

WE ALL BELONG: The role of GCE in supporting democratic participation and addressing current global challenges

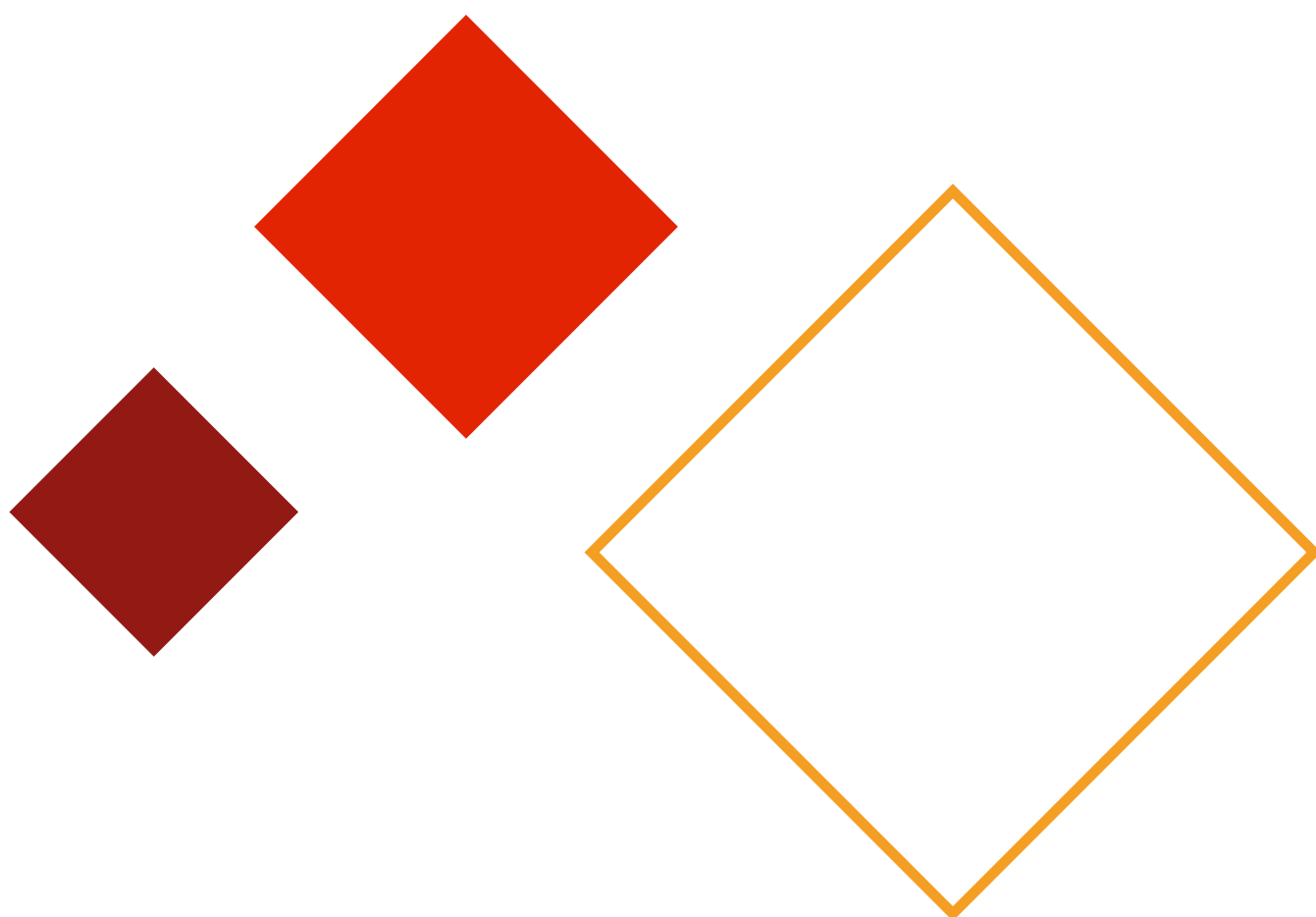
**SOLIDAR FOUNDATION
POLICY PAPER**



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Foreword



It is a great pleasure to present SOLIDAR Foundation's most recent policy paper *We all belong: The role of GCE in supporting democratic participation and addressing current global challenges*. This paper is the culmination of a year of activities for SOLIDAR Foundation focused on Global Citizenship Education (GCE) that clearly demonstrates its crucial benefit for democratic participation in a globalised world. Access to GCE should therefore be regarded as a political right, guaranteed through public funding and an increased policy focus. The paper could not have been published at a more appropriate moment. Over the past years, Europe and the world have faced parallel and mutually reinforcing global crises, such as the pandemic, escalating climate and environmental emergencies, democratic backsliding, shrinking civic space, war, rising intolerance and discrimination. Additionally, we are witnessing the increasing popularity of digital technologies like Artificial Intelligence, which provide incredible opportunities but also pose significant risks if not used correctly. These crises underline the pressing need for education to prepare all learners to develop a sense of belonging to the global community, while promoting a culture of democratic participation and democratic values.

In this endeavor, GCE plays a crucial role in strengthening our democracy and promoting political engagement. It helps us navigate the challenges of transitioning to a more inclusive society. GCE is central to the work of SOLIDAR & SOLIDAR Foundation and its members, as they all strive for achieving social justice through education, ensuring that

all learners have access to quality and publicly financed learning opportunities.

However, GCE is not always prioritised across Europe. In light of the upcoming European Elections, it is therefore essential to call for a renewed political commitment to make GCE accessible to all. This paper aims to illustrate the relevance of GCE delivered in informal and non-formal education for supporting democratic participation and when addressing current global challenges. By doing so, it showcases the key role civil society organisations play in educating learners and preparing them for a globalized world. Last but not least, this policy paper also serves as a basis for policy development through concrete recommendations that are aimed at improving and expanding the implementation of Global Citizenship Education across Europe and beyond.

SOLIDAR Foundation and our members remain steadfast in our commitment to a more holistic approach to education with the aim of fostering democratic participation in society.

Global Citizenship Education is not just a lifelong learning journey, but an ongoing endeavor to strengthen democracy. By embracing it we would make significant strides towards our vision of a truly democratic Europe within a global community.

*Mikael Leyi, Secretary General
of SOLIDAR & SOLIDAR Foundation*

Executive Summary

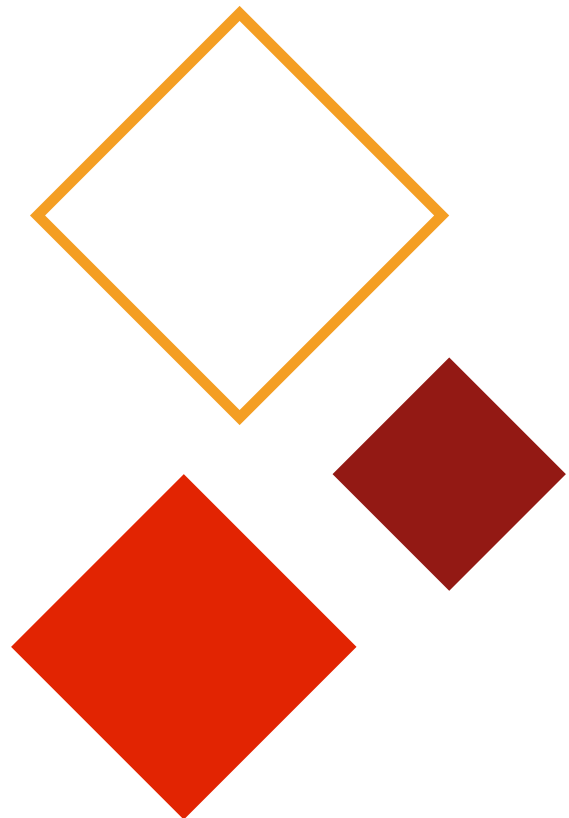
Global Citizenship Education (GCE) has been a central topic to the work of the SOLIDAR Foundation membership across Europe and beyond. What unites the membership of SOLIDAR Foundation is the fact that all of them is striving to achieve social justice through education, ensuring that all learners have access to quality, publically financed education that is done in a lifelong and life-wide learning manner. GCE is understood as **political education on a global scale which prepares learners to develop a sense of belonging to the global community, to get involved and to take an active role in society in order to contribute to a peaceful, just world in which ecological resources are preserved.** (De Andreotti, 2014).

This paper aims at discussing recent policy developments connected to GCE at European level, including a reflection on the relevance of GCE delivered in informal and non-formal education for supporting democratic participation and addressing the current global challenges.

Key findings

- GCE is gaining traction among policymakers, yet at a slow pace; a scattered presence of GCE contents in the curricula, materials and resources for teaching, and teacher training supports this perception. At the curricular level, the trend remains to integrate GCE as a sub-topic in other subjects (Tarozzi & Inguaggiato, 2018)– e.g. natural sciences, education for sustainable development, etc.
- With regards to initial teacher education (ITE) and continuing professional development (CPD) there remains the need to provide more training opportunities specifically focusing on GCE and related topics (i.e., ESD) to pre-service and in-service teachers.
- In terms of cooperation between relevant stakeholders, non-formal and informal education remain the stronghold of GCE provision. While the results of this survey are not generalisable to the whole spectrum of civil society organisations (CSOs) operating in Europe, these replies echo the findings from previous research regarding the fundamental role that the third sector plays in filling the gaps concerning GCE provision for all and in particular **systematically marginalised groups.**
- **Contextual factors, policymakers' role, implementation, and funding** are the main challenges identified based on the literature review and feedback from the survey and member interviews. With regards to **context**, political divergences and shrinking spaces for civil society are the two most salient issues.
- When it comes to the **policymakers' role and implementation**, these were reported as the most challenging areas for GCE work by SOLIDAR members and partners. Even though CSOs make continued advocacy efforts to 'convince' policymakers about the importance of mainstreaming GCE, the progress is still slow in comparison to the urgency of addressing global issues that are affecting us all.

- As for **implementation**, research on GCE implementation at the school level has pointed to the importance of the involvement of all stakeholders in the school community, suggesting that the whole school approach could be a potential avenue for improving GCE implementation.
- The **funding** issue remains pivotal for the provision of GCE. According to academic and grey literature, there are two sides to this issue: on the one hand, there are not enough funds allocated to GCE in formal education; on the other, non-formal education providers such as CSOs are highly dependent from public funds (either at the national or European level) affecting the sustainability of long-term GCE projects.
- Recent scholarship has flagged the risk of sliding into an uncritical, self-complacent version of GCE. A number of works from academic and grey literature have underlined the need to shift towards a “critical” GCE emphasizing social justice and giving space for a truly transformative learning experience (de Vries, 2020; Dyrness, 2021; Estellés & Fischman, 2021; Vella, 2022). Reflections shared by SOLIDAR members and partners that responded to the survey mirror this call for a more critical take on the predominant discourse on GCE.
- A key contribution for shifting to a more critical GCE comes from research. An increasing number of scholars is advocating for more reflexive research on GCE, highlighting the importance of deconstructing the established discourses and bringing forward voices from the field (Schippling, 2020).
- Strengths that enhance the added value of GCE point to the following: **the increasing relevance of this topic; the crucial role of CSOs**; the work that is being done with **systematically marginalised groups; and the creation of networks** through multi-stakeholder partnerships at the local, national, and European level.
- A growing body of scholarship about GCE attests for an **increasing relevance** of this topic in the policy discourse. Closely linked to the growing interest in GCE is the **crucial role that CSOs** have played through their work in GCE, by bringing the ‘voices from below’ – i.e. contributions from grassroots organisations – into the political arena. In many European countries, the third sector has influenced the development of GCE strategies.
- **Creating networks through multi-stakeholder partnerships** is to a certain extent something that connects the three dots: increasing relevance of GCE; the crucial role of CSOs; and the work with systematically marginalised groups. This became apparent throughout the literature review, consultations through the survey and in SOLIDAR Foundation member interviews.





1. Background

Global Citizenship Education (GCE) has been a central topic to the work of the SOLIDAR Foundation membership across Europe and beyond. The scope, outreach, nature, methodology and pedagogies associated with the approaches taken by the members reflect the diversity of the network. Members of the SOLIDAR network include providers of informal and non-formal education and partners of formal education providers, which operate at national level as part of networks or as stand-alone providers.

The membership of SOLIDAR is striving to achieve social justice through education, ensuring that all learners have access to quality, public education that is done in a lifelong and life wide learning manner. For this paper, GCE is understood as **political education on a global scale which prepares learners to develop a sense of belonging to the global community, to get involved and to take an active role in**

society in order to contribute to a peaceful, just world in which ecological resources are preserved. This definition stems from the works of Vanessa de Andreotti (De Andreotti, 2014) and has remained as the core concept for SOLIDAR Foundation's work on GCE.

Methodology

This paper aims at discussing recent policy developments connected to GCE at European level, including a reflection on the relevance of GCE delivered in informal and non-formal education for supporting democratic participation and addressing the current global challenges.

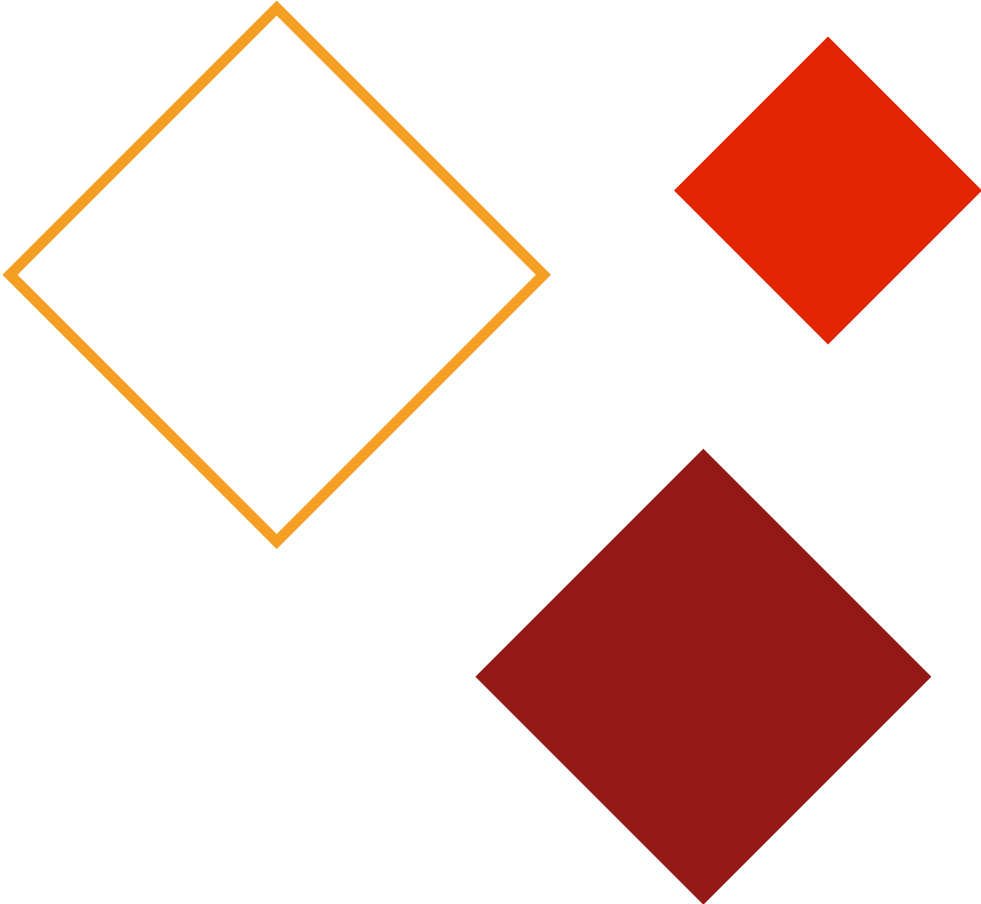
Data were collected through desk research and consultations with SOLIDAR members and partners. Desk research encompassed a review of recent academic and grey literature (since 2019), including education laws, articles, reports, working documents, etc.

available in English, French, Spanish, and Italian. As for the consultations with SOLIDAR members and partners, this was carried out in two steps: first, a call for individual in-depth interviews in May-June 2023, to which three members replied. Second, an online questionnaire of 10 items that was shared with organisations within SOLIDAR's network in June-July 2023. A total of 13 replies were received, including nine members of SOLIDAR Foundation. All data were analysed using the constant comparative method to produce a narrative report of the results.

Some limitations to the findings should be taken into consideration. First, even though the desk research was conducted in several languages, resources from SOLIDAR members in other languages were not considered (e.g., Croatian, Macedonian, Portuguese, Serbian, and Swedish); therefore, some examples were not included as there weren't translations

available. Second, the limited participation of organisations in SOLIDAR's network (members and partners impacts negatively on the generalisability of some results – in particular the quantitative; this limitation was addressed through a triangulation process using data collected in the desk research and the interviews.

The following pages provide an overview of the main findings of this paper. Section two discusses the main developments with regards to GCE in formal and non-formal education in recent years. Section three gives some key analysis pointers to *look inwards* in an effort to facilitate *moving forward* so as to address pending challenges and strengthen the provision of GCE. Finally, section four outlines pointers for improvement and recommendations at both policy and practice level for strengthening GCE implementation.



2. Taking stock of the provision of GCE in formal and non-formal education in recent years

A scattered presence of GCE contents in the curricula, materials and resources for teaching, and teacher training supports the perception that GCE is gaining traction among policymakers, yet at a slow pace (Tarozzi, 2022). A few recent policy reforms have integrated GCE as a key concept in education laws: in Spain, the LOMLOE (Organic Law Amending the Organic Law of Education) acknowledges the importance of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and GCE and therefore both topics must be included throughout compulsory education programmes.¹ However, policy developments with regards to GCE remain difficult to track, mostly due to the diversity of approaches and definitions given to this concept across countries (Tarozzi, 2022). At the curricular level, the trend remains to integrate GCE as a sub-topic in other subjects (Tarozzi & Inguaggiato, 2018)– e.g. natural sciences, education for sustainable development, etc – diluting its presence in comparison to other ‘hot topics’ such as climate change, environmental issues, etc. The 2020 Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor had already raised some concerns about this approach and the need for a shift of perspective from EU Member States to foster a GCE that goes beyond environmental education (SOLIDAR, 2021).

Data from the survey conducted from this study seems to confirm the difficulty of placing GCE at the core of education systems across the EU. Most respondents (10 out of 13 organisations) stated that more political will is needed to make GCE accessible to all, and a similar number declared that the ‘number one’ challenge for their work in GCE is that it is not a priority among decision makers. Respondents also commented on the reasons behind this difficulty: on the one hand, GCE is not widely “recognised in its own respect”; on the other, education for sustainable development (ESD), climate change, and the European Green Deal are “gaining more ground”, which translates into more funding going towards these issues. Findings from the literature support this perception; in the white paper from the EU project Building European Solidarity Today (BEST) – which included several SOLIDAR members as partners, the authors conclude that in the six countries studied (Croatia, Italy, France, Poland, Slovenia, and Spain), even if GCE is present to a small extent, more efforts need to be made to “adopt the global dimension, to pass from a national focus of the teaching of this topic to a really global one.”²

The findings from the 2020 Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor remain relevant in

¹ <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/news/new-education-law-spain>

² <https://llplatform.eu/ll/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/BEST-White-Paper-GCE.pdf>

terms of the scattered provision of GCE in formal education, and the crucial role that civil society organisations (CSOs) play in advancing this topic by providing expertise or training in non-formal education environments. As noted in previous research conducted by SOLIDAR Foundation on GCE (see the previous editions of the Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor), there is a predominant trend of integrating this topic from a cross-curricular perspective or as a sub-topic of other related subjects. The downside of these approaches is that GCE may 'fall through the cracks', and its provision will depend largely on the schools' priorities and whether teachers and educators feel prepared to address GCE in the classroom.

Tarozzi and Inguaggiato (2018) identified two key elements that have fostered GCE integration in national education strategies, in their comparative study of ten European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Spain, Portugal, UK) focusing on the integration of GCE in primary school curricula. According to the authors, in countries where there is a national strategy aligned with GCE, it is possible to find 1) pre-service and in-service teacher education opportunities and 2) a sustainable cooperation between relevant stakeholders – including governmental bodies, NGOs, local authorities, and educational institutions (Tarozzi & Inguaggiato, 2018). The following paragraphs provide further information about both elements.

With regards to the teacher training element – including initial teacher education (ITE) and continuing professional development (CPD) – the latest Eurydice report *Citizenship Education at School* (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017) found that, overall, countries were making progress to provide citizenship education through ITE and CPD.

However, recent Citizenship Education and Lifelong Learning Monitors (SOLIDAR, 2020, 2022) underlined the need to provide more training opportunities specifically focusing on GCE and related topics (i.e. ESD) to pre-service and in-service teachers. Findings from previous research also highlight that, where countries reported that GCE is included in ITE or CPD, it's not always clear whether the training is provided by accredited public bodies or by other educational institutions such as NGOs or private organisations (CONCORD, 2018); as stated in the 2018 UNESCO report on the Progress on Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Education, "greater progress is required on teacher training and education outside the school system, where implementation is generally lower than the high level of policy commitment would lead one to expect" (UNESCO, 2018).

There is, nonetheless, a caveat to the emphasis given to teacher training for advancing GCE; while teachers have an important role as members of the school community, they are not solely responsible for the provision of GCE in formal education. Estellés and Fischmann (2021) argue that such emphasis on the role of teacher education in GCE is problematic, because it oversimplifies the perception of GCE as "a redemptive educational solution to global problems" (Estellés & Fischman, 2021). According to the authors, this discourse has some important implications for teacher training, including:

1. Increases the risk of blaming educators for not achieving the explicit goals of GCE by accentuating the many benefits of GCE and neglecting the difficulties that teachers face when implementing its lofty goals (...)
2. Promotes an unrealistic idea of professional educators (...)
3. Overlooks the importance of emotion and lived experiences in civic learning (...)

4. Minimizes the social and public dimensions in civic education (Estellés & Fischman, 2021).

In this respect, contributions from critical strands of GCE shed light on the importance of critically reflecting on GCE as a practice entailing social justice activism as well (Franch, 2020). For teacher education, this means opening spaces for dialogue among teachers to “facilitate exchanges of knowledge and learning from one another about experiences of ‘doing’ GCE in schools” (Franch, 2020).

As for cooperation between relevant stakeholders, non-formal and informal education remain the stronghold of GCE provision (Damiani, 2020), in spite of the advocacy efforts made by CSOs to mainstream GCE at school. Damiani (2020) explains that both non-formal and informal contexts play a role “in developing students’ knowledge on global matters”, but also, there is the students’ “personal interest in the selection of

information about specific GCE topics to raise personal awareness” (Damiani, 2020). Survey data collected for this study illustrate this trend – among CSOs respondents, students are the second most important target group for GCE activities (8 out of 13 responses) followed by youth workers and leaders (7 out of 13 responses).

While the results of this survey are not generalisable to the whole spectrum of CSOs operating in Europe, these replies echo the findings from previous research regarding the fundamental role that the third sector plays in filling the gaps left with regards to GCE provision for all (2020 Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor; 2022 Council of Europe Review of the implementation of the Charter on EDC/HRE). In the survey, above a half of respondents (see Figure 1) implement GCE activities to improve the inclusion of refugees and migrants (7 out 13 responses), ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities (6 out of 13 responses).

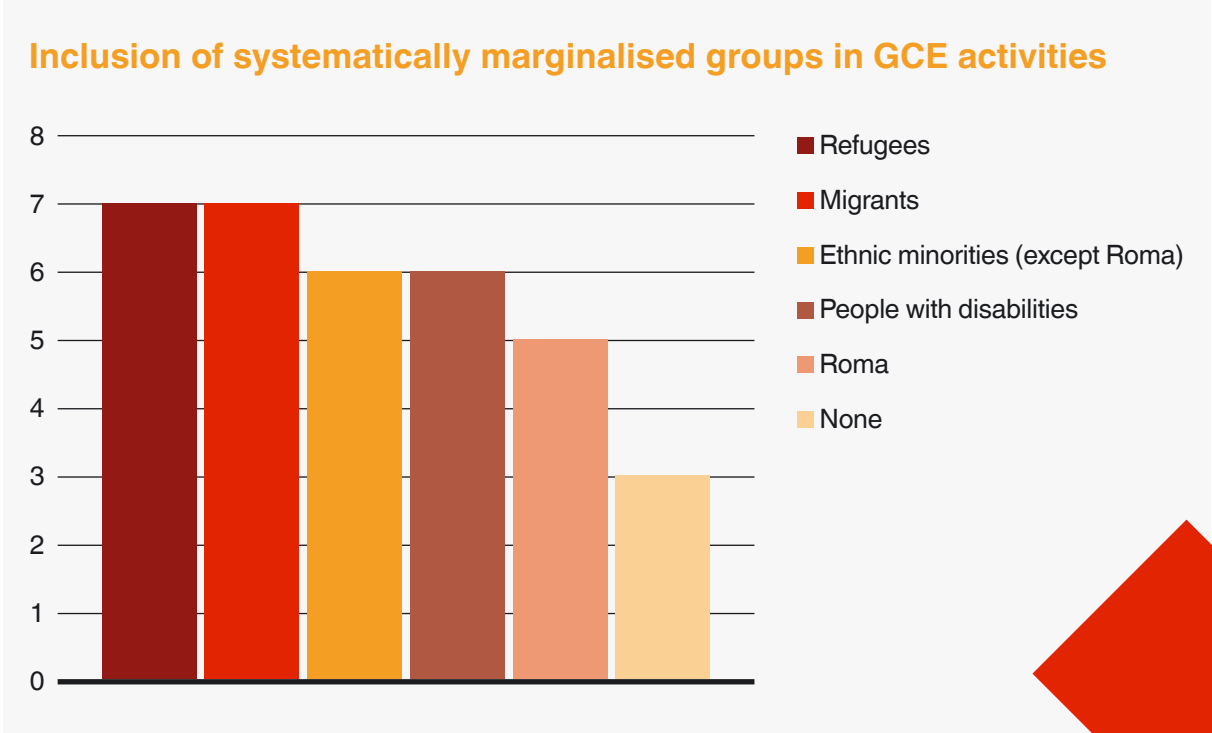


Figure 1: Inclusion of systematically marginalised groups through GCE

CSOs have a key role in advancing GCE in formal education spaces – either by providing teacher training opportunities, by cooperating with schools, or by advocating at the policy level (CONCORD, 2018). For SOLIDAR members and partners that responded to the survey, policymakers are the primary target group they work with on GCE activities (9 out of 13 responses), while primary and secondary school teachers represent the fourth largest group (6 out of 13 responses). However, when it comes to multi-stakeholder cooperation (see Figure 2), most respondents cooperate with other NGOs (11 out of 13 responses) or organisations in other countries (9 out of 13 responses). A positive trend is observed with 10 respondents reporting that they work with governmental institutions. Several respondents provided examples of their cooperation with other organisations on GCE, such as awareness raising campaigns, advocacy, research, and networking opportunities.

According to Tarozzi and Inguaggiato (2018) in countries where there is a national strategy for GCE, cooperation between diverse actors

includes “not only the ministries of education and foreign affairs, but also NGOs, local authorities and educational institutions such as universities and pedagogical colleges” (Tarozzi & Inguaggiato, 2018). Current debates at the European level have grasped the importance of such cooperation; during a policy roundtable on GCE organised by SOLIDAR Foundation at the European Parliament in June 2023, one of the main outcomes was to foster a multi-stakeholder strategy to promote GCE, including not only schools, teachers, and students, but also CSOs.

This first section gave an overview of recent trends on the provision of GCE in formal and non-formal education. Previous findings from research on GCE conducted in the latest years by SOLIDAR are still relevant, though some progress is observed in terms of the growing importance of related topics such as education for environmental sustainability. The following sections explore more in-depth pending challenges and potential opportunities for strengthening the provision of GCE.

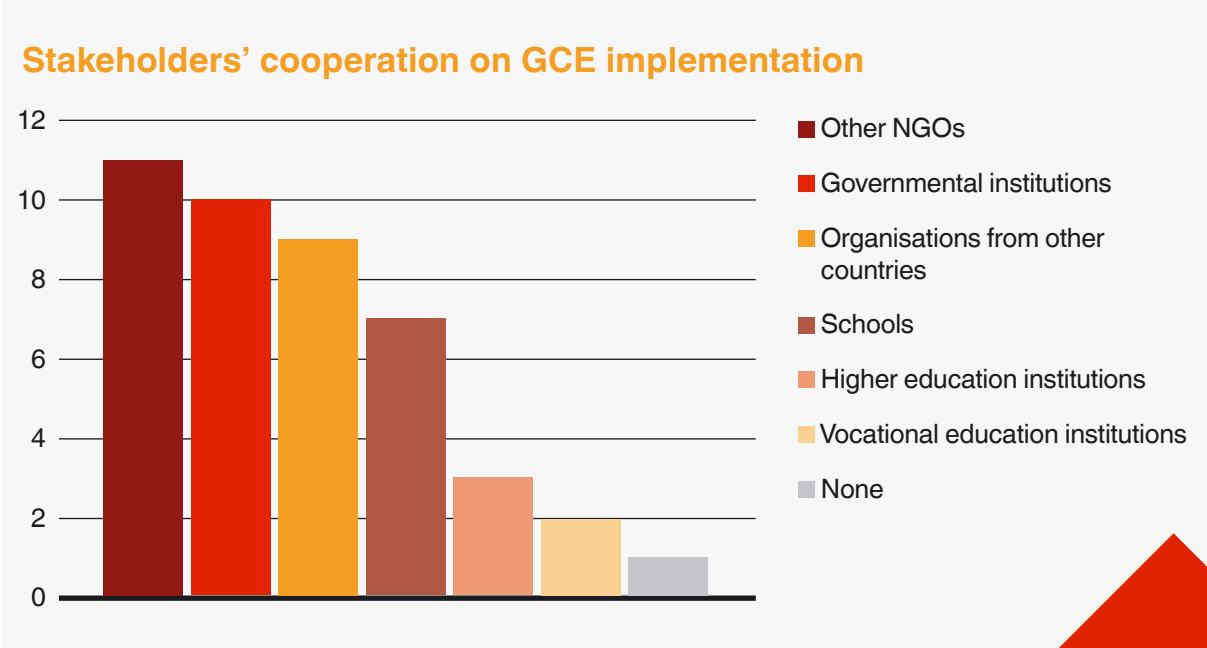


Figure 2: Stakeholders' cooperation on GCE implementation

3. Looking inwards and going forward: addressing pending challenges and strengthening GCE promotion

Undoubtedly, the concept of global citizenship has become an important element of the international education agenda, supported by the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the push for civic and citizenship education with a global perspective. However, recent scholarship has flagged the risk of sliding into an uncritical, self-complacent version of GCE. The following section discusses some key points to look *inwards* in an effort to facilitate *moving forwards* so as to address pending challenges and strengthen the provision of GCE.

Looking inwards: time for a critical GCE?

One of the main principles of the GCE vision that SOLIDAR members and partners share is that GCE promotes social justice to tackle ongoing challenges stemming from political, socio-economic, and environmental issues. Nonetheless, a number of works from academic and grey literature have underlined the need to shift towards a “critical” GCE emphasizing social justice and giving space for a truly transformative learning experience (de Vries, 2020; Dyrness, 2021; Estellés & Fischman, 2021; Vella, 2022). Estellés and Fischman (2021) discuss several critical points raised by scholars about the predominant concept of GCE: first, there is an implicit Western liberal individualism presented as “unbiased” or

“universal” viewpoints; second, it’s possible to identify GCE as a form of “educational elitism” or “social distinction” under school accountability models; and third, recent trends present GCE as “largely framed and expanded by neo-liberal policies that are far from pursuing global solidarity, sustainability, or cross-cultural literacy” (Estellés & Fischman, 2021). Reflections shared by SOLIDAR members and partners that responded to the survey mirror this call for a more critical take on the predominant discourse on GCE. As shared by one of the respondents, “activities (no matter their topic) can be more accessible if we (as providers) are aware (...) what is needed is both work on ourselves and also systematic change (through advocacy and working with policy makers).”

There are high expectations about the transformative potential of GCE for addressing the current challenges we are facing in our societies. As noted by Rieckmann (2021), GCE is concerned “with the transformation of the relationship between the individual and the world in a global perspective” and “should provide suggestions to encourage learners to reflect on their own values and take a position in the debate on values en route to sustainable development” (Rieckmann, 2021, p. 175). However, idealising it as “a redemptive educational solution to global problems” (Estellés & Fischman, 2021) increases the risk

of perpetuating the critical points described in the previous paragraph. Instead, scholarship on critical GCE suggest leaning towards a practice that is unafraid of addressing the political and the controversial – a GCE “for critical consciousness” (Bosio & Waghid, 2023) that puts into question power relations so as to address inequality and oppression (Schippling, 2020). As one of the respondents to the survey for this study explained,

“ To support GCE, we need political will and advocacy which includes challenges on our territories and not only in countries of the south. We need pedagogical resources, which ask people about their capacities to be linked with others and not only to have a political narrative or a charity behaviour, but to work on human dignity.”

A key contribution for shifting to a more critical GCE comes from research on this topic (Bosio & Waghid, 2023; de Oliveira Andreotti & de Souza, 2012a, 2012b; de Vries, 2020; Dyrness, 2021; Estellés & Fischman, 2021; Franch, 2020; Goren & Yemini, 2017; Pashby & Costa, 2021; Pashby & Sund, 2020; Schippling, 2020). An increasing number of scholars is advocating for more reflexive research on GCE, highlighting the importance of deconstructing the established discourses and bringing forward voices from the field (Schippling, 2020). Three main strands within critical GCE have the potential to support a self-reflexive practice: a transnational stance (Schippling, 2020); a decolonial/postcolonial approach (de Oliveira Andreotti & de Souza, 2012b; Pashby & Sund, 2020); and an intersectional approach (de Vries, 2020). Box 1 describes the key aspects of each approach, as developed by critical GCE scholars.

While these contributions may seem overly focused on conceptual aspects of GCE, qualitative data from the survey conducted

for this study support the willingness of practitioners to make a shift towards a GCE that is accessible to all, regardless of the age, socioeconomic status, origin, etc. Several respondents indicated that there needs to be “a cultural change” and “a systemic change” to make GCE more inclusive and accessible. For such change to operate, fostering a critical approach to GCE and facilitating spaces for practitioners to “look inwards” may help the advancement of a social-justice oriented GCE in formal and non-formal education.

Going forward: pending challenges and enhancing the added value of GCE

While looking inwards provides the space for self-reflection, it also helps to identify strengths and weaknesses in the GCE practice. This section addresses pending challenges as well as ‘what works’ to enhance the added value of GCE in formal and non-formal education.

Contextual factors, policymakers’ role, implementation, and funding are the main challenges identified based on the literature review and feedback from the survey and member interviews. With regards to **context**, political divergences and shrinking spaces for civil society are the two most salient issues. In the white paper from the EU project Building European Solidarity Today (BEST), the authors had raised their concerns about the influence of the political situation on how GCE is addressed: in Poland and Spain the irruption of the far-right in public institutions has prompted a turn towards nationalistic and conservative stances of citizenship education at school. Moreover, De Vries (2020) argues that “democratically chosen governments have become increasingly authoritarian in a number of European countries, hereby especially targeting marginalized communities” (de

Vries, 2020). The political and ideological divergences shape how values-based education is defined, delimited, and delivered (at least in formal education), including GCE. Questions related to climate change, migration, multiculturalism, among others, become ‘hot topics’ opposing “those who believe the primary purpose of citizenship education is to build national identity and those who wish to promote cosmopolitan citizenship and global solidarity” (Akkari & Maleq, 2020).

The phenomenon of shrinking spaces for civil society is closely linked to the authoritarian turn some European countries have taken

in the last years. The work done by CSOs with teachers and young people is seen as controversial and sometimes “hidden under other names like ‘peer violence’ or ‘cultural diversity’, due to the risk that this kind of activity is perceived as a political declaration against current leadership”, as noted in the white paper from BEST. The latest editions of the Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor had also discussed this trend, underlining the securitisation and the increasing power given to police forces in Western European countries to “frustrate” the civic space. Data collected from the survey and interviews for this study confirm this is a persisting challenge – according to participants GCE is perceived

Transnational stance	Decolonial/postcolonial approach	Intersectional approach
<p>Proposes to overcome “the paradigm of methodological nationalism” in educational research by reframing it within a transnational stance. This entails “a revision of traditional analytic tools and the development of innovative research designs that transcend the nation-state paradigm. The use of the concept of transnational capital as such an analytical tool is an important contribution for developing critical-oriented research on GCE” (Schippling, 2020)</p>	<p>Guiding principles (Pashby & Sund, 2020):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global issues are complex, and we need pedagogical approaches that take up rather than gloss over these complexities. • Environmental issues are deeply tied to social, political, cultural and economic inequalities; it is essential to link such issues to historical and present-day colonial systems of power. • Connecting to all species in our world requires an ethical stance towards both the deep issues threatening us all and the differently experienced impacts of environmental issues. • Classrooms are important spaces for raising questions. • Reflexivity must be encouraged and developed. 	<p>Intersectional GCE addresses “the lack of knowledge about the difference between structural oppression versus attitudes or practices of discrimination” and its aim is “to concretize the existing [UNESCO] framework, thereby making a critical implementation by practitioners more likely... Intersectionality is an analytical framework that highlights structural oppression and privilege on the basis of analytical categories that comprise our identities, like race, gender, class, and sexual orientation” (de Vries, 2020)</p>

Box 1: Transnational, decolonial/postcolonial, and intersectional approaches in critical GCE

as a “controversial issue” in countries where the governments have taken an authoritarian turn.

When it comes to the **policymakers’ role and implementation**, these were reported as the most challenging areas for GCE work by SOLIDAR members and partners (see Figure 3). Even though CSOs make continued advocacy efforts to make policymakers aware of the importance of mainstreaming GCE, the progress is still slow in comparison to the urgency of addressing the global issues that are affecting us all. When asked about what would be needed to address the main challenges affecting the promotion of GCE, respondents indicated that more awareness among policymakers (11 out of 13 responses) and political will (9 out of 13) are essential. Here, appealing to the added value of GCE supported by evidence provided through research is an important step to move forward.

As for **implementation**, Szakacs et al (2021) argue that GCE policies and pedagogies “cannot be merely imposed in a top-down fashion” (Szakács-Behling et al., 2021).

Research on GCE implementation at the school level has pointed to the importance of the involvement of all stakeholders in the school community, suggesting that the whole school approach could be a potential avenue for improving GCE implementation, or as Duarte (2021) elaborates, “an overarching model for GCE can only be created when the stakeholders at school level are taken into account, as this guarantees translating a vision into teaching practices” (Duarte, 2021).

The **funding** issue remains essential for the provision of GCE. According to academic and grey literature, there are two sides to this issue: on the one hand, there are not enough funds allocated to GCE in formal education (Damiani, 2020; Tarozzi & Inguaggiato, 2018); on the other, non-formal education providers such as CSOs are highly dependent from public funds (either at the national or European level) affecting the sustainability of long-term GCE projects (Coelho et al., 2022; CONCORD, 2018; Tarozzi, 2022). As noted in the latest paper on GCE developed by SOLIDAR,³ governments do not assign enough funding for GCE, revealing a low degree of priority of

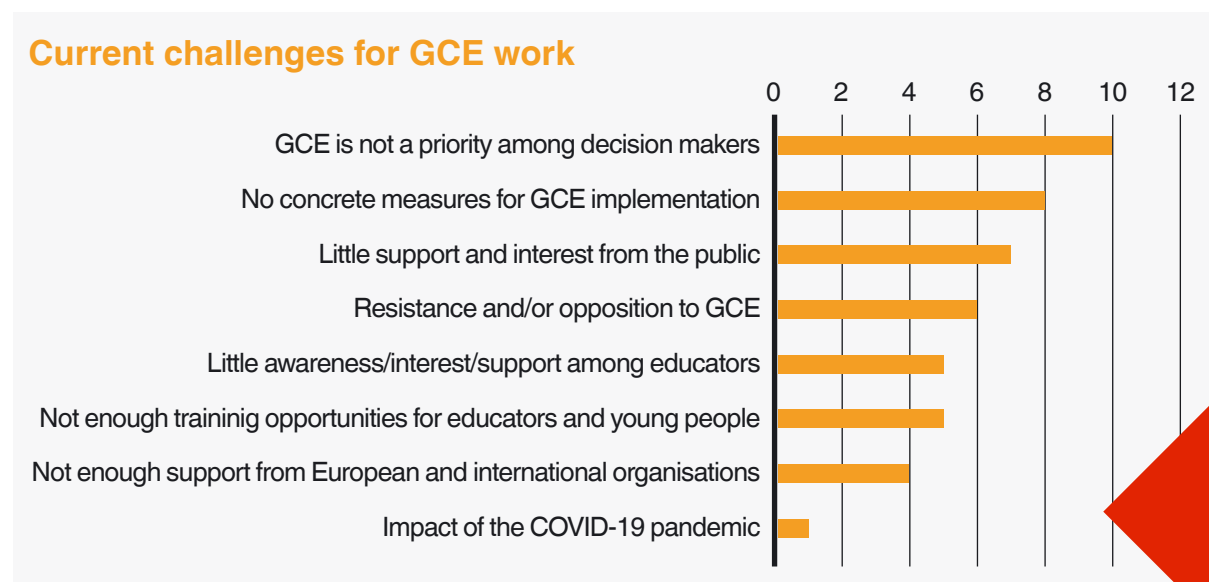


Figure 3: Current challenges for GCE work

3 https://www.solidar.org/system/downloads/attachments/000/001/148/original/GCE_Policy_Paper.pdf?1594110914

this topic at the policy level. However, as it will be discussed in the following section, a silver lining is the capacity of stakeholders from formal and non-formal education to establish European networks in their GCE work.

Though some of the challenges abovementioned require long-term solutions, there are also strengths that enhance the added value of GCE: **the increasing relevance of this topic; the crucial role of CSOs; the work that is being done with systematically marginalised groups; and the creation of networks** through multi-stakeholder partnerships at the local, national, and European level.

A growing body of scholarship about GCE attests for an **increasing relevance** of this topic in the policy discourse (Akkari & Maleq, 2020; Bosio & Waghid, 2023; Coelho et al., 2022; Damiani, 2020; de Vries, 2020; Duarte, 2021; Dyrness, 2021; Estellés & Fischman, 2021; Franch, 2020; Pashby & Costa, 2021; Pashby & Sund, 2020; Schippling, 2020; Szakács-Behling et al., 2021; Tarozzi, 2022; Tarozzi & Inguaggiato, 2018; Yemini et al., 2019). Although still at a low pace, the traditional understanding of citizenship is being reshaped, with an “increasing focus on alternative, cosmopolitan and multicultural identity models” (Akkari & Maleq, 2020). The latest editions of the Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor have underlined the importance of mainstreaming GCE, in particular in the face of the current climate crisis. Closely linked to the growing interest in GCE is the **crucial role that CSOs** have played through their work in GCE, by bringing the ‘voices from below’ – i.e. contributions from grassroots organisations – into the political arena. In many European countries, the third sector has influenced the development of GCE strategies, including Austria, Bulgaria, France, England, Latvia, Portugal, and Spain

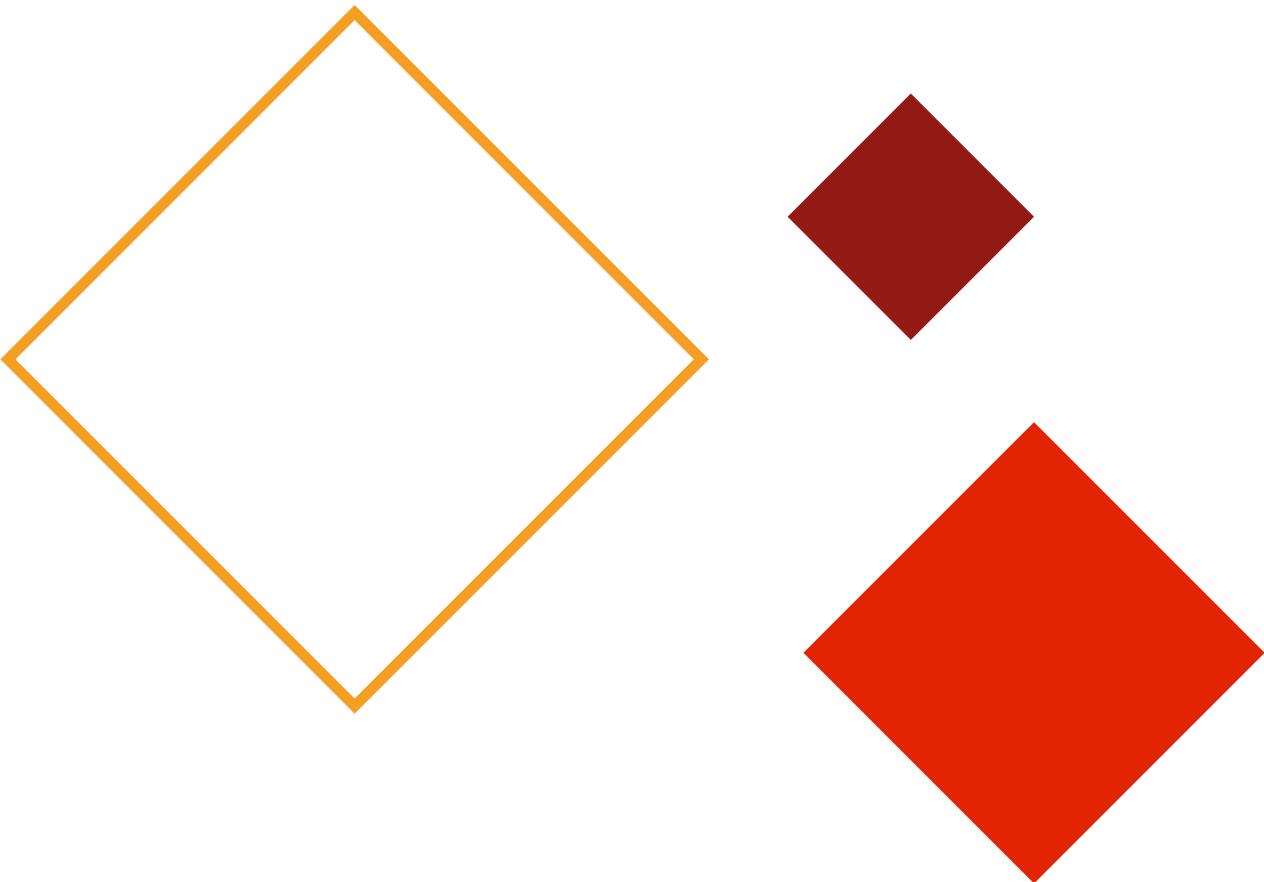
(Tarozzi, 2022). According to Tarozzi (2022), NGOs have an impact through “five areas of engagement and achievement”: promoting new sensitivity (towards GCE); advocacy and lobbying; teacher education; innovative school activities; and creating and circulating teaching materials (Tarozzi, 2022).

Nonetheless, one of the key areas where CSOs have filled the gap that formal education fails to bridge is through the work they do with **systematically marginalised groups**. As illustrated in the survey results for this study, most of SOLIDAR members and partners work with groups that are often excluded from formal education – including but not limited to migrants, refugees, Roma, NEETs, unemployed adults, etc. Hardandottir and Jonsson (2021) argue that critical and decentred GCE practices may help to “support “inclusive educational response to refugee youth within national educational settings” (Harðardóttir & Jónsson, 2021). Further, Vella (2022) explains how in an art project involving participants from different sub-Saharan African countries with artists and researchers, GCE helped “enrich socially engaged practices in art and education by subverting fixed citizen identities in the performance of pedagogical processes and acts of presentation” (Vella, 2022). And Dyrness (2021) discusses how the transnational young people’s lived experience in transnational fields “provides them with many of the skills, sensibilities and global awareness that are typically emphasised in global citizenship education programmes, but also with what is often missing from state-led GCE: opportunities to critically engage with global structures of power and inequality, to reflect on their own identities in relation to these structures, and to develop solidarity with others in the face of these structures” (Dyrness, 2021). Hence, the role of CSOs in providing learning opportunities to excluded groups of learners does not only address

a gap in terms of access to GCE education. CSOs also foster learning environments where learners can concretely develop skills and attitudes connected to GCE (such as democratic participation, advocacy, active citizenship, etc.) while connecting with actively participating in their learning experience. Ultimately, the work of CSOs in promoting GCE may encourage learners to develop their individual and collective agency and thus become active members of their communities.

Creating networks through multi-stakeholder partnerships is to a certain extent a red line that connects the previous three dots (the increasing relevance of GCE; the crucial role of CSOs; the work that is being done with systematically marginalised groups). This became apparent throughout the literature review and consultation in the survey and member interviews. Numerous studies have underlined the opportunities that

multi-stakeholder cooperation has generated for mainstreaming GCE (Akkari & Maleq, 2020; CONCORD, 2018; Khoo & Jørgensen, 2021; Tarozzi & Inguaggiato, 2018). Further, in CONCORD’s 2018 report on funding for GCE, among the key recommendations there is a focus on “multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral partnership building processes and structures with an emphasis on meaningful and active involvement of public sector institutions in education (ministries, relevant agencies)” and that for GCE in particular “it is important to think about cross-sectoral funding programmes at the national and EU level, in order to stimulate shared understanding of GE/GCE and co-operation between different sectors” (CONCORD, 2018). Data from the survey among SOLIDAR members and partners confirms this trend – cooperation with other NGOs at the local, national, and international level is an important lever for their work on GCE.



4. Pointers for improvement and further recommendations

Considering the findings of this study, as well as findings from previous research on GCE, the following pointers are proposed:

AT THE POLICY LEVEL:

- Increase the involvement of CSOs in the development of GCE strategies to ensure their relevance.
- Promote the participation of all actors of the school community (e.g., through a whole school approach) in the implementation of GCE at the school level.
- Ensure that funding opportunities are available in the medium- and long-term for GCE initiatives as part of a national strategy.
- Provide training and capacity building opportunities about GCE not only to teachers, but also to policymakers, school leaders, and all actors involved in formal education.
- Support higher education institutions to produce timely and evidence-informed research on GCE implementation in formal and non-formal education.
- Foster avenues for collaboration among formal, non-formal, and informal education providers based on a lifelong learning approach to GCE.

AT THE PRACTICE LEVEL:

- Open spaces for dialogue and collective reflection to identify potential pitfalls in the GCE practice.
- Inform GCE practitioners with a decolonial, transnational, and intersectional approach to ensure that GCE is accessible and inclusive.
- Adopt decolonial and intersectional approaches to GCE as part of curriculum development in formal and non-formal education.
- Maintain avenues for collaboration among formal, non-formal, and informal education providers based on a lifelong learning approach to GCE.

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Avenue des Arts, 50
1000 Brussels - Belgium
+32 2 479 33 72
www.solidar.org | @SOLIDAR_EU
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Author: Barbara Santibanez

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Through our member and partner organisations, SOLIDAR Foundation engages citizens in EU decision-making processes, empowers people through lifelong learning, and voices their concerns to the EU institutions by carrying out active lobbying, projects of collective action, policy monitoring, research and awareness-raising.



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