



NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN CONTEXT REPORTS

ENGLISH

July 2024



Co-funded by
the European Union

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1. Introduction

Evidence shows that Service Learning (SL) is beneficial but access to SL in primary schools in Europe remains limited despite some growth in Further Education and in Secondary Education, notably through the Erasmus Plus SLUSIK project. SLIPS will upscale an existing Service Learning programme for secondary level for primary school pupils. Through its training programme it will enable 600 primary school teachers, 150 schools' principals & governors, 75 schools and 90 policy makers to build capacity in SL.

The objectives are:

- ❖ Develop a suitable upscaled methodology for delivering service learning programmes in primary schools;
- ❖ Create and put in place the user-friendly online platform to train the primary school teachers;
- ❖ Train and develop the capacity of primary school teachers to deliver quality service learning in primary schools;
- ❖ Develop links between schools and civil society in order to better meet community needs;
- ❖ Ensure the sustainability of project results by developing the community of practitioners in order to promote the use of the methodology and the importance of service learning for social inclusion, civic engagement, resilience, prosperity and sustainability.

The training programme in Service Learning will lead to increased skills for primary school teachers leading to increased quality in the work, activities and practices of the schools, volunteering organisations and institutions involved. It will introduce new actors to volunteering, civil society and civic engagement. We will build the capacity of primary schools and primary school teachers to work transnationally and address common needs and priorities for children in the EEA. The online platform, service learning methodology and training activities, as well as policy development work, will enable transformation and change at individual, organisational and sectoral level, leading to improvements, new approaches and upgraded skills in a variety of different formal and nonformal education contexts.

During the first 6 months of the SLIPS project, the project partners have created the present document to present the state-of-the-art of the educational contexts and the implementation of service learning with particular focus on the primary school level across the partner countries and on the European level. The document is a result of the SLIPS project's WP2: Project Preparation and Research - Common Ground and has been completed with information gained through the compilation of various tasks through the Work Package including:

- ❖ T2.1 - Desk research on national and European contexts (M1-M6)
- ❖ T2.2 - Analysis and development of existing service learning materials (M1-M2)
- ❖ T2.3 - Direct data gathering (M3-M4)
- ❖ T2.4 - Creation of the State-of-the-art-report (M4-M6)

By condensing and bringing together the materials and knowledge gained into a specific report, this document details the guiding principles behind Service Learning, its applicability and

challenges with particular focus on the primary school context and an overview of the contexts within partner countries.

The document is written in English, translated into partner languages and delivered in pdf format.

2. SERVICE LEARNING: An Introduction to the Methodology

Educational practices need to undergo a profound transformation to adapt to the demands of today's society. This requires a more active, participatory and responsible citizenship committed to sustainable and global development and lifelong learning. Students can only be prepared as conscious, empowered citizens dedicated to social welfare through educational innovation. Therefore, schools must provide them with the necessary tools, values and skills to face current and future challenges and contribute positively to creating a more just, sustainable and equitable world.

In this context, service-learning is defined as an educational approach capable of promoting student active participation and the integration of curricular elements outside the classroom. You will encounter many definitions for this term in the vast literature, publications and projects about service-learning. The authors also delve into many steps for implementing this strategy and present a wide range of activities that can be considered service-learning projects. Different approaches have been developed for various levels of education, considering the unique characteristics of students involved or leading the service-learning project, their capabilities and the educational objectives. It is important to note that this chapter does not aim to summarise all of these approaches, as they are already well-documented and summarised in the [SLUSIK State of the art report](#) elaborated in the project SLUSIK, which creates the background for the SLIPS project. We will stress the selected topic to understand the concept better and align it with the context analysed in the report.

Service-learning combines two well-known educational methods in active pedagogies: experiential learning and community service action (Lucas-Mangas & Martínez-Odria, 2012). It involves implementing actions that benefit society and the student community, resulting in reciprocal benefits between those who provide the service and those who receive it. This convergence of actions allows the student to become an active person capable of solving different social problems in their environment. Service-learning, therefore, involves an educational proposal that combines learning processes and community service in a single well-articulated project in which participants learn to work on the real needs of the environment to improve it (Puig-Rovira et al., 2011).

Service-learning is not just a teaching and learning approach but a practical and real-world application of knowledge. It combines planned learning and community service, focusing on an activity that benefits the community and its educational benefits for the student. Service-learning empowers students to achieve specific learning outcomes through active community engagement and real-life solutions in practice. The process of learning is supported by reflection as a necessary

part of experiential learning. These practical aspects of service-learning are a vital feature that sets it apart from other pedagogical approaches.

Service-learning differs from traditional forms of learning because it brings course content to life by providing students with opportunities to apply their knowledge in real-world settings to benefit other people, communities, or societies. Service-learning also endeavours to instil a sense of civic engagement and responsibility. It is not about adding engagement to learning but rather about integrating engagement within the learning process.

Following a review of research on service-learning to demonstrate its pedagogical possibilities, authors (for example, Martínez-Odría (2007), Albanesi, Culcasi et al. (2021) and others) identify specific components that a service-learning project should include and that differentiate it from other community-based educational experiences and volunteer services (see Table 1):

Table 1: Key components of a service-learning project	
Attention to a real need	Service-learning is a pre-planned and organised student experience gained through a service that responds to the authentic needs of the community through a horizontal model of solidarity. Detecting a real need is decisive in determining the project's focus and the success of its results.
Student protagonism	Service-learning is based on active student involvement in all stages, from planning to assessment. Students should feel ownership of the project and act as leaders of activities, not just their implementers. Service-learning works with real student experiences and involves metacognitive learning, where the student is aware of how they learned, what they learned, what helped them learn, how they can use it in practice, and what they need to learn further.
Connecting curricular objectives	Service-learning is intentionally integrated into the academic curriculum. Its methodology can be incorporated into the curriculum of various subjects, either within one specific subject or through a combination of several subjects/teachers to solve interdisciplinary projects. The project's design, execution, and evaluation are carried out in accordance with the objectives of each curricular area involved in its development.
Reflection	Service-learning allows participants to reflect on the experience. Reflection guides the learner, facilitating an in-depth understanding of the connections between experiences and the service-learning concepts.

Civic focus	Service-learning aims to develop civic responsibility for students, developing both professional competencies and changes in the student's civic characteristics. It enables students to be introduced to the role of civil society and how it functions, such as volunteering and funding mechanisms, as well as the importance of engagement with the local community.
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Service-learning and volunteering are very similar concepts, comprising some unpaid engagement and learning, but they also have differences.

Table 2: Difference between Service-Learning and Volunteering		
Dimension	Service-learning	Volunteering
What is it	Teaching and learning strategy	Action or activity performed by individuals for other people, the community and the common good
Main aim	Develop knowledge, skills and competencies of students and, at the same time, solve real issues and challenges in the community or organisation	Provide service or offer help, solve real issues and challenges in the community or organisation
Learning component	Learning is planned and intentionally integrated into the curriculum	Learning occurs but it is usually not pre-planned or reflected.
Service component	Respond to the authentic needs of the community or organisation.	Respond to the authentic needs of the community or organisation.
Financial award	Unpaid activity	Unpaid activity
Free will	Can be mandatory or optional	Optional, free choice

Research indicates that integrating service-learning into primary school curricula can be particularly beneficial, as it allows young students to develop empathy, expand their understanding of social issues and cultivate a lifelong commitment to community involvement. In Europe, where service learning is still relatively nascent compared to the United States, educators are exploring incorporating this pedagogical approach into primary school settings.

Studies have shown that service-learning in primary schools can lead to improved academic performance, enhanced leadership skills and a greater sense of social responsibility (Paredes & Martínez, 2016; Richards et al., 2013; Lake & Jones, 2008). For example, a pilot program in a large, urban Midwestern city found that fifth- and seventh-grade students participating in a service-learning curriculum demonstrated significantly higher scores on leadership measures than their peers in the control group (Richards et al., 2013). Similarly, an article addressing service-learning in elementary classrooms emphasises the importance of integrating a year-long approach to community service, allowing children to make meaningful connections to their local communities while developing lifelong habits of participation and civic engagement (Fox, 2010).

As stated by Lucas Barcia et al. (2024), based on the analysis of different studies summarised that the incorporation of service-learning in educational settings offers numerous benefits. **These benefits include:**

- ❖ **Active and Meaningful Understanding:** SL allows children to engage in projects with real-world purposes that positively impact the community. This connection between learning and service helps them better understand their subjects and apply their knowledge in practical situations. This approach enhances personal growth and promotes the development of active, informed, responsible and committed citizens who can generate social change.
- ❖ **Development of Social and Emotional Skills:** Service-learning provides children with the opportunity to interact with diverse individuals and communities, fostering the development of social skills such as empathy, collaboration, effective communication and teamwork. Additionally, it instils a sense of responsibility, generosity and gratitude toward others.
- ❖ **Encouragement of Critical Thinking and Problem Solving:** Through service-learning, children encounter real community challenges, motivating them to think critically, seek creative solutions and develop problem-solving skills. This experience nurtures a reflective and critical approach to issues, building confidence in their ability to address and resolve problems.
- ❖ **Improved Academic Performance:** Participation in meaningful, hands-on activities keeps students engaged in learning, leading to better retention of knowledge and skills. This active engagement can positively impact academic performance. Furthermore, service-learning fosters a greater interest in learning, increasing classroom engagement and motivation.
- ❖ **Development of Civic and Citizenship Awareness:** Involvement in service-learning projects helps children understand community needs and contribute positively. It encourages the acquisition of humanistic values such as solidarity, social and civic responsibility and social justice, laying the foundation for them to become committed citizens now and in the future.

Several service-learning models are in practice. Service-learning can be incorporated into the curriculum of various subjects. It can be implemented within one subject or combined with several

subjects to solve interdisciplinary projects. It can be part of a compulsory or elective educational process and organised as a group or individual activity.

Service-learning students can be involved in a wide range of community organisations that provide a spectrum of services, including, but not limited to, social services, sports and recreation, arts and culture, education and research and environmental causes. What students will do as a service component will depend on the educational outcomes (learning part), service-learning model and the community partner’s needs, community or beneficiaries. **Four types of service in service-learning are:**

<p>Direct Service</p>	<p>Direct service projects involve students in activities where they directly interact with the beneficiaries.</p> <p><u>Examples in primary education can include:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Reading Buddies Program: Older primary students read to younger students or children in a local preschool. ❖ Community Clean-Up: Students participate in cleaning up local parks, playgrounds or community centres. They interact with community members to understand the importance of a clean environment and take immediate action to improve their surroundings. ❖ Senior Companion Visits: Students visit local senior centres to spend time with elderly residents. Activities can include reading, playing games or simply chatting, fostering intergenerational connections and providing companionship to the elderly.
<p>Indirect Service</p>	<p>Indirect service projects involve students in activities that benefit the community without direct interaction with the beneficiaries.</p> <p><u>Examples include:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Recycling Program: Students organise a school-wide recycling program, collecting recyclable materials and ensuring they are correctly sorted and sent to recycling facilities. ❖ Book Drive: Students collect gently used books to donate to schools, libraries, or shelters in need. ❖ Garden Projects: Students create and maintain a community garden, providing fresh produce to local food banks or shelters.

<p>Advocacy</p>	<p>Advocacy projects involve students raising awareness and promoting action on issues of public interest.</p> <p><u>Examples include:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Anti-Bullying Campaign: Students create posters and presentations to raise awareness about the effects of bullying and promote a positive school environment. They might present their work to classmates, parents, and community members. ❖ Environmental Awareness: Students organise a campaign to educate their school and community about environmental issues like pollution, conservation, and climate change. ❖ Health Awareness: Students promote healthy lifestyles by organising “Healthy Eating Week,” creating informational materials about nutrition and exercise, and encouraging their peers and community to adopt healthier habits.
<p>Research-Based Service-Learning</p>	<p>Research-based service-learning projects involve students in research activities to address defined community needs.</p> <p><u>Examples include:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Community Needs Assessment: Students conduct surveys and interviews within their community to identify critical issues and needs. They analyse the data and present their findings to local government or community organisations, helping to inform future initiatives. ❖ Wildlife Conservation Research: Students research local wildlife habitats and the impact of human activities on these environments. They might create a report or presentation with recommendations for conservation efforts and share it with local environmental groups or authorities. ❖ Historical Preservation Project: Students research the history of their local community, identifying significant historical sites and stories. They create a digital archive or a booklet to preserve this history and present it to the local historical society or library.

3. European Context for Service-Learning Development in Primary Education

This chapter provides a comprehensive look into the context that has facilitated the development and integration of service-learning in primary schools across Europe. It examines the educational landscape of primary schools, the multifaceted benefits of service-learning, and the supportive policies and projects that have enabled its growth.

Purpose of primary education in connection with service-learning

Primary education provides learning and educational activities typically designed to provide students with fundamental skills in reading, writing and mathematics (i.e. literacy and numeracy) and establish a solid foundation for learning and understanding core areas of knowledge and personal development, preparing for lower secondary education. It focuses on learning at a basic level of complexity with little, if any, specialisation (ISCED level 1) (International Standard Classification of Education, ISCED 2011).

The terms "elementary education" and "primary education" are often used interchangeably, but they can have different meanings depending on a particular country's context and education system. Elementary Education is a term commonly used in the United States and Canada. It typically refers to the first stage of formal education, which includes Kindergarten through 5th or 6th grade, depending on the school district. Primary Education is a term used more frequently in many other countries, including Europe, Australia and parts of Asia. It usually refers to the first few years of formal education, which often includes grades 1 through 4 or 5 but can sometimes extend to grade 6.

In European countries, primary education is the first compulsory education stage, followed by secondary education. The transition from primary to secondary education marks a significant shift in the educational structure and often includes a different school setting.

The Primary Education curriculum focuses on foundational subjects such as language, mathematics, science, social studies, physical education and the arts. The emphasis is on basic literacy, numeracy skills and social and emotional development.

Despite the many cultural and political differences among nations, the objectives and curriculum of primary education are similar. Nearly all countries are officially committed to mass education, which is viewed as eventually including a complete primary education. An increasing agreement may be found among nations to the effect that preparation for citizenship is one of the significant objectives of primary education. In terms of curriculum, this objective suggests an emphasis on reading and writing skills, arithmetic skills and basic social studies and science (Britannica, 2024).

The objectives of primary education, which are implemented at the first level of primary schools, expect pupils to be activated in their learning and the acquisition of values. Primary education is primarily aimed at developing functional literacy and acquiring the tools to learn about the world around them and the phenomena in it. Primary education should also create the conditions for

developing social and civic competencies. The psychological characteristics of the child of younger school age confirm this approach. Thinking in this developmental period is conceptually abstract, but the child can think about objects and phenomena that he can perceive directly. The basis of cognitive processes is the child's experience, which is then reflected upon by the teacher or other guide in the learning process. At the same time, however, the author Oravcová (2015) points out that this period is also characterised by the fact that it enables the perception of cause and effect relationships, links various thought processes, and logical thinking enables not only the classification and sorting of concepts and relationships but also the ordering of objects according to multiple criteria.

The characteristics of the development of cognitive processes also influence the recommended methods and forms of teaching. For the comprehensive development of a child of younger school age, i.e. in the period of the first stage of primary school, it is necessary to promote such educational situations in which the pupil satisfies his curiosity, interest and need for manipulation of objects and phenomena, learns through experimentation, exploration, research, verification of his theories. In social relationships, it is necessary to create situations and stimuli that promote the creation and maintenance of friendship bonds and respect for the needs and wishes of other people (peers and older or younger). Also crucial for children of this age is the need for positive evaluation from other people. The curricula implemented in primary education encourages teachers to develop learners' knowledge, skills and abilities through activating teaching methods. According to research in the field of learning, it is essential for the success of pupils of younger school age to develop cognitive functions. To maintain pupils' attention and interest in learning, it should be supported by appropriate methods and forms of teaching. Active involvement of pupils in the learning process, e.g. through exploratory activities or experimentation, by solving practical tasks and real-life problems, could be a way to promote the development of desirable knowledge as well as the necessary skills and competencies of pupils (Hall, 2020).

Service-learning should be an appropriate method for teaching and learning in primary education for several compelling reasons:

- ❖ Introducing service-learning at an early age **helps to lay the foundation for lifelong learning and responsible citizenship**. Primary school students are at a formative stage, where they can develop core values and skills to influence their future behaviours and attitudes.
- ❖ Service-learning integrates school curriculum with meaningful community service, **making learning more relevant and engaging**. It enhances their understanding of subjects by allowing them to apply what they learn in real-world contexts.
- ❖ Young children benefit immensely from the social interactions and emotional growth facilitated by service-learning. **It helps them develop critical social skills** such as teamwork, communication, and empathy.
- ❖ Service-learning **challenges students to think critically and solve real-life problems**. This nurtures their ability to analyse situations, consider different perspectives, and devise innovative solutions.
- ❖ Service-learning **makes education more motivating for young students**. They see the direct impact of their efforts, which boosts their enthusiasm for learning and encourages active participation in their education.

- ❖ Service-learning projects often involve collaboration with peers, teachers, and community members. This **helps students connect to their community and fosters a sense of belonging**.
- ❖ Through service-learning, primary school students are exposed to diverse groups and community issues, promoting inclusivity and understanding. This early exposure **helps to combat stereotypes and prejudices**, fostering a more inclusive and accepting mindset as they grow.
- ❖ Service-learning instils values of civic responsibility and social justice in young students. **They learn about societal issues and the importance of taking action to address them**.
- ❖ Service-learning aligns with the **goals of holistic education**, which seeks to develop the whole child. It addresses cognitive, social, emotional, and ethical development.
- ❖ The skills and values gained through service-learning in primary education **prepare students for future academic, personal, and professional challenges**. They become more adaptable, resilient, and capable of navigating complex situations, essential in an ever-changing world.

In summary, developing service-learning in primary education equips young students with essential skills, values and attitudes that benefit their academic growth, personal development and societal engagement. It fosters a comprehensive educational experience that prepares them to be active, empathetic, and responsible citizens.

Policy documents at the European level as a context for service-learning in primary schools

Service-learning development in European primary education is influenced by various policy contexts that reflect broader educational goals, social values and political priorities. Below is a description of these policy contexts

Service-learning aligns seamlessly with the [UNESCO Report](#) (2021) entitled “Reimagining our Futures Together. A New Social Contract for Education,” which states that education must be transformed towards cooperation and solidarity-based methods such as SL to face global challenges. This new social contract underlies a vision of extended citizenship and calls for civil society’s active and creative participation.

[Europe 2020 Strategy](#) emphasises smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, with education being critical. Service-learning aligns with goals to reduce early school leaving and promote social cohesion.

[European Education Area](#): Aims to build a European Education Area by 2025, promoting cross-border learning and cooperation. Service-learning projects often benefit from this emphasis on collaboration and exchange

The European Union supports and complements the Member States' activities in [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. Policies aimed at social inclusion

focused on reducing inequalities and promoting social inclusion often support service learning as a way to engage disadvantaged communities and foster empathy and understanding among students.

Active Citizenship: Encouraging young people to become active, responsible citizens is a standard policy goal across Europe. Service-learning provides practical opportunities for students to contribute to their communities and develop a sense of civic responsibility.

Various funding and support mechanisms promote service-learning. One of them is the EU's [Erasmus+ program](#) that funds educational projects that include service-learning components, facilitating international cooperation and the exchange of best practices.

[European Parliament resolution of 22 April 2008 on the role of volunteering in contributing to economic and social cohesion](#) (2007/2149(INI)) calls on the Commission, the Member States and regional and local authorities to promote volunteering through education at all levels, creating opportunities for voluntary activity at an early stage in the education system so that it is seen as normal contribution to community life and to continue to promote such activity as students grow older, to facilitate 'service-learning' where students work with voluntary or community groups in partnership as part of their diploma or degree course, to encourage links between the voluntary sector and the education sector at all levels and to promote volunteering and recognise learning in volunteering as part of lifelong learning.

Centre for European Volunteering (CEV) has addressed service-learning in its [Blueprint for European Volunteering 2030](#) (BEV2030). More specifically, under section 3, titled "Empowerment", BEV2030 claims that "thriving communities at the local level are often characterised by strong interpersonal connections, frequently established in the frame of volunteer-based and volunteer-led initiatives. If needs are to be continued to be met, discrimination & marginalisation combatted, and human rights defended, more citizens from diverse realities and backgrounds will need to be empowered and supported for active engagement as volunteers to support themselves and others". Adding to the aspect of "Enabling" enhanced information about and access to volunteering, the BEV2030 adds perspectives on 3.1.1) Civic education and service-learning as introduced more widely into the formal education systems to increase awareness of volunteering and civil society not only for children and young people but also their wider networks of families and friends. The section continues with 3.1.2) The "free will" nature of volunteering is protected as distinct from compulsory or optional parts of formal education systems that serve to connect young people to civil society and volunteering situations and 3.1.3) Diversity is highlighted by showcasing possibilities to volunteer in a broad range of fields and areas of interest and need.

The [EU Youth Strategy](#) is the framework for EU youth policy cooperation for 2019-2027, based on the Council Resolution of 26 November 2018. EU youth cooperation shall make the most of youth policy's potential. It fosters youth participation in democratic life; it also supports social and civic engagement and aims to ensure that all young people have the necessary resources to take part in society. The EU Youth Strategy focuses on three core action areas around the three words: Engage, Connect, and Empower, while working on joined-up implementation across sectors. With "Engage," the EU Youth Strategy aims to ensure the meaningful civic, economic, social, cultural, and

political participation of young people. Member States and the European Commission are invited to:

- ❖ Encourage and promote inclusive democratic participation of all young people in society and democratic processes;
- ❖ Actively engage young people, youth organisations and other organisers of youth work in policies affecting the lives of young people on all levels;
- ❖ Support youth representations at local, regional and national level, recognising young people's right to participate and self-organise;
- ❖ Support and convey the EU Youth Dialogue in order to include diverse voices of young people in decision-making processes on all levels;
- ❖ Foster the development of citizenship competencies, through citizenship education and learning strategies;
- ❖ Support and develop opportunities for 'learning to participate', raising interest in participatory actions and helping young people to prepare for participation;
- ❖ Explore and promote the use of innovative and alternative forms of democratic participation e.g. digital democracy tools.

The policy context for service-learning development in primary education in Europe is multifaceted, involving EU-wide initiatives, national education policies and the support of NGOs and educational networks. These policies and initiatives promote active citizenship, social inclusion and experiential learning, creating a supportive environment for the growth and integration of service-learning in primary education.

Relevant projects and networks in service-learning

Several projects have been supported by the EU and other sources over the last ten years. Most of the projects related to service-learning were focused on higher education. They are reported in several reports published as a part of the project [European Observatory on Service-learning in Higher Education](#).

With the focus on service-learning in lower levels of education or with youth in non-formal education, which can be inspiring for the SLIPS project, we can mention:

[EDUVOL project](#) – Volunteering as an Educational Opportunity was focused on service-learning in non-formal education. The project builds on the need to foster an international dimension in order to, on the one hand, motivate young people to engage and, on the other hand, enable youth workers to develop key competencies, a sense of initiative and civic participation through one of the successful strategies widespread in the world, service-learning. The project's main outputs were: Training for youth workers in service learning and a handbook for trainers; a Manual for youth workers on how to implement service-learning in their work and good practice examples; a Manual for youth on how to develop service-learning projects; and a Facilitation Box for Service-learning. The project was implemented in period: 1.9.2019 – 31.5.2022

[SLUSIK project](#) aimed to enhance the acquisition of social and civic competences, fostering knowledge, understanding and ownership of values and fundamental rights among secondary

school students/young people ages 12- 16 in order to contribute to their social inclusion at the local level and in society in general. Project upscaled service-learning curricula from Higher Education to Secondary Schools by adapting already existing service- learning best practices from Croatia, Slovakia, Austria and Ireland and role model practices from Spain, ensuring the use of Non-formal Methodologies and Role Models in the adapted models and that they are ready for use in any school across Europe at the end of the project. The project was implemented in period: 1.9.2019 – 31.5.2022.

Boosting HEARts and Minds of youth with Service-Learning – HEARMi was a three year project implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and Romania. The goal of the HEARMi project was to develop the capacities of four organisations of Central and Eastern Europe of Service-Learning Network and to improve the effectiveness of civic engagement of youth and youth’s capacity to champion social inclusion in service-learning projects.

Giving and receiving – young active citizens for peace and prosperity. The main project goal is to expand the platform for active engagement of young people in critical societal developments that affect them, by building stronger links between the youth and public authorities who should support them. The project will leverage the experience and best practices regionally from partner CSOs in the project, to improve the grassroots civil society participation in decision-making at local, national and/or regional forums. The stakeholders involved will include government authorities, but also other authorities that play a crucial role in community mobilisation – such as schools, youth centres, and universities. It will focus on two thematic topics: digital literacy and the fight against fake news, which affect young people greatly due to their high exposure to social media, as well as facilitate peace-building regionally through exchanges at multiple levels of stakeholders. Last but not least, the Network will specifically focus on advocating the use of the Service-Learning approach for mobilising vulnerable youth, since its combination of learning and doing has proved to be very effective with such stakeholders.

The USL Project aimed to provide training and guidance on service-learning as a teaching and learning strategy in the participating countries and their educational systems. Therefore, the objectives of this project were to understand, learn and prepare schools and their engagement partners to be ready to create and implement service-learning. A common interest and motivation for this project was to learn or inform ourselves about the potential for Service-Learning in educational settings, develop and receive practical guidelines for its integration in formal and informal school education and to learn about the challenges and strategies to overcome them.

INCLUDL-Schools: Promoting Inclusive Schools In Europe Through Universal Design For Learning And Service- Learning. The general aim of INCLUDL-Schools project is to gather a team of actors of education from various European countries that can contribute to fostering inclusion in European schools mainly by improving teachers’ skills to integrate more inclusive didactics programs in their schools and broader communities. Under this premise, there are two approaches that literature review shows as effective for fostering inclusion at schools: Service-Learning (S-L) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

SLIPSTREAM project aims to increase the quality of opportunities for youth participation in democratic life and social and civic engagement in communities by linking formal and non-formal

education, creating conditions for developing a service-learning strategy in Central and Eastern European countries (CEE region). The project wants to create tools and conditions for implementing service-learning and make it more exclusive. The partners will create tools to implement national awards for service-learning projects and improve international awards. Valuing institutions that implement service learning strengthens the promotion and visibility of this pedagogical strategy. Partners who have experience in training in service-learning strategies will develop a toolkit and materials that can be used to create their training schedule and also implement training for youth workers. Defining quality standards for service learning projects and creating an application for reflecting on learning in a service learning project will improve the quality of projects implemented by youth and increase their motivation and engagement in their communities through awareness of the knowledge and skills they have acquired. All the results, together with the developed advocacy plan and the trained service-learning ambassadors in each participating country, will create a better environment for disseminating the SL strategy and enable organisations to implement the service-learning method successfully. Project is implemented in period: 1.11.2023 – 31.1.2026

There are several networks of organisations and individuals working in the service-learning field. Similar to the projects, they are mainly related to higher education settings, for example, European Association on service-learning in Higher Education, Campus Engage in Ireland, German Higher Education Network on Societal Responsibility – Hochschulnetzwerk, Spanish Association of Service-Learning in Higher Education ApS(U), Italian Network of Service-Learning and Community Engagement, United Kingdom Community Engaged Learning/Service-Learning Network, Flemish network for Service-Learning in higher education

[Central and Eastern European Service-Learning Network](#) - The Central and Eastern European Service-Learning Network is a collaborative informal platform dedicated to advancing Service-Learning initiatives across Central and South Eastern Europe. Its mission is to promote the integration of service-learning into educational systems, foster partnerships between educational institutions and communities, and support the development of innovative approaches to civic engagement and social responsibility. With the support of the Latin American Center for Service-Learning and Solidarity (CLAYSS), a group of educators, researchers, and community organisers passionate about the potential of service-learning founded the CSEE Service-Learning Network in 2016. Since April 2016 CLAYSS has supported partners in different countries in Central and Eastern Europe through training, facilitation, bibliography design tailored to the region and technical assistance to promote S-L on a regional level. Since these activities began, partners have been meeting online and on-site to promote exchange, mutual understanding and shared learning, understanding that cooperation among key actors supports and strengthens S-L in the region. As part of this development, the Central and Eastern European Service-Learning Network has held Regional Service-Learning Weeks in different cities across the region. In 2020 the Network launched the First Regional Award for successful Service-Learning practice, aimed at pinpointing and acknowledging the work of educational institutions carrying out Service-Learning projects that promote active youth citizenship and integrate students' curricular learning with Service-Learning initiatives to benefit the community.

[Learning Through Engagement Foundation](#) is committed to high-quality and sustainable service learning in schools nationwide in order to strengthen democracy and civil society and to change

schools and learning culture. They work on this with a large network of schools and partners and cooperate with education policy and administration in Germany.

4. SLIPS Country Reports

As part of the broader report on service-learning development in primary schools in Europe, individual country reports from partnering countries were created to highlight the unique contexts, challenges and examples in integrating service-learning across different nations.

4.1 Belgium

General organisation of the educational system in Belgium

Freedom of education is a constitutional right in Belgium, meaning that every person may organise education and establish schools to that aim while it is the government’s duty to organise undenominational education (under certain conditions). The constitution also guarantees a freedom of school choice for parents ensuring that parents and children must have access to a school of their choice within a reasonable distance of their residence.

The formal educational system in Belgium is distinguished by a division of responsibilities where the communities (French-speaking, Dutch-speaking and German-speaking) hold significant authority, except for specific federal matters including:

- ❖ Setting the start and end of compulsory education,
- ❖ Establishing minimum diploma requirements,
- ❖ Regulating retirement for educational employees.

Each of these communities provides education in its respective language, ensuring linguistic coherence. In this report, focus will be on the general educational system as well as the French and Flemish Communities.

French Community	Flemish Community
<p>The French Community of Belgium oversees various sectors including cultural affairs, language use, education, childhood, youth and research. Within the Government of the French Community, four ministers are specifically focused on childcare and education. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ A Minister for Education, responsible for all levels of education starting from pre-primary. ❖ A Minister for Early Childhood, among other duties. ❖ A Minister for Higher Education, Media, and Scientific Research. ❖ A Minister for Social Advancement Education, Youth, Women's Rights, and Equal Opportunities. 	<p>In the Flemish Community of Belgium, the Ministry of Education and Training is responsible for all stages of education and training starting from pre-primary education while childcare is a competence of the Flemish Ministry of Wellbeing, Public Health and Family.</p>

<p>Additionally, there is a fifth minister tasked with managing the budget, civil service and administrative simplification for the French Community. In the Walloon Region Government, a separate minister handles training along with other responsibilities.</p>	
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Compulsory education: To ensure that every child in Belgium enjoys their constitutional right to education, compulsory schooling has been established. Children must attend school from the age of 5 until they reach 18. Full-time attendance is mandatory until the age of 15. After that, students have the option to pursue part-time schooling, combining vocational education with part-time work, in a structured learning program.

Primary education: In Belgium, pre-secondary education encompasses both pre-school and primary education. Pre-school education is available for children aged 2.5 to 6. While participation is nearly universal, it becomes mandatory at age 5. Compulsory schooling has been mandated for all children from the age of 5 since the 2020/2021 school year. Pre-school education fosters children's holistic development, nurturing their cognitive, motor, and emotional growth. Primary education is designed for children aged 6 to 12, spanning six consecutive school years. Upon completion of primary education, children receive a certificate of achievement.

Secondary education: In Belgium, youngsters from 12 to 18 should attend secondary education. Full-time secondary education consists of three stages and various types of education. Each stage has two grades. In the third stage of vocational secondary education the successful completion of a third grade is necessary in order to obtain the certificate of upper secondary education. In the first stage of secondary education a common curriculum is offered. Pupils make a choice of study only at the start of the second stage. From the second stage onwards four different types of education are offered:

French Community	Flemish Community
<p>In the French Community, education is categorised into four distinct forms: general, technical, artistic, and vocational, which are further divided into two streams: the transition stream and the qualification stream.</p> <p>The transition stream equips students for higher education while providing avenues for entry into the workforce. Conversely, the qualification stream prepares students for immediate entry into the job market while keeping the option open for further academic pursuits. General education primarily aligns with the transition stream, whereas vocational education is predominantly associated with the qualification stream. Technical and artistic</p>	<p>In Flanders, students select their educational path from the following options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ General Secondary Education (GSE): This curriculum emphasises a broad general education, laying the groundwork for further academic pursuits rather than preparing students for a specific profession. ❖ Technical Secondary Education (TSE): TSE places emphasis on both general and technical-theoretical subjects. Upon completion, students have the option to enter a profession or continue their education at a higher level. Practical training is also incorporated into this type of education. ❖ Secondary Education in the Arts: This program offers a combination of broad general

<p>education can be tailored to fit either the transition or the qualification stream, offering flexibility in academic and career trajectories.</p> <p>Students select their educational path from among these options, determining the course of their studies accordingly.</p>	<p>education and active engagement in artistic practice. Upon completion, students can choose to pursue a profession in the arts or further their education at a higher level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Vocational Secondary Education (VSE): VSE is a hands-on educational approach where students receive general education while focusing primarily on acquiring skills for a specific profession.
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In Belgium, a certificate of upper secondary education grants unrestricted access to higher education.

Special needs education: Belgium also has special needs (pre)primary and secondary education, which is organised for children in need of temporary or permanent specific support because of a physical or mental disability, serious behavioural or emotional problems or severe learning disabilities.

French Community	Flemish Community
<p>In July 2015, the Parliament of the French Community decreed further steps to support the integration of students from special needs education into regular education. If integration into regular education isn't feasible, students are directed to special needs education. Each student in primary education and the first two levels of regular secondary education is entitled to four support periods from special needs education staff for full-time integration.</p>	<p>On March 12, 2014, the Flemish Parliament passed a parliamentary act (M-decreet) to promote inclusive education. This legislation enables students with specific educational needs to fully participate in regular schools and classrooms on equal terms.</p>

System of alternating learning and working: In Belgium, when a pupil is 15 or 16 years old (s)he may enter a system of alternating learning and working. All youngsters in part-time education are obliged to take part in learning and working for at least 28 hours a week. Part-time learning and working is organised in :

- ❖ a centre for part-time education;
- ❖ a centre for apprenticeships.

The systems are organised separately between the French and Flemish communities.

Higher education: In Belgium, higher education contains programmes which result in the degree of bachelor, master and doctor. Also higher dual vocational education is part of the level of higher education.

Higher dual vocational education: is organised separately by the French and Flemish Communities.

Bachelor: In Belgium, bachelor programs can be either professionally oriented, focusing on practical skills for direct entry into the workforce, or academically oriented, emphasising broad academic knowledge or arts education, with the aim of preparing students for either further study

at the master's level or employment. Typically, bachelor programs require three years to complete, totaling 180 credits.

Master: In Belgium, master programmes focus on advanced scientific or artistic knowledge or competences which are needed for the independent practice of science or arts, or for practising a profession. They are rounded off by a master thesis most often after 2 years of duration (120 credits).

Lifelong learning: in Belgium consists of two areas:

- ❖ Part-time education in the arts - targeted at both children, youngsters and adults and can be done on a voluntary basis or through enrollment fees.
- ❖ Adult education - unrelated to the initial educational career and participants may obtain a recognized diploma, qualification or certificate in adult education.

Source:

<https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/belgium-french-community/overview#:~:text=residing%20in%20Belgium.-,Education%20is%20compulsory%20from%205%20until%2018.,institution%20with%20part%20Time%20employment.>

Strategic objectives of national policies

The Belgian education system aims to provide high-quality education accessible to all students, ensuring that they develop the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in their personal and professional lives. This involves:

- ❖ Ensuring Accessibility and Inclusivity: Providing education for all children regardless of their background, and integrating special needs education into mainstream schooling where possible.
- ❖ Promoting Lifelong Learning: Encouraging continuous education and professional development through systems like alternating learning and working.
- ❖ Supporting Professional and Academic Development: Offering diverse pathways in secondary and higher education to cater to various interests and career goals.

Belgium's education strategy and key objectives are specific for each of the communities:

French Community	Flemish Community
<p>In terms of the French Community, its education strategy and key objectives are aligned with its <u>Declaration on Community Policy</u> (CPD) (2019-2024) in which each measure should empower all, contribute to the reduction of inequalities and encourage the participation of children, young people and families, with particular attention to the most vulnerable people.</p> <p>The French Community is committed to providing excellent education and fostering a culture of empowerment to prepare</p>	<p>On October 2, 2019, a new Flemish Government began its five-year term (2019-2024). At the outset of each legislative term, the Minister of Education formulates key educational objectives in a policy paper presented to the Flemish Parliament.</p> <p>On November 21, 2019, the Flemish Parliament acknowledged the</p>

<p>individuals for the future including within aspects of job market and climate change.</p> <p>Education remains a top priority, with initiatives like the Pact for Excellence in Teaching ensuring students receive the knowledge needed to tackle upcoming challenges. Efforts will focus on reducing early school leaving and empowering disadvantaged youth.</p> <p>"Childhood-Youth Plan 0-25." - a comprehensive plan with measures to improve school infrastructure, enhance digital learning, support educational and extracurricular activities, and reinforce resources in primary education. Moreover, the plan addresses various areas, including higher education, childhood, culture, media literacy, women's rights, youth support, legal services, sports, equal opportunities, and international relations. Through these initiatives, the French Community strives to support children and youth, ensuring their well-being and success in an evolving world.</p>	<p>Minister's "Policy Paper on Education 2019-2024," outlining strategic goals:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Attain top-quality education with significant learning outcomes for all students. 2. Attract and retain skilled, dedicated teachers by elevating the profession's status. 3. Ensure every child finds their rightful place in education and receives necessary support. 4. Invest in learning environments with ample capacity for all learners. 5. Maintain high standards in higher education while curbing excessive flexibility.
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Specific Objectives for Primary Education:

For primary education, the strategic objectives focus on comprehensive child development, ensuring that students receive a well-rounded education that prepares them for secondary schooling. This includes:

- ❖ **Cognitive Development:** Building a strong foundation in basic academic skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics.
- ❖ **Motor and Affective Development:** Encouraging physical activity and emotional well-being.
- ❖ **Versatile Formation:** Developing social, artistic, and scientific skills to foster a well-rounded education.

French Community	Flemish Community
<p>Primary education aligns with the overarching objectives set by the Missions Decree (24 July 1997) and is pivotal in laying the foundation for students' academic journey. Key goals include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fostering a collaborative and expressive classroom environment that encourages spontaneity and group interaction. - Cultivating curiosity, problem-solving skills, and a passion for learning. - Promoting personal growth, self-affirmation, and social participation among students from diverse backgrounds. - Creating an inclusive atmosphere where every child feels valued, recognized, and empowered to engage in society. <p>Primary education prioritises essential skills such as reading, mathematics, and problem-solving, ensuring students meet the compulsory education objectives through diverse learning</p>	<p>Schools must establish an educational environment aligned with their pedagogical vision, fostering continuous learning for students. This environment should be tailored to students' developmental needs, ensuring ongoing support and a diverse range of learning opportunities.</p> <p>Elementary education is tasked with educating all students, providing sustained guidance and expanding support services</p>

<p>activities.</p> <p>It forms an integral part of the Common Core, spanning from pre-primary to secondary education, aiming to equip students with fundamental knowledge, skills, and competencies for lifelong learning and citizenship. This includes fostering critical thinking, promoting enjoyment of learning, and nurturing various facets of personality and social identity.</p> <p>The References guides serve as the foundation of the curriculum, delineating precisely what students should learn across different stages of schooling. They ensure coherence and progressiveness in learning, shaping subsequent curricula and teaching practices. These guides are crucial in defining learning expectations and serve as a contract between schools and society.</p> <p>The Common Core focuses on eight key areas, including language, mathematics, sciences, humanities, physical education, creativity, and learning skills. These areas outline essential knowledge and skills students should acquire by the end of their basic education, aiming to prepare them for a complex, globalised society.</p>	<p>to as many students as possible.</p>
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Educational Strategic Objectives Related to Curricula and Teaching Profession Curricula

- ❖ **Curriculum Development:** Creating flexible, inclusive, and comprehensive curricula that accommodate diverse learning needs and preferences. This includes general, technical, artistic, and vocational education streams in secondary education.
- ❖ **Innovation and Relevance:** Ensuring curricula are up-to-date with current knowledge and practices, integrating technology, and preparing students for the modern labour market.
- ❖ **Cultural and Linguistic Coherence:** Providing education in the respective languages of the Communities and promoting cultural awareness.

Teaching Profession

- ❖ **Professional Development:** Offering continuous professional development opportunities for teachers to enhance their skills and adapt to new educational methods and technologies.
- ❖ **Support and Resources:** Providing adequate support and resources to teachers, including materials, training, and guidance.
- ❖ **Teacher Well-being:** Ensuring a supportive work environment that promotes the well-being and professional satisfaction of educators.

Educational Strategic Objectives Related to Citizenship Education and Volunteering

- ❖ **Citizenship Education:** Promoting civic awareness and responsibility among students. This involves teaching the values of democracy, human rights, and social justice, and encouraging active participation in the community.
- ❖ **Volunteering:** Encouraging students to engage in volunteer activities as a way to contribute to society and develop a sense of social responsibility. This is integrated into the curriculum to complement academic learning with practical community involvement.

- ❖ **Socio-Emotional Development:** Supporting the socio-emotional development of students to foster empathy, cooperation, and a sense of belonging to the community.

Source:

<https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/belgium-french-community/overview#:~:text=residing%20in%20Belgium.-,Education%20is%20compulsory%20from%205%20until%2018.,institution%20with%20part%2Dtime%20employment.>

Educational priorities

During its presidency of the Council of the European Union from January to June 2024, Belgium will focus on four key priorities in education:

- ❖ mobility
- ❖ digital education
- ❖ evidence-informed policy
- ❖ and promotion of lifelong learning.

Efforts will concentrate on enhancing mobility for learners and educators, updating the EU learning mobility framework, improving digital skills and privacy in education, and emphasising the importance of lifelong learning through conferences and discussions on validation of prior learning, accreditation, and flexible pathways.

Source: <http://www.eun.org/news/detail?articleId=11090988>

Educational key actors

The Belgian state: Education in Belgium is largely managed by the three language communities: Flemish, French, and German-speaking. The federal government's role is limited to specific areas such as the determination of the start and end of compulsory education.

Communities: Belgium has three language communities, each with its own education system. Each community is responsible for the organisation, financing, and regulation of its education system, including curriculum development and teacher management:

Flemish Community: Manages education in Flanders and the Flemish-speaking institutions in Brussels.

French Community: Oversees education in Wallonia and the French-speaking institutions in Brussels.

German-speaking Community: Responsible for education in the German-speaking region.

NGOs and CSOs: They play critical roles in promoting equitable education, supporting marginalised groups, and developing extracurricular programs that complement formal education.

International cooperation agencies: Agencies such as the OECD and the European Union, influence Belgian education through comparative studies, policy recommendations, and funding for educational projects. Their reports and evaluations often shape national and community-level education policies.

Businesses: The involvement of businesses in education primarily revolves around vocational training and partnerships with schools and universities to align educational outcomes with labour market needs. Companies also invest in STEM initiatives to foster skills development that meets industry demands

Universities and Research Centers: These institutions are crucial for higher education and research. They contribute to educational policy through research, teacher training, and the development of new educational methodologies. They also collaborate with international research networks and participate in various EU educational programs

Educational networks:

French Community	Flemish Community
<p><u>In the French Community, there are three educational networks</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>Public education</u> is the official education organised by the French Community. It is subject to respect the philosophical and religious views of all parents - <u>Government-aided public education</u> run by the municipal or provincial authorities ; - <u>Government-aided private education</u> is organised by a private person or organisation. The network consists primarily of catholic schools. Next to denominational schools it includes schools not linked to a religion, e.g. alternative schools (on the basis of the ideas of Freinet, Montessori or Steiner) which apply specific teaching methods. 	<p>In Flanders there are three educational networks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GO! Education is the official education organised by the Flemish Community. The constitution prescribes a duty of neutrality for GO! Education. - Government-aided public education comprises schools run by the municipal or provincial authorities. - Government-aided private education is organised by a private person or organisation. The network consists primarily of catholic schools. Next to denominational schools it includes schools not linked to a religion, e.g. alternative schools (on the basis of the ideas of Freinet, Montessori or Steiner) which apply specific teaching methods.

Sources:

<https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/belgium-french-community/overview#:~:text=residing%20in%20Belgium.-,Education%20is%20compulsory%20from%205%20until%2018.,institution%20with%20part%2Dtime%20employment.>

<https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryReports?primaryCountry=BEL>

<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/d93ed6c1-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/d93ed6c1-en>

<https://www.expatica.com/be/education/children-education/education-in-belgium-100088/>

Programs for promoting service-learning or similar projects

The topic is most alive in secondary and higher education, less so in primary education although service learning is offered there too. In Belgium, there are different initiatives that promote service-learning and socio-educational practices specifically in primary education. Here are some notable programs:

- ❖ KU Leuven has integrated community service learning into its educational framework. While primarily aimed at higher education, this model has inspired similar approaches in primary education, encouraging students to engage with community issues and apply their learning in real-world contexts. Website: <https://www.kuleuven.be/english>
- ❖ The Flemish Ministry of Education supports various initiatives that integrate socio-educational practices into the curriculum. These initiatives focus on fostering civic engagement, environmental awareness, and social responsibility among primary school students. For example, schools often engage in projects such as school gardens, community clean-ups, and social service activities that promote these values. Website: <https://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/>
- ❖ School Without Racism (School Zonder Racisme) is a national initiative aimed to promote diversity and combat racism in schools. It provides resources and support for schools to implement anti-racist educational practices and engage students in activities that foster inclusivity. Their activities include: workshops, awareness campaigns, and collaborative projects with local communities to promote understanding and respect among students. Website: <https://www.schoolzonderracisme.be/>
- ❖ Many primary schools in Belgium independently develop socio-educational projects tailored to their local communities. These projects often involve partnerships with local organisations, parents, and community leaders. Examples include: Environmental projects (e.g., recycling programs, school gardens), social projects (e.g., visiting local senior centres, community service days), and cultural projects (e.g., multicultural fairs, language exchange programs).
- ❖ Montgomery International School in Brussels offers a comprehensive International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum, including the Primary Years Programme (PYP). This curriculum emphasises inquiry-based learning and critical thinking, aligning with the principles of service-learning by encouraging students to engage with real-world issues and community projects.

Service-Learning in primary education in the future

There is no official information but the following could function as general arguments for and against.

The following outlines for why service-learning may be a suitable practice in Belgium:

- ❖ Belgium's education system emphasises holistic development, including social and civic competencies alongside academic skills. Service-learning fits well within this framework by promoting personal growth, social responsibility, and community engagement among primary school students

- ❖ Some local Belgian schools already engage in socio-educational practices. For instance, projects involving environmental stewardship or community service are common and can be expanded into more structured service-learning programs
- ❖ Belgium's educational framework is already conducive to innovative teaching methods.
- ❖ Belgium's multicultural and multilingual context offers a rich environment for service-learning. This diversity can be leveraged to create meaningful community service projects that promote cultural understanding and social cohesion
- ❖ Belgium already implements several socio-educational practices that emphasise personal and social skills development. Programs targeting disadvantaged students and aiming to reduce school dropout rates provide a foundation upon which service-learning can be built

The following outlines the challenges for implementation of service learning in Belgium:

- ❖ Integrating service-learning into the existing curriculum can be challenging. Teachers may need additional training to effectively incorporate community service projects into their teaching methods. Ensuring that service-learning activities align with academic goals and standards requires careful planning and coordination
- ❖ Effective service-learning projects might require significant resources, including time, funding, and community partnerships. Schools, especially those in under-resourced areas, might struggle to allocate the necessary resources without additional support.
- ❖ Successful service-learning depends on strong partnerships between schools and the community. Establishing and maintaining these relationships can be challenging, particularly in areas where community resources are limited or where there is a lack of awareness about the benefits of such collaborations

Service-learning holds significant potential for primary schools in Belgium due to its alignment with the country's educational goals of holistic development and inclusive education. The existing support structures from EU programs and local initiatives further bolster its feasibility. However, successful implementation will require addressing challenges related to curriculum integration, resource allocation, teacher training and community involvement. With strategic planning and adequate support, service-learning can greatly enrich the educational experience of Belgian primary school students, fostering their growth as active, engaged citizens.

Source:

<https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/156/Belgium-TEACHING-PROFESSION.html>

4.2. Bosnia and Herzegovina

General organisation of the educational system

BiH consists of two entities (Republika Srpska and Federation of BiH) and Brcko district of BiH.

The education sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina reflects the state constitution. It is defined by the [BiH Constitution](#), the constitutions of the entities, cantons, and the Statute of Brčko District of BiH, which govern legal competencies in education.

In accordance with that there are twelve responsible institutions of education in BiH:

- ❖ [The Ministry of Education and Culture of Republika Srpska \(Ministarstvo prosvjete i kulture Republike Srpske\)](#),
- ❖ Ten cantonal ministries of education in the Federation of BiH and
- ❖ The Department for Education of the Brčko District Government ([Odjeljenje za obrazovanje u Vladi Brčko Distrikta BiH](#))

Republika Srpska has a centralised government and one ministry of education. Federation of BiH has a decentralised government and consists of ten cantons where each canton has their own ministry of education. Federal Ministry of Education and Science has only a coordinative role. Brcko district of BiH has a government with departments. One of those departments is The Department for Education.

There are also two others ministries with coordinating role:

- ❖ The Federal Ministry of Education and Science ([Federalno ministarstvo obrazovanja i nauke](#)) coordinates, among other things, activities within the Federation of BiH, between ten cantons.
- ❖ On a state level, there is [The Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH – MoCA \(Ministarstvo civilnih poslova BiH\)](#), established with a role to coordinate activities within all education institutions in BiH. In accordance with the law, MoCA is responsible for carrying out activities and tasks within the jurisdiction of BiH related to defining basic principles of coordination of activities, harmonisation of plans of entity bodies and defining strategy at the international level, including, among others, education.

On a state level, there are also:

- ❖ [The Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance \(Agencija za razvoj visokog obrazovanja i obezbjeđenje kvaliteta\)](#)
- ❖ [Center for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education \(Centar za informisanje i priznavanje kvalifikacija iz oblasti visokog obrazovanja\)](#) and
- ❖ [The Agency for Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education \(Agencija za predškolsko, osnovno i srednje obrazovanje\)](#) have been established at the BiH level.

The bodies for the coordination of the education sector have also been formed including the Conference of Ministers of Education in BiH and the Council for General Education in BiH.

The Rectors' Conference of Bosnia and Herzegovina has also been established and it defines and represents the common interests of universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, cooperates with education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and acts as an advisory body for the implementation of the reform of higher education.

In BiH, there are three constituent peoples and three official languages: Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian. They are taught in a school as a mother tongue.

Strategic objectives of national policies

The institutional picture of the education sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a reflection of the state regulation, defined by the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, entity and cantonal

constitutions, and the Statute of the Brčko district of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and on the basis of which the competences in the field of education are defined. Accordingly, the competent educational authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina have their own laws and strategies, as well as other bylaws that define the principles and standards of all levels of education.

In the area of education, the Ministry of Civil Affairs BiH in the field of its jurisdiction in cooperation with competent educational and other authorities, the development and adoption of a number of strategies defining different levels of education. Currently valid strategic documents at the level of BiH are:

❖ **Guidelines for improving online teaching and combined teaching for educational systems in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the context of quality (and) inclusive education**

The emergency situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic significantly affected the implementation of the educational process. The transition from the traditional model of teaching in the classroom to teaching in a virtual environment brought numerous challenges that had to be faced by all interested parties of the educational process: pupils/students, teachers, parents and even educational policy makers and competent authorities in the field of education.

In the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the very process of changing the legislative framework, i.e. by-laws, which would ensure the possibility of conducting classes via the Internet, while still talking about the quality of educational work, was complex and carries differences at the level of administrative units. . An overview of changes in by-laws at the level of administrative units is available in the Overview study on the quality of distance teaching and combined learning in primary and secondary education (and ZITO) in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the coronavirus pandemic (UNICEF, 2021a) and the Overview study on the quality of learning at distance in higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO, 2021). The studies state that the competent educational authorities made it possible for classes to be established relatively quickly when it comes to the legal-administrative aspect and that most of the obstacles were removed in a timely manner thanks to the quick interventions of the competent educational authorities and governments in order to ensure the continuity of education.

❖ **Improvement of Quality and Relevance of Vocational Education and Training in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Light of Riga Conclusions (for the period 2021-2030)** was adopted. By investing in vocational education and training at all government levels, the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina will develop a high quality and accessible initial education that both students, their parents and the society at large will recognise as attractive. Vocational education and training should ensure recognised and high-quality qualifications and key and specific technical competences recognised in the labour market that ensure progress and economic growth. In order to achieve this goal, the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina initiated the activities related to the development of the document "Improvement of Quality and Relevance of Vocational Education and

Training in Bosnia and Herzegovina – in the Light of Riga Conclusions – for the Period 2021-2030"

- ❖ **Priorities in the integration of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial key competencies in education systems in BiH (2021 - 2030)** was adopted - The aim of the document is to harmonise the priorities and next steps in the development of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial competence in accordance with the relevant key EU policies defined in the European Framework for Entrepreneurial Competence. The activities on the drafting of the document were realised with the involvement of the creators of educational policies and educational experts - representatives of the competent ministries, pedagogical institutes, educational institutions, and teachers.
- ❖ **The Platform for development of preschool education in BiH for the period 2017 - 2022** was adopted - the Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH, in cooperation with the competent educational authorities in BiH, in the period 2015-2016, with the support of UNICEF in BiH, worked intensively on the Platform document for the development of pre-school education in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2017-2022, which was finalised in April 2016. On December 4, 2017, the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted the Platform for the Development of Preschool Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2017-2022
- ❖ **Baseline of the qualification framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the initial document of the process of building and establishing a qualification framework on the basis of the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning is a framework for action for all institutions and individuals who, in accordance with their jurisdiction, are involved in the process of preparing the qualifications framework. The starting points set out in this document are also guidelines for harmonisation of regulations regulating the areas of primary, secondary and higher education, i.e. lifelong learning, as well as better linking of changes and needs of the labour market with educational programs in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- ❖ **Action Plan for the Preparation and Implementation of the Qualification Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2014-2020** is a work plan for all major activities for the development and implementation of a qualification framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina for all institutions and individuals who, in accordance with their competencies, are involved in drafting and implementation of a qualification framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The qualification framework is an instrument necessary to ensure the equal use and application of standards: education and occupation, learning outcomes, qualifications, competence and certification of educational providers.
- ❖ **Principles and standards in adult education in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2014)** represent the legal basis for the work of educational and other authorities - responsible bodies, institutions, organisations and individuals at all levels of government in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a framework for initiating, implementing and coordinating their activities in the field of adult education, in accordance with established jurisdiction. Principles and standards of adult education establish common principles and standards that are based, develop, implement and coordinate policies and legislation related to adult education

throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, monitors, assesses and considers the situation in this area, and negotiates, proposes and undertakes measures to improve it. The basic principles and standards define the Principles and Standards of Adult Education, follow international and European principles and standards in the field of adult education, and respect the specificities of the economic, social and cultural context in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

- ❖ **Strategic platform for development of adult education in the context of lifelong learning in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for the period 2014-2020**, represents the legal framework and basis for the operation and cooperation of the competent authorities, institutions, organisations and individuals at all levels of government in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the area of adoption and full implementation of the necessary strategic and / or other development documents and adult education. The Strategic platform identifies the global directions of adult education in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2014-2020. as a common platform for the development of modern adult education policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, based on the concept of lifelong learning. The Strategic Platform establishes the basis for a systematic cross-sectoral approach to strategic planning of the development of adult education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and initiates the necessary reform processes in this area that should contribute to greater competitiveness in the knowledge and labour market, increased mobility and professional flexibility of the individual and socio-economic revitalization.
- ❖ **Roadmap for the implementation of the EU Directive on regulated professions 2005 / 36EC and 2013 / 55EU** was prepared on the basis of a previously prepared Gap analysis in which the analysis of legislation in Bosnia and Herzegovina was carried out in relation to the requirements of Directive 2005/36 / EC of the European Parliament and of the Council Of the European Union on regulated professions and amendments to Directive 2013/55 / EU. Implementation of recommendations from the Roadmap increases the level of harmonisation of relevant domestic legislation with the EU Directive in line with this, which is certainly the responsibility of Bosnia and Herzegovina on its path to EU membership.
- ❖ **Priorities for development of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2016-2026** are the main measures and activities that need to be implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to strengthen the development of higher education on the one hand, and, on the other hand, achieve full inclusion in the European Higher Education Area . The priorities for the development of higher education are grouped into seven key areas: good governance and management, resources; the integration of the labour market and higher education; standards of qualifications, student experience, internationalisation and statistics.

The activities conducted in the framework of the Bologna process for higher education reform are supervised and conducted by an authority called the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG). The Group is responsible for the preparation of all documents for the biennial Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education in the European Higher Education Area, consisting of representatives – experts of each of the member countries of the Bologna Process. The Group serves the Bologna Secretariat and the host country of the Secretariat rotates every two years.

The Agency for preschool, primary and secondary education has developed a Common Core Curricula for civic education defining learning outcomes as a basis for improving the existing curricula in BiH.

The relevant ministries for administration and governance of Laws on voluntarism in Bosnia and Herzegovina are: [FBiH Ministry of Justice](#) and [RS Ministry of Family, Youth and Sports](#).

There are no national or regional authorities responsible for volunteering, and the majority of voluntary activities are administered and governed by youth non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs).

Educational priorities

Reform processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina are carried out in cooperation with all 14 competent educational institutions. The Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH, which includes the Education Sector, coordinates these activities. Competent educational authorities have complete autonomy to regulate their educational system. Coordination of activities from the state level provides support to all actors to improve these processes.

The aim of the reform processes is to improve the quality of education, support equality and access to education through the improvement of inclusive teaching, support for teaching and other staff, improved transition between different levels of education and easier access to the labour market.

Programs for promoting service-learning or similar projects

[International Association “Interactive Open Schools”](#) since its inception supports schools, teachers, and other stakeholders in their efforts to transform the education process into an effective learning and teaching environment with the children at the center of the activity. Organization started work in 2004 from the will of teachers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia and our first steps were about interculturality and cohesion between teachers from three countries. Their primary focus is on the teaching and learning process within the school, and how this process can be experiential, engaging for children (students), and impactful for their holistic development. Organisation offers diverse training for teachers, school management, the parent community within the school, and the local community (in partnership with the school) across Bosnia and Herzegovina and beyond. Also, they offer networking events, consultancy, and other support to schools. In essence, they promote values of participative democracy, inclusion, diversity, and creativity, and the approaches and methods to teaching we offer reflect these values. For example, we offer training on cooperative learning, project-based learning, and Service-Learning – methods that support high participation/engagement, co-creation, and connection. Service-Learning pedagogy offers deep and impactful learning experiences for students, teachers, and the community thus we are promoting and actively disseminating it in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2009. Over 100 schools and 1000 teachers participated in our program Service-Learning – learning through engagement. contact: muios@ioskole.net or cee.sl.award@oiskole.net

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4.3 Croatia

General organisation of the educational system

The Croatian education system consists of early childhood and preschool, primary, secondary and higher education levels, as well as adult education, to facilitate the optimal development of each student's potential, aiming for personal development, entry into the labour market and readiness for lifelong learning. Education in Croatia is accessible to everyone under equal conditions based on their abilities, with compulsory education being free of charge. Private schools and universities can be established according to the relevant legal framework, and universities have guaranteed autonomy, allowing them to independently decide on their structure, organisation and operations.

The educational system in Croatia is governed by the Ministry of Science and Education. In the sectors of early and preschool education, primary and secondary education, the Ministry handles system development, national curriculum, norms and standards, student standards, inspection control, institutional establishment and supervision, as well as ensuring financial and material conditions for the operation and training of students to acquire technical knowledge and skills. In higher education, the Ministry oversees the development of higher education, implementation of national strategies and programmes and the monitoring and provision of financial and material conditions for higher education institutions.

In Croatia, education is a primarily centralised system managed by the Ministry of Science and Education and national agencies, though there are decentralised functions performed by the founders of preschool, primary and secondary education institutions.

In addition to the Ministry, other institutions involved in implementing educational policies, monitoring, evaluation, system development and programme development in various aspects of the Croatian education system include the Education and Teacher Training Agency (AZOO), the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (ASOO), the Agency for Science and Higher Education (AZVO), the Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes (AMPEU), the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education (NCVVO), and the Croatian Academic and Research Network (CARNET).

Overview of the Educational Structure

The educational system in Croatia comprises several levels: early childhood and preschool education, primary education, secondary education, higher education and adult education. Its aim is to provide educational services that enable every student to optimally develop their potential, supporting personal development and readiness for the labour market, as well as lifelong learning.

Early Childhood and Preschool Education

Early childhood and preschool education in Croatia are decentralised, with fundamental rights transferred to local and regional authorities. This level of education is not compulsory, except for a pre-school programme designed for children before starting primary school. The pre-school programme is free of charge and mandatory, lasting one pedagogical year. The system is divided into three educational cycles:

- ❖ From six months to one year of age
- ❖ From one to three years of age
- ❖ From three years until the start of primary school.

Primary Education

Primary education in Croatia is a unified and compulsory system lasting eight years, starting at age 6 or 7 and concluding at age 14 or 15. Exceptions are made for students with developmental difficulties, allowing education up to age 21. Primary education can be public or private, offering regular and special programmes, including those for children with difficulties, alternative curriculums (such as Waldorf or Montessori) and education in the languages of national minorities.

Artistic education, which includes music and dance, is conducted alongside regular programmes. Additional educational work is organised as extended care for first and second graders, and in some schools, for third graders. Primary education provides general education and prepares students for secondary education, with admission to secondary schools based on average final grades and sometimes additional entrance exams.

Secondary Education

Secondary education, provided by secondary schools or other public institutions equips students with the necessary knowledge and skills for employment or further education. Secondary schools include grammar schools, art schools and vocational schools. Grammar and art schools typically have four-year programmes, while vocational schools may offer programmes lasting one to five years, depending on the field of study. Secondary education is not compulsory but is attended by most children, beginning at age 14 or 15.

Art secondary schools also have four-year programmes, offering competencies for employment or further education. Vocational education allows entry to the labour market or further education under certain conditions.

Horizontal mobility, the ability to switch between similar secondary education programmes, is possible through adult education.

Higher Education

Higher education is regulated by the Ministry of Science and Education, which is responsible for development, strategic planning, financial conditions, and quality assurance through the Agency for Science and Higher Education (AZVO). Higher education institutions, which can be public or private, include universities, faculties, art academies and polytechnics. Public universities are established by the Republic of Croatia, while private institutions are founded by individuals or legal entities.

Universities can offer both university and professional study programmes, whereas polytechnics offer only professional programmes. Higher education ensures equal access to all applicants, with admission processes published online.

Adult Education

Adult education includes primary and secondary education programmes approved by the Ministry of Science and Education. These programmes are equivalent to regular education programmes but adapted for adults. Formal adult education programmes must be verified by the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education and the Ministry of Science and Education. The system has been fully aligned with the Croatian Qualifications Framework since the adoption of the Adult Education Act in 2021, introducing formal programmes for acquiring micro-qualifications and recognising prior non-formal and informal learning.

Special Education

Special education for students with learning difficulties is integrated into regular schools, with full or partial integration depending on the type and degree of difficulty. Education can be provided through regular, individualised or special programmes, and in exceptional cases, in special educational institutions.

The teaching profession

The teaching profession in Croatia is regulated by educational and competency requirements specific to each role within the education system. Classroom teachers must complete a university-integrated undergraduate and graduate teacher education programme, a university graduate teacher education programme or a four-year professional teacher education programme with 240 ECTS credits. Subject teachers in primary schools must complete a university graduate programme, an integrated undergraduate and graduate programme in the relevant subject or a relevant professional graduate programme and acquire at least 55 ECTS credits in pedagogical education. Vocational teachers in secondary schools must complete a university graduate programme or a relevant professional graduate programme and have the necessary pedagogical competencies. Teaching assistants must have an appropriate secondary professional qualification and pedagogical competencies. Professional associates and educators must complete a university graduate programme and have pedagogical competencies.

New teachers are employed as interns for one year, during which they must pass a state exam to obtain their teaching licence. Teachers and school staff are required to continuously develop their skills through approved programmes in pedagogy, didactics, educational psychology and related areas. A work licence, valid for five years, is required for teachers, educators, professional associates, and principals, and is issued by the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education. The renewal process often involves demonstrating ongoing professional development and continued competence in their teaching field.

Continuous professional development is mandatory for all teachers. The Ministry of Science and Education, along with the Agency for Education and Teacher Training, provides various programmes and workshops to help teachers stay updated with the latest educational methodologies and practices. Specialised training programmes are available for teachers to

further specialise in areas such as inclusive education, ICT in education and new pedagogical strategies.

Schools and teachers are regularly inspected by the Education and Teacher Training Agency to ensure compliance with national standards. These evaluations assess teaching quality, school management and student outcomes. Teachers in Croatia have access to various professional associations that provide support, resources and advocacy for the teaching profession. These associations often play a role in policy development and professional standards.

The employment of teachers is governed by national labour laws, which provide job security, fair wages and benefits. Collective agreements between the government and teacher unions also play a significant role in defining the working conditions and rights of teachers.

Strategic objectives of national policies

Aligned with the vision outlined in the National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030 and the European educational framework, quality education entails acquiring fundamental and versatile skills, encouraging mobility for everyone, promoting multilingualism and fostering a European outlook in education. Education is increasingly integrated into the digital revolution, providing top-notch and inclusive learning opportunities through adept, just and effective use of digital technology. Concrete measures will back green and digital shifts in education and training.

The scheduled continuation of educational reforms, as laid out in the National Plan for the Development of the Education System for the Period up to 2027, champions personal, social and professional advancement at all levels of the system, striving for individual, societal and economic welfare. Alongside overarching aims, modernising the education system entails:

- ❖ Ensuring accessible, high-quality early childhood education.
- ❖ Enhancing resources and staff conditions in primary and general secondary education.
- ❖ Strengthening the link between vocational education and the job market.
- ❖ Encouraging more adults to engage in lifelong learning.
- ❖ Enhancing the accessibility, quality and relevance of higher education.
- ❖ Developing support mechanisms for children and students with disabilities and those from vulnerable backgrounds.
- ❖ Further integration of digital technology into the educational system.

Efforts include improving infrastructure, enrolment criteria and student awareness to increase participation in grammar school programmes and align educational offerings with societal and labour market needs. Continuous professional development for teachers and mentors at employers is prioritised, aiming to enhance their skills and meet the demands of high-quality vocational education. Support is provided for regional centres of competence in vocational education, focusing on organisational capacity building, networking with partners and supporting digital and green economic transitions. Adult education programmes are being developed to meet real economic needs, promote personal and social development and eliminate discrimination. Efforts to enhance the quality of higher education include external quality assurance activities and

aligning with Sustainable Development Goals. Study programmes are being modernised to better serve the needs of the labour market and society.

Educational priorities

According to the National Plan for the Development of the Education System for the Period up to 2027, the Croatian education system is striving to be inclusive, of high quality and fair, actively nurturing the comprehensive development of all learners, equipping them for employment, lifelong learning, contemporary living standards and active engagement in democratic society.

In the National Plan, the future of education is shaped by several key trends and priorities that emerge from ongoing developments. Emphasis is placed on ensuring access to early and preschool education, recognising its pivotal role in laying the foundation for lifelong learning and development. Moreover, there is a notable focus on the development of both fundamental and vocational competencies. This signals a shift towards a more comprehensive approach to education, acknowledging the importance of equipping learners with practical skills alongside academic knowledge.

Efforts to enhance higher education reflect a commitment to continuous learning and skill development, aligning with the evolving demands of the workforce. Similarly, initiatives aimed at creating a coordinated and forward-looking labour market highlight the interdependence between education and economic prosperity, with education serving as a driver of workforce development and economic growth.

Within this landscape, certain educational sectors emerge as priorities, including early and preschool education, vocational education and higher education.

Key actors within the education ecosystem play a central role in realising these priorities. Teachers and mentors are recognised for their crucial role in delivering quality education and training, with a focus on continuous professional development to ensure their effectiveness. Additionally, regional centres of competence in vocational education are highlighted as essential players in promoting vocational skills and supporting economic transitions. Furthermore, government ministries and agencies are pivotal in shaping education policy and driving strategic initiatives, while partner institutions and businesses contribute through collaboration and networking efforts.

Cooperation with civil society organisations is encouraged through civic education in schools, which is currently organised as a cross-curricular topic. Since 2019, the Curriculum for the Cross-Curricular Topic of Civic Education (Official Gazette 10/2019, No. 217) has been in force. It consists of three domains: Human Rights, Democracy and the Community. Its implementation is mandatory in all primary and secondary schools for all students.

The purpose of Civic Education is to equip and empower students for active and effective citizenship. This includes becoming responsible members of various communities—classroom, school, local, national, European and global. Civic Education helps students navigate a pluralistic society, build self-confidence and find their own solutions to current social problems and

challenges. By acquiring civic competence, which encompasses knowledge, skills and attitudes, students are prepared for successful participation in democratic life.

Civic Education covers knowledge of human rights, democratic community characteristics and political systems. It focuses on developing critical thinking based on ethical principles and communication skills necessary for social and political participation. It emphasises mediation skills, conflict resolution, problem-solving based on democratic principles and fostering values like responsibility, human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity. The curriculum uses collaborative and experiential learning methods, both inside and outside the school, creating an environment where values emerge from learning and life experiences, which involves connecting classroom lessons with visits to various institutions and organisations. Teachers play a crucial role in developing students' competencies and achieving high levels of success in Civic Education.

Programs for promoting service-learning or similar projects

While there are not many programmes that promote service learning in primary schools in Croatia per se, there are many school volunteer clubs, offering students opportunities to get involved in community service and social projects. Typically led by teachers or other professional staff, these clubs aim to cultivate active citizenship and social responsibility while fostering a sense of community within the school environment.

Those volunteer clubs are often part of the extracurricular activities offered by schools. They coordinate various community service initiatives, such as environmental clean-ups, fundraising events for charities or aiding local organisations and community members in need. Through participation in these clubs, students not only contribute positively to their communities but also develop essential skills like teamwork, leadership and empathy.

While the structure and activities of volunteer clubs may differ between schools, they generally provide students with a platform to make a meaningful difference beyond the classroom and promote a sense of civic duty and social consciousness.

The City of Rijeka stands out as a good practice example as it was the first to introduce civic education and promote volunteering in both primary and secondary schools in Croatia. The City of Rijeka introduced Civic Education in primary schools to promote non-violence, tolerance and solidarity, as well as to instil human values in students. Beginning from the 2016/2017 school year, upper primary school students have had the opportunity to enrol in this subject, supported by handbooks tailored specifically for this programme.

Civil society organisations have played a significant role in the development and implementation of Civic Education in Rijeka. They were involved in creating the student handbooks in Croatia, ensuring that the content is suitable for the students' age and remains engaging. These handbooks cover all aspects of civic education and were developed with input from civil society groups, university staff, teachers and schools, ensuring a holistic educational approach.

Service-Learning in primary education in the future

Service-learning can be a suitable practice in Croatia, as it offers numerous benefits for both students and communities. The current civic education cross-curricular topic provides a

foundation for the integration of service learning in both primary and secondary schools in Croatia. Additionally, there is increasing global recognition of the significance of service learning in education, and numerous resources and support networks are available to aid schools in implementing such programmes.

Moreover, Croatia's varied communities and social needs present abundant opportunities for meaningful service projects that align with curriculum objectives. By collaborating with local organisations and community members, schools can pinpoint relevant projects that tackle community needs while offering valuable learning experiences for students. Furthermore, the benefits of service learning, including fostering civic engagement, promoting academic achievement and enhancing personal growth, render it a valuable addition to primary education in Croatia. With proper planning, support, and resources, primary schools in Croatia can effectively introduce service learning to enrich the educational experience for students and positively impact their communities.

However, implementing service-learning projects in primary education comes with its own set of challenges and difficulties as the topics and activities rest solely on teachers. One significant challenge is the constraint of time within the structured class schedule. Engaging children during their free time requires persistence and creativity, alongside providing incentives such as outings or enjoyable practical tasks. Meticulous planning and thorough organisation are crucial, necessitating the invaluable support of the collective. Additionally, offering regular feedback on students' progress is essential to maintain their motivation and understanding of their accomplishments.

Another challenge for teachers is balancing volunteering responsibilities with primary work and family commitments. Finding time, maintaining energy levels and sustaining motivation amidst these competing obligations can be demanding. Effective organisation is essential but challenging to maintain, requiring passion, determination and a strong work ethic to overcome.

Proper project design and post-project evaluation are essential for identifying and rectifying mistakes for future endeavours. Common challenges such as time constraints, uneven participation among team members and technical difficulties sometimes must be addressed through improvisation and problem-solving.

Despite these challenges, the potential benefits of service-learning for students, communities, and society as a whole make it a valuable educational practice worth exploring and investing in. With concerted efforts to address implementation challenges and support from stakeholders at all levels, service-learning can contribute to the holistic development of students and the promotion of active citizenship in Croatia.

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4.4 Lithuania

General organisation of the educational system

Lithuania Law of Education of Republic of Lithuania indicates that the Lithuanian education system includes:

- ❖ formal education (primary, basic, secondary education, formal vocational training, higher education studies);
- ❖ non-formal education (pre-school, pre-school, other non-formal education for children (as well as education supplementing formal education) and adult education);
- ❖ self-education;
- ❖ educational assistance (vocational guidance, educational informational, psychological, social pedagogical, special pedagogical and special assistance, health care at school, consulting, teacher qualification improvement and other assistance).

Early childhood education

Early childhood education is part of non-formal education. Early childhood education is not compulsory, except when it is established that the child is growing up in a family of social risk. The purpose of early childhood education is to help children develop the basics of independence, positive communication with peers and adults, and start learning creativity and the ability to learn.

The early childhood education program is carried out by kindergartens and general education schools, a freelance teacher or another education provider. It can be both a state/municipal provider and a non-state provider. The early childhood education program is prepared by the early child education provider himself. When preparing the program, the provider relies on the early childhood education program criteria approved by the Minister of Education, Sport and Science.

Preschool education

Pre-school education is part of non-formal education. Pre-school education is compulsory. Its purpose is to help prepare for successful schooling. Preschool education begins for a child when he/she turns 6 in that calendar year. The pre-school education program is carried out by pre-school and general education schools, a freelance teacher or another education provider. It can be both a state/municipal provider and a non-state provider. Pre-school education is carried out according to the general program of Pre-school education approved by the Minister of Education and Science. The minimum duration of the pre-school education program is 640 hours.

Primary education

Primary education is part of formal education. Primary education is compulsory. The purpose of primary education is threefold: to provide the student with the basics of moral and social and cultural maturity; develop elementary literacy; to help him prepare for success in the mainstream curriculum.

Under the primary education program, a child begins to be educated when he turns 7 years old in that calendar year. If the child started learning earlier in the pre-school curriculum, he/she also starts learning earlier in the primary education curriculum. A child is educated according to the primary education program until the age of 10 (11).

The primary education program is 4 years (grades 1-4). General education schools can offer a preparatory year for students with special educational needs. That is, 1st and 2nd grade courses are completed in three years. Primary education is acquired after completing the primary education program.

Basic education

Basic education is part of formal education. By the law, children are required to study until the age of 16. Thus, compulsory education usually lasts until the 10th grade. It covers all or almost all of the basic education curriculum. The purpose of basic education is complex: to provide a person with the foundations of moral, sociocultural and civic maturity; general literacy; the primer of technological literacy; to develop national awareness; develop ambition and the ability to make decisions, choose and learn further.

A student starts studying in the basic education program when he/she receives primary education. Normally, a student is 10 (11) years old at the time and under this program he studies until he is 16 (17) years old.

The basic education program consists of two parts. Part I of the program lasts 4 years (covers grades 5-8). Part II – 2 years and includes 9-10 (I-II high school) classes. Basic education is obtained after completing the basic education program and passing the basic education achievement test.

Secondary education

Secondary education is part of formal education. Secondary education is not compulsory, but it is guaranteed by the state. The purpose of secondary education is threefold: to help a person acquire

general subjects, sociocultural and technological literacy; moral, national and civic maturity; the basics of professional competence.

A student enters the secondary education program when he/she acquires basic education. Students usually study in the secondary education program from 16 (17) to 18 (19) years old.

The secondary education program is two years long. It is offered in grades 11-12 (III-IV high school). It consists of mandatory and optional general education and possible vocational training modules. If the secondary education program is carried out together with vocational training, the program lasts longer than 2 years. Secondary education is obtained after completing the secondary education program and passing the matriculation exams.

Teacher Training Regulation

The teacher's qualification is obtained in one of the following ways:

- ❖ upon completion of a college or university first-cycle pedagogy study program that integrates a pedagogy study module and a subject module, and/or a pedagogical specialisation module. Upon completion of the study program, a professional bachelor's or bachelor's degree in educational sciences and a teacher's qualification are obtained;
- ❖ after completing the pedagogy study module alongside college or university first-cycle study programs in non-pedagogy fields of study. Upon completion of studies, a professional bachelor's or bachelor's degree and a teacher's qualification are obtained in the studied main study group;
- ❖ after completing the pedagogy professional study program, which is prepared on the basis of the pedagogy studies or pedagogical specialisation module. These are university studies designed to prepare for independent pedagogical activity, to which persons with higher education who meet the requirements for teacher qualifications approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sports are accepted. After completing the study program, a teacher's qualification is obtained;
- ❖ according to the procedure established by legal acts, including and recognizing competences acquired during pedagogical work and/or through non-formal education.

Strategic objectives of national policies

In the Republic of Lithuania, there is a state education strategy in which priority areas are identified:

- ❖ 1st priority - Teacher's personality;
- ❖ 2nd priority - Education quality culture;
- ❖ 3rd priority - Focus on inclusion;
- ❖ 4th priority - Lifelong learning and empowerment.

The strategy, as a long-term planning document, foresees the priority directions of education policy: to increase professionalism of teachers and lecturers; nurture data education quality culture based on analysis and self-evaluation; to develop access to education and equal opportunities; promote lifelong learning. The improvement of education involves horizontal processes occurring in several areas of state management. The Ministry of Education, Sport and

Science, other state institutions, municipalities, non-governmental organisations, other legal and natural persons will participate in the implementation of the Strategy. The goals and objectives of the strategy will be implemented under the guidance National Progress Program and other medium term documents. Specific measures for the objectives of the Strategy and to achieve the tasks, each implementing institution will provide in its strategic activity plans. The implementation of the strategy will be coordinated by the Ministry of Education, Sport and Science.

Educational strategic objectives related to the curriculum and teaching profession

In 2019, the Republic of Lithuania adopted guidelines for updating the general training programs of secondary education. General training programs is a document regulating the content of education at the national level, which helps to achieve the goals of primary, basic and secondary education defined in the Education Law of the Republic of Lithuania. In general the programs define the educational results to be achieved, describe the scope of teaching and learning content, and detail the characteristics of the levels of achievement of the educational results. The essential aims of the quality of the content of educational programs determine that the content of general training programs is relevant and meaningful for students, open to the diversity of their needs and talents, integral, engaging in the solution of real problems, encouraging self-directed learning and the creation of one's own knowledge. It provides opportunities for students to explore, solve problems by reflecting on them from different perspectives, and act practically by applying knowledge and skills from different fields.

The following quality criteria are used in the preparation of the General Training Programs:

- ❖ **Value orientation** – the learning content promotes the development of value attitudes;
- ❖ **Demandingness** - learning content encourages academic challenges, detailed knowledge, creative thinking, activity and reflection;
- ❖ **Contextuality** – learning content is associated with contexts that would motivate the student for an active cognitive process and application of learning results;
- ❖ **Dynamism** - the learning content reveals the continuous reality and the results of its cognition (concepts, theories, ideas) change, broadening and deepening the world view and opening the perspective of the future;
- ❖ **Focus** - in order to achieve deep learning and quality of results, learning content is ensured, scope that provides a breadth of vision and better perception;
- ❖ **Consistency** - the sequence of learning content is based on educational tasks, relevant sciences academic logic and taking into account the student's already achieved learning results, as well as the characteristics of the age groups;
- ❖ **Integrity** - the interrelationship between the contents of various educational subjects is strengthened in order to help for the student to form a coherent worldview;
- ❖ **Harmony** - educational goals, tasks, learning content, educational activities and evaluation of results are aligned with each other.

Educational priorities

One of the goals of Lithuania's progress strategy "Lithuania 2030" is to create a learning society that is modern and dynamic, ready for future challenges and capable of operating in a constantly changing world. It states that Lithuanian people are educated, interested in science and

innovation, easily understand and use new technologies, know foreign languages and apply the principles of lifelong learning. The strategy also declares that the population has favourable conditions for the development of non-formal education and lifelong learning.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania has identified STEAM as one of the main priorities of Lithuanian education. When entering higher education institutions, the ministry distinguishes the following priority fields of study: pedagogy, information technology, mathematics, engineering, nursing and midwifery, and officer training.

The National Education Agency has approved the areas of prioritisation of pedagogical staff qualification improvement: strengthening digital competences; improvement of the competences required to implement the principle of inclusion; strengthening of civic education competences; improvement of educational practice and didactic competences; development of competencies necessary for leadership development and learning.

NGOs in the field of education are represented by the National Education NGO Network, which acts as an association uniting non-governmental educational organisations working in the fields of pre-school and general education, higher education and non-formal education for children and adults. In its analysis of the opening of the education system in Lithuania, the network notes that the education system in Lithuania is still very closed, focused on the maintenance of state educational institutions, and the inclusion of non-profit organisations operating in the field of education as social partners both in decision-making and in the provision of services is quite sluggish. One of the OECD recommendations for Lithuania is to include non-governmental organisations in the modelling and provision of public services. Nevertheless, in 2019 in the field of education, only 2.9 percent of funded public services were purchased from independent entities, including NGOs.

Programs for promoting service-learning or similar projects

Lions Clubs International Foundation provides LIONS QUEST programs which encourages the selection and implementation of projects with short-term and long-term goals in schools and the community. The following LIONS QUEST programs are currently implemented in Lithuanian educational institutions:

- ❖ Preschool education program "Time Together"
- ❖ I-IV grades program "Time together"
- ❖ V-VIII grades program "Adolescent Crossroads"
- ❖ IX-XII grades program "Keys to Success"

It is a recommendation for schools which would like to implement LIONS QUEST programs to cooperate with the members of Lithuanian LIONS clubs. LIONS QUEST programs are implemented in all municipalities of Lithuania, in some of them they are integrated into all educational institutions from pre-school education to 12th grade. The LIONS QUEST "Keys to Success" program is also implemented in vocational training institutions.

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4.5 Slovakia

General organisation of the educational system

In the Slovak Republic, the school system consists of three basic levels of schools: primary, secondary and tertiary. The structure of the educational system is determined by law and the details of the functioning of its components are regulated by decrees of the Ministry of Education, research, science and youth of the Slovak Republic. The school system represents the set of all

school institutions, their functioning and the means (including legislative) that provide education in the country. The school system is the set of formal and non-formal education institutions, managed and administered by the Ministry of Education.

Kindergartens are educational establishments that educate children in accordance with their age and individual characteristics in cooperation with the family and with foster family education facilities. Kindergartens and special kindergartens provide the education of pre-school children following the law. They may provide half-day, full-day, weekly, or continuous educational care.

Primary schools provide basic education, ensuring pupils' intellectual, emotional and sensory-motor development in the sense of scientific knowledge and in accordance with the principles of patriotism, humanity and democracy. They provide moral, aesthetic, occupational, health, physical, ecological and religious education. Primary school is divided into two grades, the first four years and the second five years. After the fourth year, pupils may continue their attendance in the upper years of primary school or apply for admission to the first year of an eight-year grammar school.

Secondary schools provide pupils with secondary vocational education, complete secondary vocational education, complete general secondary education and higher vocational education. They prepare pupils for professions and activities in the national economy, administration, culture, the arts and other areas of life (including higher education). Secondary schools educate pupils with the principles of patriotism, humanity and democracy and in the sense of scientific knowledge. They prepare them for creative work and professional activity in the professions and provide moral, aesthetic, health, physical, ecological and religious/ethical education. A grammar school is a general education, internally differentiated school that prepares pupils primarily for university studies. The secondary vocational school prepares pupils primarily for professional activities, especially technical-economic, economic, pedagogical, medical, socio-legal, administrative, artistic and cultural activities. The course of study lasts four years. Graduates of vocational secondary schools may go on to higher education. A conservatory is a specific type of secondary vocational school that prepares pupils for vocational training in singing, music, dance or dramatic arts and university studies. The secondary vocational school prepares pupils in two- and three-year apprenticeship courses and four-year study courses to perform manual occupations and professional activities.

Universities are the top educational, scientific and artistic institutions that have the exclusive right to provide higher education. Higher education lasts between 4 and 6 years and ends with a state final examination. Graduates of higher education studies are awarded the following degrees: bachelor's degree (B.Sc.), master's degree (M.Sc.), engineer's degree (Eng.), doctor of medicine (M.D.) and doctor of veterinary medicine (M.V.D.) in technical, agricultural and economic fields of study, and doctor of veterinary medicine (V.V.M.) in medical fields of study.

Part of the educational system is school facilities, whose scope is mainly oriented to education and leisure education. School facilities are:

- ❖ educational (school children's clubs, leisure activity centres, leisure centres, youth homes and outdoor schools),

- ❖ special education (educational prevention and foster care facilities),
- ❖ counselling (pedagogical-psychological counselling centres and special-educational counselling facilities),
- ❖ interest-educational (language school, state language school and shorthand school),
- ❖ school-purpose (school catering facilities, practical training centres and school service facilities).

Supporting teachers in Slovakia

As in other EU countries, Slovakia has a problem with teacher shortages, and measures to support teachers need to be developed and implemented. One measure is the establishment of regional teacher support centres. When pushing for changes in the school system from above through the creation of new national education policies, new methodological guidelines or new educational standards, teachers must understand, adopt and apply these changes in their work with pupils. This is why, as part of the Recovery and Resilience Plan, a network of regional teacher support centres is being established to:

- ❖ Establish regional partnerships to support the implementation of the principles and objectives of the new primary education curriculum.
- ❖ Support the professional training of pedagogical leaders in the regions.
- ❖ Provide support for teachers in the regions in implementing the new primary education curriculum through mentoring and guidance.

This network of regional centres to support teacher education is still being built in Slovakia. Currently, there are 32 such centres in Slovakia. Further expansion with new centres is expected from 1 September 2024.

Another form of support for teachers is innovative training. This is the deepening, broadening and innovation of professional competencies necessary for performing professional activities or applying the latest knowledge and experience from practice in education and training. For completing 50 hours of innovative training, a teacher receives 3% of his/her salary (but no more than 12% over 7 years).

Strategic objectives of national policies

The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, in cooperation with the National Institute of Education and Youth and with the involvement of the professional public, has prepared a proposal for changes to the primary school curriculum. As of September 2023, the first 39 primary schools will educate their first-year pupils according to the new curriculum. All primary schools will compulsorily teach according to the new curriculum from the school year 2026/2027, starting with the first year of the first cycle.

The main objective of the reform is to provide pupils with an education adequate for the 21st century, adapted to contemporary society. The aim is to increase pupils' literacy and the skills needed to live in a global and low-carbon digital economy and society. The new proposal includes: reform of the content and form of education (curriculum and textbook reform) and

preparing and developing teachers for new content and forms of teaching (changing teacher training and strengthening teachers' professional development)

The main objectives of the new national curriculum

1. Shifting the focus of education from the transmission of knowledge to the development of pupils' competencies

It is about changing education content so that education in our primary schools is adapted to the needs of the 21st century, that is, to the current and future society and, in particular, to the current generation of children. The basic principle of change is to shift the focus from transmitting knowledge to developing pupils' meaningful competencies and competencies.

The emphasis will, therefore, not be so much on the acquisition of isolated encyclopaedic knowledge and the subsequent reproduction of knowledge, but more on the development of students' complex competencies and on linking the content of education to real-life situations. The aim is to develop pupils' critical thinking and soft skills, such as solving problems, processing information, working in a team, arguing and questioning, taking initiative and responsibility, and creating and implementing personal projects. Pupils should be able to understand and analyse different perspectives and critically evaluate contemporary global and intercultural issues.

To achieve this goal, it is necessary to reinforce the teaching of pupils through experience. Rather than imparting ready-made information, teaching will create situations in which pupils can interpret the data in confrontation with experience. The learning will create space for commenting on topical issues, discussion and active involvement of pupils in the learning process. Instead of defining the curriculum in detail within narrowly defined subjects, the content of learning will be conceived in broader educational units (e.g. man and nature, man and society). The reform will also systematically integrate cross-cutting themes such as financial literacy, global health (e.g. epidemics), climate change and warming into the curriculum.

2. Increase sensitivity and adaptability of educational programmes to the individual needs and capabilities of pupils

The intention of the forthcoming changes is also to increase the sensitivity of education to pupils' individual needs and abilities to support the development of each pupil's potential to the maximum extent possible, especially if he or she comes from a disadvantaged background or has special educational needs or talents. This shall be done by structuring the national curriculum internally into three consecutive and interdependent educational cycles. These cycles set out the expected learning outcomes for pupils in the different learning areas and their components (performance standards at the end of each cycle) and the learning content (the content standards will also be spread across the learning cycles). Based on these cycles, the school curriculum is defined and adapted to each grade level in such a way that there is flexibility and adaptability in the design of the school curriculum concerning the specific conditions of the school and the pupils.

What exactly will the changes bring

To schools. Above all, it is an opportunity to adapt education to the real needs and possibilities of the school about the specific pupils who attend it. It is actually about increasing schools' autonomy in determining the content of education, educational forms, and methods of pedagogical work. Indeed, it will also involve the new preparation of school education programmes. Still, these will express the essence of the school's operation as a complex institution and will not be merely formal, dead documents.

To teachers. Teachers will be able to set a pace in their lessons that matches the potential of their pupils. By removing the overly detailed definition of learning content in some subjects, teachers and schools will be able to organise learning in a more flexible way (e.g. block teaching) and use various learning forms and methods such as active learning, experimentation, discovery and discussion among pupils. The reform will bring greater coherence and consistency between subjects and learning areas

To pupils. The new curriculum will help pupils understand the meaning of education for themselves. So that they do not feel that education is useless and do not understand what and why they are supposed to learn. The content of education will better reflect their abilities and learning pace. Through the new curriculum, pupils will be provided with educational content that meets the demands and challenges of the 21st century and prepares them for further study and for their future personal and working lives. They will acquire not only a variety of knowledge but also strategies for effective learning. By linking learning content to real-life situations and developing complex competences instead of rote learning, pupils will better understand the purpose of school learning and increase their motivation. By respecting their uniqueness, personal pace and interests, and thus personalising learning more, their intrinsic motivation and sense of happiness at school will also increase. Mental health and wellbeing topics will also be part of the educational content.

To parents. Digital skills form the basis for a successful career in the labour market. The aim of the changes is for schools to give every child the opportunity to learn using the latest technologies. Children love experiences, and they remember things best through them, too. Learning about the world is also possible through discovery, experimentation and experience. This, too, brings about a change in the way each pupil develops his or her potential. There will also be changes in the fact that children will be given much more space and opportunities to be active during their time at school. The principles of healthy living will become part of the curriculum themes in different subjects.

The modern 21st Century Learning Standards will prepare children to think and act on the knowledge and skills they have acquired. The quantity of curriculum will be reduced in favour of increasing the quality of the curriculum. School will be a place that also prepares children for the pitfalls of the virtual world. It will teach them how to navigate safely and responsibly in the digital environment. The change aims to increase children's self-confidence, which will also contribute to preventing bullying.

Educational priorities

The new school reform brings more opportunities for schools to develop partnerships and collaborations outside the school - with organisations, institutions or even informal groups. It emphasises cross-cutting themes, particularly in 'Man and nature, man and society, man and Values, man and the world of work'. Schools have set up a subsidy system to finance innovative training for their teaching staff.

Slovakia currently has several different programmes based on long-term and short-term cooperation. Schools are free to choose which programmes to join. Such programmes are covered by various NGOs and non-profit organisations, as well as by methodological and educational centres, national educational institutions, agencies, etc. How the situation will develop in this respect depends to a large extent on the political situation and the general social climate since at the moment, part of the coalition is waging a "fight against NGOs", which has been very successful in part of society (without, of course, having a deeper or even shallower insight into the issue).

Service learning is defined as a strategy within the Concept of Education of Children and Youth for Volunteering, adopted in 2018 by Ministry of Education. The aim of the Concept is to create the preconditions for the implementation of education and learning for volunteering at all levels of education in schools and school educational institutions, to define the objectives and principles of education and learning for volunteering and to set out measures for their implementation. The concept and its implementation in practice are intended to contribute to making volunteering a natural part of people's lifestyles and the lives of communities in Slovakia, thus linking schools with real life.

Programs for promoting service-learning or similar projects

Service learning in Slovakia is supported by the Platform of Volunteer Centres and Organisations, which offers all educators innovative training in service learning in the education and training of children and youth for volunteering and youth workers accredited training in service learning. In addition, the Platform of Volunteer Centres and Organisations is also the umbrella of the Engaged School project. It recognises kindergartens, primary and secondary schools that have incorporated service-learning strategies into the traditional classroom and contributes to disseminating the method in other schools. The Engaged School seeks and recognises good examples of practice where volunteering education has become part of the educational process. In 2023, the project involved 35 pupil projects in 3 categories. <https://www.angazovanaskola.sk/>

The Platform of Volunteer Centres and Organisations also supports the development of SL in cooperation with regional volunteer centres.

For primary schools, there is the Roots & Shoots school programme in Slovakia, which is run by the Green Foundation. The programme is defined as "community-based learning". The programme is implemented in schools in various forms, involving whole classes or pupil teams of pupils from different classes and grades. It occurs during school hours, in blocks, as an interest group or as an extra project. There is a strong emphasis on mapping the needs of the neighbourhood or community and pupil participation in all steps. Pupils' projects are required to benefit the community or the neighbourhood and not to take place in school or on school grounds. 14 schools

are involved in the programme in the school year 2023/24, they are divided between 4 coordinators who act as consultants/mentors for teachers, for teams, conduct workshops with pupils, and possibly a final evaluation and reflection <https://www.rootsandshoots.sk/>

Service-Learning in primary education in the future

Service-learning is at the beginning of its development in Slovakia, but it is not a completely unknown strategy. The potential for the development of service-learning in primary education is presented by the education reform. On the other hand, the reform itself will require the capacities of primary education teachers to implement the changes and thus may pose a threat in the near future.

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4.6 Spain

General organisation of the educational system

The Spanish education system comprises:

- ❖ The education authorities, education professionals, and other public and private actors who perform regulatory, financing, or service provision functions for the exercise of the right to education included in the 1978 Spanish Constitution;
- ❖ Those entitled to the right to education;
- ❖ The set of relations, structures, measures, and actions being implemented to ensure it.

Main characteristics of the administration of the education system

- ❖ Decentralisation: educational competences are shared between the General State Administration (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training) and the authorities of the autonomous communities (Departments for Education).
- ❖ The central education administration executes the general guidelines of the Government on education policy and regulates the basic elements or aspects of the system;

- ❖ Regional education authorities develop the State regulations and have executive and administrative competencies for managing the education system in their own territory.
- ❖ Schools have pedagogical, organisational, and managerial autonomy for their resources.
- ❖ Participation of the education community in the schools' organisation, governance, running, and evaluation.

The Spanish education system consists of five educational levels, two of which are compulsory and funded by the state. Additionally, it has a series of special education programs.

Early Childhood Education. This stage is not compulsory and lasts 6 years, divided into two cycles. The first cycle, from 0-3 years, is managed by private companies or institutions, although there can be agreements. The second cycle, from 3-6 years, is provided in public schools fully funded by the government, though there are also places available in subsidised or private schools.

Primary Education. Is the first compulsory stage and runs from six to twelve years old. Afterward, students move to Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO), which covers the age range of 12 to 16 years. This is when compulsory education ends, and students can choose from several options: continue with Bachillerato studies or undertake Vocational Training. Both paths subsequently allow access to university studies.

Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO). This is taken in secondary education institutes between the ages of 12 and 16. Upon completing this stage, students receive their first official certification, which allows them to access upper secondary education or enter the workforce.

Basic Vocational Training Cycles. These are taken in secondary education institutes between the ages of 15 and 17. Students who complete these courses receive the diploma of Graduated in Compulsory Secondary Education and the title of Basic Technician in the corresponding speciality.

Upper secondary education is primarily provided in secondary schools. It lasts for two academic years, typically taken between the ages of 16 and 18. It offers students two options:

- ❖ **Bachillerato:** Upon completing Bachillerato, students receive the Bachillerato diploma, which grants access to higher-level studies.
- ❖ **Intermediate Vocational Training (professional pathway):** This is offered in vocational training institutes, integrated vocational training centres, and national reference centres. Upon completing these studies, students receive the title of Technician in Vocational Training. Those who wish to continue their studies can pursue intermediate vocational training specialisation courses in professional fields where this option is available.

Higher education includes:

- ❖ **University studies,** which are offered at universities and lead to Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctorate degrees.
- ❖ **Advanced artistic education,** which is provided at higher schools of artistic education and leads to Bachelor's degrees in Higher Artistic Education, Master's, and Doctorate degrees.
- ❖ **Higher-level vocational training,** which is offered at the same institutions as intermediate-level vocational training. Upon completion of these studies, students receive the title of Higher Technician in Vocational Training. Those who wish to continue their

studies can pursue advanced specialisation courses in vocational training in the professional fields where this option is available.

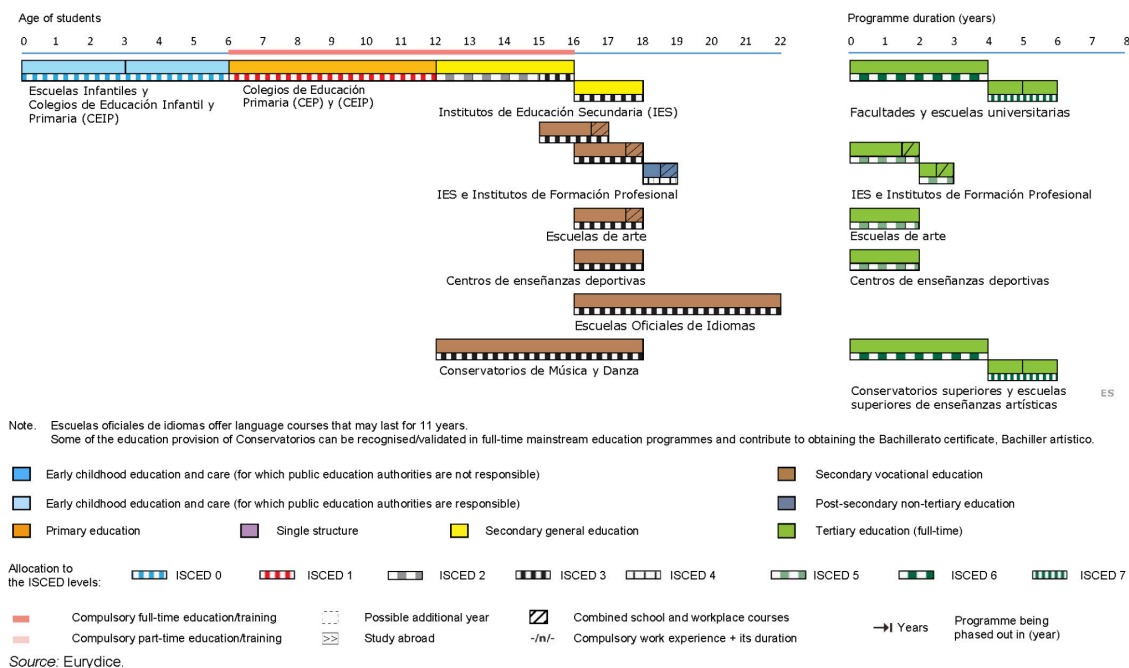
In addition to these types of education, the Spanish education system offers specialised education:

- ❖ **Language education**, which includes language teaching at levels A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). These programmes are provided in the official language schools.
- ❖ **Artistic education** is delivered in different specific institutions, by each type and level of education which includes:
 - elementary music and dance education;
 - professional artistic education in music, dance, or arts and design;
 - higher artistic education, as mentioned above.
- ❖ **Sports education**, organised into intermediate and higher training cycles and taught in the same institutions as vocational education.

Teaching staff characteristics: the minimum qualification level for basic education teachers in Spain ranges from a bachelor's degree or equivalent (ISCED 6) for pre-primary and primary education to a master's degree or equivalent (ISCED 7) for secondary education.

Below, in image 1, the structure of the Spanish education system is shown in more detail.

Spain – 2023/2024



Strategic objectives of national policies

Regarding the strategic objectives intended to be achieved in the educational field (Eurydice España-REDIE, 2020):

- ❖ Realise lifelong learning and mobility.

- ❖ Improve the quality and effectiveness of education and training.
- ❖ Promote equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship.
- ❖ Increase creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

Specifically, in Spain, since the Organic Law 2/2006, of May 3, on Education, at the levels of Early Childhood, Primary, and Secondary Education, the main objectives have primarily focused on three key figures:

- ❖ **Students:** The aim is to ensure inclusive education without discrimination, guarantee equal opportunities, promote values that foster personal freedom, and provide lifelong learning.
- ❖ **Families:** Encouraging the participation of parents and guardians in the education of their children.
- ❖ **Teachers:** Promoting teaching quality, research, experimentation, and educational innovation.

However, this Law was modified by the Organic Law 3/2020 (LOMLOE) passed in 2020. The implementation of the amendments introduced by the LOMLOE started in the school year 2020/21 and ended at the beginning of the school year 2023/24. This reform acknowledges the best interests of the child and places children's rights among the guiding principles of the system, promotes gender equality, encourages the continuous improvement of schools and the individualisation of learning, gives a central role to the development of digital competences and recognizes the importance of education for sustainable development.

In the Royal Decree 157/2022, of March 1, which establishes the organisation and minimum teachings of Primary Education, seven key competencies are identified that every student must acquire by the end of their Primary stage: (a) Competence in linguistic communication, (b) Plurilingual competence, (c) Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology, and engineering, (d) Digital competence, (e) Personal, social, and learning to learn competence, (f) Citizenship competence, (g) Entrepreneurial competence, and (h) Cultural awareness and expression competence.

Three of these competencies pave the way for the development of strategies where students can acquire a social profile and skills related to Service-Learning (ApS) initiatives:

- ❖ **Personal, social, and learning-to-learn competence:** This includes collaborating constructively with others, maintaining resilience, and managing lifelong learning. It also involves contributing to one's own physical, mental, and emotional well-being as well as that of others, by developing skills to care for oneself and those around through shared responsibility.
- ❖ **Citizenship competence:** This focuses on enabling students to exercise responsible citizenship and fully participate in social and civic life.
- ❖ **Entrepreneurial competence:** This aims to provide strategies that allow students to detect needs and opportunities, train their thinking to analyze and evaluate their environment, and create and rethink ideas using imagination, creativity, strategic thinking, and ethical, critical, and constructive reflection within creative and innovative processes. It also seeks to awaken the willingness to learn, take risks, and face uncertainty.

In the field of Higher Education, some documents regulate it, such as:

In the White Paper on the Degree in Teaching (ANECA, 2004), the following specific competencies related to the subject are established:

- ❖ Ability to understand the complexity of educational processes in general and teaching-learning processes in particular (goals and functions of education and the educational system, theories of development and learning, cultural and social environment, the institutional and organisational context of the school, curriculum design and development, the teaching role, ...).
- ❖ Participate in research projects related to teaching and learning, introducing innovative proposals aimed at improving educational quality.
- ❖ Ability to engage students in the participatory construction of democratic coexistence rules, and to collaboratively address and resolve problematic situations and interpersonal conflicts of various natures.
- ❖ Ability to collaborate with different sectors of the educational community and the environment.

ORDER ECI/3857/2007, of December 27, which establishes the requirements for the verification of official university degrees that qualify for the profession of Primary Education Teacher, includes among its objectives:

- ❖ Collaborate with different sectors of the educational community and the social environment. Assume the educational dimension of the teaching function and promote democratic education for active citizenship.
- ❖ Maintain a critical and autonomous relationship regarding knowledge, values, and public and private social institutions.

Royal Decree 1791/2010, of December 30, on the Statute of University Students, in Chapter XIV, regarding the activities of social participation and development cooperation by students, mentions in Article 64 (General Principles) a series of commitments, rights, and duties of students related to social participation and development cooperation:

- ❖ The right to request incorporation into social participation and development cooperation activities.
- ❖ The right to receive free training for the development of social participation and cooperation activities within the framework of collaboration agreements.
- ❖ The duty to participate in training activities designed for the proper development of social participation and development cooperation activities.
- ❖ The right to have the university issue a certificate accrediting the services provided in social participation.

After presenting an overview of the various educational objectives, curricula, and professional goals, we now focus on the objectives related to citizenship and volunteering. The Volunteer Law 45/2015, of October 14, 2015, in Article 6, outlines a series of areas for action:

- ❖ Social volunteering
- ❖ International volunteering and development cooperation

- ❖ Environmental volunteering
- ❖ Cultural volunteering
- ❖ Sports volunteering
- ❖ Educational volunteering
- ❖ Socio-health volunteering
- ❖ Leisure and free time volunteering
- ❖ Community volunteering
- ❖ Civil protection volunteering

Regulations will determine the conditions under which international volunteer activities for development cooperation will be carried out, as well as in other areas of action, depending on the location of these activities, the specialty of the activities, their duration, or a combination of some of these circumstances.

In summary, the strategic educational objectives related to education for citizenship and volunteering can be summarised in the general goal of contributing to the formation of a global, supportive, active, critical and responsible citizenship. The specific objectives are:

- ❖ Contributing to the creation of a global, responsible, supportive, active, and participatory citizenship for all ages.
- ❖ Contributing to the strengthening and development of capacities in individuals and groups through training activities.
- ❖ Contributing to the strengthening and development of capacities of individuals who participate as volunteers, both in Spain and internationally.

Educational priorities

Currently, the main educational trends and priorities that will guide education policy from the Spanish Government are directed towards (Ministry of Finance, 2023):

1. Modernization of the system and improvement of quality:
 - ❖ Curriculum and organisation of education. The education system requires a more competence-based curriculum, focused on learning rather than teaching, emphasising effective learning environments and pedagogies. This should also increase access and completion rates at all levels of education and training.
 - ❖ Vocational Training. The goal remains to transform the vocational training model by unifying this training into a single coherent and integrated system.
 - ❖ Digitalization. This is one of the main investment lines of the Recovery, Transformation, and Resilience Plan in the field of education.
 - ❖ Evaluation. It is developed in three areas: national evaluations, international evaluations, and educational indicators.
 - ❖ Promotion of quality. This will be implemented through various awards and competitions.
2. Equity:

- ❖ Scholarships. Aimed not only at facilitating access but also at ensuring permanence in the education system, thus guaranteeing the right to education for all individuals.
 - ❖ Inclusion. This is a central goal of the national and international political agenda.
 - ❖ Educational dropout. The planning and implementation of measures in this area will be carried out with the autonomous communities through territorial cooperation programs.
3. Improvement of educational attention in the area of direct management by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training.
 4. University education. Among the priority action areas are the comprehensive reform of the legal framework, the increase in funding for the scholarship and study aid system, and the reduction of public university fees to ensure equal educational opportunities. Additionally, promoting training, qualification, and the teaching and research capacity of the university system through increased pre- and postdoctoral support, reducing job insecurity and progressively stabilising university faculty, and supporting the digitalization of the University System, among others.

Currently, efforts are being made to improve employability through the value of Vocational Training (VT). To this end, investment is directed towards creating dual vocational training, which alternates between the educational centre and the company. Dual VT allows students to receive training at the educational centre while simultaneously applying what they have learned in the workplace. This approach meets current business demands, promotes youth employability, and enhances competitiveness and productivity (Ministry of Education, Vocational Training, and Sports, 2022).

Additionally, the priority areas include lifelong learning, inclusive education, training in the digital era, transparency, labour mobility, and sustainable investment (Eurydice Spain-REDIE, 2020). The development of these areas relies on teachers, trainers, school principals, and other educational staff, as well as proper management by central and regional governments.

The role of the State is aimed at developing sustainable development strategies through alliances between the different actors involved, guided by political consensus and social demand, in which new policies, measures, governance and working methods are being developed. In this sense, work is being done towards the commitment of citizens and administrations to create a state policy that impacts the 2030 Agenda with proposals for policies to prevent and fight inequality, aimed at a circular and social economy. To this end, the following measures and targets are proposed (Government of Spain, 2018):

- 1) This commitment will be proposed to the Sectoral Conference on Education and the General Conference on University Policy, as well as the following measures, for its adoption by all administrations and actors:
 - ❖ Mainstream education for sustainable development (as defined in target 4.7 and according to UNESCO's guidelines) in all compulsory education and in the education system, through education plans and programmes, by 2025.

- ❖ Incorporate training in the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs by 2021 in all undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, so that all students who complete undergraduate or postgraduate studies have received basic training in sustainable development and global citizenship, 100% by 2025.
- ❖ Incorporate by 2022 the system of access to the teaching function (compulsory and university), in the minimum contents required in the selection processes, the knowledge and skills necessary for education for sustainable development, and the 2030 Agenda.
- ❖ By 2025, all teaching staff in compulsory and university education will have received qualifications under the 2030 Agenda.

Moreover, The role of companies and NGOs aims to promote specific values, taking on a fundamental role in Spanish education (Planas, 2005):

- ❖ Reducing school failure and dropout rates, especially among immigrant families.
- ❖ Narrowing the digital divide by facilitating access to technology and promoting its responsible use.
- ❖ Taking care of the mental health of minors.
- ❖ Promoting employability among young people.

Programs for promoting service-learning or similar projects

In the Spanish educational context, different experiences have been carried out in the Service-Learning Primary Education. In this sense, and under different topics we can mention, among others, the most recent:

- ❖ A Heroic Christmas: The development of artistic-expressive activities in Physical Education through Service Learning (2023). The project titled "A Heroic Christmas", had as its purpose to develop curricular contents of Physical Education in the 2nd year of Primary Education. The project is developed from active methodologies, specifically Learning by Projects and Gamification, with which it is intended to promote cooperative work, creativity and interdisciplinarity between subjects. In the first place, a justification and contextualization of the project is carried out and, later, the curricular elements with which it is related are developed. Finally, tools and instruments are shown to be able to evaluate all those involved in the project, both students and teachers.

<https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=8997620>

- ❖ Mathematics can be fun. Service-learning innovation project at the University with primary school students (2022). In this project, students of the Degree in Primary Education teach children from a basketball club a classroom workshop called "Fun Maths", creating a space in which micro-learning is offered playfully. The study aims to show the design and development of a SL project outside the academic environment and to measure the participants' evaluation of the experience.

<https://redined.educacion.gob.es/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11162/226464/Matematicas.pdf?sequence=1>

- ❖ Disability awareness through an integrated program of sport education and service-learning (2022). The objectives of this project are (1) to present a didactic proposal that aims to raise awareness about disability through the integration of Service-Learning (S-L) in the Sport Education Model (SEM) using an adapted sport (sitting volleyball); (2) evaluate the perception of the participant teachers; (3) offer improvement proposals for future implementations. 181 students from the third year of Secondary Education (SE) (n = 80) and from the fifth year of Primary Education (PE) (n = 101) participated. The program consisted of the creation of two sports networks formed by two natural groups from SE and two from PE in each of the networks. All the students experienced a SE season at Physical Education in which three S-L actions during recesses were added, with SE students being the service providers. Network member's affiliation was promoted through SE characteristics. Awareness was integrated through the simulation of physical disability. The results showed a positive perception of the teachers who highlighted, besides other benefits, the development of awareness in PE students and of empathy in SE students.

<https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=8058610>

- ❖ University Students' classroom management in a proposal of Service Learning in Physical Education in Learning Communities (2021). The main purpose of this project is to analyse university students' perceptions about Classroom Management in a Service-Learning experience carried out in Community Learning schools. The context of this research is represented by six schools mainly hosting students in a social exclusion situation, in Didactics of Physical Education of Primary Education Degree. Methodologically, information was obtained through critical incident narratives of university students, analysed qualitatively through the categorical analysis using coding matrices with NVivo software. The main research findings focus on the need to use disruptive methodologies, such as ServiceLearning, to improve management skills in initial training. In addition, they outline that the main management problems are centred on conflict resolution and interaction with the group, as well as the difficulty of attending diversity in the Physical Education classroom. Finally, everyone recognizes the great contribution of this methodology to their teacher training, as they consider contact with the reality of the classroom as essential throughout the training process.

<https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7590958>

- ❖ Musical revitalisation of the schoolyard: Results of a service-learning project (2021). The project aimed to revitalise recess through musical activities for children aged 6 to 12 in seven schools. The results of the qualitative analysis show that the project has promoted the musical development of the children through singing, the experience of rhythm, and expression through movement, using a selected repertoire of popular children's folk songs. In the university students, it helped foster a commitment to primary school students through the promotion of coeducation and socio-cultural diversity—values that have fostered the development of social and civic competences. The student teachers also achieved professional growth by obtaining through this project skills typical of Music Education teachers.

<https://uvadoc.uva.es/handle/10324/64752>

- ❖ Gamification through a service-learning project: designing an educational rest from university for elementary students (2020). An innovative experience is presented in which students of the Pre-primary and Primary degrees at SAFA University Centre have designed digital breakouts based on curricular contents and objectives from different didactic units of the second year of primary education belonging to SAFA Andújar school. Once these educational breakouts were completed, they were sent to the primary school so that students could work with them and send their feedback to university students resulting in a very enriching experience for all the involved educational agents.

<https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7633123>

- ❖ Service-Learning in Mathematics: experience between Primary Education students and seniors (2020). This is a Service Learning experience implemented by a student of the Primary Education Teacher Degree in an Early Childhood and Primary Education Center. This experience is framed in the subject of Mathematics in 6th grade of Primary Education and follows the project phases suggested by the Spanish ApS Network. (1) Starting point: the few visits that the elderly usually receive in nursing homes and the difficulties they have in performing mathematical operations. (2) Motivate the group: it is explained to both the Primary students and the residents that they are going to carry out a series of joint sessions in which mathematical tasks are proposed using manipulative support to reduce their abstraction. Both groups are very excited about the project. (3) Planning: the sessions are designed and validated with the residence's occupational therapist. These sessions consist of power strips, street markets, and popular games that involve the use of Mathematics. (4) Carrying out the project: on Fridays, the 6th-grade students go to the residence to share experiences. (5) Evaluation, celebration, and improvement: in the last session the students give the residents some origami cards as a thank you. Both recipients of the learning (6th-grade students) and the service (residents) complete questionnaires that show a high degree of satisfaction with the experience and suggest that it be extended over time. Likewise, it is detected that the ApS experience contributes to increasing the values of citizenship, solidarity, and empathy of the students, which is why the CEIP management team plans to expand the experience at the centre level for the next year.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338819661_Aprendizaje-Servicio_en_Matematicas_experiencia_entre_alumnos_de_Educacion Primaria_y_personas_de_la_tercera_edad

- ❖ A service-learning educational experience in Primary Education: Drop by Drop (2018). The main objective of this Service Learning project developed in Primary Education was to raise awareness about the importance of the value of water. To achieve real learning it is considered necessary to make them aware of other realities. The Bassari Association decided to collaborate in the project by transferring to our students the difficulties of access to a resource as necessary as water in a village in Senegal (Africa) and they proposed to mobilise with a crowdfunding solidarity campaign to build a well, drop by drop, among all. Students of the school CEU San Pablo Sanchinarro with the collaboration of the entire educational community worked for a week with motivation and enthusiasm to achieve the goal of taking water through a well. Finally, it was possible to raise more money than necessary for the construction of the well, allowing the construction of a water tank.

However, the greatest achievement of the project was the students were involved and awarded towards other realities.

<https://revistas.uam.es/tendenciaspedagogicas/article/view/tp2018.32.014>

- ❖ Making STEM Education Objectives Sustainable through a Tutoring Program. This program was based on Service-Learning and Tutoring methodology. The objective of this research was two-fold. First, to determine the impact of a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education program on school performance amongst primary education students. Second, to identify the potential benefits of this program on the key competences of university students in Primary Education Teacher Training. The primary education students' sub-sample, after being matched on key covariates, was randomly assigned either to the experimental ($N = 25$) or control group ($N = 25$). The university students' sub-sample consisted of 26 students self-selected from the Primary Education Teacher Training degree. The intervention consisted of 20 two-hour weekly sessions of highly structured after-school tutoring delivered by previously trained university students.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/su12166653>

- ❖ The centre promoting Service-Learning in the Basque Country has published a catalogue of 60 experiences of learning by doing a service to the community, collected over more than four years and which are being developed by educational centres at almost all levels, as well as social organisations of all kinds.
- ❖ The Ministry of Ecological Transition has published "100 Good Service-Learning Practices -SL-". It includes experiences developed by 300 schools and 430 social entities (civic, cultural, youth associations, foundations, NGOs, city councils, and public institutions), linked to the Sustainable Development Goals.
- ❖ Additionally, the Teaching Innovation Projects carried out at the University of Granada include:
 - "Development of Nutritional Education Proposals through Multidisciplinary Collaborative Work with a Service-Learning Approach (15-76)," funded under the FIDO UGR Plan 2015-2017.
 - "INES Project: Educational Nutritional Intervention for a Healthy School (579)," funded under the FIDO UGR Plan 2019-2020, a continuation of the previous project.
 - "Teaching Sciences through Service-Learning in Education and Science Degrees: A Proposal for Scientific Training in Primary and Secondary Education (19-67)," funded under the FIDO UGR Plan 2018-2020.

Service-Learning in primary education in the future

If we ask whether service-learning is an appropriate practice in the Spanish context, the answer would be a resounding yes. The existing literature confirms the great potential of service-learning

experiences, as well as the numerous benefits of such initiatives. Recent research indicates that the implementation of this methodology positively impacts both personal and social development. For instance, Blázquez-Sánchez's (2013) study showed that their program promoted autonomy and self-regulation in the learning process of the participants, helping them make decisions and set goals. Additionally, Blázquez-Sánchez's (2020) studies found that students improved aspects such as task planning and execution, and León-Díaz et al. (2018) observed that participants applied theoretical knowledge during the service performed, thereby enhancing their skills through practical application.

Other research conducted in the Spanish context has yielded results such as fostering cooperation, increasing effective communication, promoting solidarity among students, encouraging respect for others, understanding community needs, and raising awareness of social issues (Baquero and Majó, 2014; Trujillo, 2016; Velázquez, 2010). These are essential values in the early educational stages that contribute to the holistic development of future citizens and the development of social justice and social awareness.

Furthermore, other highlighted benefits from the research include a positive impact on academic performance, personal autonomy (Hervás et al., 2018), and inquiry and problem-solving skills, among others (Blázquez-Sánchez, 2020).

Moreover, there has been a proliferation of networks such as the Andalusian Service-Learning Network and the Spanish Service-Learning Network, which aim to promote the development of service-learning in their respective regions. These networks comprise diverse individuals and entities, including educational centres, teacher training centres, social organisations, universities, and other local initiatives. Additionally, the ApS(U) association is committed to contributing decisively to the institutionalisation of service-learning in Spanish universities. Aligned with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda, ApS(U) promotes the transformation of universities by fostering a culture of teaching innovation linked to knowledge transfer and social responsibility. This initiative is driving the creation of new projects at both national and international levels, as well as the expansion and dissemination of service-learning throughout the country.

Furthermore, there has been growing interest from the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA), which promotes the development of service-learning-based research and its transfer to the community sector.

Additionally, various research initiatives and best practices are being promoted through international, national, and regional conferences and workshops. These events not only showcase the activities undertaken by different institutions but also foster alliances and new collaborations to continue disseminating and developing new proposals.

Furthermore, the Organic Law of the University System [LOSU] (2023) includes in the academic training of students the right to participate in service-learning activities, among other initiatives, along with their academic recognition (Art. 33 K).

All of this highlights the feasibility, interest, and necessity of continuing to develop service-learning in Spain.

However, if we consider the difficulties involved in implementing service-learning, time might be the primary obstacle. The bureaucratic processes that these initiatives typically require greatly hinder their implementation. Additionally, the limited time available prevents essential moments of reflection and coordination, which are crucial for the design, development, and evaluation of service-learning. Moreover, there is often a lack of funding that meets the needs and characteristics of the various ongoing studies, as well as insufficient institutional support.

Among the challenges is the shift in mindset towards more socially-oriented teaching and learning methodologies connected with real-life contexts. Additionally, there is a need for improved teacher training, providing them with the skills to become expert guides in designing meaningful, useful, and relevant learning contexts, and positioning students as central actors in the learning process (Tedesco, 2011). Although universities are offering various courses related to the use and development of service-learning (SL) programs, and entities such as *Plena Inclusión* are providing talks, webinars, and specific training on SL, a process of institutionalisation is also developing in some universities through the implementation of SL offices and the signing of the “Canary Islands Declaration” among Spanish universities. This document recognizes international agreements and highlights the need to prioritise Service-Learning in the education system, constituting a key reference to promote the institutionalisation of SL in universities. Furthermore, better coordination between teachers and various social institutions is necessary, which is also increasing this collaboration through the development of teaching innovation projects, the formalisation of agreements between NGOs, social entities, etc., and universities, or invitations to the various SL congresses and conferences held annually in Spain. Considering these difficulties and challenges, we can undertake service-learning initiatives with a high percentage of assured success.

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4.7 Portugal

General organisation of the educational system

At the time, the education system was governed by a high degree of bureaucratic centralism and tight control over not only the curriculum and the management of teachers and the teaching-learning process. Schools didn't have any margin of autonomy and participation in decision-making that affected daily school life as the day-to-day running of the school was very limited. The school was seen as a political and ideological control, serving as a vehicle for propagating the regime's values: God, Country and Family. In fact, the pedagogical and administrative organisation of school institutions of this period ensured a strong coherence and articulation, which made it possible to convergence of all valences towards a national education (Formosinho and Machado, 2000b).

The management and administration of schools was carried out by principals and and rectors in a repressive way in order to guarantee political and ideological control. They held power over the school since they were a kind of delegates of central power. The rectors and directors were appointed by the Ministry of Education according to criteria of political trust. They functioned as a link between the central political and administration and management in the day-to-day running of each school. Although locally influential, they had no autonomy and therefore subordinated all their actions to the central actions to the central administration. However, the achievement of objectives and the realisation in the functions assigned to them gave them effective power over the other organisational actors (Lima, 1998a).

Law no. 5/73, of July 25, commonly known as the "Veiga Simão", sought to respond to student protest and the modernization of the country in favour of greater efficiency in education through the development of measures such as pre-school education, the extension of compulsory schooling from 6 to 8 years, the reconversion of years, the reconversion of secondary education (which would have one more year and a professional professional preparation framework), the quantitative expansion of establishments (closer to the people who seek them) and the expansion and diversification of higher education. This reform, in addition to linking education to the modernization and development of the country, "fed by a liberal and meritocratic conception of meritocratic conception of equal opportunities that should allow the best to access higher levels of schooling" to higher levels of schooling" (Formosinho and Machado, 2000b:33), devalued education as a guarantee of the propagation of the regime's values. In fact, this piece of legislation, in an attempt to "democratise education", promotes, within school organisations, the school organisations, the occupation by teachers and students of spaces that echo the urgency of democratising society. However, this effect at the level of education is not at all desired by the political system as a whole. The beginning of the 21st century marks the start of a new cycle in the evolution of the education system in Portugal, marked essentially by the manifestation of a certain discontent with the situation in education. The cycle of reforms and after more than two decades of continuous transformation, the performance of the system is not very encouraging, oscillating between "disappointment" and "disappointment" and "catastrophe". This situation makes it easier

to accept the “neo-liberal” matrix, with emphasis on the privatisation of education, the subordination of education to the market logic, with free choice of school by parents, inter-school competition, through rankings, the reinforcement of authority, rigour and discipline (Estêvão, 2002; Barroso, 2003) and strong leadership.

The education policy agenda, government discourses and the legislation itself have allocated concepts linked to the sphere of education. (Formosinho and Machado, 2000c). The commercial atmosphere and business culture seem to overshadow the academic and pedagogical ethos, diminishing the democratic, collegial and participatory governance of schools. Along these lines, we are witnessing the paradigm shift from collegiality to unipersonality of the school's management body. democratic representativeness for strategic bodies, with external or community external or community representation, without executive functions. Individual individual leaders will now present their governance plan, known as the Intervention Intervention Plan, to implement it and to be accountable for it, not before defining the teams by appointment (Lima, 2011a) This new path, approved by Decree-Law n.º 75/2008, of April 22, seems to result in a centralization and concentration of powers, rather than the instead of the announced decentralisation reminiscent of the Fayolian “unity of command”. Within this framework, the governance of schools has become linked to individual, strong and effective leadership based on the leader's own natural characteristics. The new legal regime applies to public preschool, primary and secondary education establishments, known as school groupings or non-grouped schools.

Strategic objectives of national policies

Plan of the school schedule

Classes normally start at 9:00 am and end at 4:00 pm, from Monday to Friday. As a general rule, there are no teaching activities on the weekend.

In the 1st cycle of basic education (1st to 4th grade), classes usually start at 9:00 am and end at 4:00 pm, from Monday to Friday. As a general rule, there are no teaching activities on the weekend. There are, on average, three or four teaching hours dedicated to the daily curriculum, and there may be an additional 1 hour for curriculum enrichment activities (these activities usually start at 4:30pm and end at 5:30pm). In this cycle, there is a mid-morning break (30 minutes) and a lunch break (1 or 1.5 hours). There is another break in the afternoon (30 minutes) for those who extend their attendance to the aforementioned curricular enrichment activities.

In elementary school, extracurricular activities are mostly promoted by municipalities or parents' associations. These activities can include English or other foreign languages, sports, arts, science, information and communication technologies (ICT), community and civic education and study support activities.

Family support is offered during school breaks. Only a small number of schools offer such activities to students in the other grades.

Service-Learning in Portugal

In Portugal Service-Learning is not a known and used method. There are some publications and some investigations on behalf of HEI.

In regards of the discovery of projects and publications in the national portuguese context the the OUSAM project was developed through a profound questioning of the conventional school form, constituting itself as an example of a process of community animation in which children take on a participatory role in educational activities and are a link between themselves and professionals with families and local people. Animation is thus the “structuring axis of a globalised educational intervention that calls for different types of articulation: the articulation between formal and non-formal educational modalities; articulation between school and non-school activities; articulation between activities; the link between the education of children and adults” (Canário, 2000: 136). Indeed, the activities developed with children were an integral part of a process of mediation with adults; a link in globalised processes of education and community development, involving the children themselves, the professionals and leaders of the institution, families, communities and other local projects and institutions. In this project few children had access to pre-school education, especially those living in the most isolated areas of the municipality. However, these towns didn't have enough children to warrant the creation of several “official” kindergartens in the “official” format. Although this situation was viewed, at the time, with some and was considered by various entities to be an obstacle to educational action, those specific conditions were seen by the project's animators as potential to be discovered and educational processes mediated by children, such as the involvement of families and local communities.

The project was seen at the time, and still is today by some people, as a “fallback solution”, but it has established itself and become widely recognized as a community development process, the essence of which is endogeneity, participation and collective learning. In another paper, the conclusions of the investigation sought to bring socialisation and education together in an intervention logic that aimed to bring the school closer to its communities, with a view to encouraging local development. In this environment, we also get closer to the possibility of the child as a social actor who learns at the same time, just as adults do. However, the paths that are envisioned for the future of education in Portugal aim precisely to make the school more of a school, i.e. more self-centred and more distant from the communities. Basically by creating large school organisations, on the one hand, and lengthening the school day, on the other. Both trends, together with the reinforcement of more traditional school subjects, emphasise the role of the student, with teachers becoming the adults who intervene almost exclusively in their education. (Amiguiho, nd.).

On the other hand, in a study conducted on a university in Portugal was, the following insights were uncovered: The aim of the study was to explore the impact of using the Experiential Service-Learning (SL) pedagogical model versus traditional teaching-learning on students from a Portuguese university, attending three different courses. It was seen, from this study, that the contact with practical and real contexts of intervention enabled by the service-learning experiences gave meaning to the academic knowledge and skills they acquired throughout their training and allowed them - ultimately - to understand how they could develop their professional activity in the real world. It is, therefore, suggested that the service-learning experience, by combining theory with practice, enables students to mobilise skills such as critical thinking, adaptability, and flexibility to articulate different knowledge and perspectives, which is also associated with the benefits and knowledge arising from an experience of “service to others”

which would not otherwise take place. In the meantime, the increase in pro-social behaviour in the AFL students after conducting the service-learning experience is noteworthy.

Previous studies (e.g., Smith, 2008) highlight how this experiential approach provides opportunities for participants to develop important relationships with others, whom they help meet needs while developing an “ethics of care” oriented toward social good and strengthening civic engagement (Chiva-Bartoll et al., 2021; Ribeiro et al., 2021). Still in regards to HEI there is the ESSA project. The preliminary findings suggest that the ESSA project can be a motor to “empower students as critical agents of social responsibility” (Coelho et al., 2017, 1173), showing that students consider the participation in USR projects as a turning point in their development: “It was easier to try to say what it was that didn’t change me!” (Female, Medicine, UPorto). Based on the thematic map as a graphical representation that illustrates the general conceptualization of data patterns and the relationships between them (Braun and Clarke, 2006), the theme “perception of ESSA project impact on students” had a major expression in all the data analysed and from where derivate five sub themes and seven codes that are interconnected (see more details in Figure 1). The perception of impact on their vision of the University underlies students’ perception of impact in two different and interconnected codes: the perception of the University role and the students role as core sub-themes because they predict what will be the perception of impact on other dimensions. Some students understand the University role in a more engaged way with themselves and society.

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, service-learning is not a known practice in Portugal. This is supported by Pereira e Costa, 2019 , due to the general unawareness of the teaching-learning methodology of SL learning, teachers have expressed many reservations about this methodology, considering the odds and perhaps the difficulty to apply it. They have even taken it as volunteering practices proxy and other pedagogical practices such as placements and applied existing projects in some disciplines. They have stated that one cannot be constantly adapting the curriculum to present reality. Although their lack of knowledge (teachers) about the methodology of SL, they demonstrate, however, a positive positioning in relation to activities of social nature.

Programs for promoting service-learning or similar projects

In the sense that Service-Learning is kicking-off slowly in the Portuguese context, some projects related to the service of the community arise. This way, HEI seems involved in the service-learning scope, as per example UALG (university of Algarve), has partnerships with different EU HEI to collaborate in service-learning programmes/projects.¹ In the north of the country, in Viana do Castelo, another project kicked off. Called RURASL² - this project aimed to bring together Higher Education Institutions and rural partners to address rural community needs. It supported the modernization of European higher education through an international module with courses in service-learning and social entrepreneurship.

¹ <https://sea-eu.org/service-learning/>

²<https://inovacao.rederural.gov.pt/projetos/erasmus/44-projetos-erasmus/1235-rurasl-rural-3-0-service-learning-for-the-rural-development>

Service-Learning in primary education in the future

Service-learning in Portugal has concerned the HEI scope, not the primary schools nor primary education. Although the subject is recent in Portugal, it has a lot of potential but the framework of the education curriculum is something to be considered. Service-learning would be relevant for the development of the social model and academics. "It is possible to affirm that service-learning is a methodology for the future, but with past and present needs. The sooner ideological "barriers" that often delay the development of academia and therefore of academics, the better development of academia and therefore of academics, the better the students will be trained, and the better they will integrate the job market and society with different eyes." (Beresford, 2019).

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5. Summaries from Direct Data Gathering

Survey with Questionnaires

The consortium of SLIPS (Service Learning in Primary Schools) project has developed, under the WP2, extensive research through each country's partners. The countries involved in the dissemination of the Service Learning in Primary Schools questionnaire that collected answers from teachers and involved personnel in Primary Schools was: Belgium - Centre for European Volunteering (CEV), Croatia - Croatian Volunteer Development Center (CVDC), Spain - University of Granada (UGR), Slovakia - Platforma dobrovoľníckych centier a organizácií (PDCO), Bosnia - Center for Youth Development (PRONI), Lithuania - Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) and Portugal - Out of the Box Europe (OTB Europe).

The questionnaire aimed to identify primary school teachers' expectations regarding training and support in implementing service-learning projects. The questionnaire gathered 12 questions (with the majority of them being a scale on importance of the topic asked), and 3 with open ended, for teachers to provide their insights on SL projects and effectiveness.

Overall, between all consortium partners involved, 289 answers were collected. The respective countries gathered the following numbers: Croatia (CVDC) - 78, Bosnia (PRONI) - 55, Spain (UGR) - 24, Slovakia (PDCO) - 30, Belgium (CEV) - 54, Lithuania (VMU) - 23 and Portugal (OTBE) - 25.

We collected the open ended questions where primary school teachers (school directors and others), provided their insights in relation to topics of service-learning, materials and their structure and in case of no experience key-points when implementing service-learning.

Below we provide the full answers and collected a summary of the most mentioned and important topics of the respondents.

From all partners of the consortium involved in the questionnaires dissemination through the communication channels of their networks, the responses that were collected in the “**Are there other topics that should be covered in the materials? Please indicate and explain them**” were highly diversified.

- ❖ The **psychological factor** was mentioned. The emotional literacy and resilience was brought up as a key indicator to cover general guidance on helping children to control their emotions (fear, anger and self regulation).
 - Recognising how to support children’s emotional well-being can impact their development and their learning outcomes.
 - Developing empathy and emotional intelligence among children through activities and workshops. Within these workshops children should be able to better understand their own emotions, creating a more supportive and collaborative classroom environment. The benefits of mental health in students can also be seen through service learning.
 - Engaging into service learning can provide a sense of purpose, improve children's self esteem and develop coping skills when dealing with stress and anxiety.
 - As last point, the positive and negative impacts of technology on children's development should include managing cyberbullying, coping with emotions related to academic performance and leveraging educational technologies like ChatGPT to increase learning.

- ❖ **Community involvement and service learning** come as an ally when collecting the answers from the primary school teachers.
 - Successful service learning projects should be disseminated and provided to serve as guidance and inspiration for teachers and students planning their own projects.
 - Encouraging projects that involve older people in community life promotes intergenerational collaboration, this can enrich the learning experience and help build stronger community bonds.
 - Animal Welfare groups and youth organisations participation should be acknowledged and promoted, these types of activities can instil a sense of responsibility and compassion in students.
 - Environmental projects can also be a bonus. Promoting activities as community clean-up events, tree planting initiatives, and activities focused on recycling and renewable energy could assist in teaching students about environmental stewardship and sustainability.
 - As the final topic mentioned, emphasising the importance of volunteering and social engagement is essential. Service learning projects should feature the value of providing for the community and fostering social responsibility.

- ❖ **Educational methodologies for children with special needs** should be included, as part of inclusion and diversity. It’s key to ensure the students receive appropriate support is essential for their success.

- The cultural sensitivity should be linked with developing strategies to make service learning projects inclusive and culturally sensitive. Diverse backgrounds students when engaging them enriches their learning experiences and promotes respect. Inclusion of students with diverse cultural backgrounds in projects should be fundamental.
- ❖ In regards to **Educational Methods and Practical Implementation**, providing more resources and teaching aids creating diverse learning styles. In this sense, all students can benefit from educational materials.
 - An effective assessment of service learning projects should be done, this serves to measure learning outcomes.
 - Effective assessment framework assists to understand the impact of the SL projects and improve future initiatives.
 - Having a clear and practical vision of instruction, detailed guides on planning, funding, executing SL projects can assist teachers and students to carry out successful projects. Each context has a different educational approach. When handling different and specific contexts enhances the effectiveness of SL.
- ❖ **Legislation and Policy** within the local law ensures the projects comply with legal requirements and receive the needed support.
 - In this sense, communication within authorities is essential.
 - Developing strategies and having effective communication with authorities can ease the implementation of SL projects.
- ❖ The **support surrounding the primary schools community** is a key factor for integration of SL in the curriculum.
 - There should be an introduction of SL to teachers, its opportunities and professional development support should be supplied. Involving the parents of children in SL projects can enhance the success and impact of the SL projects.
 - Motivating teachers, recognizing their value and rewarding them to be involved in SL, afterwards their performance will encourage their engagement in SL activities

Other and more various subjects that were mentioned in the questionnaire answers came:

- ❖ Volunteer activities and first aid training, which is valuable to be inserted into the SL projects.
- ❖ Teaching students about decision making and conflict resolution, for the purpose of personal development and fostering a positive impact.
- ❖ Lessons about sustainability and environment, for the students to contribute to a healthier planet.
- ❖ International cultures and practices to provide the students for a global perspective understanding and promoting global citizenship.
- ❖ Also, developing strategies for anticipating and managing risks in service learning projects. Ensuring the safety and success of these projects is paramount.

By covering these topics, the educational materials, as mentioned by the respondents of the questionnaire, will be more comprehensive, addressing various aspects of student development,

community engagement and practical implementation. These enhancements aim to assist in creating a more robust and effective service learning program.

The second open question provided in the questionnaire was “**Please describe the format of the materials dedicated to teachers on service-learning in primary schools. How should they be structured?**”. This provided the teachers a safe space to share their thoughts on the best way to target and engage primary school teachers.

- ❖ When approaching **SL within materials** to serve as learning to primary school teachers and a way of engaging them is key to provide concepts in action.
- ❖ Provide video examples and digital assignments to demonstrate SL. These videos should include real-life project examples, teacher testimonials, and step-by-step guides for implementing SL activities.
- ❖ Also, when it comes to materials the respondents answered that there should be a creation of an online platform. This user friendly and accessible platform could include information about SL values, stories and practical exercises.
- ❖ Besides, online courses and manuals with theoretical and informational aspects of SL alongside practical exercises that could be adapted to different classroom needs.
- ❖ The development of infographics and visual aids to assist with the complex information, making it more accessible for teachers to acknowledge and implement SL projects. At last, online games and simulations to engage students in SL activities, providing experiential learning and critical thinking.
- ❖ **Printed materials** come as an asset when assisting teachers. Providing PDF files that can be downloaded, printed and shared is crucial. These PDF files should gather detailed guides, step by step instructions and other key elements when it comes to executing SL projects.
- ❖ Manuals and booklets should be created and display practice examples, practical activities and theoretical explanations. Should be easy to explore and suitable for class.
- ❖ Brochures and flyers that collect as summary key SL concepts and project ideas. They can be served to disseminate SL initiatives to parents, administrators and community. Posters and worksheets could be displayed in classrooms. These posters should be visually appealing and interactive.
- ❖ The combination of materials differs in opinions. Supplying hybrid resources, meaning digital and print versions of all materials to cater different preferences and ensure accessibility for all teachers.
- ❖ As mentioned above this includes PDFs, digital platforms and printable content. Creating powerpoint presentations that can serve for teachers to present SL concepts and projects to the students. Engaging visuals and concise information.
- ❖ The practical examples and **real life applications** serve as foundation to show the benefits and results of SL.
- ❖ Including this case studies of successful SL projects in diverse schools is key. The examples should display different approaches and outcomes. This could influence the engagement of the school community.
- ❖ Collecting teachers testimonies on the experiences and challenges and solutions found with SL.

- ❖ Develop role play activities that allow students to explore SL projects through interactive and immersive experiences.
- ❖ Based on **support and training face-to-face meetings** and workshops should be organised, to foster collaboration amongst teachers. With these events teachers can help each other and refine their SL projects.
- ❖ Producing training videos that offer practical advice teaching strategies, and detailed explanations of SL methodologies.
- ❖ Guidelines for practical tasks should be provided - as project tasks and activities, always considering different needs the schools and communities require.
- ❖ In regards to **content organisations materials** should be displayed in a simple, schematic format for quick and easy reference. Each section should clearly define the objectives, steps, and expected outcomes of SL projects.
- ❖ The materials must be comprehensive but concise, focusing on essential information and practical application. Within this framework materials need to be allowed for customization to suit different classroom environments and students needs.

By embodying these formats and structures, educational materials dedicated to service learning for primary school teachers will be comprehensive, practical, and accessible. This approach will support teachers in effectively integrating SL into their curricula, broadening the learning experience for students and fostering a greater sense of community involvement.

As the last question of the questionnaire the consortium tried to understand what was the vision of primary school teachers **“If you don't have experience with service-learning, what will be the crucial points in implementing service-learning from your school's point of view?”**

- ❖ Primarily the answers gathered followed the line of comprehension about the SL scope and its benefits. This gathers stakeholders and the student community overall (teachers, students, parents, school administration).
- ❖ This also should educate teachers on SL and include some engaging materials and practical examples.
- ❖ The training on SL principles and motivation should be provided to teachers, motivating them through events such workshops, seminars and other engaging events.
- ❖ Materials are mentioned as key factors when approaching SL without experience. Materials on the basics of concepts should be simple and easy to understand for a quick implementation. It is key to ensure that these resources are available in hybrid format - Paper and electronic format
- ❖ There is a need to define clear objectives for the development and proper structure of SL projects. This should align with the curriculum framework. From the beginning these projects must have a well defined structure with measurable objectives.
- ❖ It's key to involve the community, organisations and businesses, also it is important to involve parents in community related activities to support the SL projects.
- ❖ The support and collaboration from the school management can predict the involvement of a greater number of teachers in SL projects. There must be a collaboration amongst teachers, students, parents, and the community.
- ❖ The motivation of teachers is a key factor, the success of SL implementation appears as an outcome.

- ❖ SL projects should be practical and involve real world community needs, focusing on the personal development, social inclusion and civic responsibility of students.
- ❖ In regards to the sustainability of SL projects, it needed the proper support and training. Integrating SL into the regular school curriculum and ensuring long-term commitment.
- ❖ When it comes to evaluation, it's crucial to set up systems for evaluating the impact and progress of SL projects, and use feedback to refine and improve future projects.

Interviews with primary school teachers

As part of the direct data gathering, the project partners conducted several interviews with primary school teachers already experienced in service learning and/or community activities.

CEV gathered 5 teachers, all of these were female and their ages varied in the range of 22 and 52 years old. All of these respondents were based in Belgium and had experience in the domain of SL, ranging from 1 to 16+ years of experience.

Bosnia gathered 3 teachers, all of them female. Their experiences with SL switched between 4 and 16+ years of experience. As a similar case, Lithuania convened 3 teachers all of them female with experience in SL of 5 to 30 years. Slovakia collected answers from 3 teachers as well, all of them female with experience in SL of 4 to 9 years.

In Spain, 3 teachers were involved in the interviews, and unlike the other interviews that were conducted, 2 of them male and 1 female. The male teachers and their experience with SL differed between 5 to 16+ years. The female teacher had less than 4 years experience in SL.

In Croatia, 4 teachers were interviewed. All of them female with experience in SL ranging from less than 4 years to 15 years of experience.

In the case of Portugal the interviews were not conducted because of the lack of engagement of primary school teachers and the lack of knowledge in the SL domain.

The data collected from all of these 21 teachers showcased a strong representation of the female gender in SL across the countries where the interviews were conducted, also the experience in the SL domain differs. This suggests that the majority of countries have well established SL practices.

Summary of the critical characteristics of Service-Learning from the point of teachers:

Teachers revealed several critical characteristics of SL that enhance student engagement and community impact. In Belgium there was a strong emphasis on empathy, community support and personal growth through hands-on experiences in real world situations. In the Croatian context, it focuses on meeting community needs and developing students' self-regulation skills, fostering active citizenship and problem-solving abilities. In Spain, SL integrates environmental awareness into the curriculum, encouraging proactive community involvement and meaningful interactions. Slovakia stresses community engagement and self-directed learning, using concrete experiences to connect subjects and gather information effectively. As for Bosnia, SL fosters compassion, responsibility, and socialisation among students, despite diverse levels of teacher familiarity. In

Lithuania, SL promotes educational enhancement, leadership, and citizenship through community service activities, fostering responsible and proactive citizens engaged in community development and personal growth initiatives.

The motivation of teachers to join the SL, and start to implement SL:

The motivation of teachers to implement SL has a wide-range for diverse reasons. In Belgium, the exposure of IB curriculums SL component propted a teacher to integrate meaningful service activities into the schools framework, driven by a personal mission to address social issues. In Croatia, similarly, a teacher's passion for volunteering led to the adoption of SL to foster solidarity among students. In the case of Spain, teachers were motivated by the innovation of methods and engaging students with real world issues. Meanwhile, in Slovakia teachers were inspired by colleagues' engagement and school support. In regards to the Bosnian perspective, teachers found motivation in students' participation and the dynamic nature of SL, which gathered opportunities for learning and personal development. In the meantime, teachers switched their focus from traditional academics to instilling values and societal contributions through SL, reflecting a wider cultural shift towards empathy and community involvement.

Most important things that contributed to overall SL project success:

SL projects and its success hinges on several critical factors. In Belgium, integrating service activities in the curriculum created a dynamic and relevant learning environment. Teachers served as facilitators, guiding students on fostering engagement and understanding. In Croatia, pertinent issues were addressed by institutional leaders that emphasised knowledge acquisition and community service. In Spain the motivation from students (and the involvement with families) came from the engagement with associations and practical problem solving. Slovakia underlined teacher-driven initiatives, effective communication with the community, and fostering intergenerational relationships, promoting lifelong learning and responsibility among students. Bosnia emphasised effective time management, skill acquisition, and increased self-esteem through engagement with NGOs and strategic partnerships, showcasing the multifaceted benefits of SL. As in the case of Lithuania, the teachers worked on cooperation among colleagues, students, and parents, implementing simple and flexible projects that were shaped to changing needs while promoting respect, compassion, and social responsibility within the community.

The most important things that contributed to SL project's success and are connected with the teachers engaged:

The success of SL projects is linked to the dedication and engagement of teachers across countries. In Belgium, teachers received training tailored to the needs of schools supported by strong leadership and parental involvement. In Croatia, there was a difference in teachers' willingness to try different engagement methods. In Spain, success was found through organised class outings, shared responsibilities, and addressing real-world issues, which increased motivation and curriculum integration. On Slovakia's behalf it emphasised the importance of teachers' initiatives, identification with SL values, and support from school heads. Similarly, Bosnia stressed teacher initiatives and alignment with SL principles, supported by school leadership. Lastly, Lithuania credited teachers' dedication, creativity, and effective time management, promoting cooperation and community activities, and fostering trust in SL involvement. These

indicators collectively ensure the success of SL projects by deeply involving teachers and fostering collaboration and community engagement.

The most important things that contributed to SL project's success and are connected with the students engaged:

The success of SL projects is linked to student engagement across countries. In Belgium, focuses on making the experience meaningful for students by integrating in class activities and discussions to enhance emotional expression. This has resulted in student interest, mainly outside school. In Croatia, there is an emphasis in real life learning engagements and team work, fostering social relations and exposing students to new knowledge and skills. In Spain, high student motivation was found through direct communication with users and emotional involvement in projects with individuals with special educational needs and disabilities (SEN), supported by families and the community. Meanwhile, in Slovakia, there was a strong sense of students' self generated motivation and engagement in community activities, leading to a strong school identity and friendships. In Bosnia, there was a focus on students' motivation to become change makers with active participation in community activities and a desire to engage in NGOs. Finally, Lithuania emphasised the importance of parental involvement and previous experiences, which boosted students' confidence and promoted community cohesion.

These indicators collectively ensured the success of SL initiatives by deeply involving students and fostering lasting community connections.

The most important things that contributed to SL project success and are connected with community/community partners?

The success of SL is built on community and partner engagement across Europe. In Belgium, focuses on community mobilisation, assisting students on developing main skills and fostering empathy and innovation. Croatia, emphasises collaboration with community counselling centres, promoting tolerance and diversity, and engaging families in voluntary work. Spain benefits from community support for project facilities, growing student motivation and participation through collaboration with the city council. In Slovakia, it integrates schools with the community, ensuring relevant projects through data mapping and networking. From Bosnia's perspective, it values youth appreciation, challenging stereotypes, encouraging youth voices, promoting positive attitudes and community support.

These efforts ensure that SL projects positively impact students and benefit the community.

Biggest challenges in SL implementation and strategies to overcome:

Implementing SL projects unfolds various challenges, but strategies can assist to overcome them effectively.

In Belgium, it underlines issues as students struggle to brainstorm by themselves, the need for teacher guidance, disengaged students and the challenge of creating meaningful experiences. Effective communication about the SL vision is also problematic. To tackle these issues, the respondents suggest promoting collaboration and idea exchange between teachers, integrating

service opportunities with the curriculum, providing teacher training, cost management, engaging students with pleasant assignments and setting clear goals for SL projects.

Croatia, focuses on time management, balancing volunteer work with other responsibilities, project design and evaluation and participation issues. Their strategies include planning, support systems, maintaining motivation and determination and continuous project assessment.

In the case of Spain, it identifies challenges in coordinating participants and locations, securing government support and dealing with the community and family uncertainties. The Spanish respondents recommend having dedicated coordinators, enlisting interns/volunteers, writing structured proposals for government support, and raising community awareness about SL benefits.

Slovakia addresses raising children's awareness and responsibility, securing funds, and managing SL activities within school hours. Slovakian teachers suggest integrating SL projects in the curriculum and scheduling activities out of regular class hours.

For Bosnia, it highlights motivating and retaining youth participation, switching perceptions about SL activities in schools, and managing resources. The respondents recommend creating engaging tasks, building school-NGO relationships and optimising resources through collaboration.

In the Lithuanian case, it points to the integration of SL in busy schedules, organisation of large scale events and maintaining the motivation. Lithuanian teachers suggest simplifying activities, planning for large events, and using positive feedback to encourage engagement.

By addressing these issues and providing tailored strategies, educators and organisations can successfully implement SL projects designing a supportive and engaging learning environment.

Message: (Learning from your SL experience, what would you say to other primary school teachers who have decided to launch their own SL project but still need to gain experience?)

The respondents provided some answers on the key insights of launching SL in their own country's perspective. Belgium and Spain were strongly keen on embracing the process, taking the first step and not fearing the process. Parental and community involvement hold importance in the Belgium and Lithuanian context, to build community support. Inclusion and equity. To ensure the participation of students and in a way to avoid any type of neglect, Belgium and Bosnia mentioned these components as crucial. Collaboration and flexibility to make the process enriching, maintain determination and acceptance of students' ideas were highly brought up by Belgium and Slovakia. Having a clear plan and goal, manageable steps to ensure effectiveness - planning and execution - is crucial in Bosnia and Lithuania's respondents. Lastly, a positive attitude, being bold, positive, and open to modify plans emerges as the foundation.

By integration of all of these insights, teachers can manage their SL projects fostering an engaging learning environment.

Important knowledge about the context for SL:

Within the data gathered through the interviews conducted by all partners involved, the answers were similar. Age appropriate activities, guidance, management, learning, flexibility and

integration were some factors mentioned by the teachers on the Belgium inquiries. In regards to Croatia, project planning and implementation, school support, collaboration, involving parents and local institutions were the most answered. Meanwhile in the Spanish context, and as similar as Belgium, understanding the school context and the adaptation and flexibility is key. Also, motivation and engagement appears as crucial. From the perspective of Slovakia, training and preparation, starting small, community and stakeholder engagement, resource management are the most commonly referenced. In the scope of Bosnia, as other countries mentioned in a higher plan, inclusivity and engagement is essential. Also, the needs assessment and collaboration linked to safety and compliance are significant. As last, within the Lithuanian framework, and comparable to the other countries, preparedness and communication, relevance and interest and action and willingness were the frequently mentioned aspects in regards to SL context.

These insights provide a comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors influencing SL implementation across different schools and regions, emphasising adaptability, resourcefulness, and student-centred approaches.

Conclusion

Through all the questions gathered in the interview, the respondents that were already familiar with the concept of SL, although they had different experiences with SL, they contributed with their insights, experiences in their own countries and the different contexts of SL. This uncovered new findings and areas for exploration, providing a significant impact on our research. Within the detailed responses, we gained a clear view on how SL is perceived and implemented in the partnership countries, particularly in the context of Primary Schools.

6. Useful Materials about Service-Learning

There are a number of documents produced about service-learning methodology in Europe, mainly for the higher education setting. During the mapping stage, project partners found several books, manuals, toolkits, guides and websites that can serve for the development of materials in the SLIPS project. We will mention some of them, but we will focus on materials which are not focused on the higher education settings and are in English:

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8. Annexes

Annex 1. Sample Survey

This questionnaire aims to map your expectations from training and support in implementing service-learning projects in practice. Based on your answers, we will develop materials to help primary schools implement service learning in their teaching practice.

Service-Learning (SL) is considered a form of pedagogy which combines the service to the community with the learning opportunities offered to the involved students. If you are not sure what <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9AXsV3eull&t=3s>

Thank you for your cooperation.

School and management

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 not at all important, 5 very important), rate how important you think it is for the implementation of service-learning in primary education:

- school management approval for implementation
- the link with the school's objectives and educational programme
- openness of the school to work with the community or community partners
- parental consent for the implementation of SL projects
- support and motivation from school management
- openness of the curriculum
- curriculum setting
- willingness of the school to use innovative approaches in education
- good cooperation and communication among colleagues,
- supporting professionalism,
- building non formal relationships between students and teachers,
- increase the students' competencies, skills and abilities,
- the impact on the learning process on the students,
- increase the engagement with the community and their necessity

Teachers

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 not at all important, 5 very important), rate how important you think it is for the implementation of service-learning in primary education:

- motivation of teachers to implement projects with community partners
- teachers as a role model for pupils
- open-minded and creative teachers
- teachers interested in local issues
- teachers interested in listening to other needs
- the ability of teachers to provide support to pupils

- the ability of teachers to connect with community partners
- knowledge of teachers about the service learning methodology
- ability of teachers to motivate pupils to work with the community
- ability of teachers to foster a civic and social sense in the students

If you should participate in training about service-learning, what will be the most effective way of learning for you (you can choose more options)?

- in-person training with other primary school teachers
- in-person training with other primary school teachers combined with asynchronous online tasks and a platform with materials
- full online synchronous training
- entire online asynchronous training platform with materials
- in-person support during the service-learning implementation
- online support during the service-learning implementation

Training and materials

If there will be any materials developed about how to implement service-learning in primary education, which topics should materials be covered (please choose a number on the 1 – 5 scale, where 1 is not important at all, and 5 is very important):

1 2 3 4 5

- Theoretical concepts behind the service-learning Pedagogy
- Definition and explanation of service learning
- Specifics of SL in primary education
- How to plan SL projects - concrete steps
- Communication about SL with parents
- Communication and cooperation with the community partners
- Roles of different actors in service-learning
- Concrete activities with children to develop and run service learning projects (for example, worksheets)
- Examples of service learning projects in primary education
- A Toolkit outlining the steps to be taken in a service-learning project

Are there any other topics that should be covered in the materials? Please name and explain them:

.....

Please describe the form of the materials dedicated to the teachers about SL in primary schools. What should they look like?

.....

If you have no experience with SL, what will be the crucial points in SL implementation from your school's point of view?

.....

Your position in the school:

- a) teachers
- b) director
- c) other

Gender:

- a) female
- b) male
- c) non-binary
- d) I prefer not to say

Age:.....

Number of years of experience as a teacher:

Do you have experience with service-learning implementation?

- a) yes
- b) no
- c) I am not sure

If you wish to receive information about service-learning in primary schools, please leave your email address:

.....

The questionnaire is implemented as part of the project Service Learning In Primary Schools (SLIPS), which is co-funded by the European Union under the number 101134702.

Annex 2. Sample Interview

Guide for the interview with the primary school teachers who have experiences with SL

Leaning on your own experience with service-learning projects, please share your thoughts on following questions:

1. Age
2. Gender
3. How long have you, as an individual, been connected to Service Learning?
 - less than 4 years
 - 5-9 years
 - 10-15 years
 - 16+ years
4. What are the key characteristics of Service-Learning?
5. Why did you decide to be part of Service Learning at the beginning? Did your motivations change over time?
6. What are 3 of the most important things that contributed to your overall SL project success? Feel free to share more information for each one.
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
7. What 3 of the most important things contributed to your SL project success and are connected with the teachers engaged? Feel free to share more information for each one.
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
8. What are 3 of the most important things that contributed to your SL project success and are connected with the students engaged? Feel free to share more information for each one.
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)

9. What do you think are 3 the most important things that contributed to your SL project success and are connected with your community/community partners? Feel free to share more information for each one.
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
10. What was the biggest challenge you had in implementing your SL project(s) so far and if you were successful in managing it, how did you overcome it?
11. Learning from your SL experience, what would you say to other primary school teachers who have decided to launch their own SL project but still need to gain experience?
12. What do you think everyone needs to know about the particular context of primary schools before starting an SL project in a primary school?