

POLICY PAPER
on Global Citizenship Education
and Democratic Participation
in Europe

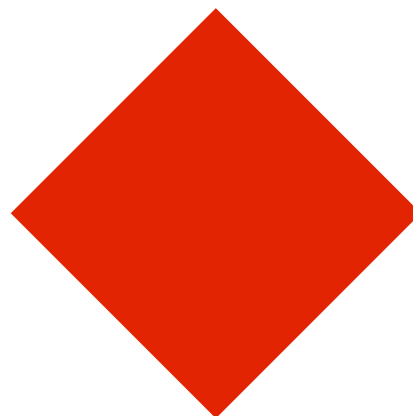
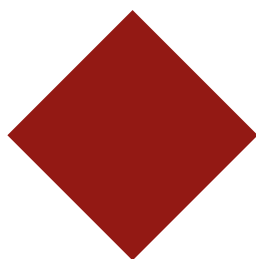
SOLIDAR FOUNDATION



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Foreword

Faced with a fragmented European Parliament containing multiple political groups with anti-democratic tendencies and post-truth politics, it is **imperative to urgently invest in educational activities that foster an active, informed citizenry**. This paper explores the potential of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) to counter these trends as a transformative tool to enhance democratic participation in the European Union (EU).

The need for robust political education has not been this urgent for decades. Low voter turnout among youth in European elections, the rise of Eurosceptic sentiments and autocratic tendencies, underscore a broader crisis of democratic engagement. One of the root causes to these trends is a lack of trust in the EU's democratic institutions. In response, **Global Citizenship Education** – a concept that envisions political education on a global scale with the aim to cultivate a sense of belonging to a global community – **emerges as a powerful tool to combat these challenges**.

At SOLIDAR Foundation and with our diverse network of member organizations, we have long been committed to promoting GCE, both on the ground and in policy discussions. For years, we have worked to empower individuals through education that promotes democratic values, human rights, and social justice, recognising that these values are essential to fostering an active and engaged citizenry. However, as this paper underscores, much more remains to be done to ensure that GCE is effectively implemented across Europe and that it reaches all learners, especially



the most vulnerable or marginalised. The recommendations in this paper point to the urgent need for coordinated efforts and stronger policy to convert GCE into a cornerstone of educational and democratic systems throughout the EU.

Drawing on existing evidence, the paper highlights how GCE can nurture democratic values and promote trust in institutions, both at the national and European levels. It underscores the role of participatory learning, whole-community approaches, and the integration of digital tools to engage learners in meaningful democratic practices. Moreover, it emphasises that educators' competences in delivering quality GCE are critical for ensuring its success. The recommendations presented in this paper aim high and are at the same time very hands-on, calling for the development of a coherent, cross-curricular framework for GCE across Europe. Our recommendations also stress the importance of collaboration among formal, non-formal, and informal educational sectors, ensuring that GCE is not confined to classrooms but becomes a lifelong learning process. If adopted, they have the potential to shape the future of education and political participation in Europe for generations to come.

As we face the challenges of the 21st century – from global inequalities and the ongoing planetary crisis to wars, increased political polarisation and the accelerating digital transition – **lifelong learning policies that nurture global and European citizenship must be a cornerstone of our collective response.** By cultivating an informed, active, and engaged citizenry, we lay the groundwork for a more resilient and democratic Europe. One that can deliver an inclusive vision for our societies while respecting the planetary boundaries and acting on the basis of international solidarity.

*Mikael Leyi, Secretary General
SOLIDAR & SOLIDAR Foundation*



Executive summary

Within this paper, Global Citizenship Education (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” (Andreotti, 2014). The paper analyses the role of GCE in enhancing democratic participation within the European Union (EU). This focus is driven by the low turnout of young people in European elections over the past decade, with the exception of the last two election periods. The latest elections demonstrated the increasing popularity of eurosceptic political actors among youth. One of the decisive factors behind this choice is a lack of trust in EU democratic institutions.

To demonstrate the importance of GCE in promoting democratic values and fostering trust in democratic institutions within the EU, the paper reviews existing evidence on the impact of citizenship education on political participation and EU policies in this field. The paper concludes with a number of recommendations to strengthen democratic engagement through education across Europe. These recommendations include the promotion of participatory and experiential learning, as well as the implementation of cross-curricular and whole-school approach. Non-formal education methodologies play an important role in GCE implementation both at schools and in non-governmental organisations to achieve GCE learning objectives. Collaboration among formal, non-formal, and informal education stakeholders can put these concepts into action. Quality citizenship education plays an important role in the democratic engagement of

underprivileged students and in addressing inequalities in democratic participation. The increasing level of democratic engagement on digital platforms necessitates a digital element in citizenship education. Teachers’ competences are key to the quality of citizenship education and must be integrated into pre-service and in-service teacher training.

As recognized in EU policy frameworks, common European citizenship education policies are fundamental to the promotion of European and global dimensions of citizenship that are necessary to achieve the EU’s goals in this area. While several EU policy documents outline existing policy gaps, the EU must follow up on its own agenda and develop programmatic frameworks on citizenship education with clear quality criteria, methodologies, and practice recommendations for education stakeholders in Europe. The concept of citizenship promoted by the EU must contain references to global and European dimensions and include the principles of democracy and human rights. The development of a citizenship education framework for vocational education and training (VET) could become a unique and innovative EU initiative. Various resources can be used to achieve these goals. Better cohesion among the available GCE funding schemes can increase the impact of regional GCE initiatives and streamline a consistent EU message in citizenship education. Close cooperation with the Council of Europe is an additional resource that can reinforce the quality of citizenship education in the EU. Research cooperation at the EU level would expand the available data on the effects of citizenship education in the EU context.

Introduction

This paper is part of a series of publications coordinated by SOLIDAR Foundation on the impact, relevance, and current policy state of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in the European Union (EU). The previous paper, We All Belong: The role of GCE in supporting democratic participation and addressing current global challenges (Santibanez, 2023), provided a general overview on the modes of GCE provision in the EU member states and the relevance of GCE in informal and non-formal education. This publication focuses on the interconnection between democratic participation and GCE. **Democratic participation concerns everyone living in the EU** and is integral to the concept of lifelong learning as it is understood within the EU context (Council of the European Union, 2018). However, in this paper, we pay particular attention to the role of GCE in strengthening the democratic participation of young people. This focus is driven by the importance that the EU places on this specific target group in its policies aimed at enhancing democratic engagement. Additionally, more data is available at the regional level on their values, political views, and actions (Del Monte, 2023). Young people are also more involved in formal and non-formal education activities, and the impact of education interventions on their behaviour is more accessible.

The “shocking absenteeism” of young people from European elections has been a prominent topic among scholars and policymakers for at least the past two decades (Dezelan, 2023). Various studies have confirmed that young voters lack the intention to participate in electoral processes or other civic activities

(Ellison, Pollock, & Grimm, 2020; Gentry, 2018). In this context, the increased participation of young people in the 2019 European Parliament elections seemed to be an unexpected turn. Among young people under 25, 42% voted, which represented a +14 percentage point increase compared to 2014 (Zalc, Becuwe, & Buruian, 2019). The infamous millennials aged 25-39, who according to some studies have fully lost their faith in democracies (Foa, Klassen, Wenger, Rand, & Slade, 2020), increased their participation by 14 percentage points, reaching 47%. Some experts claimed that the unexpected turnout was related to the update of the voting calendar, which made the European elections coincide with national elections (Dezelan, 2023). However, the 2024 Eurobarometer study showed that, on average, 64% of young people in Europe intended to vote, confirming the new trend (European Commission, 2024).

The low turnout among young voters was hardly an imaginary problem. For years, age had been one of the strongest predictors of voting activity – the younger the eligible voter, the less likely they were to vote (Dezelan, 2023). There is still a significant discrepancy in the number of young people who intend to vote among the EU member states: in some countries, less than a third of young people intend to vote, while in other countries, the numbers go beyond 70% (European Commission, 2024). At the same time, considering the rising numbers among young voters, it makes sense to step away from the traditional narrative of youth political apathy and look more attentively at what this absenteeism could signify (Cammaerts,

Bruter, Banaji, Harrison, & Anstead, 2013). We discover that young people are interested in politics, engaged in civic activities, and care about many issues on the political agenda (European Commission, 2024; European Parliament, 2021). Young people do not vote or are hesitant to vote because they feel that their voice does not count, and they do not believe that voting can bring about change (Zalc et al., 2019). They are not careless, but they do not feel heard or represented by traditional democratic parties (Maraffa, 2024). They are anxious about the ongoing war in Europe, climate change, and the increasing cost of living (Schläger, Katsioulis, & Engels, 2024). They also use civic engagement platforms that are different from the traditional channels reached by democratic parties and decision-makers (Dezelan, 2023). As a result, in 2024, in the EU member states with the highest number of eligible voters – Germany, France, and Italy – young people largely voted for far-right parties, often criticized for their anti-democratic narratives (Ipsos, 2024; Schläger et al., 2024; Statista, 2024).

Clearly, **many young people do not trust existing political institutions** and, to vote against the status quo, end up voting for parties leading an anti-democratic discourse (Ellison et al., 2020). To sustain democracy, education cannot simply be about existing institutions; it must also be about educating for and through the values that democratic institutions are based on. In 2024, young people agreed that their education prepared them for voting (European Commission, 2024). Another step is needed to ensure that this education promotes the values and experiences of democratic engagement. **Relevant and inclusive policies are essential for effective practices**, and the purpose of this publication is to offer recommendations for

education policies that strengthen democratic engagement.

Global Citizenship Education (GCE) aims to **strengthen learners' competences for democratic participation**. It is “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” (Andreotti, 2014). According to Sustainable Development Goal 4 on “inclusive and equitable quality education,” GCE is integral to quality education and includes approaches such as human rights and citizenship education (UN, 2015). In the context of GCE, democratic participation involves not only voting but also other forms of civic engagement, such as participation in community and international projects, advocacy, awareness-raising, forming partnerships, and other activities that address global issues. Moreover, global citizenship competences comprise a behavioural dimension as well as values, knowledge, and attitudes (UNESCO, 2014). Global citizens share human rights values, respect diversity, and understand local, national, and global issues. Taking into consideration the EU context and the focus of this paper, additionally, we look at educational approaches that strengthen democratic values and attitudes, such as support for democratic procedures and trust in democratic institutions.

To include all relevant evidence, within this publication, we also refer to citizenship education in general. Citizenship education is “educational theory and practice concerned with promoting a desired kind of citizenship in a given society” and it “refers to membership in a political community” (Hämäläinen & Nivala, 2023). The values and goals of this political community delineate the specific forms of

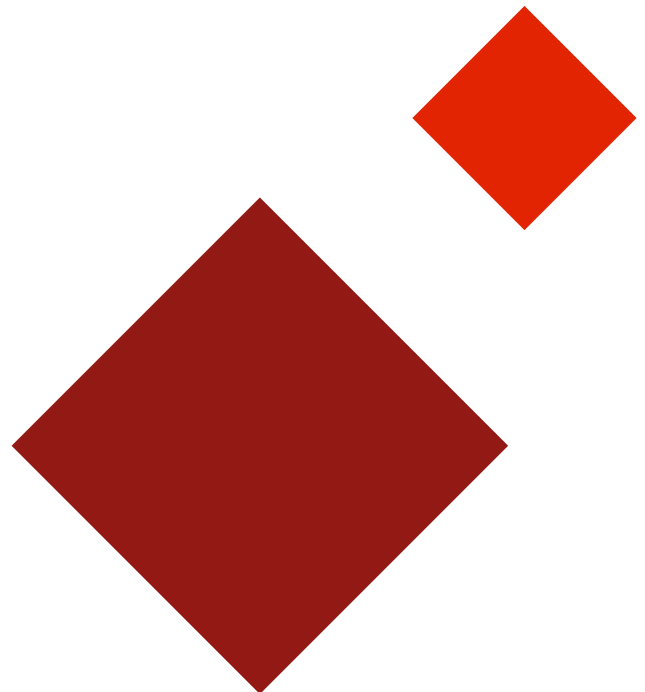


citizenship education and their content that are dominant in a specific context. When it comes to the EU, two main approaches emerge in policy documents. Responsibility and participation in civic and social life are central to active citizenship (Bacian & Huemer, 2023). Democratic citizenship education is aimed at the development of democratic engagement and values (Himmelmann, 2013). European and global dimensions of citizenship are integral to the promotion of fundamental EU values (European Parliament, 2022) and, for that reason, global citizenship education is closely related to the EU vision of the desirable political engagement expected from EU citizens. Another emerging dimension in Europe is digital citizenship education, which promotes similar values and attitudes but in digital environments (Frau-Meigs, O'Neill, Soriani, & Tomé, 2017). Finally, the adjectives “civic” and “citizenship” are used interchangeably in this publication due to the fact that GCE foresees engagement as a member of the community (“civic”), but also as a legal status that implies rights and obligations as a citizen (“citizenship”).

This paper has the following objectives:

- Provide an overview of currently available evidence on the impact of GCE on democratic participation and define best practices.
- Map GCE policy developments in the EU, with a particular focus on democratic participation.
- Offer recommendations on improving GCE policies and practices across all types of education in the EU to strengthen democratic participation.

The methodological approach and paper structure are closely related to these objectives. In the first chapter, we conduct a literature review to analyse the evidence on the effects of citizenship education on democratic attitudes and point out what works best according to the available data. The second chapter examines the current EU policy framework in the area of global citizenship and citizenship education and offers insights from the field based on the experiences of SOLIDAR network members. These experiences were gathered through 2 online semi-structured interviews and a focus group, involving 6 network representatives from 3 EU member states. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are drawn from the scientific evidence, policy analysis, and field experiences for enhancing democratic participation through GCE provision in the EU.



Chapter 1. Evidence on citizenship education and its impact on enhancing democratic participation

The concept of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) has recently emerged in the academic field, and as such, there is **a lack of evidence** specifically related to this term in the current state of research (Ahmed & Mohammed, 2022). Narrowing the focus to GCE's effects on democratic participation would further limit the scope of relevant studies. GCE is a broad framework that includes several educational approaches, including citizenship education. Therefore, to provide a more comprehensive overview of the evidence, this chapter includes empirical studies on citizenship education. While this chapter mainly addresses citizenship education, we recognize that incorporating **a global dimension is essential** for enhancing its relevance and preparing learners to engage with global issues that are interconnected.

Numerous articles analyse the effects of citizenship education on various learning outcomes. Considering new forms of political engagement beyond voting, we focus on the impact of education on diverse forms of democratic participation (Dezelan, 2023). In addition to individual studies, five literature reviews support the collection and analysis of evidence on the impact of citizenship education (Campbell, 2019; Donbavand & Hoskins, 2021; Geboers, Geijsel, Admiraal, & Dam, 2013; Jerome, Hyder, Hilal, & Kisby,

2024; Manning & Edwards, 2014). Many publications that focus on short-term results of citizenship education, as well as several longitudinal studies conclude that **education can significantly affect civic engagement.**

The relationship between education and voting behaviour is confirmed by numerous studies related to elections, including EU Parliamentary elections – the more time a citizen spends in the education system, the greater the likelihood that they will vote. (Campbell, 2006; European Commission, 2024; Zalc et al., 2019). Moreover, **it is not only the level but also the content of education that influences political choices.**

Three longitudinal studies provide evidence that citizenship education can substantially impact democratic participation. Through controlled trials, Gill et al. (2018) analysed the voting behaviour of students who graduated from a school emphasizing promoting civic engagement. The authors discovered that enrolling in this school significantly increased the probability of students voting compared to those who did not attend the school. However, it is worth noting that even though admission to the school occurred through a randomized lottery, students still made an active choice to enrol or not. It is possible that students who chose this particular school already



had an interest in active citizenship, thus multiple factors could have influenced their voting behaviours. Nevertheless, the **proven positive effect of citizenship education** in this case cannot be negated.

Another longitudinal study confirms that factors beyond formal education interventions can enhance the effects of citizenship education provided at school. The combined influences of school and family amplify citizenship education effects in the short term and sustain them over the long term (McDevitt & Kioussis, 2006). The involvement of parents in discussions on social and civic issues along with education provided at schools leads to democratic participation. The third longitudinal study, which is important for our understanding of citizenship education provision beyond the secondary level, also supports this conclusion. In a rare 20-year field experiment, Holbein (2017) studied the impact of education to social and emotional skills in early childhood on future voting behaviour of students. The data indicate that developing psychosocial skills at an early age significantly impacts

adult political behaviours. Therefore, a lifelong learning approach to citizenship education for democratic participation is crucial. Longitudinal studies allow for GCE analysis from a lifelong perspective. It is important to note that all three longitudinal studies were conducted in the US. To ensure regional relevance, similar studies should be conducted in Europe.

Young people's civic engagement can be fostered by building their confidence in their civic and political capacities (Manganelli, Lucidi, & Alivernini, 2014). According to available studies, **several approaches to citizenship education significantly positively impact democratic attitudes and behaviour**. The school analysed by Gill et al. (2018) follows a whole school approach that implies an inclusive and democratic school climate and governance, teaching and learning, as well as community cooperation (European Commission, 2015). All components of the whole-school approach are also identified by two other longitudinal studies as essential for achieving behavioural change. McDevitt and Kioussis (2006) and

Holbein (2017) emphasize cooperation with families and the community and a cross-curricular approach to citizenship education. Successful citizenship education practices described in these papers involved various activities beyond a single school project or subject. The traditional approach of teaching civics as a single subject can strengthen political knowledge, but it does not lead to higher voter turnout or other behavioural manifestations (Campbell & Niemi, 2016; Goodwin, Greasley, John, & Richardson, 2010; Weinschenk & Dawes, 2022). The same applies to education about the EU. Teaching through a single subject focusing on information transfer improves knowledge about the EU but only slightly affects attitudes towards the EU and motivation to vote (Oberle & Forstmann, 2015). In contrast, simulation games promote both knowledge and trust in EU institutions (Oberle & Leunig, 2016). Experiential learning thus provides better results for influencing attitudes and motivation. Participatory approaches central to citizenship education can be integrated throughout the curriculum in various subjects and extracurricular activities. Engaging and including students in their learning process gives them valuable experience in examining emerging issues and making choices relevant to their future (Blevins, LeCompte, Riggers-Piehl, Scholten, & Magill, 2021). An election-based curriculum is another way for students to learn how to make their own choices and take responsibility for them (McDevitt & Kioussis, 2006).

Beyond individual activities and subjects, **an inclusive and democratic school ethos is crucial for achieving significant long-term results** with citizenship education (Campbell, 2019). School ethos, comparable to school culture and governance deriving from the

whole-school approach, signifies safety, inclusion, and participation opportunities for each school community member (CoE, 2018). Relationships among staff, between staff and students, and between staff and parents are decisive for trust within the school. Global experiences show that interactions between students and teachers can enhance or nullify the effects of interventions aimed at political engagement (Finkel & Ernst, 2005). School policies must reflect the values promoted in classrooms – human rights, democratic participation principles, and equity. To ensure experiential learning of democracy for students, decision-making structures and procedures should consider all school stakeholders. Participation in school governance correlates positively with the degree of democratic participation over time (Keating & Janmaat, 2016). Interestingly, participatory approaches in citizenship education **particularly benefit socio-economically disadvantaged students**. Their political engagement is more significantly impacted compared to their more privileged peers (Liu, Donbavand, Hoskins, Janmaat, & Kavadias, 2021). Thus, participatory citizenship education approaches can address inequalities in democratic participation across different social backgrounds.

Qualification of school staff for establishing effective citizenship education practices is essential. The empirical evidence connects young people's civic competences and political participation with the qualification of teachers and calls for strengthening their competences both through in-service and pre-service training (Barr et al., 2015; Pontes, Henn, & Griffiths, 2019). Even though many teachers claim that they promote citizenship education through their work without a specific training, the most efficient

approach is systematic and deliberate (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020). Professional development of educators for teaching social and political matters to promote active citizenship through relevant content, participatory methods, and assessment translates into greater knowledge and skills of students (Daas, ten Dam, & Dijkstra, 2016). To remain relevant, teacher education should include a global dimension so that educators could develop an understanding of the interconnected world among their students (Schugurensky & Wolhuter, 2020).

One of the most notable trends in democratic participation is the development of digital engagement that is especially prominent among young people. Results of the EU elections in 2024 demonstrated that addressing young people as citizens on digital platforms of their political engagement is crucial to include them in the democratic political discourse (European Commission, 2024). Many young citizens who do not feel represented or heard by formal democratic institutions engage online by joining political groups, signing petitions, and donating money (Chou, Gagnon, Hartung, & Pruitt, 2017). Furthermore, the “global” component of GCE is inseparable from digital communication and engagement (Helm, Baroni, & Acconcia, 2024). To address young people’s attitudes and behaviour in the global interconnected world, **citizenship education must include a digital dimension**. Currently available data confirm that similar methods are applicable and effective in digital citizenship education as in traditional approaches.

Interaction with other users and the exchange of opinions, rather than just acquiring information, lead to a sense of inclusion in political deliberation (Smith, Peter, Sturgis, &

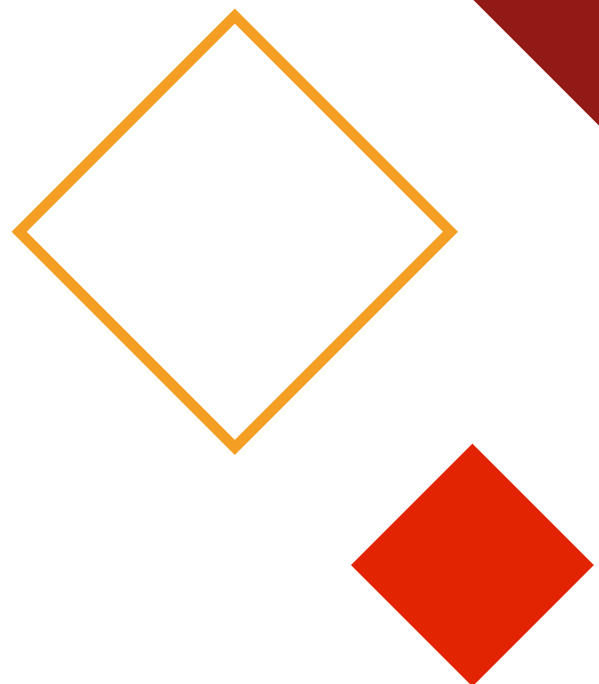
Hisako, 2009; Strandberg, 2015). Of course, facilitation is key – a digital platform for civic engagement should reflect democratic and human rights values since these are the attitudes we aim to strengthen (Choi & Cristol, 2021). The more people are involved in a digital citizenship initiative, the more incentivized other users feel to participate (Margetts, John, Escher, & Reissfelder, 2009). The next stage beyond discussion is creating digital content. Students who learn how to create and share content on social issues are more likely to participate in civic initiatives than those who only consume content (Bowyer & Kahne, 2020). According to available data, blogging about political issues also strengthens young people’s political interest and self-efficacy (Levy, Journell, He, & Towns, 2015). Interestingly, in the cited study, several teachers were hesitant to allow the exchange of opinions among peers to avoid heated discussions. This highlights the importance of educators’ capacity to teach controversial issues to strengthen democratic competences (Kerr & Huddleston, 2015).

In promoting digital citizenship, it is important to prioritize quality over quantity, focusing on safe and constructive content. Emphasis should be placed on supporting **digital mental health**, ensuring that the online environment remains a positive space for all users. The goal is not just the volume of content but rather the type of content that fosters responsible civic engagement. Today, young people are already politically engaged online and supporting them in creating thoughtful content can further enhance their role in civic action. While research on the effects of digital citizenship education is growing, more data are needed to analyse if online engagement translates into offline participation (Vissers, Hooghe, Stolle, & Mahéo, 2012).

The presented data demonstrate that evidence on GCE implementation could offer more clarity on the translation of international frameworks to regional and local levels and deepen the understanding of GCE outcomes. At the same time, citizenship education is a complex process that involves socialisation, personal development, and the strengthening of various competences (Davies et al., 2018). Efforts to elaborate and amend suitable methodologies for data collection and analysis of citizenship education frameworks are ongoing. For instance, UNESCO is developing methodologies for the measurement of GCE and related approaches in alignment with SDG 4.7 (UIS, 2017).

Most evidence on GCE implementation comes from formal education contexts, primarily in schools. Data on non-formal and informal GCE interventions are rarely collected systematically, as these approaches involve a different scale of engagement compared to schools and are often difficult to measure. However, this does not imply that civil society organizations' interventions are less effective. GCE today is predominantly promoted by non-formal education actors (Akkari & Maleq, 2020). Non-formal methods are also widely used for GCE in formal education institutions, as these methods are instrumental in achieving GCE learning outcomes (Brown, 2018). **Systematic monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of GCE activities by civil society organizations can provide valuable data for advocacy and research.** Providing funding and capacity-building support for M&E activities would, therefore, enhance the effectiveness of implemented citizenship education policies.

At the same time, it is important to consider that the current emphasis on measurement in education policy-making stems from an economic approach to education, which views it as a means to economic growth and a source of competitive advantage in the globalized economy (Biesta, 2009). GCE, however, aims at democratic engagement and, in this sense, requires an alternative methodology that allows for examining specific experiences, perceived changes, and critical policy analysis (Young & Diem, 2018).



Chapter 2. Mapping the EU's Global Citizenship Education Policies: An Analysis of Progress and Gaps

The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (EU) states that the support, coordination, and supplementing of actions by Member States in the area of education is an institutional competence of the EU (European Union, 2007, art. 6). The TFEU focuses on access to education, as well as its quality and cooperation among the Member States, third countries, and international organisations (ibid., preamble and art. 165). It is noteworthy that the Union aims to enhance the European dimension of education and promote youth involvement in Europe's democratic processes through education (ibid., art. 165). Therefore, **quality education, according to the EU, promotes the civic engagement of young people on the international level.** In this context, education for European and global citizenship falls under the EU mandate.

According to the available data, **there are numerous issues in education systems across Europe that can be addressed through global citizenship education (GCE).** Many learners still face bullying, hate speech, and discrimination while educators lack the qualification to strengthen inclusion in educational institutions (European Education and Culture Executive Agency & European Commission, 2023). Such derogatory actions

do not only take place offline. Every second young adult has been personally affected by digital harassment or degradation (HateAid, 2021). GCE is also essential for teaching young people about the interconnectedness of local affairs and international trends. Considering the impact of EU governance, as well as the right to define the mode of this governance through EU citizenship, quality citizenship education can no longer be envisioned without including the EU dimension. Students exhibiting higher confidence in civic institutions demonstrated a more pronounced sense of European identity, but there is a notable difference among the member states in the number of students who report having the chance to learn about the EU political, economic, and social issues (Schulz et al., 2023). In 2021, most young respondents said they did not understand much or anything about the EU (European Parliament, 2021). The results of the 2024 Parliamentary elections emphasize the value of addressing knowledge about the EU and the attitudes of young people: Eurosceptic candidates saw increased support from younger demographics (Schläger et al., 2024; Statista, 2024).

In contrast to isolated efforts at national and local levels, **EU policies on citizenship**

education provide added value, including coordination opportunities and the exchange of experience (Grimonprez, 2020). The adoption of the Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance, and non-discrimination through education by all EU member states in 2015 signified an increasing emphasis on the promotion of European values in education (European Union, 2015). The Declaration affirms that the member states will coordinate their efforts to ensure the development of civic competences, critical thinking, media literacy, inclusion in education, and intercultural dialogue. However, the Declaration defines no concrete steps towards the achievement of these goals.

Today, citizenship education is integral to EU strategic frameworks. At the same time, similarly to the Declaration proclamations, it remains a matter of general objectives and scattered recommendations rather than an action plan. Particular attention is given to the development of civic competences. The European Union Youth Strategy (2019 – 2027) invites member states and the Commission to foster democratic engagement of young people through education (European Union, 2018). The European Youth Goals include quality learning that calls for providing citizenship education that equips young people with knowledge of politics, human rights, and democracy, but also experiential learning for active participation. The European Declaration on Global Education 2050 explicitly refers to global citizenship and indicates what the EU means by quality education (European Union, 2022). Quality education supports the development of civic competences, participatory learning processes, and empowers learners to deal with global issues, such as climate change or

threats to peace. The document emphasizes the importance of promoting GCE through participatory and democratic learning in EU policies. The promotion of democratic values and active citizenship is proclaimed as one of the main goals of regional collaboration in the “Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training” (European Union, 2021). The EU Council suggests that member states give particular attention to the development of citizenship competences for promoting common EU values in the Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning (Council of the European Union, 2018, 2.7).

Beyond goal setting, some more details on the EU actions in the area of citizenship education are given in the “Achieving the European Education Area by 2025” communication (European Commission, 2020). While the notion of citizenship education is mentioned only twice in the document, **inclusive education and a safe learning environment are central to the establishment of the European Education Area**. The document mentions a significant contribution of the Erasmus+ programme for the promotion of citizenship, non-discrimination, and fundamental freedoms in the EU. It is planned that the programme will not only continue to play an important role in strengthening cooperation among higher education institutions, but it will also become a platform for networks of teacher training institutions and associations. The importance of teacher training for achieving quality education as envisioned in the EU is emphasized throughout the communication. Following TFEU formulations, the communication also refers to the complementarity of the European dimension to national citizenship education. In this sense, it echoes the

“Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching” that calls for integrating the European dimension of citizenship education in teachers’ training and presents democratic participation as one of the key expected outcomes of education (Council of the European Union, 2018).

Another focal point of the “Achieving the European Education Area by 2025” communication is vocational education and training (VET). Since citizenship education is downplayed in the text, VET development is not connected to citizenship either, but rather to green and digital transitions, adaptation to a changing job market, and inclusive learning. At the same time, contributing to sustainable development requires civic knowledge and engagement (Joint Research Centre of the European Commission & Bianchi, 2020). A full-fledged economic inclusion demands political inclusion (Sen, 1999). **A lack of democratic citizenship education and human rights education provision in the area of VET** has been consistently pointed out by major European actors in this field (De Coster & Sigalas, 2017). SOLIDAR network members have consistently indicated it in their reflections on the EU policy gaps in GCE provision. At the moment, in most EU member states, the VET curriculum does not mention the EU (Grimonprez, 2020, *ibid.*). Almost half of all upper secondary education students were enrolled in vocational education in 2020 (CEDEFOP, 2023). Excluding this group from lifelong citizenship education would have severe consequences for youth democratic participation. Considering the value that the EU gives to VET and its role in strengthening citizenship skills, there is potential to formulate a pioneering framework for the holistic

integration of citizenship education in VET in terms of content, pedagogies, and governance (Council of the European Union, 2020b, 2020a). Such a framework would support advocacy and capacity-building efforts of actors who aim to promote universal access to citizenship education in the EU.

The regulation on Erasmus + objectives followed up on the themes indicated in the “Achieving European Education Area by 2025” communication a year later (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2021). The programme seeks to promote a European identity, encourage active citizenship, and boost participation in democratic processes. According to the Regulation text, these goals are achieved through approaches similar to GCE, such as studying or working abroad to promote intercultural learning, critical thinking, and getting involved in local and host communities to share experiences.

These policy developments demonstrate the strategic value of GCE and similar approaches to citizenship education for the EU. However, **there is no programmatic document that would offer the EU perspective on citizenship education with clear milestones and quality criteria.** Furthermore, there are no guides that could be applied directly by education stakeholders on the national level, such as policymakers or teachers, to translate the quality criteria into practice. As one of the interviewees from the SOLIDAR network mentioned, national manuals can be outdated and no longer relatable to children and young people. Often, they do not include references to the EU or global dimensions, which makes it essential to fund the development of new materials to address this gap. Additionally, the education concepts used in policy documents



can be confusing to citizens unfamiliar with them. Clear communication materials are needed to facilitate awareness raising.

After the adoption of the Paris Declaration on promoting citizenship education in 2015, many member states reported on the continuous implementation of common citizenship education principles by providing information on a single subject in their curriculum (European Education and Culture Executive Agency & European Commission, 2023). Considering the evidence cited in the previous chapter of this publication, such an approach is proven to be outdated and inefficient. Only a cross-curricular implementation of citizenship education aimed at democratic engagement can lead to a sustainable behavioural change. EU policies must clearly state which methodologies are recommended for the achievement of the strategic goals in this area and how these methodologies appear in practice. As the “Resolution on Learning

EU at school” states, to equip learners with the capacity to exercise their democratic rights, it is crucial to develop materials on EU citizenship (European Parliament, 2016). The first steps towards strengthening EU education practices were taken with the establishment of a platform for EU school stakeholders and VET educators (‘European School Education Platform’, n.d.), as well as the interactive toolkit on teaching about the EU (‘Learning Materials - European Union’, n.d.). These instruments have to be further advanced, disseminated, and complemented with a system of teacher support and an exchange of best practices. Currently, the materials on citizenship education are dispersed and do not constitute a holistic picture on what quality citizenship education looks like for the EU.

These concerns were already recognized and were called upon to be addressed by the EU Parliament in their 2022 “Resolution on the implementation of citizenship education

actions” (European Parliament, 2022). The Resolution stresses the value of European and global dimensions of citizenship education and offers several steps towards regional coherence in citizenship education policies. The document suggests using a common definition of citizenship education on the EU level and refers to the Council of Europe (CoE) Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education and the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture. This is an important point since the CoE Charter deals explicitly with education for democratic citizenship. There are diverse conceptualisations of GCE and many of them, including a widely used UNESCO framework, do not include democracy (UNESCO, 2023). According to the EU strategic frameworks, the ultimate purpose of citizenship education is to strengthen democratic engagement and therefore, this element of GCE must be particularly emphasized. Furthermore, the CoE concept of citizenship education is closely related to human rights education. As the CoE Charter states, they coincide in goals and practices (art. 3). Human rights are fundamental European common values that are to be promoted through education along with civic and democratic values (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2021; European Union, 2021). Therefore, the EU citizenship education framework should be founded on human rights and democracy values and include related competences in the expected learning outcomes.

The Resolution on the implementation of citizenship education actions also calls for increasing the quality of citizenship education by integrating citizenship education with its global and EU dimensions into initial and continuous training for educators and youth

leaders, promoting a whole-school approach and participatory pedagogies, including VET and early childhood education (art. 6, 7, 21, 33). The Parliament recognizes the importance of moving beyond the political consensus and establishing actual targets, action plans, and instruments for coherent implementation on the EU level (art. 11, 12). The development of a new citizenship education competence framework for educators and students is recommended to cover the implementation gap (art. 25). Digital competences for the safe usage of digital tools and media should be integral to the framework (art. 37). Moreover, the document advises measures to assess the implementation of the EU policy framework in the area of citizenship education according to the CoE Reference Framework for Democratic Culture and the European Reference Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (art. 31).

In 2023, the EU Council revisited the issue of citizenship education in the EU in its “Conclusions on the Contribution of Education and Training to Strengthening Common European Values and Democratic Citizenship” (Council of the European Union, 2023). The Council emphasizes that citizenship education in the EU must aim to strengthen democratic competences, incorporate a European and global dimension, and be delivered in both online and offline formats (p. 7). Notably, the Council underscores the importance of developing democratic citizenship education within the context of the EU Youth Strategy (p. 4) and across all levels of education, particularly in VET (p. 9).

The conclusions also call for integrating European history into citizenship education (p. 11). History is an important element for promoting citizenship beyond the national



dimension, as well as beyond the narrative of Europe's innate culture of democracy and human rights that ensures European unity. Just as human rights and democracy, the ideas of nationalism and fascism also originated in Europe (Hobsbawm, 1990). History shows that peaceful coexistence, based on the fundamental values of human dignity and democracy, is a choice that requires the values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge of every citizen.

Some resources for achieving the goals outlined in the Resolution on Citizenship Education Actions adopted in 2022 and the EU Council conclusions from 2023 are highlighted in these documents. It is suggested to apply the Erasmus+ programme to increase teachers' mobility. When combined with the networking potential of the programme, such mobility activities could support teacher training in the area of citizenship education with its European and global dimensions. The documents suggest increasing funding through available

instruments for citizenship education initiatives, establishing awards, and strengthening policy coordination. For example, the "Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values" (CERV) (European Commission, n.d.) and "Development Education and Awareness Raising" (DEAR) (European Union, n.d.) funding programmes play an important role in promoting GCE. Greater coherence among all funding schemes would help streamline efforts, allowing for coordinated projects that can leverage each programme's strengths without redundant overlap. A complementary approach helps avoid fragmented funding streams and ensures a better impact, as well as a consistent policy message in the area of citizenship education across all funding instruments.

The availability of funding schemes for the promotion of European and global citizenship through education also creates opportunities for the cooperation of formal, non-formal, and informal education actors. The Council's conclusions on democratic citizenship

education call for the use of innovative and interactive educational practices that are largely developed in the field of non-formal and informal learning (Council of the European Union, 2023). As one of the SOLIDAR network members mentioned, without the EU funding there would be no European or global citizenship education in their country. Today, **cooperation between formal, non-formal, and informal learning stakeholders is essential for the provision of lifelong quality GCE** (Brown, 2018; Ribeiro, Caetano, & Menezes, 2016).

It is relevant to mention two other elements of EU citizenship education policies that could contribute to the implementation of the EU goals. First of all, beyond policy documents, the EU has an information network on education systems and policies in Europe that supports cooperation among member states by providing detailed analyses and comparative data on the status of education policies across Europe - Eurydice. The latest Eurydice report on citizenship education in the EU was published in 2017 and established that the implementation of citizenship education in the EU varies greatly among the member states (De Coster & Sigalas, 2017). The report called for the development of a clear common policy framework and resources for teachers on citizenship education. In addition to Eurydice studies, an annual Education and Training Monitor is published by the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture with contributions from other relevant EU institutions. The latest research on citizenship education provision in the EU was published in the Monitor in 2018 (European Commission, 2018). The publication offers conclusions similar to the evidence cited in the first chapter of this paper. Changes in students' attitudes can be achieved through

democratic practices at school and through the whole-school approach to citizenship education. Quality citizenship education requires training both at the initial and in-service stages for teachers.

While the policy framework gap still exists in the EU, the 2017-2018 data on citizenship education is outdated. It is time to revisit the matter of citizenship education provision in the EU member states to develop relevant common policy instruments. Furthermore, it would be beneficial for the next report to include more evidence from non-governmental stakeholders. Currently, the information in the reports is primarily based on input from a single governmental informant per country. This approach could be enhanced by incorporating perspectives from various educational professionals, including non-governmental organisations, to provide a more comprehensive and balanced view (Abs, 2021). In a longer perspective, missing data on the long-term effects of citizenship education on students' attitudes in the EU could also be collected by the Eurydice network.

The second policy element that could support the development of European and global citizenship education is cooperation with the CoE. The cooperation between the EU and the CoE in the area of education is declared in the TFEU (art. 165). The Memorandum of Understanding between the two European organisations points out education for democratic citizenship and human rights as one of the cooperation priorities (Council of Europe & European Union, 2007, art. 36). While the "Resolution on the implementation of citizenship education actions" focuses on CoE policy documents, the organisation also has an array of practical tools for educators and policymakers on education for

democratic citizenship. These materials can be used, adapted, or referred to for guidance on the implementation of quality citizenship education. The CoE Observatory on History Teaching in Europe is mentioned in the EU Council conclusions on democratic citizenship education as a potential collaboration platform for the two European regional organizations in the field of history education (Council of the European Union, 2023, p. 11). Close cooperation between the EU and CoE is a highly beneficial foundation for the development of the EU citizenship education policies with a global and a European dimension. For instance, the European Year of Digital Citizenship Education in 2025, declared by the CoE Standing Conference of Ministers of Education, most of whom represent EU member states, could provide an opportunity to strengthen this cooperation.



Conclusions and recommendations on global citizenship education for democratic participation in the EU

The last decade of the European elections has demonstrated the need to address democratic participation and trust in democratic institutions of the European Union (EU) citizens. **Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is a relevant approach for the EU policies that could strengthen global and European dimensions in the education policies of the member states and enhance democratic engagement.** According to the existing evidence, citizenship education can be particularly useful in working with young people who are a focal target group for the EU policies. At the same time, there are several conditions for the efficient provision of GCE in the EU that should be taken into consideration to enhance political participation through policy development. These conditions emerge from the analysis of the available evidence on the effects of citizenship education on democratic participation and the inquiry of currently existing EU frameworks in the area of citizenship education.

→ A participatory approach is integral to efficient citizenship education. Experiential learning of democratic participation within a class, a whole school, or a community can lead to long-term results and continuous engagement beyond formal education

institutions. Cooperation among formal, non-formal, and informal education stakeholders can enhance the participatory approach and the outreach of quality GCE beyond formal schooling and on a lifelong scale.

→ **Whole-school and cross-curricular approaches to the provision of citizenship education are proven to bring sustainable change in attitudes and behaviour.** A holistic institutional approach to citizenship at schools is what works best. As long as democratic principles are at the foundation of the school ethos and culture, governance, as well as teaching and learning, students will successfully build up their civic competences.

→ **Citizenship education is particularly important for the democratic engagement of underprivileged students.** Such interventions have a significant effect on their competences and allow for addressing inequalities in democratic participation.

→ **An increasing level of democratic engagement on digital platforms requires a digital element in citizenship**

education. The same approaches that are proven to bring the best results in offline work can be applied to online learning: creating the content and engaging is more potent than perceiving information provided by others. More research on the translation of online interactions into offline skills is needed.

- To enhance teachers' confidence in topics related to democratic citizenship and assure the safety of all in a digital, blended, or offline learning environment, **it is crucial to integrate citizenship education into pre-service and in-service teacher training.**
- **Citizenship education in its global and European dimensions falls into the EU mandate.** Common policies enhance the quality of citizenship education provision in the region by offering experience exchange opportunities, the use of shared funds, and the promotion of EU values in education.
- To achieve common strategic goals, **the EU must follow up on its own agenda and develop programmatic frameworks on citizenship education with clear quality criteria, methodologies, and practice recommendations for education stakeholders in Europe.**
- **The development of a shared definition is key** to determine what quality citizenship education for the EU implies. Considering the strategic priorities of the EU, the term must contain references to global and European dimensions and include the principles of democracy and human rights.
- **The advanced vocational education and training (VET) policies at the EU level**

provide an opportunity for creating a unique approach to citizenship education in VET. Including VET students in citizenship education provision in each member state is crucial for ensuring their political engagement.

- There is a **variety of resources** that could be used for bringing forward the citizenship education agenda **at the EU level.** Among the existing programmes, Erasmus+ stands out as an instrument to strengthen teachers' mobility and capacity to teach global and European citizenship in their subjects. Better cohesion among the available GCE funding schemes, including the DEAR and CERV programmes, can increase the impact of regional GCE initiatives and streamline a consistent EU message in citizenship education. Close cooperation with the Council of Europe, including the area of history education, is an additional resource that can reinforce the quality of citizenship education in the EU.
- **Research cooperation would expand available data** on the effects of citizenship education. It is essential that GCE research methodologies enhance the purpose of GCE, strengthen democratic engagement, and provide space for particular experiences and perceptions of change. Longitudinal studies in the EU and regular assessments of citizenship education provision in member states could provide evidence to secure the relevance of policy recommendations. This approach is particularly important for GCE analysis from a lifelong learning perspective. The Eurydice platform and the European Education and Training Monitor could serve as a foundation for such cooperation.

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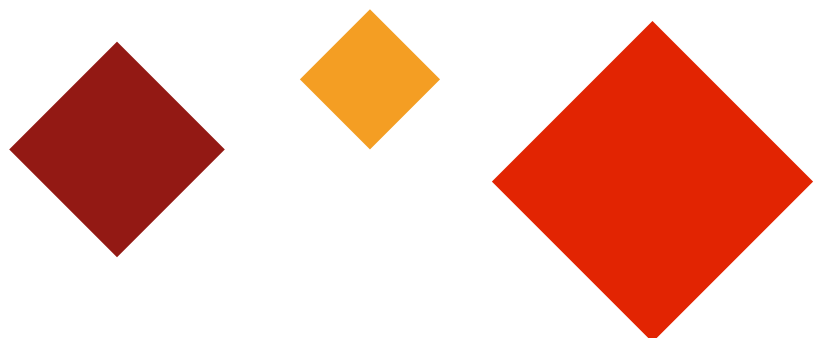
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Through our member and partner organisations, SOLIDAR Foundation engages communities in EU decision making processes, empowers people through lifelong learning, and voices their concerns to the EU institutions by carrying out active lobbying, projects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



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