

## **BREAKING BARRIERS: Global Citizenship Education for Inclusive Participation | Policy Roundtable**

Tuesday, 13 May 2025, European Parliament

### **Opening Remarks**

**The Roundtable opened with welcoming remarks by Elisa Gambardella**, Education and Lifelong Learning Coordinator, **SOLIDAR Foundation**. The opening remarks emphasised the collaborative nature of the event and its purpose: **collecting different inputs from relevant stakeholders to contribute to the development of the upcoming Global Citizenship Education (GCE) Policy Paper** which focuses on the **relation between socio-economic background and the access and impact of GCE**.

Member of the European Parliament [Aodhán Ó Ríordáin](#) was introduced and thanked for participating to the event, noting how their keynote would help ground the discussion in the broader political and social context in which we live.

### **Keynote Speech – Aodhán Ó Ríordáin (MEP, S&D Group)**

**MEP Aodhán Ó Ríordáin recalled his experience as an educator in an all-girls school in a disadvantaged part of Dublin**, where structural barriers to access, such as a public library being closed on weekends, **severely limited learning opportunities**. He highlighted how these seemingly small but significant failures of public infrastructure disproportionately impact marginalised communities and reinforce cycles of disadvantage.

Reflecting on the broader political context, **Ó Ríordáin spoke about the transformative power of literacy and empowerment for young people**, particularly young women, and connected this to our current political context, **warning about the rise of the far right as a political movement fuelled by fear, disinformation, and the targeting of scapegoats**. The MEP emphasised how **Global Citizenship Education must be part of the solution to these challenges**, nurturing a new generation equipped with critical thinking skills, empathy, and a strong commitment to democratic values.

### **SOLIDAR Foundation's GCE Journey**

**Alexandra Matthys (Education & Lifelong Learning Officer, SOLIDAR Foundation)** presented **SOLIDAR Foundation's past and current work on GCE**, including the work undertaken in the three-year thematic GCE policy cycle which is concluding in 2025. She highlighted the publication of the [Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor](#) which analysed policy developments linked to **citizenship education and lifelong learning** at EU level and across Europe and provided **good practices** from SOLIDAR Foundation members

and partners. The presentation also included a reflection on the learnings of the [2023 and 2024 GCE Policy Papers](#), respectively focusing on the relevance of GCE delivered in informal and non-formal education for supporting democratic participation and addressing the current global challenges, and on the relationship between GCE and youth participation in democratic processes. Alexandra also touched upon other tools and initiatives created in the frame of SOLIDAR Foundation's 3-year GCE policy & advocacy cycle (2023-2025), such as [the Policy Pill on GCE](#) and the [2024 GCE European Parliament's Election Campaign #Vote4GCE](#).

She highlighted the digital dimension (Digital Citizenship Education) of GCE and how SOLIDAR Foundation has worked on this topic through [the ECHO Network Project](#).

**Member organizations presented testimonies** about their participation in the network's work on GCE, offering grounded examples of Global Citizenship Education in practice and illustrating how they reach learners from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

- **Lana Jurman** ([Centre for Peace Studies, Croatia](#)) presented CPS' experience **contributing to the *Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor***. Lana highlighted what was described as **Croatia's "GCE paradox"**, for which **Global Citizenship Education is not formally integrated into the national curriculum**, yet **Croatian students perform relatively well in this regard**. The **value of collaboration with SOLIDAR Foundation was emphasised**, with the process described as both challenging and rewarding. Lana also reflected on the struggle to translate civil society evidence into policy change, noting that **decision-makers often remain disengaged from the insights of non-formal education**, despite their importance in promoting inclusive democratic practices.
- **Jillian Simpson** ([Workers' Educational Association, UK](#)) shared, in line with SOLIDAR Foundation's work on Digital Citizenship Education, the **development of WEA's Disinformation Course**, created in response to the growing spread of disinformation online, **a trend that disproportionately affects communities with limited access to formal education**. The course supports adult learners in **developing critical thinking skills and digital literacy** connecting historical injustices, such as the Hillsborough disaster, to broader themes of trust, power, and truth.
- **Vasiliki Tsekoura** ([DAFNI KEK, Greece](#)) presented an **intergenerational approach to fostering inclusive participation**. In the framework of the [AKA project](#), DAFNI KEK **worked with adult learners from vulnerable socio-economic backgrounds**, many of whom were attending second-chance or evening schools. **Through a series of World Café-style workshops, participants explored themes such as equality, solidarity, and active citizenship**. A central goal was to **build trust in institutions by creating open spaces for dialogue and political engagement**. The impact of

involving a Member of the European Parliament in one of the sessions was highlighted, as this enabled participants to ask questions directly and feel that their voices were heard.

To conclude, Alexandra announced the **upcoming Roadmap for promoting Global Citizenship Education and Inclusion in the EEA** which will consolidate findings from SOLIDAR Foundation's earlier work on GCE, draw on the policy papers published the past three years, and on insights of Members, and feed into concrete policy pointers.

She also pointed out the work of the **Civil Society Alliance for Global Citizenship Education**. This Alliance of ca. 25 civil society organisations promotes citizenship education and democratic participation in Europe, created by SOLIDAR Foundation as a result of its Policy Cycles on GCE (2023-2025) and currently **coordinated by SOLIDAR Foundation, EAEA and Südwind**.

### **Roundtable Discussion – Institutional and Policy Perspectives**

*Moderator: Elisa Gambardella (SOLIDAR Foundation)*

The roundtable began with **reflections from institutional stakeholders on how their work intersects with Global Citizenship Education (GCE) and socio-economic inequality:**

- **Daria Arlavi (Policy Officer, [DG EAC](#), European Commission)** presented the work of the **[European Education Area \(EEA\) Working Group on Equality and Values](#)**, which supports mutual learning between countries, civil society organisations and other stakeholders on equity, inclusion as well as [citizenship education](#). Daria stressed the importance of inclusive curricula, encouraging civic engagement, identifying and dismantling systemic barriers that affect underrepresented learners, and engaging families and communities to strengthen diversity and inclusion efforts. The benefits of involving civil society organizations were also mentioned, as these organizations, with their direct experience with marginalized learners, can play a crucial role in shaping and implementing educational agendas on inclusion and citizenship education. She also referred to **the findings from the [2022 ICCS study](#)** which revealed stark **disparities in civic knowledge and engagement linked to socio-economic background**.
- **Koen Bois d'Enghien (Policy Officer, [DG EMPL](#), European Commission)** addressed the **lack of consistent integration of citizenship education in the vocational education and training (VET) sector**, despite its inclusion in recent EU skills frameworks. In particular, **the [Union of Skills](#) initiative and the [Basic Skills Action Plan](#) were mentioned**, which both recognise citizenship as a core competence alongside literacy, numeracy, and digital competences. Koen also shared how an **upcoming [CEDEFOP](#) study will analyse policies regarding citizenship education in VET**

across several Member States and referred to a new EU VET strategy expected for 2026.

- **Liam Wegimont (Executive Director, [GENE](#))** discussed the [Dublin Declaration on Global Education to 2050](#), which outlines a **vision of GCE as universal, participatory, and transformative practice**. He put emphasis on how **global education must connect local and global issues and be grounded in solidarity**. Additionally, the role of GENE's peer review processes and policy dialogue platforms in helping national ministries develop tailored GCE strategies was highlighted. They drew **attention to the [ANGEL](#) academic network and preparations for the ICCS 2027 study**.
- **Giulia Meschino (Secretary General, [EVTA](#))** emphasised the importance of **recognising VET learners as citizens, not only as future members of the workforce**. Giulia introduced EVTA's "**VET GLOCAL**" project, which developed **tools for integrating global challenges and civic engagement into vocational training**. They stressed that civic competences should be reflected in learning outcomes and accreditation frameworks and argued that long-term investment and structural funding are essential for scaling such initiatives in a sustainable way.

**In a second round of inputs**, the panellists discussed the **structural and policy conditions required to embed GCE across education systems and socio-economic contexts**:

- **Daria Arlavi (Policy Officer, [DG EAC](#), European Commission)** highlighted that, with the **new Basic Skills Action Plan**, citizenship is, for the first time, considered a key part of basic skills. The Action Plan encourages a culture of lifelong learning, which is crucial for developing informed and engaged citizens. She also referred to the follow-up to the [2023 Council conclusions on the contribution of education and training to strengthening common European values and democratic citizenship](#). She mentioned, for example, a **forthcoming Eurydice report** on citizenship education in schools, expected by the end of 2026, and citizenship education' as the annual theme for 2025 for eTwinning and European Innovative Teaching Award.
- **Koen Bois d'Enghien (Policy Officer, [DG EMPL](#), European Commission)** reiterated the **importance of integrating GCE into VET policies and EU VET frameworks**, particularly through analysing and addressing obstacles and enabling factors for the development citizenship competences among VET learners. Such measures would prepare vocational learners not only for employment but also for active civic participation.
- **Liam Wegimont (Executive Director, [GENE](#))** emphasised the necessity of robust data collection and evidence-based policymaking. **They warned that without disaggregated data on who receives GCE and its outcomes, there is a risk that policies could reinforce rather than reduce existing inequalities**. They also noted

that EU and national funding mechanisms should include clear equity and inclusion criteria.

- **Giulia Meschino (Secretary General, [EVTA](#))** called for **formal institutional recognition of the full range of learning outcomes**. She urged accreditation bodies to acknowledge civic and global citizenship competences alongside technical and professional ones. Giulia stressed that only when these competences are assessed and valued in qualification frameworks can they be fully and sustainably integrated into educational practice.

## Conclusion

The Roundtable concluded with a **strong reaffirmation of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) as a strategic tool for advancing democracy, equity, and inclusion across European societies**. Throughout the discussions, participants emphasised that GCE is not merely an educational methodology but a cross-cutting policy priority necessary to foster **democratic competences, civic engagement, and global awareness, all of which are essential in today's complex and divided world**.

Speakers consistently underscored that **strengthening GCE requires coordinated, multi-level strategies involving the full range of stakeholders**, including EU institutions, national governments, civil society organizations, educational providers, and grassroots learners. The call for collaboration was accompanied by **practical insights: embedding citizenship competences in accreditation systems, enhancing data collection and impact measurement, aligning EU policy frameworks, and securing long-term structural funding for inclusive educational initiatives**.

Importantly, the Roundtable also **highlighted the role of GCE in addressing disinformation, promoting critical thinking, and empowering underrepresented communities, particularly those from vulnerable socio-economic backgrounds**. Several contributions stressed the **urgency of ensuring that GCE is not reserved for the privileged but is integrated across all education sectors**, with particular attention to vocational and adult learning.

**These insights will directly inform SOLIDAR Foundation's 2025 Policy Paper**, providing both evidence and strategic direction for the advancement of GCE throughout Europe.