

# Policy Paper on Global Citizenship Education and Democratic Participation in Europe

## Essentials

European Parliamentary Elections 2024 took place in times of a low point for global democracy. In recent years, European democracy has faced challenges, with lower levels of trust in democratic institutions, particularly among young people. Young voters are more likely to feel disconnected from EU institutions and are less likely to vote, partly due to this mistrust.

Global Citizenship Education is designed to build the competences needed for democratic participation, teaching people about their roles as active, informed citizens within both local and global communities. This education strengthens trust in democratic institutions and encourages (young) people to be involved in shaping the future of the EU.

The SOLIDAR Foundation *Paper on Global Citizenship Education and Democratic Participation in Europe* shows that GCE can make a real difference, helping people engage more in democratic processes and fostering long-lasting civic competences. This study confirms that citizenship education increases young people's trust in democracy and boosts political participation.

For GCE to reach its full potential, policymakers at the EU level must commit to improving and expanding citizenship education to promote effective GCE approaches and long-term impact:

- **Hands-On Learning:** Practical experience in democratic participation, like school projects or community initiatives, builds lifelong civic skills.
- **Whole-School Approach:** Schools that emphasize democratic values across all activities, from curriculum to school culture and governance, see the best outcomes in fostering civic engagement.
- **Supporting Marginalized Students:** Citizenship education is particularly impactful for learners from underrepresented backgrounds, helping to close gaps in political engagement.
- **Digital Citizenship:** As political engagement increasingly moves online, GCE must include a digital dimension to prepare learners for active citizenship in digital spaces.
- **Preparing Teachers for Effective GCE:** For educators to handle complex topics and support a safe and inclusive learning space, citizenship education must be integral to both pre-service and in-service teacher training.
- **GCE in vocational education and training:** Including VET learners in citizenship education provision in each EU state is crucial for ensuring their political engagement.
- **Building Stronger Foundations for GCE in the EU:** A unified EU approach to GCE would enhance quality and consistency across member states. Programs like Erasmus+ could support teacher training, and enhanced collaboration with institutions like the Council of Europe would strengthen GCE. Reliable, long-term research into GCE's impact could further guide effective policies.