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CITIZENSHIP AND LIFELONG LEARNING MONITOR 2021

GERMANY

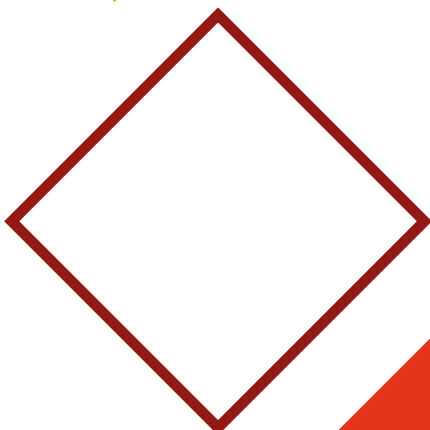
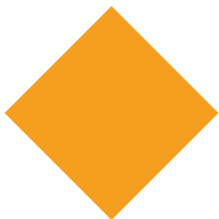
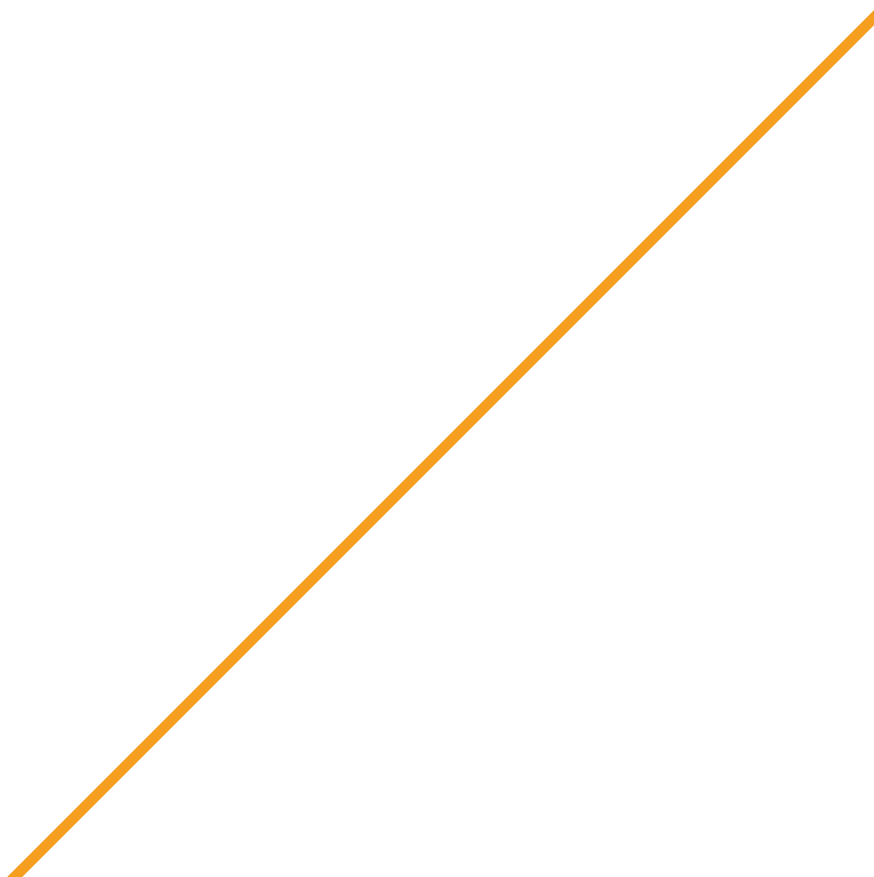




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ABSTRACT

The following report is one of eleven national case studies building up the 6th edition of the SOLIDAR Foundation's annual Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor. The German case study looks into the implementation of Education for Environmental Sustainability (EES) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) considering the importance of these two topics in equipping learners with the needed competences to fight against the climate crisis. The report also assesses the possibility of learners to exert the civic and green competences that they have in the context of a shrinking civic space in Germany. The commitment to EES and ESD is mainstreamed across Germany, and present across most policy initiatives and strategies linked to the education sector, but, unfortunately, the implementation of this is not

always advancing smoothly with wide gaps across the different state level educational systems and with a focus on youth rather than on a lifelong and lifewide learning approach that would encompass all learners. At the same time, the civic space has been shrinking across Germany due to the pandemic, but also due to prior trends linked to the restrictive interpretation of legislation for the purpose of stripping civil society organisations (CSOs) of certain benefits and support. Based on the situation in Germany, this report is concluded with recommendations from SOLIDAR Foundation and its members in Germany on what can be done to ensure that civic and environmental education are adequately implemented and lived through to ensure active citizens engaged in the societal life.

INTRODUCTION

The following report represents one of eleven national case studies feeding into the sixth edition of the SOLIDAR Foundation's annual Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor. The purpose of this case study is to analyse and investigate the changes undertaken in the fields of citizenship education and lifelong learning policies in Germany and their relationship with the state of the civic space in the country. The German report is focused on two main topics: education for environmental sustainability in the frame of Global Citizenship Education, and the shrinking civic space and the ways civil society organisations (CSOs) counter this nationally and through cross-border solidarity. Compared to most of the other national case studies for this Monitor, it must be specified that Germany is a federal state, composed of sixteen Länder which are taking decisions over the organization of the educational system. Given this situation, the Monitor relies on desk research to draw conclusions pertinent to the entire German territory but more in-depth information will be presented from the Land of North-Rhine Westphalia, considering that the SOLIDAR Foundation membership supporting

this research process is based there. The report will look into the way Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Education for Environmental Sustainability (EES) have been included in formal, informal and non-formal education, taking into consideration the implementation of Germany's [National Action Plan for ESD \(2017\)](#), focusing on this specific aspect of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in light of the current climate crisis. As the pandemic has opened new avenues for reflecting on ESD and EES, at the same time it has also shed more light on the issue of the shrinking civic space. Therefore, the Monitor will also look at the situation in Germany, considering the trends before and after the pandemic and the implications on the German citizenry. Considering the global challenges ahead, SOLIDAR Foundation identifies as essential to prepare learners to react to the climate challenges but also to make sure that the crises that have and will hit the European countries are not used to curtail the freedom of the people and frustrate their active participation in society and capacity to exert civic competences.

EDUCATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

EES IN FORMAL EDUCATION

The concept of ESD in Germany, and, therefore, implicitly partially of EES, has been mainstreamed across Germany more easily than in other European countries. The [2015 launch of the UNESCO World Programme of Action on ESD](#), which represented the follow-up to the [UN Decade of ESD](#), contributed to improving the topic's standing across formal education in Germany. In taking over the mainstreaming of the topic, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research set up a National Platform which ran a two-years long multi-stakeholder process in which consultations with networks, expert forums and the general public were organized in order to feed into the development of a

National Action Plan on ESD (NAP)¹. The process marked clear the commitment of the public authorities to have a participatory approach to this but also to ensure that policy documentation is in place to guide the process of implementing ESD. As the government is now committed to UNESCO's new programme, Education for Sustainable Development: Towards achieving the SDGs (ESD for 2030),² it is time to see what steps have been made for the implementation of the NAP and, in doing so, to assess the situation of ESD and EES across Germany.

130 objectives and 349 measures defined the NAP, looking at all levels of education and training and ranging from references to the inclusion of ESD in policy and legal documentation, but also to teacher training, to curricular changes and to the involvement of informal and non-formal education providers in collaborations with the formal education sector and in policy consultations. A lifelong and lifewide learning approach permeates the governmental strategy, while also looking at the possibility of boosting the whole-school approach³. This anchoring strategy has led to significant improvement in the provision of ESD across Germany, but it has to be remarked that discrepancies across sectors of education, across regions and across different types of documentation including ESD still remain a challenge, while the quality and depth of the conceptualization of ESD across Germany has also been done with



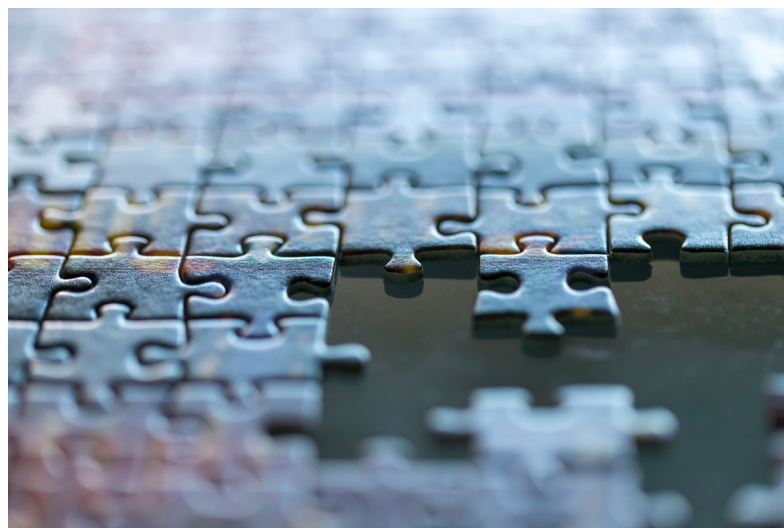
1 German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (2017). *German National Action Plan on ESD adopted*. Available at : <https://www.bne-portal.de/bne/en/german-national-action-plan/german-national-action-plan-on-esd-adopted/german-national-action-plan-on-esd-adopted.html>. Last accessed: 23 February 2022.

2 German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (2020). *ESD for 2030 – The Future of ESD*. Available at : https://www.bne-portal.de/bne/en/esd-for-2030/esd-for-2030_node.html. Last accessed: 23 February 2022.

3 German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (2017). *National Action Plan on Education for Sustainable Development: The German contribution to the UNESCO Global Action Programme*. National Platform on Education for Sustainable Development: Berlin. Available at: https://www.bne-portal.de/bne/shareddocs/downloads/files/bmbf_nap_bne_en_screen_2.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1. Last accessed: 22 February 2022.

mixed results⁴. Only four of the sixteen federal states have included ESD as a concept in their educational acts. Lower Saxony is the only Land that included ESD as a binding component in the setting up of educational objectives for primary and secondary formal education. When expanding the research to EES, more references can be found in Berlin, Brandenburg, Hamburg, Hessen, Lower Saxony, Saarland, with Berlin incorporating even aspects of GCE⁵. This might be the result of a lack of coordination at federal level, since the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) has been only sporadically referring to ESD since the release of the NAP⁶. The KMK should have ensured better coordination in education across the federal states, as it reunites all ministers for this sector from all the territory.

At the level of the curriculum, all states are referring to ESD, but to different degrees. If comprehensive organizational and methodological concretization of the topic in the curriculum is visible across all topics in Baden-Wuerttemberg and Saxony, ESD is only mentioned slightly withing Geography as a subject in a slew of other states. Berlin/Brandenburg, North-Rhine Westphalia and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern are other encouraging states in terms of ESD implementation. The implementation of the topic is either cross-curricular or subject specific, depending on the approach of each Land⁷, creating an imperfect puzzle of access to ESD for learners in Germany. Though regional divergences are perfectly natural in a federal state, the discrepancy is not only limited to different approaches, but rather to different intensities to which learners are exposed to this topic, which is problematic considering the importance of



EES and ESD in the coming years. While the strategy for implementing the topic can be different, by neglecting to offer due attention to it in certain states, the risk is that learners are left behind and become maladjusted to a 21st century society in which the climate challenge is significant. Beyond this situation, however, one needs to consider whether the topic is adequately implemented in those states where the policy and legal discourse is up to date to the requirements to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and where the topic is institutionalised. A significant structural challenge was represented by how little the curricula for teacher training has changed during these years, revealing in fact that though structural changes were expected in terms of teaching ESD, the education professionals were not prepared to implement this adequately⁸. This issue is representative for all German federal states, revealing that the education professionals have been ill prepared to implement the topic across the entire German territory. Given this issue, questions are raised about the efficiency of the topic's implementation.

4 Holst, Jorrit; Brock, Antje; Singer-Brodowski, Mandy and de Haan, Gerhard (2020). Monitoring Progress of Change: Implementation of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) within Documents of the German Education System. In *Sustainability*: 12 (10). Pp.7-14. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341631975_Monitoring_Progress_of_Change_Implementation_of_Education_for_Sustainable_Development_ESD_within_Documents_of_the_German_Education_System. Last accessed: 21 February 2022.

5 Ibid.

6 Holst, Jorrit; Brock, Antje; Singer-Brodowski, Mandy and de Haan, Gerhard (2020). Monitoring Progress of Change: Implementation of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) within Documents of the German Education System. Pp.7-14.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

EES IN VET AND NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL EDUCATION

For what accounts for Vocational Education and Training, the National Reports of VET in the past decade have always highlighted the obligation of the public administration to mainstream ESD and have presented the discourse change which mainstreamed ESD, but no substantial result seems emerge in relation to the actual implementation of ESD across VET⁹. Reviews of the work of KMK on VET also show untapped potential into climate education, with EES being sidetracked, while ESD is not conceptualized in a practical way, to link with the sector specific trainings that VET provides. Training regulations for apprenticeships do not mention ESD at all¹⁰. While the NAP was developed with a lifelong and lifewide learning approach, **the actual implementation is missing out on reforming adult education**, which is especially problematic considering that the vast majority of learners or potential learners are adults. At the same time, the climate crisis cannot be tackled simply by ensuring that future generations are apt at tackling it, but it has to benefit from the current generations also being ready for it.

The Recovery and Resilience Facility provided an opportunity for Member States to align investment in directions that would push for a green transition. Germany has been positively appreciated by the European Commission in its submission of the National Plan for Recovery and Resilience (NRRP) due to committing 42% of the funding to be received towards green objectives¹¹. However, upon closer review this is not connected with education at all, as ESD and EES are overlooked for increased investment. The German government has

referred, at large, to digital education within the NRRP¹², actually following many recommendations which SOLIDAR Foundation has advocated for during the pandemic in terms of closing social inequality gaps when it comes to digital education. However, the glaring omission of EES and the narrow focus on education raise concerns over the direction in which the German authorities are going when it comes to reforming the paradigm with which learners operate to ensure that they are equipped with the proper mindset to engage with the 21st century and that they are made adaptable for the challenges ahead.

SOLIDAR Foundation member, [Willi Eichler Akademie \(WEA\)](#), underlines the commitment that the German federal government has taken into mainstreaming ESD and EES in formal education, confirming also the whole-school approach that is representative of their work. However, [WEA](#) representatives explain that that both the federal and the Land-level administrations are confronting with more logistical issues of implementation, especially in the context of the pandemic. The transition to online classes meant also an overhauled approach to ESD, for which education professionals were not prepared, especially in lieu of the lack of training on ESD in the recent years. Indicators, quality criteria and standards for learning outcomes are not implemented across all Länder, while the financial resources of municipalities or other small, local administrative units are not sufficiently attuned to the needs of implementing ESD. [WEA](#) representatives highlight the need for focusing more on promoting networks and synergies across all types of education providers, but also between these providers and the municipalities, NGOs, and other stakeholders, to ensure a whole-community

9 Holst, Jorrit; Brock, Antje; Singer-Brodowski, Mandy and de Haan, Gerhard (2020). Monitoring Progress of Change: Implementation of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) within Documents of the German Education System.

10 Ibid.

11 European Commission (2021). *NextGenerationEU: European Commission endorses Germany's recovery and resilience plan*. Available at : https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_3133. Last accessed: 21 February 2022.

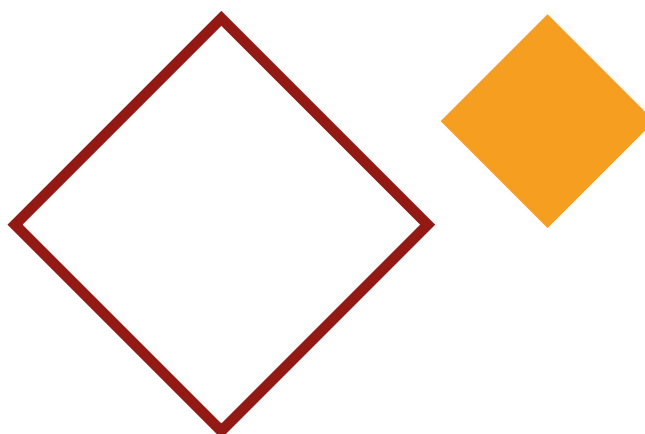
12 European Commission (2021). *Analysis of the recovery and resilience plan of Germany*. Accompanying the document Proposal for a Council Implementing Decision on the approval of the assessment of the recovery and resilience plan for Germany (COM(2021) 341 final). Available at: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021SC0163R\(01\)&from=FR](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021SC0163R(01)&from=FR). Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

approach. Moreover, [WEA](#) supports creating bindingness in relation to ESD across all topics, ensuring that it is mandatory in education to teach ESD in an interdisciplinary fashion. For such an environment to be fostered, **education institutions need to be supported to become sustainable themselves while a democratic culture must be fostered across these institutions to ensure that learners develop into active participants in society that will promote a sustainable society.**

At the moment, though more structured than in many European countries, the process of implementing ESD, EES and GCE is still relying on the good will and innovation of certain education institutions and education professionals, taking a project-based approach as well, and missing out on opportunities to further mainstream this essential topic. However, it is encouraging to see that the German education unions, notably so [GEW](#), are calling for a need of a structural overhaul of education to ensure that GCE, as understood by UNESCO,

becomes the norm and all learners are prepared for the 21st century society¹³. Starting from bottom-up approaches, relying on pressures from the education professionals, one can hope that the German authorities will be given a further impetus to act in a more coordinated manner on this. Read [here](#) the Schwerin Declaration of [GEW](#) to see their demands for more civic education and GCE in adult education, considering the importance of educating the majority of the population.

In the same vein, CSOs and NGOs are promoting more nuanced assessments on what it means to be sustainable and environmentally conscious in a very diverse 21st century society. SOLIDAR Foundation member, WEA, recognizes the intersectionality existent in our current society and strives to work towards sustainability in a way that leaves no one behind and is attuned to the diverse needs of the German population. You can see more in the case study below on how they strive to perform such nuanced work.



13 Education International (2020). *Germany: New Declaration says civic education is key to strengthening democracy*. Available at : <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/23411:germany-new-declaration-says-civic-education-is-key-to-strengthening-democracy>. Last accessed: 23 February 2022.

CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member, [Willi Eichler Akademie \(WEA\)](#) offers trainings and workshops together with their partner organization “[LilaBunt](#)” in the framework of the state-supported official “Bildungsurlaub” (Training holidays) to which workers in Germany are entitled. [LilaBunt](#) provides a boarding house, where people can stay during these seminars which are developed by WEA. One example is the workshop: [Queer the SDGs! A queer-feminist analysis and appropriation of the 2030 Agenda](#). For many political and civil society actors, it currently forms a conceptual frame of reference to advance a global "socio-ecological transformation" and to take stock of corresponding progress. But for whom do the Sustainable Development Goals speak and for whom not? Which lifestyles and needs, which queer realities and hetero-normativity appear in the SDGs, which are missing? In order to take into account the real existing social diversity, supposed social consensus - and thus also the SDGs - have to be read, analysed and reformulated from multiple perspectives. In the seminar "Queer the SDGs" this is done from a queer-feminist and

postcolonial perspective! With a mix of methods - impulse lectures, films & podcasts, interviews, wikiworkshops. The seminar contributes to thinking about queer perspectives in the work with the SDGs and making them visible. The target groups are people who are active in (development) political education, social work, local politics, etc. and already have a basic knowledge of the SDGs and their own queer experiences, or an interest in queer-feminist perspectives. The seminar is open to all genders, but a quota system is in place to ensure that members of the LGBT+ community are not underrepresented, and thus guarantee space for queer perspectives.



Source: LilaBunt

Though this report is mostly looking at the type of education provided, there is an acknowledgement that this starts first from ensuring that formal, informal and non-formal education providers are committed to ESD and EES and incorporate it in their daily work. Teaching and leading by example are essential processes

when it comes to ESD and EES and SOLIDAR Foundation members have shown their commitment to ensuring that their operations are fully compliant with the needs of an environmentally sustainable society. Read more about this work in the case study below.

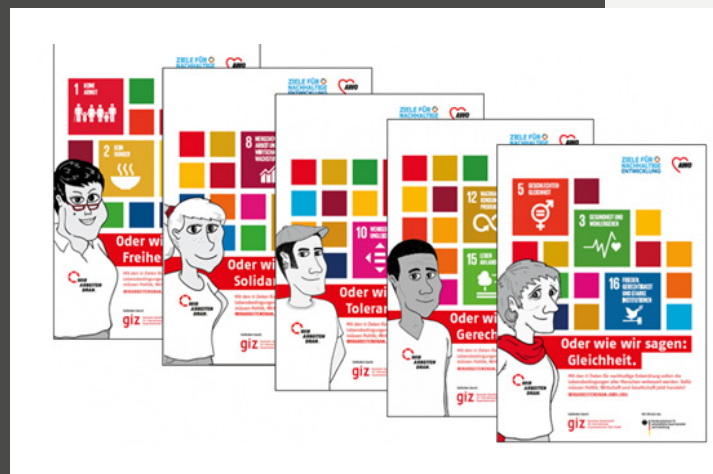
CASE STUDY

Two SOLIDAR Foundation members, [Willi Eichler Akademie \(WEA\)](#) and [AWO](#), have examples of work through which they strive to lead by example, greening up their activities, to make sure that beyond raising awareness, they are part of the solution to the climate change and not the cause.

In the case of [WEA](#), it has stepped up its efforts to obtain the ESD-compliant label that NGOs can apply for with the federal authorities in Germany. The certificate obtained stands for the quality of an organisation's ESD work and makes it visible to the public, leading to opportunities such as:

- ♦ Support in the development of the pedagogical concept and mission statement through further training events
- ♦ Independent advice and recommendations on their own educational practice from the Federal Agency working on ESD
- ♦ Qualification offers for staff
- ♦ Increased awareness of own quality standards
- ♦ Stronger orientation towards sustainability in educational work and organisational design
- ♦ Improved visibility of the quality of their own ESD work
- ♦ Increased awareness of the institution

In the case of [AWO](#), it has launched the [Wir Arbeiten Dran](#) campaign, specifically to flip the attention to the work of NGOs and CSOs which are seen as doing the rightful work in the context of Agenda 2030 but which should also be subjected scrutiny to ensure that they uphold their principles and raise up to their self-imposed standards. It is essential to consider this given that an organisation such as [AWO](#) employed 218.000 workers in 2016, which at the moment was more than BMW or Allianz and almost as much as Daimler or Telekom. Social work also leads to greenhouse gas emissions, to waste and the consumption of raw materials. The campaign provides educational materials, best practices examples, and debate platforms to support CSOs to reflect over their practices and intensify their greening process. These exercises of self-reflection force workers, beneficiaries and all learners in general to go beyond declarative or performative positions and actually engage directly with actions to protect the environment, boosting their ownership over the solutions taken to combat global challenges and emboldening them to take an active role in society.



Source: AWO, Wir Arbeiten Dran campaign

SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE

THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC

As the pandemic has disrupted education, it has also impacted the civic space in which learners were supposed to exert the civic and environmental competences gained in education. At a time when extremism is increasing in Germany¹⁴ and when the human-made climate crisis requires more worldwide actions from governments and large business conglomerates¹⁵, German citizens have been stonewalled by their curtailment of their rights and by a restricted civic space. Based on the Infection Protection Act, the German government is entitled to restrict rights of citizens to prevent the spread of a disease and thus protect the right of previously uninfected people to life and physical integrity. Some of the rights that are covered by this act include freedom of the

person, the freedom of assembly and the inviolability of the home. However, the right for assembly is not incompatible with the Infection Protection Act, as there is a clear requirement that the complete denial of the right to assembly is only used as a last resort measure, when it is impossible to ensure that aspects for the safe implementation of assembly, such as the physical distancing requirement, cannot be met¹⁶. The interpretation of the German federal government and of the local administrations of these ideas, in the beginning of the pandemic, was exceptionally strict with very few gatherings being allowed. However, efforts from the civil society coupled with continuous suing of the public authorities' behaviour has led to a different interpretation of these regulations over April 2020¹⁷, once the courts ruled against the improper interpretation of the laws in place by the public authorities. As of then, the cancellation of gatherings became less of a norm, with more efforts to ensure distanced protests. It has to be mentioned that at the time of writing this report, large scale protests are occurring even when not meeting the sanitary requirements, especially the anti-COVID-19 measures protests. However, in this context, protestors have reported disproportionate usage of force by police authorities and escalation of conflicts¹⁸.

This situation linked to the freedom of assembly and to the disproportionate usage of force by the police has been one aspect that has led to CIVICUS to report, in its Monitor, a declining



INFEKTIONS-
SCHUTZGESETZ

14 Euronews (2021). *Rising number of far-right extremists in Germany, says government*. Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2021/06/15/rising-number-of-far-right-extremists-in-germany-says-government>. Last accessed: 24 February 2022.

15 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2021). *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis*. Pp.36-41. Available at: https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_Full_Report.pdf. Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

16 Gesetze im Internet: Ein Service des Bundesministeriums der Justiz (2000). *Gesetz zur Verhütung und Bekämpfung von Infektionskrankheiten beim Menschen (Infektionsschutzgesetz - IfSG)*. Available at <https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/ifsg/IfSG.pdf>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

17 BVerfG (2020). *Beschluss der 1. Kammer des Ersten Senats vom 15. April 2020, 1 BvR 828/20 -, Rn. 1-19*. Available at: https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Entscheidungen/DE/2020/04/rk20200415_1bvr082820.html. Last accessed: 22 February 2022.; Nasr, Joseph (2020). *Germans have right to protest during coronavirus pandemic: court*. Reuters. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-germany-protests-idUSKCN21Y220>. Last accessed: 22 February 2022.

18 CIVICUS (2021). *Journalists Continuously Targeted at Anti-Covid-19 Protests*. Available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2021/04/13/journalists-continuously-targeted-anti-covid-19-protests/>. Last accessed: 23 February 2022.



civic space in Germany. They have also highlighted the numerous attacks on journalists, especially within the anti-COVID-19 regulations protests, revealing how the law enforcement authorities of Germany have failed to ensure a safe environment for the press, effectively chipping away at the concept of press freedom in Germany¹⁹. These are shocking developments especially as the rate of politically-motivated crimes reached in 2020 its second highest level since 2001²⁰, while crimes against people

from the LGBT+ community have increased by 36% in 2020²¹. This approach is emboldening a climate of fear while also creating divisions which serve as further distractions from the solidarity needed to tackle the climate crisis.

SPOTLIGHT: THE CASE OF THE NON-PROFIT STATUS IN GERMANY



While measures such as curtailments to the right to freedom of assembly have been more or less common across Europe, the shrinking of the civic space in Germany has also one peculiarity which has caused the civil society significant concern. This is linked with the restrictive Non-Profit legislation, which was observed as an issue in the European Commission's 2021 Rule of Law Report on Germany as well²². Based on Germany's current fiscal code, examples of what means charitable purpose – which organisations need to pursue if they wish to be seen as non-profit organisations and have access to a more favourable taxation climate – do not cover the promotion of human rights or social justice, or the fight against racism or other types of discrimination. This antiquated law is, therefore, limiting the scope of what can be considered a non-profit association. This creates a risk for non-profit associations to lose the privileged status that would ensure tax privileges, which in turn are also required for certain other state and private foundations financing mechanisms to kick in. As of 2019, political actors have launched a debate in which they considered whether the

19 CIVICUS (2021). *Decline in RSF World Press Freedom Index amid Increasing Attacks on Journalists*. Available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2021/06/17/decline-rsf-world-press-freedom-index-amid-increasing-attacks-journalists/>. Last accessed: 21 February 2022.; CIVICUS (2021). *Journalists Continue to Face Attacks, Death Threats during Protests against COVID-19 Measures*. Available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2021/01/07/journalists-continue-face-attacks-death-threats-during-protests-against-covid-19-measures/>. Last accessed: 21 February 2022.; CIVICUS (2021). *Journalists Continuously Targeted at Anti-Covid-19 Protests*.

20 Goßner, Christina (2020). *Politically-motivated crimes in Germany at second-highest level since 2001*. Euractiv. Available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/politically-motivated-crimes-in-germany-at-second-highest-level-since-2001/>. Last accessed: 22 February 2022.

21 Anarte, Enrique (2021). *Hate crimes against LGBT+ people in Germany rise 36% in 2020*. Reuters. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-lgbt-crime-idUSKBN2CL1TN>. Last accessed: 24 February 2022.

22 European Commission (2021). *2021 Rule of Law Report Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in Germany*. Pp.17-18. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/2021_rorl_country_chapter_germany_en.pdf. Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

involvement of certain non-profit associations in the political life and debates would not preclude them from maintaining their status. The Federal Fiscal Court has further amplified this debate when revoking the charitable status of the anti-globalisation network Attac due to their political engagement²³. As CSOs depend on the political parties' will to fund them and must not politically compete with these actors, one can clearly see how the shrinking of the civic space is shaping up in Germany. This has created the so-called 'chilling effect', with CSOs shying away from political activism or policing their speech to make sure that they do not cause controversy and draw the ire of the political powers. To make it clear how widespread this debate is in Germany, leading figures of the CDU/CSU political parties have questioned the right of organisations protesting against deportations to have a charitable status²⁴. Therefore, even mainstream parties,

with significant powers, have been contributing to the shrinking of the civic space.

CIVIL SOCIETY STRIKES BACK

Though the aforementioned concerns reveal sliding back in Germany, the conditions for CSOs and civil society in general are still rated as 'good' and 'very good' in the report of the [European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights](#)²⁵. In times of COVID-19, a German Foundation for Civic Engagement and Volunteering was created, a Joint Impact Support Programme in times of corona was set up, both contributing at the creation of infrastructure aimed at providing space for dialogue and channeling targeted support towards the civil society²⁶. At the same time, funding for combatting extremism and radicalization through the 'Living Democracy!' programme



Source: demokratie-leben.de

23 Kube, Vivian; Weller, Pauline; Çalışkan, Selmin and Matjašič Peter (2021). *Shrinking Space in Germany, Shrinking Space in Europe: Why a Politically Engaged Civil Society Is Essential for a Strong Democracy and How Germany Can Safeguard It*. Society for Civil Rights and Open Societies Foundation. Pp.3, 6. Available at: <https://freiheitsrechte.org/home/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/shrinking-spaces-in-germany-shrinking-spaces-in-europe.pdf>. Last accessed: 3 March 2022.

24 Kube, Vivian; Weller, Pauline; Çalışkan, Selmin and Matjašič Peter (2021). *Shrinking Space in Germany, Shrinking Space in Europe: Why a Politically Engaged Civil Society Is Essential for a Strong Democracy and How Germany Can Safeguard It*. Pp.3, 6.

25 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2021). *Protecting Civic Space in the EU*. P.15. Available at: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2021-protecting-civic-space_en.pdf. Last accessed: 3 March 2022.

26 Ibid. P.19.

was increased²⁷, showing a clear commitment to support the civil society in promoting democratic values at a time when extremism and hate crimes are on the rise in Germany. However, these developments have to be seen in a larger context, in which a draft law for setting up a comprehensive funding framework for civil society associations has not garnered enough support in the parliament²⁸. This lack of structural support and reliance on the good-will of project/initiative-based investment are worrisome for reasons which SOLIDAR Foundation member, [Willi Eichler Akademie](#), has shared for the purpose of this research. [WEA](#) representatives have shown worry at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economic situation in Germany, explaining how an economic crisis can push CSOs in a very vulnerable position in terms of reduced access to funding. At the same time, the existence of the emergency funding during the pandemic was deemed by [WEA](#) representatives as insufficient given the scope of economic hardship incurred by CSOs and especially by those that have full-time staffers and had to maintain the payment of wages in these times. Furthermore, at a closer look the available funding caused discrepancies, as the support experienced by urban-based CSOs is not the same as for the rural-based ones considering the different types of challenges experienced by these different types of CSOs. 42% of rural organisations were able to continue their work during the pandemic as opposed to 60% of the urban-based CSOs²⁹. **The skepticism amongst rural-based CSOs is also higher, and this worrying trend is stifling the civic space for a significant part of the**

German population which is yet again left behind, as the rural-urban divisions were also presented in the 2019 Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor³⁰.

CSOs have been significant contributors to ensuring that the unstable situation of the pandemic, and its associated civic space risks, had not taken an even grimmer turn. The ad-hoc, creative work done by such organisations at a time when their entire operations have had to shift due to the sanitary crisis must be celebrated and presented as a work that continued to empower learners and citizens across Germany. In a recent UNESCO report, it was shown how, during the pandemic, the learners' chances to participate in student governance decreased by 52%, the chances to participate in community action by 50%, the chances to participate in volunteering by 49% and the chances to participate in classroom discussion by 30%³¹. These numbers are worrisome for the competences of active participation in society that are being hampered, and they refer only to young learners, but the situation for active participation can be expanded to all categories of learners. For this reason, CSOs have been doing spectacular work during the pandemic in finding innovative ways to engage learners and ensure that civic competences can still be built and that the current and future generations will maintain their levels of engagement and their understanding of the importance of the civic space. Such an example is provided by the German Federal Association of Volunteer Agencies, which has developed guidelines on how to safely engage in times of

27 Ibid. P.42.

28 Ibid.

29 Ziviz (2021). *Die Situation der Organisierten Zivilgesellschaft im Juni 2021*. Engagement-Barometer – 4. Panelbefragung. Available at: https://www.ziviz.de/sites/ziv/files/engagement-barometer_corona_befragung_2021-06_ergebnisse.pdf. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

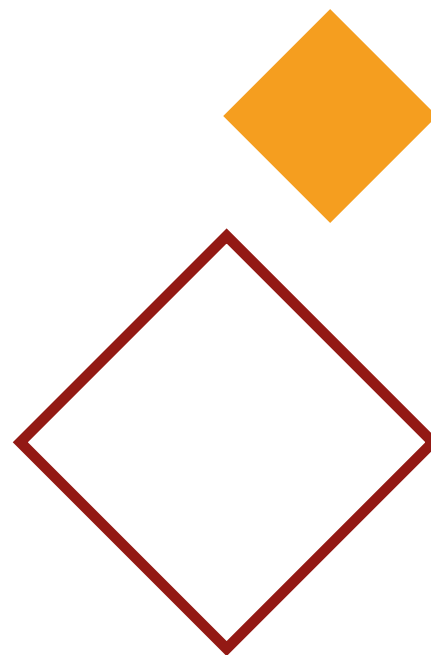
30 Frank, Andrei (2020). *Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor 2019: Germany National Report*. P.6. Available at: https://www.solidar.org/system/downloads/attachments/000/001/128/original/Country_Germany.pdf?1588761277. Last accessed: 3 March 2022.

31 UNESCO and Council of Europe (2021). *The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student voice: Findings and Recommendations*. UNESCO: Paris; Council of Europe: Strasbourg. Pp.15-16. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/finalpublication-the-impact-of-covid19-on-student-voice/1680a42e52>. Last accessed: 24 February 2022.

the pandemic but also on what means engagement during these times. Their work looked at the importance of being a role model during the pandemic and of comforting others, stressing how engagement takes different forms, and highlighting that all types of engagement are essential in these times. At the same time, they have provided digital alternatives for ongoing volunteering processes³². At the same time, the #kulturtrutzcorona facilitated the continuation of cultural events and activities in the digital realm³³, bridging gaps between people and ensuring participation in a similar way that the [Resistenza Virale](#) initiative – launched by SOLIDAR Foundation member [ARCI](#) – did in Italy³⁴. Foundations such as the [Friedrich Ebert Stiftung](#) have also become reliable sources of disseminating information from approved channels on what needs to be done in the pandemic or on how the pandemic was developing. Such efforts have been complemented by what was mentioned in the sections above

about the civil society actors continuing protests during the pandemic and pursuing legal actions in the German courts to ensure that the freedom for assembly is protected.

CSOs have gone beyond this work, to also promote cross-border solidarity during the pandemic. The influence of globalization and of the interconnections between people across the world have been made even more visible during the COVID-19 outbreak. It is in this context also that it becomes clear that one needs to show solidarity beyond the borders of their country considering how global challenges can only have global solutions. In this respect, SOLIDAR Foundation member, [WEA](#), has continued to implement its [Europa Impulse project](#). The aim of the project is to cultivate people's understandings of the European identity, creating commitment to supporting fellow EU citizens. More about the project can be found in the textbox below.



32 Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Freiwilligenagenturen (2020). Engagement und Coronahilfe. Available at: <https://bagfa.de/aktuelles/engagement-und-coronahilfe/>. Last accessed: 24 February 2022.

33 Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2022). *Engagement und Zivilgesellschaft für Solidarität*. Thema im Fokus. Available at: <https://www.fes.de/akademie-management-und-politik/themen-im-fokus/engagement-und-zivilgesellschaft-fuer-solidaritaet>. Last accessed: 23 February 2022.

34 Frank, Andrei (2021). *Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor 2020: Italy National Report*. P.11. Available at: https://www.solidar.org/system/downloads/attachments/000/001/314/original/CLLL_Monitor2020_National_report_Italy.pdf?1617694931. Last accessed: 3 March 2022.

CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member, [WEA](#), has been implementing as of 2019 the [Europa-Impulse](#) project, with funding from the German Federal Agency for Civic Education. The project focuses on various workshops, conferences, meetings, seminars and similar events to discuss the topic of Europe and European identity. It is meant to develop knowledge and skills that enable active participation in a democratic society, but also in the context of European citizenship. The project is marked by large-scale annual conferences, such as the one in 2021 that focused specifically on the UN's Agenda 2030 and sustainable development goals (SDGs), as well as on how these relate to Europe. You can find [here](#) the interventions of all speakers, and follow the debate that emerged from this conference. At the same time, the project is organized on topics linked to Europe but also topics linked to imparting knowledge on the cultural setting in various places of Europe.

The aim is to boost understanding of the Europe-wide context, but also to familiarize German learners with the specific aspects of the other European countries towards which they must show solidarity. This top-down and bottom-up level of awareness-raising approach has provided German citizens with the opportunity to get in touch with members of the Land and federal parliaments of Germany, with MEPs, with academics, with former German politicians, while also opening up opportunities to meet current leading political figures from across Europe.

The events are further complemented by various publications on the topic, including newsletters with editorials from the significant political actors that have been engaged through these events. For more on the upcoming events of this project, please follow [Europa Impulse's website](#).

The civic space situation in Germany remains positive, even when considering the most recent setbacks, but it must be highlighted that the ad-hoc work of CSOs promoting an ever-increasing civic space needs to be better

supported in the upcoming years, especially considering the powder keg that rising extremism, populism and hate-crimes represent for the German society.



CONCLUSION

The following report considered the development of civic competences in Germany from the specific angle of two rising challenges: the environmental crisis and the shrinking civic space. The purpose of the report was to analyse the current situation regarding these challenges in the German context as well as to consider the implications of this on developing civic competences for a 21st century society. When discussing about the climate crisis, it is important to consider that civic competences can be attuned to combatting this challenge through ESD and EES. The situation in Germany is more encouraging than in other EU member states, as can be seen in the other 2021 Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor national case studies, with a federal level commitment to ESD which is streamlined across policy initiatives. This has resulted in a varying degree of implementation at state level, with regional discrepancies existing in terms of access to the topic, training for teachers, resources dedicated to the topic, presence of the topic in the curricula but also in terms of the more practical aspects of evaluation, benchmarking, teaching related to the topic. The topic is very much focused on young learners, missing out on the adult population that needs to

be prepared in the same way, and its component on EES is not developed in a specific way, or does not receive due attention considering the importance of combatting climate change denial. EES is approached as a part of ESD, which raises concerns about the way in which the upcoming European Commission Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Education for Environmental Sustainability will be perceived nationally, considering that EES is merely a subtopic of ESD. At the same time, the civic space, in which learners need to exert civic and green competences, has been shrinking. Even if this is not as worrying as in other places in Europe, and Germany remains a country with a sustainable civic space, the challenges posed to the funding and status of CSOs are worrying as well as the lack of increased structural investment in CSOs in light of the pandemic. In this context, this report has highlighted the work that CSOs have been doing to close these gaps and to prepare learners and citizens for the challenges ahead, providing invaluable resources and support that should be constructively built upon given the societal polarization that plagues Europe, including Germany.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ Scale up the monitoring of the implementation of ESD and EES at state level
- ◆ Provide increased investment for the implementation of ESD and EES at state level, especially in a targeted manner to ensure that states that have been struggling with this topic can more easily include it in the curriculum and learning process
- ◆ Increase the opportunities for training on ESD and EES for the education professionals, while providing them with opportunities during the working hours to engage in said training
- ◆ Provide more avenues for collaboration between formal, informal and non-formal education providers to ensure that in the states where the implementation of the topic in formal education has been slower, the informal and non-formal education providers can offer support for the topic
- ◆ Review the law on statuses for CSOs, ensuring that the political activism does not hamper the possibility of having the charity status and the subsequent fiscal regime
- ◆ Direct more resources at ensuring the physical integrity of the journalists, clearly committing to the freedom of the press
- ◆ Resume negotiations for the draft law on the topic of structural funding for CSOs and level the playing field across Germany for all CSOs to be equally enabled to be active
- ◆ Ensure the participation of CSOs in policymaking

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