

## Europe and North America Education 2030 consultation Strasbourg, 24 October 2018

### Education for democratic citizenship and inclusive social development

#### Background Paper 2

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#### Abstract

Education is essential to developing and maintaining sustainable societies founded on democratic culture: attitudes and behaviours that seek to resolve conflicts peacefully; recognize that while majorities decide, minorities have rights; are respectful of diversity and mindful of our physical environment; and include all members of society. This paper outlines the major purposes of education before focusing on the role of education in preparing students for life as active citizens in democratic societies. By developing competences for democratic culture, education prepares for democratic citizenship, counteracts tendencies towards populism, and helps build resilience to violent extremism.

Education can further democratic culture and social inclusion provided that it is recognized as an important element in assessing the quality as well as the relevance of education. Quality education systems and institutions model the democratic principles that they seek to promote in students, help students develop their full potential, provide them with the means to overcome the barriers to their development that are rooted in their socio-economic backgrounds. They remove or compensate for obstacles that stem from students' backgrounds and may prevent individuals from fulfilling their aspirations.

#### Guiding Questions

1. Taking account of current and future opportunities and challenges, how can education best help build sustainable, democratic societies?
2. How can education systems, institutions, and individual education actors best build competences for democratic culture and promote them throughout the different educational curricula?
3. How can a focus on education for democracy and citizenship also be part of a strategy to promote equity in and through education?

## The context of the Education 2030 regional consultation

Target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Quality Education asks Member States to ensure that all learners “acquire values, attitudes and behaviours to promote sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development”. It seeks to address – through education – the major global challenges faced by democratic societies, such as respect for human rights and minorities, acceptance of diversity, peaceful conflict resolution, and societal and environmental sustainability. The Regional Consultation provides countries in the European and North American region with the opportunity to review how they are addressing these challenges in their specific context.

### Democratic culture

When we think of democracy, the images that come to mind are often those of parliaments, city councils, constitutions, and elections. However, these institutions and laws will not function unless people and society have developed a democratic culture rooted in the principle of the rule of law. This designates attitudes and behaviours that characterize democratic citizenship and seek to resolve conflicts peacefully and through debate; recognize that while majorities decide, minorities have rights; are respectful of diversity; are conscious of and concerned about our physical environment; and seek to include all members of society. It also implies promoting the notion that states are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards. Ultimately, these values, attitudes, and behaviours help make our societies sustainable.

Education at all levels and of all strands plays an essential role in developing and maintaining democratic culture. It is also critical to bringing up engaged citizens by learning and teaching fundamental values and civic rights and obligations. Education can further social inclusion by combating hostile attitudes towards vulnerable groups. It should help young people exercise their democratic rights, learn to cooperate with their fellow citizens, assess the media critically and strengthen their sense of belonging. Education is therefore also important to strengthening the cohesion of European societies.

Attitudes and behaviours must be developed anew in each generation and maintained throughout life. Formal education, through education systems and institutions, plays a particularly important role in this regard. In the European region, *education is one of the few areas of which virtually all citizens have direct personal experience for much of their lives*: as students, as parents, as education professionals, as representatives of public authorities or NGOs, or in other capacities. Many citizens will play several of these roles simultaneously or in the course of their lives.

A culture of democracy should also be a culture of environmental responsibility and conscience of the importance of sustainability. *Education should develop the ability of individuals, as well as societies, to*

*weigh long term and short-term goals and to accept personal sacrifices with a view to future sustainability and societal benefit.*

## Purposes, inclusion, and quality

*Education is not a single-purpose undertaking. Rather, education systems and institutions should address all major purposes of education:*

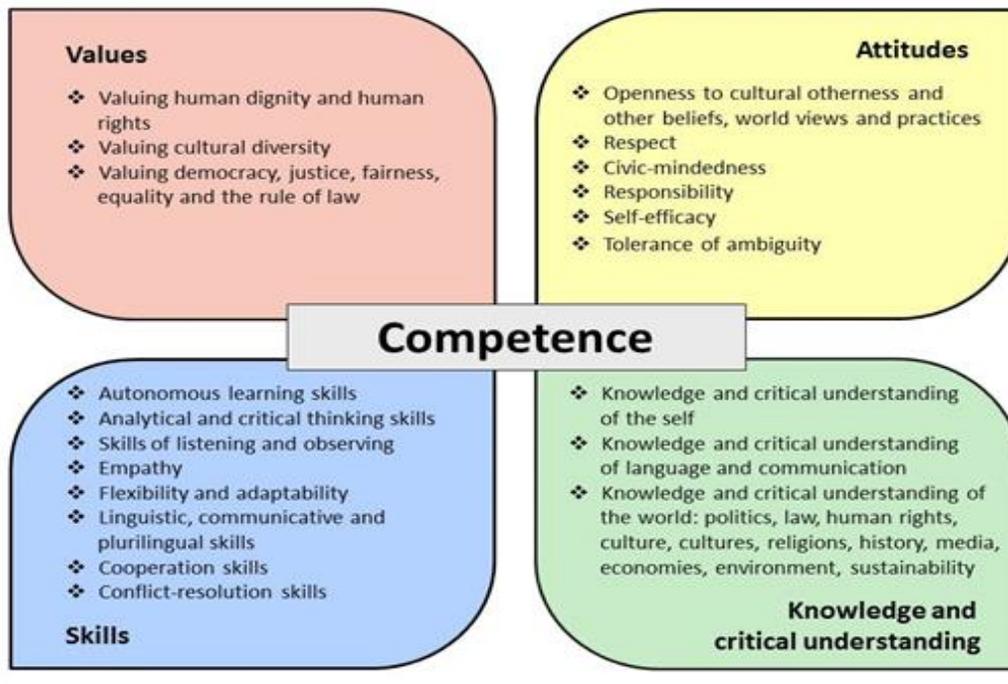
- preparation for sustainable employment;
- preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies;
- personal development throughout life;
- the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced knowledge base.

*These purposes are complementary rather than contradictory.* Many of the competences that make individuals attractive on the labour market also help them be active citizens and further their personal development. In addition to offering a competitive advantage on the labour market, higher levels of education attainment have notably been associated with higher levels of civic engagement and active participation in society. Nevertheless, public debate on education tends to emphasize preparation for the labour market over the other main purposes. This discourse, and the policy and budget priorities that emanate from it, needs to evolve to make our societies sustainable politically, socially, and culturally as well as financially.

## Competences for democracy

Education is, among other things, a process to develop a set of competences in students. This is true for all levels and all strands of education, even if the exact competences will vary considerably. The view policy makers take of the purposes of education generally and of specific strands or programmes will, to a considerable extent, determine the competences and learning outcomes aimed for.

*For education to play an important role in developing the democratic culture without which societies will not be democratic, regardless of their institutional and legal framework, education programmes and systems should model democratic principles and aim to develop competences that support this goal.* The Council of Europe has developed a framework based on 20 competences organized around four categories – the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC):



Even if different competences may be developed at different levels of education and in different learners, *education systems should aim to develop all competences in all learners*. A democratically competent individual will demonstrate all competences to some extent. Knowledge is accompanied by critical understanding and cannot be seen in isolation from skills, values, and attitudes.

The development of the model demonstrated that some concepts may require clarification. For example, “critical understanding” – often also referred to as “critical thinking” – involves questioning established understanding and practice but is not limited to questioning. Critical understanding also requires developing viable alternatives.

The CDC Framework builds on the proposition that *values are developed rather than innate*. *Values are therefore an integral part of education*. *This view is expressed through many national laws, which specify the values that the national education system should aim to develop*. The CDC Framework outlines values that arise from the European Convention on Human Rights and that are therefore important to all European societies. While grounded in European experiences and standards, the CDC also echoes global commitments to promote Global Citizenship and Human Rights Education in accordance with the *1974 Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*.

All competences in the CDC Framework can be taught, learned and assessed: in other words, they can and should be developed through education. While they can also be developed through non-formal and informal learning, *formal education systems and programmes should take the leading role in developing competences for democratic culture in all citizens*. Teacher education and pedagogical approaches as

well as assessment may vary from one set of competences to another as well as between settings and education traditions.

## Democratic citizenship

*Competences for democratic culture cannot just be taught theoretically; they need to be practiced.* Democratic citizenship relies on putting theory into practice: it combines knowledge and understanding with the ability and will to act. These competences must therefore be developed through education practice, as well as through theoretical learning. Schools that are run in authoritarian ways and/or that do not encourage student participation in the learning process and in the daily life of the school will not develop a culture of democracy in its students and will, in the worst of cases, lead students to become cynical of democracy as a system in which discourse and principles are contradicted by action.

*Education institutions and systems should promote a culture of democracy through whole-school (or whole-institution, in the case of higher education) approaches.* Schools and higher education institutions should encourage student and staff participation in the learning process as well as in institutional governance, adapted to the age of the students.

*In the same way, policy makers should take a whole-system approach: developing democratic citizenship is an important mission for all of education:* the mission includes pre-school education and vocational education and training as well as higher education.

## Global Citizenship Education

Education for democratic citizenship is part of and in line with UNESCO's approach to Global Citizenship Education (GCED). GCED is a global approach that aims to empower learners to assume active roles to face and resolve global challenges and to contribute to a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure world. UNESCO has defined GCED learning outcomes based on the three core conceptual dimensions of learning (cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural). These learning outcomes need to be locally adapted based on local (or regional) contexts and needs. In the European context, education for democratic citizenship is an example of GCED contextualization that fully supports the achievement of SDG Target 4.7. Thus, the Europe 2020 Strategy and the Education and Training 2020 Strategic Framework are fully aligned with this global approach.

## Education for Sustainable Development

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), part and parcel of the Target 4.7, empowers learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability, and a just society for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity. ESD, with its emphasis on competences such as critical thinking and problem solving, related to empathy, solidarity and action-taking, can help prepare learners to become empowered citizens for a sustainable future.

In today's world of complex challenges and rapid changes, people must learn to understand individual issues in a holistic way and cooperate with other people of diverse opinion towards a sustainable solution. People must be equipped with knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to drive such a change.

Acting for sustainable development requires citizenship engagement. Empowered individuals can engage constructively in socio-political processes and contribute to move society in a more sustainable direction. This can already start at schools with more opportunities for community engagement and action learning. Citizen action is especially important to addressing structural sustainability challenges. Democratic citizenship requires knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to collectively take action for the overarching goal of a sustainable future. This is why ESD is recognized by UN General Assembly as "an integral element of the SDG on quality education and a key enabler of all the other SDGs."

## Quality education

Most education systems and institutions aim for the highest possible quality but there is surprisingly little public debate about what quality actually means. The degree to which education is successful cannot be divorced from consideration of the goals societies seek to achieve through education. *The purposes of education as well as the ability of education to further democratic culture and social inclusion should therefore be important elements in assessing the quality of education systems, institutions, and programmes.* Among other things, a high quality education system must provide adequate opportunities for all learners, and it must successfully address all major purposes of education.

## Social inclusion

Effective education systems and institutions, then, help students overcome barriers rooted in their socio-economic backgrounds, help them develop their full potential and favour upward social mobility. They recognize that providing equal opportunities may require special measures and incentives aimed at disadvantaged groups. They go beyond removing formal barriers to access and aim to provide equal opportunities for all students. They aim to remove or compensate for obstacles that stem from students' backgrounds and that may prevent individuals from enjoying their formal rights.

*Education should further social inclusion by enabling all students to fulfil their potential and make full use of their talents. This requires high quality teaching as well as guidance, and it requires working with parents and communities as well as within education institutions.* Through outreach and community programmes schools and higher education institutions can help build a culture of education success in communities in which there are few role models and little incentive for children and young people to undertake education.

To be socially inclusive, therefore, education systems and institutions need to provide students with opportunities, including financial aid, and to develop an understanding of the role and importance of

education in communities. Education must make it possible for all students to develop and fulfil their aspirations as long as these are commensurate with their potential. In many cases, this involves not only removing obstacles but also developing the aspirations of students and parents. In communities and social settings that undervalue education, limited aspirations may combine with financial and other barriers to make education a vehicle for exclusion, rather than play its role in furthering social inclusion.

## Populism

In the European region, the past few years have seen a rise in populism. While definitions of populism vary, and while populism may be of the political right as well as of the political left, it tends to champion simple “solutions” to complex problems and to polarize society into “them” and “us”. In its ultimate consequence, populists would deeply question the institutions and practice of democracy: since they claim to represent the “people”, albeit in their own understanding of the term, elections are either unnecessary since they would only confirm what populists already “know” - that they represent the majority – or “anti-democratic” by giving results that do not correspond to the “will of the people” as populists see it. The increase in the number of people seeking refuge in many European countries since summer 2015 has been challenging in terms of logistics but also in the way many citizens and political parties have used refugees in a precarious situation to stir up a populist backlash.

Ascribing populism solely to lack of education would be an oversimplification. Relevant education of good quality can be a powerful antidote to populism. It requires developing *multi-perspectivity: the ability and will to see different sides of an issue as well as respect for others and openness to other beliefs, convictions, and practices*. Multi-perspectivity does not imply that all views are equally valid or that one is obliged to change one’s views to fit those of others. Multi-perspectivity does, however, imply an obligation to give due consideration to views that differ from one’s own and to be open to the possibility of changing one’s mind.

Multilingualism can help develop this ability by opening doors to other cultures and by allowing learners to realize that the same reality can be described and approached in different ways.

## Building resilience to violent extremism

At most periods in European history, some individuals and groups have been prepared to use violence to obtain political and other goals they were unable to obtain through democratic means. Most recently, this has been exemplified by terrorist attacks in several European cities, which gave rise to political declarations recognizing the key role of education in building resilience to violent extremism, as well as to education policy and practice initiatives nationally and at European level.

The role of education is particularly important to create the conditions that build the defenses, within learners, against violent extremism and strengthen their commitment to non-violence and peace. De-radicalization programmes – usually conducted outside of the framework of formal education – are also

important. *Schools and other education institutions should be places where students feel free to speak and safe to learn, where even extremist (non-violent) opinions can be voiced but where such opinions are met by arguments and confronted by peers rather than driven into closed sub-cultures underground or dark corners of cyberspace.*

## Recommendations

1. In their criteria for assessing the role and quality of schools and higher education institutions, as well as in their funding practices, public authorities should take due account of the contribution of education to developing and maintaining sustainable, democratic societies.
2. Schools and higher education institutions, supported by public authorities, should work to develop competences for democratic culture in all their students and play an active role in their societies by contributing to their social, political, cultural, and environmental sustainability.

## References

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Recommendation Rec (2007) 6 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Public Responsibility for Higher Education and Research

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Recommendation Rec (2007) 6 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on history teaching in twenty-first-century Europe

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Campaign “Free to Learn, Safe to Speak: Democratic Schools for All”

### World Forum for Democracy

2017 edition on “Is Populism a problem?”

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/world-forum-democracy/wfd-2017-reports>

## **Council of Europe and UNESCO**

Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention)

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/165>

Recommendation on Recognition of Qualifications held by Refugees, Displaced Persons and Persons in a Refugee-like Situation

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/higher-education-and-research/-/new-recommendation-on-recognition-of-qualifications-held-by-refugees>

## **European Commission**

Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education (Paris Declaration 17 March 2015):

[http://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/01\\_-\\_janvier/79/4/declaration\\_on\\_promoting\\_citizenship\\_527794.pdf](http://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/01_-_janvier/79/4/declaration_on_promoting_citizenship_527794.pdf)

## **UNESCO**

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Global Citizenship Education Topics and Learning Objectives (2015).

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002329/232993e.pdf>

Preventing violent extremism through education: a guide for policy-makers (2017).

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Addressing Anti-Semitism through Education: Guidelines for Policymakers (2018)

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Global Citizenship Education and the rise of nationalist perspectives: Reflections and possible ways forward (2018)

[http://www.unesco.org/ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?catno=265414&set=005B61C6D8\\_3\\_452&gp=1&lin=1&ll=1](http://www.unesco.org/ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?catno=265414&set=005B61C6D8_3_452&gp=1&lin=1&ll=1)

Education for Sustainable Development Goals: learning objectives (2017)

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Issues and trends in Education for Sustainable Development (2018)

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