France as a long track record of putting a strong focus on citizenship education, providing it as a compulsory separate subject for all grades of general education. Overall our members at SOLIDAR Foundation have reported general satisfaction with the content taught as part of citizenship education, illustrated with France having the highest proportion of citizens who are active in social, civic and political activities strongly correlated to educational attainment. However, our members have stressed the need to continue developing a more equal relationship between CSOs and public authorities in the field of non-formal and informal education, along with sustainable funding to promote active citizenship outside of the classroom.
1. Ensuring that people acquire civic and intercultural competences

France puts a strong emphasis on citizenship education. It is one of two EU countries — together with Belgium — where citizenship education is provided as a compulsory separate subject for all grades of general education\(^1\). The topic is also a cross-curricular theme incorporated in other subjects. Recent official documents place respect for others within the scope of basic skills, alongside reading, writing and mathematics.

According to our members, the content taught as part of citizenship education in France is satisfactory, as the theoretical approach includes both a separate subject called “moral and civic course” and a set of competences common to all subjects, which includes citizenship education. When compared to other member states which integrate citizenship education to other classes, France devotes a specific class to this domain with a record of spending the longest time implementing specific courses on citizenship education\(^2\).

The 2017 Law on equality and citizenship allows for the validation by higher education institutions of the knowledge and competences acquired by students through nonacademic activities that include citizenship involvement. According to the EU-SILC survey, France has the highest proportion of citizens who are active in social, civic and political activities with a strong correlation with educational attainment\(^3\).

After the terrorist attacks in France and the Paris Declaration on preventing violent youth radicalization through education and youth action, a strong focus was put on moral and civic values and critical thinking. For instance, in 2016 a ‘Citizen Pathway’ (Parcours citoyen) was launched in 2016, consisting mainly in moral, civic and media education, and targeted at all levels of school education. In continuation of the ‘Citizen Pathway’ initiative, France will launch a one-month universal national service for all young people aged 16 in the middle of 2019\(^4\).

CASE STUDY

Teaching tolerance and inclusion through writing and critical thinking

La Ligue de l’Enseignement is a long-standing French association which promotes public and secular education to young people and adults through integrating culture, training and the necessary tools and information for actively participating in society. Starting in 2018, La Ligue began the campaign ‘Let’s play the brotherhood card’ (Jouons la carte de la fraternité), aimed at bringing greater awareness on tolerance and respect based on creative writing workshops and photographic reviews. The project helps young people and children to deconstruct negative perceptions and representations on specific current societal topics. Thus, on 21st March 2018 for the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, more than 100 000 children and youth sent postal cards to individuals in their local communities with a message filled with fraternity and solidarity in France, Spain, Poland and Croatia\(^5\).

Active citizens by educational level 2015 (% of people ages 16 and over)


3. Ibid.
5. https://www.fraternity-card.eu/
Local and regional participation are more prevalent in France when it comes to building participatory structures through values and attitudes promoted by citizenship education, such as the 2013-2014 participatory debates in cities on school reforms and territorial educational projects which brought stakeholders together⁶.

In France, civil society organisations and NGOs are recognized as complementary to public schools which officially gives them the right to act in and with the school community. However, our members have stressed the need to shift the relationship between CSOs and public authorities in France such as moving from donor-receiver to a more equal relationship based on trust and legitimacy when contributing to public policies.

2. Enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, particularly regarding the use of the internet and social media

Media literacy in France appeared almost at the same time as the media themselves with initiatives linking education and media around projects and events promoted by committed teachers, until the official inclusion of media education in the basic core of common competences was made into law in 2005, then set up in primary schools in 2008 and became mandatory to pass the French General Certificate for Secondary Education in 2011⁷.

On the ground work that NGOs carry on a daily basis makes them central actors for tackling hate speech and fake news. Furthermore, in France NGOs and civil society have acquired a high level of trust from public actors and citizens. According to a recent poll, 52 per cent of people think associations are the best actors to provide useful information to fight against hate speech⁸.

According to our members, more measures can be taken to make the fight against hate speech and fake news more efficient. First, financial and logistic support in spreading positive narratives through networks to upscale dissemination and reach the public concerning media information and disinformation, such as the project Seriously which was established through a public-private partnership involving private companies, universities, NGOs and CSOs. Taking online giant players on board such as Google and Facebook, the project aimed at offering users the opportunity to respond and debunk disinformation through the help of algorithms⁹.

Furthermore, our members have highlighted the need to promote a collaborative approach between various stakeholders providing lifelong learning and citizenship education. Promotion of critical thinking remains prevalent in non-formal education providers, such as with the project Embracing controversy (Enseigner la controverse) launched after the 2015 Paris attack, which aimed at teaching the basics of how to start a debate with critical analysis for teachers and educators in secondary and upper secondary schools¹⁰.

9. blog.seriously.org
Recommendations

• Formal education providers should work on recognizing competences acquired through non formal and informal education

• Have a more equal relationship between CSOs and government rather than donor-receiver relationship during public policy-making

• More sustainable funding for citizenship education independent of political priorities and attitudes of governments towards CSOs/NGOs

• Support and implement more projects aimed at tackling fake news and hate speech, such as public-private partnerships involving CSOs and NGOs along with private companies, universities and other education providers
This Monitor is a contribution to further examine the relationship between citizenship and lifelong learning experiences and policy outcomes in and outside of the classroom in various European countries. Mapping the different approaches that SOLIDAR Foundation members have taken in promoting EU values in relation to citizenship education and lifelong learning for greater democratic participation of citizens, the outcomes will be disseminated towards European and national policy-makers and offers an array of best practices to collect, use and transfer among networks. The SOLIDAR Education and Lifelong Learning Forum will further work on the topic and develop a long term sustainable advocacy strategy for CSOs towards national and EU-wide authorities to influence the debate and revision of national curricula and education systems.

Through its member and partner organizations, SOLIDAR Foundation engages citizens in EU decision making processes, empowers people through lifelong learning and VET, and voices their concerns to the EU institutions by carrying out active lobbying, project management and coordination, policy monitoring, research and awareness-raising.