The role of each individual is crucial in this context.

The project "SOLIDinEDU" allowed exploring and understanding common problems in different European countries.

## The main issues identified in the context of Social identity and reflection are the following:

- Lack of information at Schools/Universities for students regarding the topic of Social Identity and Reflection;
- Lack of specific trainings for teachers concerning students with special educational needs;
- Multiculturalism and different religions,
- Lack of attention to mental health and special educational needs,
- Lack of Empathy and learning cultivated through creativity and environmental awareness.

## Research and data about the problems and gaps:

*"The concept of social identity has been justifiably central to many accounts of inequality, social reproduction, alienation, and resistance that occur in and through schools"*

*"According to a recent NPR article, the "majority of parents" do not talk to their children about social identity, which refers to group membership based on characteristics such as religion, gender, national origin, race, family makeup, and socio-economic status."*

*"Parents of color are much more likely than white parents to report that race/ethnicity not only shapes their child's identity but also, according to the report, "Black (64%), Asian (64%), and Hispanic (51%) parents are more likely than White parents (41%) to say that race and ethnicity shape how other people treat their child a lot or some.""*



## **RECOMMENDATION NUMBER 1: MANDATORY TEACHERS' TRAINING**

Government should organize and provide mandatory and free of charge training for the teachers concerning the following subjects:

- Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation
- How to deal with students with different cultural backgrounds
- Mental Health & Special Educational Needs
- Empathy and Soft Skills
- Environmental Awareness

## **RECOMMENDATION NUMBER 2: IS THE OLD WAY THE RIGHT WAY? INNOVATIVE STUDENT COURSES**

The school and university curriculum should include the following courses:

- Empathy & Soft Skills
- Multicultural values & Human Rights
- Mindfulness & Happiness
- Environmental Education
- Creative work

It is crucial to enrich schools' and universities' curricula by involving courses on mental health. It would have a positive impact on students' productivity and personal performance. Moreover, a better understanding of the importance of mental health would support the process of self-reflection.

Environmental education should focus on outdoor activities. It would facilitate a better self-reflection and social identity process.

To allow students to express their creativity and foster teamwork skills, schools and universities should organize innovative workshops.

Activities such as bicycle repair, composting, cooking would allow students to improve their skills and would create an environment to work in teams and learn from each other.





## RECOMMENDATION NUMBER 3: SCHOOL UNIFORMS FLEXIBILITY

Self-expression through outfits is considered a powerful tool. Schools should provide uniforms for students free of charge in case there is a mandatory uniforms policy. Moreover, students must have the right to choose the type of uniform (skirts/pants, scarfs/ties) according to their gender identity.



### REFERENCES USED AND RESOURCES

- SOLIDinEDU YouthLab results (Egypt, Sweden, Netherlands, Bulgaria, and Greece)
- <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/>
- [https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/about-education-and-training-in-the-eu\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/about-education-and-training-in-the-eu_en)
- Stanton Wortham (2003) Curriculum as a Resource for the Development of Social Identity
- <https://www.shankerinstitute.org/blog/social-identity-development-age-accountability>
- [https://www.npr.org/2019/10/08/767205198/the-things-parents-dont-talk-about-with-their-kids-but-should?utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=npr&utm\\_term=nprnews&utm\\_source=twitter.com&t=1646228595432](https://www.npr.org/2019/10/08/767205198/the-things-parents-dont-talk-about-with-their-kids-but-should?utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=npr&utm_term=nprnews&utm_source=twitter.com&t=1646228595432)

# VOLUNTEERISM

## Introduction:

Volunteerism is considered one of the most powerful tools to improve and gain important soft skills. However, by analyzing SOLIDinEDU Youth Lab results and relevant available data, it was indicated, that there is a lack of information about different volunteerism benefits and opportunities on the local, national, and international levels. The recommendations are mainly focused on different ways and tools to promote the benefits and opportunities of volunteerism.

## Research and data about the problems and gaps:

*"In 2015, the involvement in informal voluntary activities in the EU-28 was slightly higher than in formal (organised) voluntary activities (22.2 % versus 19.3 %). This pattern was repeated across most of the EU Member States".[1]*

*"Some Member States had high levels for formal and informal volunteering, such as the Netherlands (82.5 % for informal volunteering and 40.3 % for formal), Finland (74.2 % informal and 34.1 % formal) and Sweden (70.4 % informal and 35.5 % formal). At the other end of the spectrum, we find Romania (3.2 % for both) Cyprus (2.6 % informal and 7.2 % formal) and Malta (0.9 % informal and 8.8 % formal)."[2]*



## **RECOMMENDATION NO. 1: PROMOTION OF VOLUNTEERISM!**

To effectively promote volunteerism opportunities, schools and universities in collaboration with local organizations could use the following sources:

- Mass media channels. Local radio and television channels which target is youngsters.
- Social media. Specifically, the collaboration with celebrities would have a positive impact. Social media challenges could be used as a tool to promote informal volunteerism. Interactive promotion could bring positive results and could create a ripple effect.

## **RECOMMENDATION NO. 2: THE ULTIMATE ENTITY**

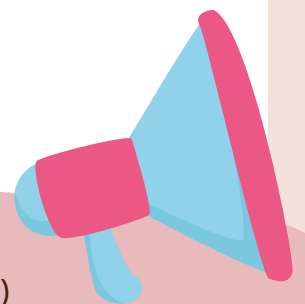
An ultimate entity should be established on the institutional level. It should combine the private and public sectors, and launch an initiative to provide volunteering opportunities. Its focus should be spreading the information among the students and local youngsters about the available volunteering opportunities in various sectors: health sector, environment, societal work, arts, music, etc. It could be achieved by:

- Organization field visits.
- Launching a website with a good infrastructure that allows students to access it and find opportunities/activities in all fields.

## **REFERENCES USED AND RESOURCES**

[1] Social participation and integration statistics - Statistics Explained (europa.eu)

[2] Social participation and integration statistics - Statistics Explained (europa.eu)



# DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

## Introduction:

Inclusion is involvement and empowerment, where the inherent worth and dignity of all people are recognized. An inclusive university promotes and sustains a sense of belonging. It values and practices respect for the talents, beliefs, backgrounds, and ways of living of its members. However, while analyzing the concept of diversity and inclusion in different countries' education curricula, the following gaps and issues were indicated:

- lack of awareness on what diversity and inclusion is as a concept and its importance;
- lack of discussion and acknowledgment of the differences, beliefs, and backgrounds;
- lack of knowledge on how to stimulate willingness for inclusion and cultivate empathy;
- lack of promotion of flexibility and openness.

## Research and data about the problems and gaps

*“For most children, participation in education starts before the primary level. Research shows that there are clear benefits for children who participate in ECEC in terms of their overall development and academic performance. This finding is especially valid for disadvantaged students (OECD, 2017; Vandebroek, Beblavý, and Lenaerts, 2018)”.*

*“Stratification is the result of educational differentiation and thereby refers to the extent to which students are enrolled into different classes, schools, or school programs based on their ability, interest, or other characteristics. An important result of stratification is that students of similar ability levels become concentrated within the same schools or within the same classes, thereby increasing academic segregation (Parker et al., 2016, p. 12)”.*



## **RECOMMENDATION NR. 1: TRAINING OF EDUCATORS**

Diversity and Inclusion are neglected topics in the educational system. It seems that understanding and adapting the curricula has been more a matter of personal initiative by the teachers/professors than the interest of school/university as an institution. Professional seminars for educators, where they could improve their skills to work with people's various needs, could be a powerful solution. Seminars should foster an exchange the good practices between professionals. It is crucial to expose educators to different teaching and learning methodologies, such as non-formal and informal learning. It would be useful to provide educators with the tools to adapt these methodologies to their daily work with students.

## **RECOMMENDATION NR. 2: RESPECTING THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS**

It is crucial to consider the specific needs of the individuals in terms of their personal beliefs. To face each individual's need, it is necessary to address basic special needs.

### **Catering at schools:**

here should be different food options for several social groups, based on their eating habits according to their beliefs/religion.

As the solution to the problem could be the establishment of the registration platform. Each individual in process of registration in the given institution could express their beliefs so the school/university would know what type of food to include in their daily menu.

### **Prayer rooms:**

Prayer rooms in the institutions would give people with different beliefs/backgrounds the opportunity to practice their beliefs and feel more comfortable being a part of that society.

The idea is to have a clean empty room in each institution where any person, does not matter what his/her belief is could feel free to do his/her prayer or just meditate or relax.

### **Handicap equipment:**

It is crucial to reinforce all public schools and universities to have all the necessary handicap equipment like handicap toilets, elevators or platforms, textured walkways for blind people, etc. The lack of instruction makes it uncomfortable for people with disabilities to adapt to the school environment and makes them feel unwelcome in the public areas/institution

## **RECOMMENDATION NR. 3: INITIATE THE EMBRACING DIVERSITY DAY**

Academic institutions in collaboration with their students should organize an event dedicated to increasing knowledge and awareness about diversity. This event could be organized at the beginning of each academic year. The target group for this event should be all school/university communities: students, faculty staff, & workers. Moreover, each institution should ensure that the event's activities and discussed topics are personalized and chosen based on its community needs. This event should represent the minorities, identify their differences, and increase awareness about ways to help those with special needs. Informal learning and awareness are very effective, and organising an event by students addressed to their peers will build a community where cohesion and respect are its core values.

### **Benefits::**

- Students participating in organizing the event would improve their research skills, increase their awareness about their community, and enhance their creativity in presenting the topics.
- The event would be an advanced welcome party at the start of each year, where students would get to know and understand each other deeply.
- Students would learn to speak up, share their stories and experiences.
- The institution's community will gain skills and techniques to understand the experiences and perspectives of others.
- Execution of such an event ties up both volunteerism and diversity & inclusion pillars.

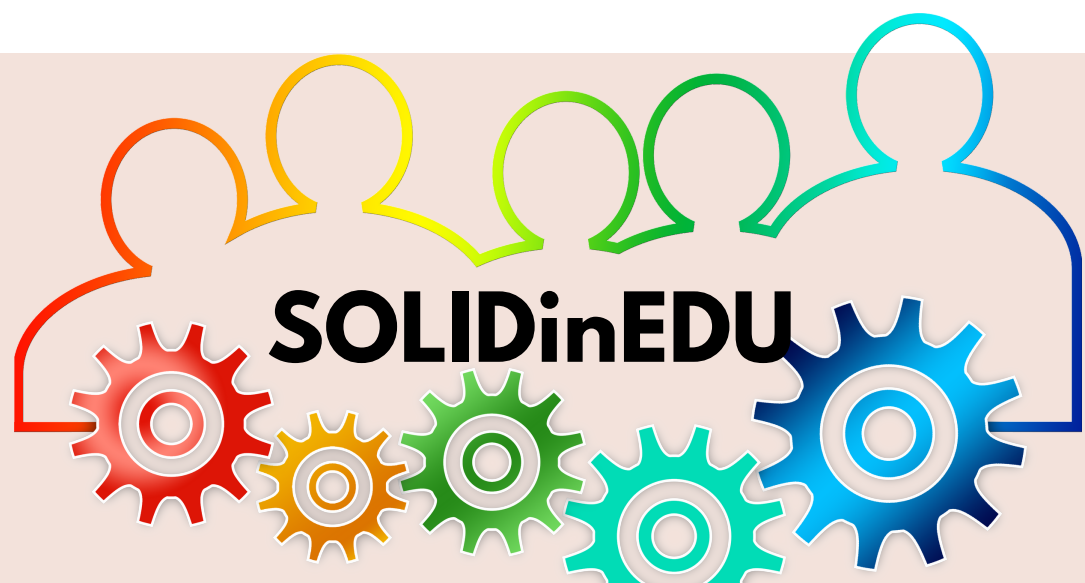
### **Potential topics and themes:**

Gender, Differing Abilities, Religion & Spirituality, LGBTQI+ and Veterans

## **REFERENCES USED AND RESOURCES**

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