

European Education Area Strategic Framework **Working Group on Equality and Values**

Policy brief on citizenship education



Citizenship education

This document summarises key messages of the 2023 [Issue paper on citizenship education](#), produced within the European Education Area strategic framework [Working group on equality and values in education and training](#) (2021-2025).

This executive summary presents the main challenges and points for attention in the Issue paper. The background context, definitions, some research insights and examples of related initiatives and practices are available in the full version.

POLICY

Despite growing emphasis on the importance of citizenship education, a significant gap persists between policy objectives and their actual implementation. Too often, citizenship education is not given sufficient attention in education policy and schools. The implementation gap may be further widened by the unfamiliarity with (un)successful approaches drawn from past experiences and practices in other countries. It is useful for policy makers to, through research and evaluation, gain insight into the effectiveness and impact of different types of citizenship education.

In the context of the EU, issues related to respecting diversity and embracing multiple levels of identities

and belongings (local, regional, national, European, and global), are an important part of citizenship education discussions.

Traditionally, citizenship education documents refer to citizens, but it may be beneficial to expand to a more comprehensive understanding and include non-citizens as well, such as refugees.

Education authorities should more systematically issue guidelines for teachers on how to assess students in citizenship education.

Several EU-funded initiatives and programmes support citizenship education. For example, promoting democratic participation, common values and civic engagement is one of the four horizontal priorities of the Erasmus+ programme. Broadened [Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Actions](#) which now include schools and vocational education and training institutions, empower teachers to talk about the EU and to enhance participation of pupils in the democratic process. New actions also support teacher training and school networking. These are complemented by other actions such as [Erasmus+ Teacher Academies](#) and [e-Twinning](#) activities. The [Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values \(CERV\) programme](#), [Horizon Europe](#), the [New European Bauhaus](#) also support different efforts relating to citizenship education.

CURRICULUM AND CONTENT

To remain relevant, citizenship education must be able to respond to and reflect societal changes and complex global issues.

The understanding and implementation of its core elements in schools often fall short due to lack of time and overloaded curricula. Attention given to citizenship competence is often perceived as having to compete with basic skills needs.

Lack of effective teaching materials or not knowing where to find useful materials can also be an issue. Instead of avoiding controversial or sensitive topics, these should be addressed carefully and respectfully.

Citizenship education is given less attention in the VET sector. However, citizenship education can be practiced in workplaces, in companies, sector organisations and trade unions, as well as in collaboration with these actors. Learning about the origins and functioning of the EU, and its impact on citizens' lives, the rights and responsibilities that come along with EU citizenship, civic engagements, and ways to participate in development of EU policies, is an important component of citizenship education. Teaching about these issues should leave room for critical reflection and learners' active engagement.

TEACHING AND TEACHER EDUCATION

Citizenship education can be demanding and/or daunting for teachers, especially if not sufficiently addressed in initial teacher education and through continuous professional development. Teachers in different subject areas might need different kinds of professional training relating to citizenship education or (tailor made courses for the subject(s) taught).

There is a need to focus on transformational and action-oriented pedagogical approaches, including on more practical and fieldwork-oriented, pre-service teacher education on citizenship education.

The nature of citizenship education often requires controversial, political, religious, or ethical conversations in the classroom which may be uncomfortable for some teachers.

Increased linguistic and cultural diversity within the classroom provides many opportunities for learning but it can also pose challenges when conveying nuances in discussions and raising issues which may heighten sensitivities for some pupils.

These discussions must be age-appropriate and encompass not just knowledge and skills, but also attitudes and values. Effective citizenship education

requires non-traditional teaching and learning approaches, fostering autonomy, and encouraging learner participation.

Teachers face numerous challenges, including dealing with exclusionary practices, aggression, violence, threats, (cyber)bullying, and self-harm among learners. Additionally, students are often more familiar with technologies and online platforms than their teachers, which can leave teachers unaware of key information sources.

Teachers often report having insufficient time for citizenship education due to administrative burdens. The topics, approaches and effective practices associated with citizenship education evolve continuously and it is essential that teachers remain up to date with the latest developments.

Teachers must be supported to work collaboratively to achieve the desired learning outcomes and specialist support (e.g., psychological support) should be made

available where needed, to tackle more serious issues. School leadership plays a crucial role in supporting teachers and providing the necessary support and direction for effective citizenship education. However, not all school leaders are well-equipped for this task, and not enough school leaders have access to professional development relating to citizenship education.

Teachers rarely have the time to apply for EU funding for citizenship education projects and schools rarely have staff specialised in procedures for funding opportunities and projects implementation.

To support effective citizenship education, it is useful for teachers to broaden their experiences. Teacher mobility can enhance citizenship education, and sustainable national and international networks of teachers can provide further support.

LEARNING APPROACHES AND TEACHING METHODOLOGIES

Education about inclusion, equity, democratic values, human rights, and cultural diversity should not be delivered in a top-down manner and should leave space for critical reflection. Teaching about EU values and institutions should spark students' interest and curiosity, and not come across as dogmatic.

Citizenship education should not only be taught as a specific subject, but also in a cross-curricular manner, embedded in all classes and all subjects, in both formal and non-formal learning.

Effective teaching of citizenship education requires learner-centred methods building upon learners' daily experiences and a competence-based approach encompassing attitudes. Citizenship education should be transformative and action directed. Less traditional formats of teaching and learning for example include learner/people-centred methods, peer education, phenomenon-based learning, project learning, cooperative learning, collaborative work, service learning, using examples from the media/art/film, and discussions on controversial issues as well as relevant social problems, with the teacher acting as a (neutral yet engaged) facilitator rather than a provider of knowledge.

Citizenship education should be embodied in school processes and environments, creating democracy-in-action learning environments.

A whole school approach, which involves the full school community, is essential for effective citizenship education. This includes mobilising the full school community (including parents/guardians, wider family, community groups, NGOs).

Citizenship education can benefit from a closer connection to Education for Sustainable Development, thus providing

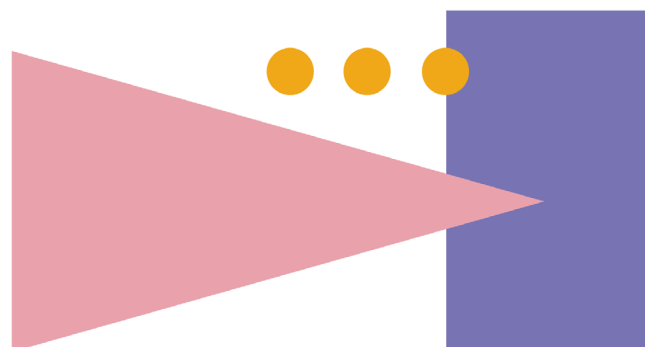
students with an understanding of their roles and responsibilities as global citizens.

Initiatives involving role models, such as present and past students or teachers, can be helpful. Mediators can also be used to bridge gaps between schools and local communities and minorities.

NGOs and community groups can, in both formal and informal learning, provide important support to teachers in addressing specific topics, such as minority religions or the history of the countries of origin of students.

Resource centres and visits to EU institutions can provide valuable support and inspiration for citizenship education.

The advancement of new media and the digital universe has brought opportunities but also poses threats. Though AI can open different opportunities for personalised learning, e.g., by providing feedback on progress and performing, concerns have been raised about AI chatbots' potential to spread misinformation, reinforce negative stereotypes, or amplify social biases.



PARENTS/CAREGIVERS AND COMMUNITY

Parents/caregivers can sometimes be resistant to citizenship education, viewing it as exposure to indoctrination or unsuitable topics. A disparity can exist between the values taught in school and those upheld at home. This disparity can create a challenging environment for both teachers and learners.

A lack of trust in teachers and schools by parents/caregivers and the wider community can undermine citizenship education. Parents/caregivers of non-majority pupils often feel excluded or unheard by schools. Furthermore, physical distance from school can make parental involvement challenging in some communities. An intergenerational approach can be a successful component of citizenship education. Providing learning opportunities for parents/caregivers can help break down barriers between schools and parents. Joint workshops involving students, teachers, and parents can serve as a platform for open dialogue and mutual understanding, thereby enhancing citizenship education.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

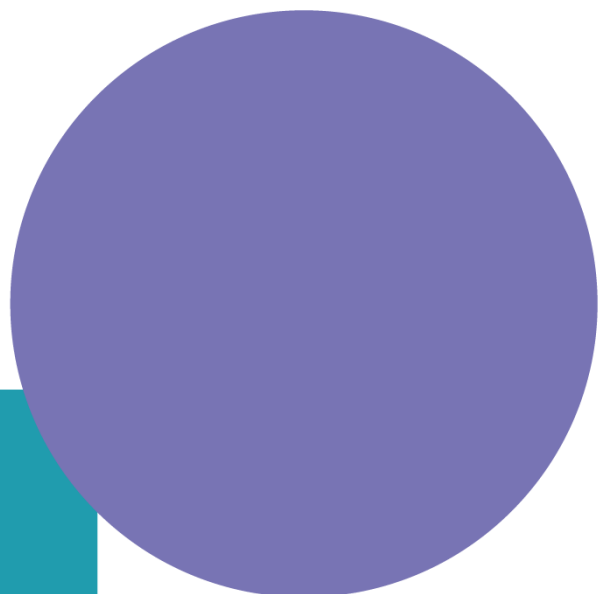
Measuring competences in citizenship education is complex for different reasons, partly due to citizenship education often being taught as a cross curricular (integrated) topic. Devising measurement instruments for non-formal education is especially challenging, as is assessing active and participatory learning.

Schools and teachers often lack awareness of effective measurement instruments. There is a shortage of communities of practice on assessment and evaluation among schools and teachers.

Formative assessment, being more process-oriented and providing feedback loops, would seem more suitable than summative forms. While the cognitive dimension is often assessed more than attitudes or values, the evaluation of competences in citizenship education should be multifaceted, covering knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Self-assessment and peer assessment are increasingly used by schools. However, they require training and time to implement, and assessments based on self-reflection can be flawed.

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