

## *Expert Round Table*

# Building Learning Societies: Recognition and Validation of Learning Outcomes of Social Work and Volunteering



SOLIDAR hosted a round table discussion on 28 November 2012 focusing on the need for the recognition and validation of learning outcomes achieved outside of traditional educational settings. Hosted by the **Ariane Rodert** of the European Economic and Social Committee, the conversation revolved around the necessity of recognizing as well as quantifying learning outcomes for acquired in volunteering (and social work) for workers by tools developed in the project '[Promoting the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs](#)'. Interventions were made by: **Vincent Chavaroche** (CEMEA, France), **Maria Kölpfen** (AWO, Germany), **Oonagh Aitken** (Social Action and Volunteering CSV, UK), **Jens Bjornavold** (CEDEFOP), **Koen Nomden** (DG Education and Culture EAC-A2), and **Regina Ebner** (EUCIS-LLL). The round table was moderated by **Annika Nilsson**, Chair Education Experts' Network SOLIDAR.

### Executive summary

In her opening remarks, **Ariane Rodert (EESC)** urged that the learning of volunteers be captured. Volunteering is crucial to the growth of individuals as it fosters active citizenship and integration, she explained, as well as it having the capability to even out the gap between various education levels while providing alternative routes and arenas for learning by workers.

**Vincent Chavaroche (CEMEA)** explained the work CEMEA is doing to help the development of Life Long Learning EU policy development, specifically by promoting social mobility, inclusion, and the value of skills in non-formal and informal learning settings that then lead to employment. The goal is to develop non-formal education as part of learning within society through the exchange of good practices and vocabulary and by establishing criteria for quality work that will later be evaluated. The hope is that by doing this, individuals will have the know-how and key competencies such as global skills that allow them to flourish in the work force. Validating the steps people take through Life Long Learning

programs develop citizenship and self-evaluation, increasing vocational mobility and employability because of the focus on sharable values.

**Maria Kölpfen (AWO)** explored talent management, on the basis of the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, and how it can be used for personnel development. She explained that the key is to keep an eye out for those employees who have certain non-formal and informal abilities and are outstanding in the work they do; it is the company's responsibility to recognize and foster such talents in an effective way for key positions.

**Oonagh Aitken (Social Action and Volunteering CSV, UK)** delved into the learning outcomes of social work and volunteering. CSV, a group that works with over 5000 learners and 150 000 volunteers, focuses on engaging and supporting vulnerable people such as the elderly, troubled families, and young people in care. Volunteering is a key part of social action and innovation, Aitken explained, stressing the importance of community engagement. CSV's volunteers are trained and evaluated, and much of their learning continues as their work progresses. There continues to not be a formal process of recognizing the learning outcomes of volunteering in the UK, though increasingly more employers value such a civic focus in students, and academic credit can be attained along with less tangible outcomes such as management skills. Further steps need to be taken, however, in order for the learning outcomes associated with volunteering to be validated.

**Jens Bjornavold (CEDEFOP)** looked at the relationship between the shift to learning outcomes, qualification frameworks, and the validation and recognition of prior learning. He emphasized the importance of defining qualification levels which would facilitate the learning process, suggesting that the qualification systems be opened to a broader range of learning experiences that would additionally highlight certain learning achieved through volunteering and social work. Bjornavold stressed that the key to Life Long Learning is validation, which will give additional value to the experiences of volunteering. However, the lack of a mainstream system to value experiences along with the lack of integration of such validations in the education and labour markets are barriers that must be broken down.

**Koen Nomden (DG EAC-A2)** helped explain that validation is a part of the Europe 2020 initiative for the functioning of labour and social inclusion, particularly because of the differentiation between the EU member states. Though the deadline was pushed from the originally-proposed 2015 to 2018 and no specific plan is provided, the proposal is focusing on the validation of learning outcomes, of which member states are invited to help develop a

system in place to obtain qualification. Tools for applying the member states' agreed-upon set of principles include focusing on disadvantaged groups, performing a skills audit for the unemployed to mitigate unemployment risk, and providing guidance and counselling.

Nomden reiterated that the learning outcomes approach is broad and will cover all forms of education, including higher education, VET, and the youth and volunteering sectors.

### **Conclusion**

**Regina Ebner (EUCIS-LLL)**, in her closing remarks, summarized the steps needing to be taken as follows: primarily, that the skills individuals have as a result of other-environment learning be recognized and acknowledged. It is crucial to enable workers to have access to learning, and even more so that the learning is valued, despite where it took place. Such steps will lead to the prevention of skills becoming obsolete.



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