

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION – A POLITICAL RIGHT?

POLICY ROUNDTABLE

European Parliament, 08.06.2023, 10.00-12.00

Opening Remarks

MEP Massimiliano Smeriglio, S&D CULT Coordinator, started the discussion by highlighting the need to find a way to defend human rights and learn the lessons from the war, in terms of peace, and that Global Citizenship Education (GCE) can provide the framework. He sets out the aim of the roundtable, namely, to stimulate the debate on the usefulness of GCE and to see how to achieve a new perception of European integration and citizenship. In this key moment ahead of the European Parliament elections, it is crucial to realise the importance of people receiving education so that they know how the system works, and their agency in it. Citizenship education might already exist in some of the curricula, but the shortcomings in the methods in which it is taught shall be addressed. Noting the issue of the distinction between formal, non-formal and informal education, MEP Smeriglio questions whether in the absence of an international approach to education there shall be a collective approach as opposed to a nationalistic one to citizenship education.

Mikael Leyi, Secretary General of SOLIDAR & SOLIDAR Foundation, remarks that education should not be limited to only the skills agenda but adopt a holistic approach to education aimed at fostering democratic participation in society. Increasing inequalities and social injustice permeate the discussions of the GCE. In the context of parallel and mutually reinforcing crises, he pinpoints the kickstarting of the conversation on GCE, which is key for SOLIDAR Foundation's membership. Indeed, today's discussion is the starting point for a broader discussion on GCE which will culminate with a policy paper and a manifesto for campaigning towards the European Parliament Elections in 2024.

He reiterates that this is a watershed moment for Europe, one year ahead of the European Parliament elections, and it is paramount to increase the voting turnout. He highlights that we have a responsibility to underline the risks the elections results can pose, and we must prevent them, in particular the growth of the extreme political right. Not understanding politics is a prevalent sentiment in Europe and it is our duty to tackle it. He concludes that to work on GCE means to embed a deep understanding of one's community in the international and global context.

GCE across practices and countries - Case studies

MEP Marcos Ros Sempere, S&D CULT MEP, asserts that any form of education, be it non-formal, informal or formal, is a fundamental right. Education is a key driver for equal opportunities, and we must work tirelessly to make sure that we succeed in the realisation of the 2025 European Education Area (EEA). GCE

is a crucial tool that we have, as values of tolerance, inclusion and human rights are undebatable, thus the EU should have more power in the field of education.

He notes that young people are actually more aware and engaged in climate issues. Concerning young people, he adds the importance of fighting against any form of harassment at school, such as bullying, and that we need to draw up a European strategy on cyber bullying. He sums up that our main aim is to have a holistic approach and to disseminate EU values while improving our society.

Inés Molinero, Project Officer, [Liga Española de la Educación y la Cultura Popular](#), GCE in Spain, conveys that the organisation sees the work on citizenship education carried out at SOLIDAR as guidelines, when answering how GCE can be supported. One of their actions is to promote citizenship education through informal and non-formal education as well as through cooperation with formal education institutions. A lot of work has been done in the past on citizenship education, and it shall now be discussed in the policy framework.

She mentions that La Liga has a clear idea of what citizenship should be and how it should keep abreast the shift towards the global dimension. For this reason, it is paramount for civil society to work together and improve education in citizenship and global citizenship. From a national perspective, she reminds the audience of the reform implemented by the conservative government led by Rajoy and which equated civic education and religious education in Spain. La Liga has been advocating for this reform to be called back and, during the government led by Sanchez, a new reform was adopted to restore citizenship education as such. Nevertheless, this proves how politically sensitive this topic is, and thus the upcoming elections in Spain pose a question on new reforms in this sector. On the formal education context and based on the experience of La Liga, she further suggests that teachers must be provided with support, such as Initial Teachers Training and Continuous Professional Development as well as materials, which require reforms to modernise the system.

Lastly, she stresses the lack of structural funding as the leading reason for the absence of sustainable strategies on this subject. Moreover, she highlights that challenges stem from the new ways in which young people participate and communicate, as there are constantly evolving social realities to adapt to and that formal education struggles to keep up with. In this sense, further cooperation between Civil Society Organisations and formal education institutions would allow for better pedagogical adaptability and as a result, increased uptake of learning opportunities related to GCE.

Salima Chitalia, Project Manager, [Pour La Solidarité](#), GCE in Belgium, shares that her organisation, a Think-and-Do Thank, is also active in the field, having developed a unique methodology of work for the socio-professional insertion of young people notably through a programme, [100%Jeunes](#), in which NEETs (young people neither in education, employment or training) are embarked in various multidisciplinary activities through a collective and individual path. She introduces the [AKA \(Awareness, Knowledge, Action\) Active Citizens](#) project, consisting of global citizenship-based activities resulting in transformational effects on educators and organisations. An aspect learnt during the ongoing implementation of the activities in this project was the need, in Belgium and more specifically in Brussels, for better and

enhanced cooperation between civil society organisations promoting non-formal education opportunities for young people and those of the socio-cultural sector addressing the needs of the NEETs.

Marcella Milana, Associate Professor, University of Verona, introduces an academic perspective, stating that GCE is the natural development of various strands promoted by NGOs. In the past, it was more based on intercultural education combined with citizenship education, but in the 21st century it evolved into environmental concerns.

In Italy, there have been some efforts to introduce GCE, also using the European Social Fund (ESF, now ESF+), by adopting the GCE terminology in schooling framework. In 2019, civic education was introduced in the curriculum, and it was based on citizenship, sustainability, and digitalisation. In the Italian context, there has been improvement in framing, but there is no medium- and long-term security in terms of funding, echoing what was shared by Inés Molinero in her intervention. And along with Inés, she also identifies the problem of the implementation of the strategy being too reliable on the government, thus susceptible to government changes and instabilities.

She notes that the main question is how GCE could be implemented, given the absence of research and the fact that teachers have difficulties on how to incorporate the knowledge into the lessons. Considering that CSOs and other institutions have previously promoted GCE, for instance in 2017, a strategy could consist of gathering various stakeholders. Some of them are represented by a group of academics (such as the UNESCO Chair in GCE) that are trying to promote knowledge on GCE. She concludes that GCE as a political right would benefit from more knowledge and methods on how it could be done in practice.

Roundtable discussion - Policy perspectives at EU level

MEP Domènec Ruiz Devesa, S&D CULT MEP introduces the topic of human rights in the context of citizenship and recalls the existence of various instruments in place, such as the ones handled by the UN. This is because to fully empower people to be citizens, human rights must be enforced and respected.

MEP Devesa highlights that the European dimension of citizenship is not philosophical, and it is our duty to sustain it as established in the treaties. Even though limited, the Union should have the capacity to work on citizenship. He suggests developing a demonstrative curriculum, which could be legitimate considering that students are already benefitting from Erasmus and mobility at the EU level. The EU could use the existing venues where competencies can be shifted. A minimum knowledge of the EU in the member states is a desirable outcome, but the question that persists is how it can be delivered.

Stefan Zotti, Team Leader, DG EAC, presents the European Commission's priority which shifted towards GCE since 2018, following a [Council Recommendation](#) which shows the ambition of the member states on the matter. Since 2021, various programmes benefitted from funding, such as Jeann Monnet for schools and teacher trainings, and more innovative programmes are expected in 2023. The European Commission is also providing teaching materials to teachers, such as toolkits for teachers in secondary school. However, if teachers do not feel comfortable with teaching these topics, there will be an issue.

Mr. Zotti further notes that the EC does not only contribute to the dimension of GCE on a cognitive level but also on a behavioral level through its support of volunteering activities such as the European Solidarity Corps and various humanitarian aid activities. Moreover, the high-level Working Group on equality and values in education and training focuses on European cooperation in education and training in an inclusive manner, advancing the work of the Commission in this direction.

When it comes to sustainability, Mr. Zotti mentions the Education for Climate Coalition, which brings young people to work together on sustainability projects. It consists of 8,000 members and is based on citizenship education in practice.

Mr. Zotti confirms the competence issue at the EU level and asserts that the European Commission gave and continues to give impulses for citizenship education but there are limitations. He concludes by saying that more efforts should be put into citizenship education and global citizenship education.

Rilli Lappalainen, President of CONCORD and Chair of Bridge 47 presents the GCE as one of the tools at [CONCORD](#), and that [Bridge 47](#) promotes GCE, aiming to bring a global perspective into the topic. A key point in the discussion is that not only what the EU as a collective is doing is relevant but to acknowledge that the others are watching how the EU behaves at the global level, hence having the potential to set an example.

Mr. Lappalainen points out the necessity to think of people's behaviour and how and what they consume, and not only of they have the tools in schools. Moreover, it is crucial to see how non-formal and informal education can work together.

Considering the reality of the shrinking space for citizens and civil society in Europe, it is paramount to sustain the core values at any step of proceeding with good work. Indeed, the European Year of Skills shall not be limited to the skills in terms of working life but skills for life as a whole.

Liam Wegimont, Executive Director, GENE highlights the fragmentation of efforts as a challenge to achieving global citizenship education in light of several topics: citizenship, peace, sustainability, etc. In this context, he applauds the [European Declaration of Global Education \(the Dublin Declaration\)](#) for gathering all of them under the umbrella term of Global Education, pointing at the need for strong engagement from stakeholders. He further praises the Dublin Declaration for being built on international agreements and for pinpointing a strategic framework focused on commitments, aiming at making Global Education a political priority. He reiterates the need to ensure qualitative, inclusive education.

Mr. Wegimont indicates that the right to global education is not new: the movement towards the right of GCE is not a vague aspiration but a path that has been worked on. GCE has been included in recent presidency programmes, and one of the things that need to be maintained is national structural funding. Mr. Wegimont concludes that this is not an agenda of the political left; we need a broad coalition in the political spectrum because this is an issue of humanity.

Erika Maria Rodriguez Somlyay, Policy and Project Officer, LLLP notes that a lot of work has been done collectively on GCE, such as fostering fruitful discussions and documentation ([SOLIDAR Citizenship and](#)

[Lifelong Learning monitors](#)), calling for the recognition of transversal skills. The LLP work aims to see how GCE can be embedded into existing frameworks of links between local, regional, national, international and global. GCE must be treated as a lifelong and life-wide right, and it would bring citizens together to work on issues that concern everyone.

As a practical recommendation, Ms. Rodriguez Somlyay mentions the importance of the nature of assessment, as the members call for a move towards a more balanced approach regarding the assessment of practices, maybe more formative.

Ute Ackermann Boeros, Vice President, EuroClio affirms that making GCE a political right requires a big outreach, capacity building and networks. She claims that there is a clear link between cultural heritage and citizenship, hence one of our aims should be preventing the abuse of citizenship education and history in schools (one example being the war in Ukraine). She mentions the successful work carried out by EuroClio through projects in Georgia and Western Balkans, aimed at fostering inclusive networks and tolerance building through history education.

Ms. Ackermann Boeros highlights also the importance of teachers' perspective. The data collected by [EuroClio](#) shows the need to address individual teachers, as issues such as corruption and reduced democracy are prevalent hindering progress. Teachers feel the lack of support from the respective education ministers. Therefore, to support value-based education, it is important to gather various groups and stakeholders and address teachers and student teachers – individual teachers need to be empowered into thinking that they can contribute.

Discussion

Stefan Zotti adds that obstacles for implementation may be found on the ground, meaning that not all changes discussed at a theoretical level are feasible to be applied in practice, considering the local and regional reality. For instance, in the current situation, a problem for teachers would be that they would not know what to teach, which is beyond their teaching competences. Mr. Zotti insists that discussions with the member states must be sustained and supported.

Elisa Briga, Deputy Secretary General at EFIL, takes the floor from the audience to stress the role of volunteers and welcoming communities, and that education does not lie solely in the hands of formal education, but that there should be an overarching effort, conveyed by politics and policies and implemented holistically.

Ute Ackermann Boeros underlines that enhancing teachers' competences and confidence is key. She claims to be fond of the collaboration between formal and informal, but there is still a lot to do, including associations, projects etc. There should be more avenues to accommodate this holistic approach to education.

Liam Wegimont notes that cross party and cross political spectrum support is necessary. Moreover, institutional and inter-institutional coordination is necessary, such as the coherence between DG EAC

and DG INTPA. GCE is at the core of a necessary reform, at the heart of the renaissance of education and global solidarity in Europe.

Concluding remarks

MEP João Albuquerque, S&D CULT concludes the roundtable with a reflection on education: in the public policy there have been constant changes and adaptations, thus modernisation, but in the educational sector we are stuck with archaic methodology and teaching methods.

MEP Albuquerque pinpoints that the primary goal of education as consolidation of our democracy is to give access to everyone. However, socio-economic backgrounds are prevalent for the levels of education. The problem of having equality in education is far from being resolved since there are people left behind in the educational systems, in all classrooms. Hence, he invites us to reflect on what we expect from schools in the 21st century.

When talking about Global Citizenship Education, MEP Albuquerque calls on the need to reflect on the level of inclusion we want to promote, and on the identities, as there is a big difference between the political left and political right, since the topic becomes ideological, and it is counterproductive to the point.

Schools and educational systems are the way to promote chance in education – but what is the role of schools? Considering that the current systems test results and not knowledge, neither the required competences, he brings up the question on how we could make schools and systems promote inclusion.

Regarding the European Year of Skills, he notes that there is a systemic issue that needs a systemic approach; schools should not be focused only to give the competences that are needed by the labour market, but the focus should be on transversal capacities and skills, and problem-solving capabilities. Schools bear the capacity to be the most tangible educational experience for several people.

Mr. Albuquerque embeds the GCE in the discussion of voting at an early age, considering the reluctance among young people due to lack of knowledge and preparedness. Therefore, investment in GCE should be at the center of educational policies, as a complementary to technical education. He underscores that we cannot afford to disregard citizens participation, and that we need to form citizens and no longer workers and consumers. Finally, GCE enables us to focus on all generations, to allow all people to take part in democratic activities since there is a tendency for the elderly to be more active, and they need to adapt to the modernised tools.

At the end of the roundtable, **Mikael Leyi** concludes that GCE is not only a lifelong learning journey but a lifelong continuous work for democracy, and he invites all participants to stay up to date with the work that SOLIDAR Foundation will be developing over the course of 2023 on this important topic.