

Safeguarding European values: The case for a European Agency for Citizenship Education

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DISCLAIMER

This Discussion Paper is a joint publication between VALUES UNITE and the European Policy Centre. The proposal to establish a European Agency for Citizenship Education should serve as a starting point for a debate on how to best safeguard European values and cohesion.

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Executive summary

WHY THE EU MUST FOCUS ON CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

European values, as set out in Article 2 TEU and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, are under pressure. The EU has tried to counter this trend with several measures and instruments, including a Rule of Law toolbox, annual Rule of Law Reports and an upcoming European Democracy Action Plan. However, until now, the measures taken have had little impact on the violations of key principles of European cooperation, such as the rule of law, non-discrimination or the freedom of the press.

This trend is worrisome, particularly in the context of growing discontent and distrust towards both national democratic institutions and the EU, and even more so in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. If EU member states stop abiding by European values, the EU will face not only a crisis of legitimacy but an existential one. European values are both the basis for European cohesion, and for social cohesion within European societies. Without a common understanding of basic values, there will be no common ground for future cooperation among citizens nor governments.

In order to reverse this trend, the EU must first and foremost invest in its citizens' democratic competences. Citizens are the basis of democracy in the EU. It is crucial to provide the 446 million EU citizens with the necessary knowledge and skills to actively engage in politics. As such, we advocate the establishment of a European Agency for Citizenship Education.

ESTABLISHING THE EUROPEAN AGENCY FOR CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

A European Agency for Citizenship Education would seek to improve the access to and the quality of citizenship education in all EU member states and support the development of a European dimension of citizenship education. The Agency would promote a comprehensive approach towards citizenship education, directed at all age groups, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, and locations. Being needs-oriented, the Agency would focus on those areas and actors that require most support. In addition, it would foster innovative and digital learning methods, which have become especially relevant due to the new normal under COVID-19. The Agency would provide funding, learning materials, digital infrastructure and capacity-building opportunities to educators. It would work in a decentralised manner and in close cooperation with local and regional actors, but also remain non-partisan and independent of governments and EU institutions' political agenda.

Establishing an EU agency that focuses on citizenship education is an ambitious task. Several steps will be necessary to reach this goal, as the current political set-up of the European Council is not likely to endorse the establishment of such an agency. National governments are reticent to push for more European action in education, despite regular declarations endorsing active citizenship in the Union. In the meantime, the EU should focus on investing in research and monitoring to better understand the state of play of citizenship education in Europe. The EU could also identify the necessary steps to establish such an agency by launching a Pilot Project and Preparatory Action, as part of the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

Introduction

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Nelson Mandela

The COVID-19 pandemic has made evident the importance of civic responsibility and democratic resilience in the wake of public restrictions. Decision-makers are calling on citizens to act responsibly to protect each other. They also rely heavily on citizens’ ability to distinguish scientific facts from fake news, thus contributing to governments’ efforts to tackle a global health crisis. While citizenship education rarely makes headlines, it is the foundation which decision-makers rely upon to ensure the legitimacy of their actions.

In the EU, the pandemic has shifted the Union’s priorities from a broader range of policy issues to crisis management and economic recovery. However, the crisis should not lead to short-term thinking. The economic crisis is likely to lead to rising unemployment in Europe, while the restrictions that continue to restrain public life could potentially lead to growing popular contestation. These developments will put governments under pressure and test the EU’s and member states’ democratic resilience.

This comes at a time when violations against European values were already at the top of the EU’s agenda. The newly published 2020 Rule of Law Report of the European Commission paints a bleak picture of

democratic decline across the Union, with multiple concerns for the independence of the judiciary, freedom of the press and the fight against corruption. These developments put into question the basis of European cooperation and the cohesion of the European project.

In order to preserve democracy, the EU should focus on what holds our democracies together: its citizens.

In order to preserve democracy, the EU should focus on what holds our democracies together: its citizens. Providing citizens with the knowledge and skills to stand up for their own interests and the common good will enable them to withstand democratic erosion. As such, this Discussion Paper proposes to invest in citizenship education on a much larger scale than what has been done until now, and to found a European Agency for Citizenship Education (EACE). A more ambitious EU agenda on citizenship education would also improve the link between decision-makers and citizens. Bridging the growing divide between EU citizens and their decision-makers should be one of the main objectives of the EU – and the EACE could play a crucial role in this endeavour.¹

1. The EU fails to safeguard European values through citizenship education

1.1. THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY OF VALUES IS CRUMBLING

“The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.”

Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union

In the past years, the EU has failed to safeguard basic principles that underpin European cooperation, such as democracy, the rule of law or the protection of minorities. The European Commission’s first Rule of Law Report and several independent non-governmental organisations (NGOs) point towards several violations

of European values: In Hungary, the government of Viktor Orbán has taken steps to transform a consolidated democracy into an increasingly autocratic state,² including constitutional reforms, restrictions to academic and press freedom, the unlawful criminalisation of refugee organisations, and corrupt procurement practices. The current Polish government has significantly restricted the independence of the judiciary over the past years; a third of Polish municipalities have declared themselves ‘LGBT-free zones’.

However, the situation has not ‘only’ deteriorated in Hungary and Poland. In Malta and Slovakia, journalists are being killed, with dubious links to state authorities.³ In Romania and Bulgaria, corruption within several state institutions has put into question the quality of those democracies and led to several thousands of citizens demonstrating against their governments. These developments are particularly worrisome as they put into question the cooperation of EU member states. For

instance, Germany and the Netherlands have already refused to extradite Polish citizens under the European Arrest Warrant, citing the lacking independence of the Polish judiciary as a reason.

The community of values was already in a dire state before the COVID-19 crisis hit Europe. Since then, European democracies have become even more vulnerable. COVID-19 restrictions have impeded the decision-making processes of several European countries. For instance, there was little parliamentary oversight over the public health measures that were implemented by the executive.⁴ The quality of public debate has also decreased, with conspiracy narratives and fake news fuelling resentment against certain social groups and governments.⁵

The community of values was already in a dire state before the COVID-19 crisis hit Europe.

Finally, civil society is also facing a more difficult context in the wake of COVID-19. NGOs are likely to financially suffer from the inevitable economic recession, while the restrictions could further reduce the spaces in which civil society organisations (CSOs) operate. CSOs struggle to uphold their work, as some governments have cut their funding sources. European leaders also decided to cut the Justice, Rights and Values programme from the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) during the July 2020 negotiations. Since then, the European Parliament did manage to increase this budget line. Nevertheless, this shows that civil society support is not the priority for national decision-makers.⁶

“The Union’s aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples.”

Article 3 of the Treaty on the European Union

Despite EU decision-makers’ increased attention on these issues, there is a lack of effective mechanisms to safeguard European values. This has led several countries to undergo a process of democratic erosion. The failure of EU institutions to uphold the rule of law is particularly visible with the Article 7 procedures triggered against Poland and Hungary in 2017 and 2018 respectively, which are both blocked in the Council of the European Union (Council). Therefore, the EU should invest in an approach that pre-empt violations against basic European values and principles, rather than merely reacting to them when it often is too late. One avenue could be to invest in EU citizens and develop their democratic competences. Well-informed and politically knowledgeable citizens are the foundation of any democracy.

INFOBOX 1: DEFINING CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Citizenship education aims to foster active citizenship by conveying competences like critical thinking, tolerance and understanding of political systems and social contexts. It is delivered in all educational sectors: formal (e.g. schools, vocational training, further education establishments), non-formal (any organised educational activity outside the established formal system) and informal (learning in daily life situations). While citizenship education is a fully-fledged subject in schools in some EU countries, it is spread over a range of different subjects in others, such as history, geography, languages, ethics or philosophy. In some EU member states, non-formal education is a common practice and includes lifelong learning possibilities, while in others, citizenship education mostly takes place in the formal sector.

Well-informed and politically knowledgeable citizens are the foundation of any democracy.

The Maastricht Treaty introduced the concept of EU citizenship, providing European citizens with additional rights. These include “the right to vote and stand as a candidate at elections to the European Parliament and at municipal elections, the right to good administration, the right of access to documents, European Ombudsman, the right to petition, freedom of movement and residence, diplomatic and consular protection”.⁷ The EU gave its citizens the ability to participate and engage in politics, as well as an additional right to vote, but did not focus on investing in citizenship education, which would give citizens the knowledge and skills necessary to use those newfound rights (see Infobox 1). Until now, the EU’s educational policies have been mostly focused on employability and access to the labour market. The EU’s policies do not recognise the importance of EU citizens as guardians for democratic values, even though the EU Single Market relies heavily on stable and democratic political systems.

Investing in democratic competences would not only enable all EU citizens to participate in democratic life equally but would also allow citizens to discuss and shape the values of the European Union more actively. Values are never set in stone: they evolve with social, economic and political transformations, and therefore need to be constantly understood and practised by citizens to stay relevant. In order to keep European values adapted to future societal changes, the EU should give all its citizens the means to participate in the political realm.

Developing the EU's competences in the field of citizenship education would not only safeguard European values against violations by individual governments; it would also improve the link between the EU and its citizens, making it a more democratic Union. Indeed, the EU, as a *political* system, has become more contested. In the last European election in 2019, although the turnout was relatively high in comparison with previous years, the political polarisation of societies was reflected in the outcome, with a high number of authoritarian populists entering the European Parliament. On top of those political divides, the COVID-19 crisis is likely to create more regional imbalances, both in terms of economic recovery and democratic standards. In order to uphold the EU's slogan, *United in diversity*, the EU and its member states should put both European and social cohesion at the centre of their COVID-19 recovery. This also includes investing in citizens' democratic competences on a much broader scale.

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Furthermore, citizenship education counteracts political and religious extremism, which has been increasing in many European member states. Extremism threatens core European values like tolerance and pluralism, as well as social cohesion. Terrorist acts – such as the recent beheading of French schoolteacher Samuel Paty for showing cartoon depictions of the Prophet Mohammed, or the murder of German politician Walter Lübcke by a neo-Nazi extremist for his migration policy – stress the need for greater educational efforts to prevent fundamentalist ideologies, hate and violent crimes from spreading. Citizenship education can also prevent hostility towards entire religious or ethnic groups (e.g. Islamophobia) from spreading after terrorist attacks, by addressing the difference between religious beliefs and extremist teachings. Therefore, it contributes to individuals' resilience towards extremist ideas.

Finally, investing in democratic competences can also contribute to making the EU a more resilient Union. The EU defines resilience in this context as “the ability to face shocks and persistent structural changes in such a way that societal well-being is preserved, without compromising the heritage for future generations.”⁸ Strengthening citizens' ability to cope with crises like the COVID-19 pandemic and structural changes such as the climate and digital transitions is essential for the Union's resilience. We have seen how important public understanding of democratic decision-making processes and active participation are to managing such transformations. If democratic competences are not provided, the public acceptance of adopted measures ceases.

Investing in democratic competences can contribute to making the EU a more resilient Union.

The European Commission has recently published the European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, calling for the development of the following:

“life skills and our capacity to adapt, manage change, and care for each other as a community. Resilience, media literacy, civic competence, financial, environmental and health literacy are key in this context. Open, democratic societies depend on active citizens who can discern information from various sources, identify disinformation, take informed decisions, are resilient and act responsibly”.⁹

Citizenship education would thus increase the EU's democratic resilience by fostering civic competences and strengthen citizens' capacity to adapt.

1.2. THE STATE OF PLAY IN THE FIELD OF EU CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION POLICY

1.2.1. The EU lacks comprehensive policy measures on citizenship education

In a European-wide consultation from 2017, the vast majority of over 1,000 respondents concluded that “education should help young people understand the importance of common values and that the Union should help Member States in achieving this task”.¹⁰ However, the EU has limited competences in the field of education and training. As defined in Article 165 TFEU, the EU “shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action”. Based on this Article, a range of EU initiatives already exists in the field of education, including policy cooperation mechanisms and funding instruments – most notably the Erasmus+ programme to promote mobility and exchange. However, citizenship education plays a marginal role in existing EU programmes, as the approach has been focused on education and training as a means to support employability.

A milestone for citizenship education at the EU level was the Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education (Paris Declaration), signed by all EU education ministers in 2015. It was triggered by the terrorist attacks in France earlier that year. The Declaration underlines the essential role of citizenship education, especially in boosting democratic resilience to counter extremism and fake news. The

ministers declared the “urgent need to cooperate and coordinate, to exchange experiences, and to ensure that the best ideas and practices can be shared throughout the European Union”.¹¹ In 2018, the Council once again stressed the value of citizenship education to creating and maintaining a cohesive Europe.¹² While there have been formal commitments to citizenship education by EU decision-makers, the necessary policy measures and resources to enhance citizenship education are still lacking.

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The Council already recognised the relevance of education policy to active citizenship and social cohesion in its 2009 conclusions, which established a Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020). It views education policies as follows:

“Efficient investment in human capital through education and training systems is an essential component of Europe’s strategy to deliver the high levels of sustainable, knowledge-based growth and jobs that lie at the heart of the Lisbon strategy, at the same time as promoting personal fulfilment, social cohesion and active citizenship.”¹³

Hence, one of the objectives of the framework is “[p]romoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship”.¹⁴ Similar objectives can also be found in other frameworks, such as the EU Youth Strategy. There, the objective is to “[e]ncourage and equip young people with the necessary resources to become active citizens, agents of solidarity and positive change inspired by EU values and European identity”.¹⁵

So, there are already multiple statements of intentions that set objectives for citizenship education. However, the European Commission has failed to follow up on these intentions with concrete policy measures on citizenship education. Meanwhile, the policies that the EU has taken are primarily driven by a desire to get more people on the labour market.

The few EU-level initiatives and activities on citizenship education are also scattered across different agencies, networks and programmes and lack a common strategy.

- ▶ Erasmus+ is a key EU funding instrument to support education in Europe. Its budget of €14.7 billion is also aimed at promoting active citizenship but is

limited to young people. Especially under its “Key Action 2: Innovation and good practices” and “Key Action 3: Support for policy reform”, the programme funds certain activities on citizenship education, such as the Eurydice reports, and Jean Monnet Actions like Case4EU@School, which focus on fostering the European dimension of citizenship education.¹⁶ A central issue of this funding scheme is that national agencies are responsible for the selection of projects and distribution of funds. This also means that national governments have a say in the selection of the projects that get funding.

Overall, the resources assigned to citizenship education within Erasmus+ are very limited and fail to provide substantial support for citizenship education beyond the European dimension. While the Erasmus+ budget has been increased compared to the last MFF (2014-20) from €14.7 billion to €23.4 billion, this is still far below the Commission’s original proposal in 2018 (€30 billion). In addition, at the time of writing this paper, it remains unclear how much money will be allocated to citizenship education within the new Erasmus+ programme.

- ▶ Within the ET 2020, working groups were established as part of the EU’s policy cooperation process to help EU member states address challenges faced in their education and training systems. They aim to support national policymaking and offer a forum for the exchange of expertise and best practices. One of the seven working groups covers the theme “Common Values and Inclusive Education”. While this group covers issues of citizenship education, none focus on it explicitly. In addition, the mandate of those working groups ended in June 2020, which means that the EU currently lacks a platform for exchange and dialogue between policymakers on citizenship education.

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- ▶ The European Commission plans to establish a European Education Area (EEA) by 2025, with a package of measures encompassing new initiatives, investments and better cooperation between EU member states.¹⁷ Similarly to the ET 2020, these plans also include the objective of “common values and inclusive education”. While this is a welcome step to strengthening the EU’s education policies, the EEA package does not focus on citizenship education as such, even though the Council has recognised that active citizenship should be part of the Union’s education policies. In addition, the Commission introduced a Digital Education Action Plan at the same time as the EEA, to strengthen European cooperation.

The objectives are to “learn from the COVID-19 crisis, during which technology is being used at an unprecedented scale in education and training” and to “make education and training systems fit for the digital age”.¹⁸ However, it is unclear to what degree citizenship education will be part of this new initiative.

- ▶ The Europe for Citizens programme funds projects that contribute to the public understanding of EU history, values and diversity, and those that encourage citizens to participate and engage in democracy at the EU level. European think tanks and CSOs are the main target group of the grant scheme. This funding programme is an example of how the EU can take on an operative role in fostering European values and active citizenship. However, it is limited to the European dimension of citizenship education and does not provide support to strengthening the overall access to and quality of citizenship education. In addition, its budget of €187 million for the 2014-20 period is relatively small, and thus the programme only had a limited impact. While the budget for the Justice, Rights and Values Programme has been increased to €1,641 billion for 2021-27, the extent to which it will support citizenship education, and the amount that will be spent on the successor programme, Europe for Citizens, remain unclear.¹⁹

Next to the EU institutions, another important player in the field of citizenship education is the Council of Europe (CoE). In 1997, the heads of state and government decided to launch an initiative on education for democratic citizenship, aiming to raise citizens’ awareness of their rights and responsibilities in a democracy. Since then,

the CoE has coined the term “Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE)”. In 2010, it adopted the comprehensive Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, defining the objectives and principles of EDC/HRE as well as policy recommendations member states should adopt.²⁰

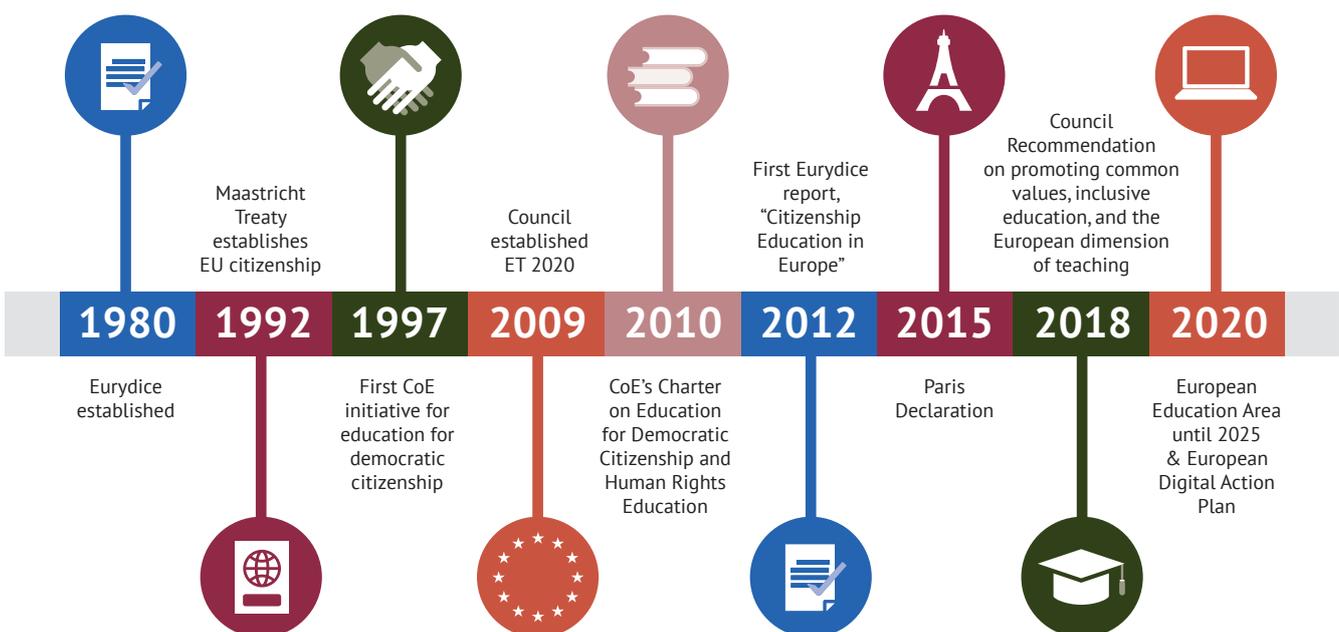
The Charter recognises the crucial role of NGOs, youth organisations and other stakeholders in providing non- and informal education. The CoE still leads much of the efforts in citizenship education today, providing learning materials, reports and handbooks, for instance, on digital citizenship education. It is represented in EU-level working groups, and EU funding is provided to some of the CoE’s education departments’ activities on citizenship education. However, member states have yet to implement the CoE’s recommendations fully. Developing a comprehensive European strategy on citizenship education could contribute to overcoming the marginal role it currently plays in various programmes and activities.

1.2.2. Empirical data and monitoring on equal access and quality of citizenship education are lacking

Citizenship education lacks an independent and thorough analysis as well as regular monitoring. One of the four common EU objectives within the ET 2020 is to “[i]mprove the quality and efficiency of education and training”.²¹ This should also be the case for citizenship education. To improve the quality of citizenship education across the EU, the Union would first need to evaluate the access to citizenship education and also get a better picture of the state of citizenship education in the EU.

Fig. 1

Milestones of citizenship education in Europe



Currently, the Eurydice network covers the analysis of citizenship education in a limited scope. This network was established by the European Commission and member states as early as 1980 to support European cooperation in the field of education. It is coordinated by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) and has been part of the Erasmus+ programme since 2014. It provides comparative analysis of educational systems and policies in Europe. Two reports have covered citizenship education so far, in 2012 and 2017 respectively.²² They primarily analysed national policies within formal education (e.g. national curricular, participation in school governance, evaluation and monitoring criteria). However, they lacked a broader view of citizenship education, including in non- and informal education.

In addition, the data used in Eurydice reports is gathered from national educational authorities, which usually have strong links with national governments. The latter prefer to showcase their successes rather than their shortcomings. Since 2012, the Commission also publishes an annual Education and Training Monitor that compares education and training systems in the different member states. However, this monitoring does not cover citizenship education beyond the data and analysis that Eurydice provides.

In 2018, the Commission established the European Education and Training Expert Panel, composed of 18 experts to contribute to developing the successor to the current ET 2020. Among other themes, the expert panel focused on inclusion and citizenship in their findings and concluded that collecting reliable data is an important next step. The experts identified a lack of systematically collected data on who is participating in national educational programmes. They suggested that the EU should encourage member states to collect this data and establish more general national monitoring systems for inclusion and diversity.²³ This expert panel was a temporary advisory board and has since been dissolved. For a better understanding of the deficiencies and needs in education and especially citizenship education, a permanent dialogue platform between academia, practitioners and policymakers should be established.

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INFOBOX 2: THE GERMAN FEDERAL AGENCY FOR CIVIC EDUCATION

The German Federal Agency for Civic Education is a federal public authority which provides citizenship education and information on political issues to all people in Germany. It defines citizenship education as “educating and encouraging citizens to actively participate in society and in the democratic process.”²⁴ Its objectives are to foster awareness for democracy and further participation in the political and social spheres. It was established in 1952 to prevent the re-establishment of a totalitarian regime. The Agency provides a range of educational materials for teachers and a wider public, publications like monthly magazines and book series, study trips for political multipliers. It also organises events on a variety of topics relating to history, current events and international affairs.

The limited data that is available indicates that the access to and quality of citizenship education varies widely throughout the EU. Certain member states, such as Germany and Luxembourg, provide greater public resources towards citizenship education, also in the non- and informal areas. Both countries fund institutions that are fully committed to providing citizenship education: the Federal Agency for Civic Education (Germany; see Infobox 2) and the Centre for Citizenship Education (Luxembourg). In other member states, education providers mostly rely on third-party funding or project-based public funding.

According to the Eurydice report published in 2012, the “length of time during which citizenship education is taught as a separate subject varies considerably between countries, ranging from 12 years in France to one year in Bulgaria”.²⁵ This indicates that access to citizenship education varies widely in the formal sector. Overall, three approaches to citizenship education were identified in this report: (i) citizenship education as a stand-alone subject; (ii) the integration of citizenship education into wider subjects, such as history and geography; and (iii) citizenship education as a cross-curricular dimension.

There is also a lack of common standards, evaluation criteria and benchmarks to assess the access and quality of citizenship education. The different approaches represent the diversity of European educational systems and cultures and should not be harmonised. Room for diversity is essential to allow for learning experiences to adapt to regional and national historical contexts and the structure of national education systems. However, in line with its educational objectives, the EU should guarantee equal learning opportunities, which in turn requires adequate tools to compare and evaluate equal access to citizenship education.

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Finally, according to the results of the 2016 European Report for International Civic and Citizenship Education, most students have the opportunity to learn about Europe at school. However, “[o]pportunities to learn about political and economic systems at European level, about political and social issues in European countries, and about political and economic integration between European countries” varies across European countries.²⁶ This also shows that there is no clear information available on the European dimension of citizenship education.

All in all, little analysis is available to be able to compare the quality of EU member states’ citizenship education, understand how thoroughly the European dimension of citizenship education is covered, and identify the existing hurdles to accessing citizenship education across EU member states. More frequent monitoring and evaluation in the areas of formal, non-formal and informal education would be necessary to evaluate the access to and quality of citizenship education in the EU comprehensively.

1.2.3. EU policy on lifelong learning opportunities lack focus on democratic competences

The EU has also recognised the relevance of adult learning – which mostly takes place through non- and informal education – to promote active citizenship within the ET 2020 framework and the Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning.²⁷ Citizenship education should *increase* “the supply of and encourage[e] individuals’ engagement in adult learning as a means of strengthening social inclusion and active participation in the community and society” and develop “digital literacy and provid[e] opportunities for adults to develop the basic skills and forms of literacy needed for participating actively in modern society.”²⁸

However, little data and research on the extent to which non- and informal citizenship education across Europe contribute to adult learning is available. A very rough indication is given by the numbers of education facilities and the size of member states’ funding for civil society as a whole. These numbers indicate significant differences in the access to non- and informal citizenship education across member states. The Lifelong Learning Platform, co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme, emphasises the need to widen access to quality education for all citizens through non-formal and informal education opportunities, but does not focus on citizenship education in particular.²⁹

The European Skills Agenda released by the European Commission to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic sets out lifelong learning targets to be achieved by 2025. The Agenda’s indicators, however, lack measures for active citizenship. These should be added to strengthen European democracies and citizenship engagement across all age groups. Funded by Erasmus+, the EU has also established the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE), “a European, multilingual, open membership community of adult learning professionals, including adult educators and trainers, guidance and support staff, researchers and academics, and policymakers.”³⁰ It leads efforts towards enhancing the access to and quality of lifelong learning opportunities for adults. Nevertheless, competences for democratic citizenship unfortunately play a marginal role in its activities. The Union’s efforts on lifelong learning opportunities lack sufficient focus on citizenship education.

EU efforts in the field of digital education lack perspectives of citizenship education.

EU efforts in the field of digital education lack perspectives of citizenship education. Finally, the ongoing digital transformation is inciting EU citizens to learn new skills. And yet, according to the Digital Economy and Society Index, only 58% of EU citizens have basic digital skills.³¹ Digital literacy is essential to a resilient society, especially now that fake news and disinformation campaigns threaten our democratic systems and social cohesion. The European Commission has recognised this: the European Democracy Action Plan, which will be launched at the end of 2020, also focuses on fighting disinformation. In addition, the Commission adopted a new Digital Education Action Plan in September 2020 to strengthen digital competences of EU citizens.

Citizenship education should play an essential role in strengthening digital literacy and digital citizenship competences, thereby protecting European democracy from interference and manipulation. The COVID-19 pandemic has also stressed the need to adopt digital learning methods in citizenship education, provide for distance learning, and make use of digital learning opportunities. This can support the outreach of educational offers to remote areas which lack sufficient learning opportunities. EU activities on training and capacity building for citizenship education should hence include digital education methods.



RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW THE EU SHOULD DEVELOP ITS POLICY ON CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

1. The EU should develop a comprehensive European strategy on citizenship education to overcome the marginal role it currently plays in various programmes and activities.
2. The EU should support member states in implementing the Council of Europe's recommendations on citizenship education.
3. More frequent monitoring and evaluation in the areas of formal, non-formal and informal education would be necessary to comprehensively evaluate the access to and quality of citizenship education in the EU.
4. The EU must invest in training and capacity-building programmes for educators on citizenship education, to enhance students' quality of and access to citizenship education.
5. European efforts to enhance lifelong learning opportunities should include democratic competences, to strengthen European democracies and citizenship engagement for all age groups.
6. Reinforcing digital literacy and competences for digital citizenship should be a central component of the EU's efforts to protect European democracy from interference and manipulation and of its digital education strategy.
7. Training and capacity building for citizenship education should include digital education methods to adapt to distance learning.

Citizenship education should play an essential role in strengthening digital literacy and digital citizenship competences, thereby protecting European democracy from interference and manipulation.

1.2.4. Teacher training and capacity-building programmes on citizenship education need to be enhanced

The Eurydice 2012 report on citizenship education emphasises that teacher training plays an important role in citizenship education and should therefore be supported. Learning-by-doing methods are crucial to foster democratic competences. Practical experiences and activities *outside* of schools should also strengthen the theoretical aspect of citizenship education.³² Initial teacher education or continuing professional development programmes should be reinforced to enable educators to engage in citizenship education.

With regard to citizenship education, the abovementioned expert panel suggested “an alignment with European reference framework for democratic culture; the development of guidelines or codes for dealing with controversial issues in classrooms; ensuring appropriate initial teacher education and continuing professional development and finally, initiating a discourse on religion in the context of citizenship education” are needed.³³ An essential measure should, therefore, be to invest in training and capacity-building programmes on citizenship education for educators.

An essential measure with regard to citizenship education should be to invest in training and capacity-building programmes on citizenship education for educators.

2. Establishing a European Agency for Citizenship Education

Based on the objectives defined in the 2015 Paris Declaration and European Commission initiatives in the field of education, particularly the ET 2020 and the EEA, the Commission should adopt a more comprehensive policy towards citizenship education and dedicate more human and financial resources to this end. To achieve this goal, we propose the establishment of a European Agency for Citizenship Education (EACE).³⁴

2.1. DEFINING CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN THE EU

Various terms are used to describe education in active participation: civic education, citizenship education, citizenship education for democratic citizenship and human rights. The different terms partially reflect member states' varying approaches to citizenship education and are not necessarily used consistently across borders. The difference in approaches is often a consequence of the unique history and political culture of each member state. The term *citizenship education* was chosen for this paper for practical reasons, given that it is the most frequently used term.

The definition used in this Discussion Paper reflects the approach and understanding of citizenship education as defined by the CoE's Charter for Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education and the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture. The CoE describes "Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education" as follows:

"a. 'Education for democratic citizenship' means education, training, awareness-raising, information, practices and activities which aim [...] to empower [learners] to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life, with a view to the promotion and protection of democracy and the rule of law.

"b. 'Human rights education' means education, training, awareness raising, information, practices and activities which aim [...] to empower learners to contribute to the building and defence of a universal culture of human rights in society, with a view to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms."³⁵

These definitions should serve as the basis for defining citizenship education in the EU. The Council of the EU's conclusions from 2018 complements this definition:

"Civic competence is the ability to act as responsible citizens and to fully participate in civic and social life,

based on understanding of social, economic, legal and political concepts and structures, as well as global developments and sustainability."³⁶

"[Education in the EU] should promote intercultural competences, democratic values and respect for fundamental rights, prevent and combat all forms of discrimination and racism, and equip children, young people and adults to interact positively with their peers from diverse backgrounds."³⁷

The EACE would adopt an understanding of citizenship education which follows these existing definitions. Above all, citizenship education should enable the active participation of all EU citizens in not only civic and social but also political life, and provide the knowledge and the tools to contribute to a cohesive, values-based and resilient European Union.

Currently, citizenship education focuses on the national and regional levels of the EU, with a very weak European dimension. This is why the Agency would also promote citizenship education with a European dimension. Learning materials and methods provided by the EACE should not only foster an understanding of the social, economic, legal and political concepts of the nation state but also give a broader understanding of the multilevel governance structures of our globalised world. Developing the European dimension of citizenship education would contribute to a better mutual understanding between EU member states and enable citizens to develop a common vision of the future of the EU.³⁸

Currently, citizenship education focuses on the national and regional levels of the EU, with a very weak European dimension. This is why the Agency would also promote citizenship education with a European dimension.

2.2. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The EACE's purpose would be to help the European Commission and EU member states enhance citizenship education by coordinating, supporting and supplementing the EU's existing activities in the field. To this end, the Agency should focus on three core objectives.

OBJECTIVE 1: SECURE EQUAL ACCESS TO CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Access to education is a basic human right enshrined in Article 14 of the Charter. It is a particularly relevant right because education equality translates into equal opportunities. In the case of citizenship education, this means equality of opportunities to participate in social and political life. Securing equal access to citizenship education secures political rights and social inclusion. It is essential for social cohesion and a stable and democratic political system. By improving the equal access to citizenship education, the EACE would contribute to citizens' ability to participate in political and social life at national and European levels. In addition, the EACE's focus on lifelong learning and non-formal and informal citizenship education would also ensure equal accessibility for all age and socioeconomic groups.

Securing equal access to citizenship education secures political rights and social inclusion. It is essential for social cohesion and a stable and democratic political system.

OBJECTIVE 2: IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Equal access to citizenship education is only the first step. The EACE would also focus on the quality of citizenship education, given that learning outcomes can only be as good as the quality of learning opportunities. Providing high-quality citizenship education through the development of innovative and targeted learning materials and methods is, therefore, essential. The EACE would work in close cooperation with local and regional stakeholders to provide capacity building and training suited to the diverse set of learning environments within Europe. Putting learner voices and practitioners at the heart of the development of high-quality citizenship education would ensure that the Agency could deliver learning outcomes for all social groups across the Union.

Providing high-quality citizenship education through the development of innovative and targeted learning materials and methods is essential.

OBJECTIVE 3: FOSTER INNOVATIVE AND DIGITAL LEARNING METHODS

Enhancing competencies, such as critical thinking and (digital) media literacy, is essential to strengthening democratic resilience in Europe. Disinformation campaigns and fake news are serious threats to social cohesion and democracy. The current COVID-19 context has further increased the need for digital and distance learning methods, which are likely to remain important in the future. The EACE would, therefore, focus on developing innovative and digital learning opportunities and improve citizens' digital media literacy skills and help citizens to adapt to distance learning. This provides opportunities to overcome language barriers, set up learning programmes across borders and complement the EU's existing initiatives in this field.



RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO COUNTER ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE EACE

1. The EACE would *not* harmonise citizenship education. Instead, it would support equal access to qualitative citizenship education across the EU and strengthen the European dimension of citizenship education.
2. The EACE would *not* define European values top-down, but rather enable a European-wide dialogue on how to promote common values and active citizenship.
3. The EACE would have a strong legal basis in the EU Treaties and would not aim to interfere with national competences.
4. While the EACE is inspired by the German Federal Agency for Civic Education, it would not be its equivalent, and the EU27 would develop its objectives and tasks jointly.
5. Citizenship education is currently not considered a priority for the COVID-19 economic recovery – but it should be. Economic crises put societies under enormous pressure. Democratic resilience should thus be at the core of the recovery plan.
6. Citizenship education is seen through different lenses across the EU. Some countries wish to avoid any state interference in education due to historical experiences with totalitarian, one-party systems. Others argue that the EU should not meddle with the democratic education of citizens. While these arguments are understandable, they prevent the EU from becoming a more democratic union, and EU citizens from being able to access qualitative citizenship education.

2.3. THE LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP

2.3.1. The legal basis and mandate

The proposed Agency should be created on the legal basis of Article 165 TFEU. 21 other decentralised EU agencies have been created based on such sector-specific articles.³⁹ Article 165(1) states that,

“The Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity.”

Based on this legal framework, various EU activities in the field of citizenship education have been launched, such as Eurydice and the Erasmus+ programme.

The EACE would pool the existing initiatives by providing well-structured additional resources for EU competences and tasks. Its mandate should be defined by several of the listed objectives and competences defined in Article 165(2) TFEU:

1. It will encourage cooperation between member states through coordination, by “promoting cooperation between education establishments” and “developing exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education systems of the Member States”.
2. It will support and supplement national actions through operational tasks, by “encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors, and encouraging the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe” and “the development of distance education”.

The EACE would work with this mandate, focusing on citizenship education to strengthen the European values set out in Article 2 TEU and the Charter. The defined mandate should not be interpreted in a restrictive manner. With regard to changing social, political and economic circumstances, the EACE would require flexibility and adaptability to ensure its relevance for EU citizens. For instance, the pedagogical approaches should be adapted to specific learning environments; the topics discussed should be relevant to the learners and take on current case studies; and the learning methods should be adapted to the latest new technologies.

The EACE would not create structures parallel to existing EU funding instruments or programmes, but instead pool and coordinate those activities and establish greater resources for the latter.

The EACE would not create structures parallel to existing EU funding instruments or programmes, but instead pool and coordinate those activities and establish greater resources for the latter. The EACE would also avoid duplicating structures from national or regional authorities in the field of education. Institutions and organisations such as the CoE, the German Federal Agency for Citizenship Education or the Networking European Citizenship Education (NECE) will be supported and supplemented where necessary, but not duplicated. The EACE should establish close ties with existing local, national and transnational bodies and NGOs, especially with the relevant unit of the CoE. The EACE should also coordinate closely with existing EU agencies that might be useful to further several of its tasks: the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the EACEA and the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop).

2.3.2. Accountability, structure, funding, and cooperation with EU institutions

Similarly to the FRA, the European Institute for Gender Equality or the Cedefop, the EACE should be established as one of the EU’s decentralised agencies. Agencies are an integral part of the Union’s institutional landscape, contributing to the successful implementation of EU policies. In that same spirit, the EACE would ensure high standards of access to and quality of citizenship education, as is envisioned in the framework of the EEA.

The EACE should be established as one of the EU’s decentralised agencies.

Appropriate reporting and control are crucial factors for ensuring the accountability of decentralised EU agencies. For this purpose, a Management Board would be appointed and entrusted with managing the Agency’s financial and operational activities. Following the existing audit, monitoring and reporting processes based on the Framework Financial Regulation (2019/715), the EACE would be accountable to the European Commission, European Parliament and Council through the submission of an annual financial statement and report. Both would need to be adopted by the Management Board beforehand. To ensure the necessary independence of the Agency, the Management Board should adopt the Agency’s multiannual work programme, which in turn should align with the agreed objectives and benchmarks from relevant sector policies (e.g. EEA, EU Youth Strategy, European Democracy Action Plan).

The Management Board should consist of representatives from relevant EU institutions and other stakeholders working on citizenship education in the EU.⁴⁰ Representatives from the European Parliament,

European Commission, CoE, NECE and NGOs like the European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) and the European Civic Forum should be represented. It should encompass the most relevant stakeholders but consist of no more than 20 representatives. The Board would be responsible for appointing the Director of the EACE. In turn, the Director would be responsible for the day-to-day administration of the Agency, managing all staff-related matters, and preparing and implementing the decisions, strategies, programmes and activities adopted by the Management Board.

The Management Board should consist of representatives from relevant EU institutions and other stakeholders working on citizenship education in the EU.

Most decentralised agencies are funded entirely by contributions from the EU budget, as laid out in the MFF. This should also be the case for the EACE, which would fall under the “decentralised agencies” of the MFF’s Heading 2.7., “Investing in People, Social Cohesion and Values”.⁴¹ As the negotiations on the next EU budget will only take place after the 2024 European Parliament election, the current MFF offers an option to already work on this proposal by establishing a pilot project within the framework of Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions (PP/PAs). The introduction of a Pilot Project would present an opportunity to test the initiative and prepare the grounds for the actual establishment of the EACE. Launching a PP/PA could provide the opportunity to test the feasibility of the new Agency and its benefits for national education systems. Though the Council and Commission can use this tool, the European Parliament usually initiates PP/PAs.

Alternatively, if the hurdles to establish the EACE as a decentralised agency are too high, the EACE could be established within the European Commission’s Directorate-General of Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC). However, it should be separate from the EACEA, which does not focus on citizenship education as such and already manages a large number of activities and funding programmes. The disadvantage of having the Agency be part of the European Commission is that it could be seen as promoting a particular view of European identity. By contrast, as a decentralised agency, the EACE would be able to support citizenship education in a more independent fashion. Another option would be to establish the EACE in a smaller form; as a unit within the FRA which focuses especially on non- and informal citizenship education.

2.4. ACTIVITIES AND TASKS

To achieve the abovementioned objectives, the EACE would exercise the following coordination and operative tasks. These tasks are open for further discussion and are the first set of recommendations. Whether or not they will actually be implemented depends on political will and practical feasibility.

2.4.1. Coordination tasks

Establish platforms for long-term dialogue on citizenship education

The Agency would develop a European dialogue and exchange platform on citizenship education. This dialogue should include local, regional, national and European policymakers in the field of citizenship education. The purpose of the structured exchange would be to collect best practices, develop policy recommendations, and strengthen citizenship education and its European dimension. Like with the previously existing ET 2020 Working Group on Promoting Common Values and Inclusive Education, external expertise should be integrated into the Agency.

The Agency would develop a European dialogue and exchange platform on citizenship education.

In addition, structured dialogue between educational authorities, academia and practitioners should be developed. Representatives from the formal, non-formal and informal education sectors and academia should provide recommendations and advice to national and European policymakers on how to improve the implementation of citizenship education across the EU27 and strengthen the European dimension of citizenship education. For this purpose, the European Commission’s European Education and Training Expert Panel should be fleshed out further. The Agency should also closely collaborate with existing European and international associations and practitioners’ networks, such as the NECE, the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction, and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement.

Coordinate capacity-building activities

The EACE should fund and coordinate capacity-building programmes to strengthen citizenship education among the relevant multipliers (i.e. teachers, CSOs). Besides transmitting European values, capacity-building programmes should focus on the European dimension and on innovative learning methods and practices, such as deliberative democracy approaches and digital participation methods. The EACE should

provide capacity-building programmes on the European dimension of citizenship education to certain groups of stakeholders close to the political sphere, such as journalists, national parliamentarians and national civil servants, through formats such as study trips to Brussels.

The EACE should fund and coordinate capacity-building programmes to strengthen citizenship education.

Currently, each EU institution produces its own learning materials and has visitors' programmes. The Agency could strengthen the impact of those efforts by coordinating existing capacity-building programmes provided by the EU institutions. The EACE should also provide capacity building to national multipliers, working closely with government bodies and educational organisations and agencies to provide education on the European dimension of citizenship education.

2.4.2. Operational tasks

Establish long-term research and monitoring on citizenship education

The EACE should coordinate and support long-term research on and monitoring of citizenship education in the EU. The Agency should contribute to the annual Education and Training Monitor, making citizenship education a permanent topic of analysis. A research unit within the Agency would ensure comprehensive and regular analysis of citizenship education in the EU. This should be done in close cooperation with the existing Eurydice network. However, data collection should go beyond the current practice, which relies solely on data provided by national governments. The EACE's research unit could commission regular monitoring reports and tailor-made research on citizenship education, for instance from the Joint Research Centre, the Commission's science and knowledge centre, but also from universities and external research centres. The research and analysis should feed into the creation of concrete evaluation criteria, benchmarks and recommendations on citizenship education in EU member states.

The EACE should coordinate and support long-term research on and monitoring of citizenship education in the EU.

Establish an operational grant for non-formal and informal citizenship education

The EACE should establish and coordinate a long-term, operational grant-making mechanism for non- and informal citizenship education, supporting organisations that seek to promote European values, especially where funding opportunities are not provided at national and/or local levels. This mechanism should also provide local informal groups and small NGOs with funding opportunities for information campaigns and grassroots activities since they currently lack funding opportunities at the EU level. The calls for proposals should be developed in close cooperation with local stakeholders, acknowledging the diversity in political cultures and needs across the EU.

The money should go directly to the organisations on the ground. They would not necessarily have to work on the European dimension of citizenship education but would have to adhere to and promote European values. The EACE would also be responsible for the funding strategy, funding criteria, project management and support of the grantees as well as evaluation processes. The EACE should be in close contact with organisations like the French-German Youth Office, and bilateral funds, such as the French-German Citizens' Fund. It should also support other EU member states in establishing similar bilateral funds to promote non- and informal citizenship education and exchange.

Provide easily accessible information and teaching materials

The EACE should commission teaching and learning materials and provide the general public with easily accessible information on relevant political debates that consider different political, social and cultural positions from across Europe. The materials and information should target a range of different audiences and ages in all European languages and use a variety of different pedagogical approaches. This way, educators from across the EU can source a large database of (educational) materials to use in classrooms, but also in other (i.e. non- and informal) educational settings. Those materials should ideally become an integral part of the national or regional school curricula, to ensure that they are not only available but also used in classrooms. The Agency should also enhance the dissemination and translation of existing materials and publications – both those created by the EU and national education authorities. This would enable mutual understanding between EU citizens and a stronger focus on the European dimension of citizenship education.

The EACE should commission teaching and learning materials and provide the general public with easily accessible information on relevant political debates that consider different political, social and cultural positions from across Europe.

Materials which explain the EU already exist, especially through the School Education Gateway online platform Erasmus+. This platform is dedicated to formal education materials, while the EPALe also has a resource centre. However, those resource centres do not focus on citizenship education as such and have not been developed by educators themselves. There is also no information on how these resources are distributed and used across the EU. Finally, the Commission's communication department (DG COMM) also provides information resources about the functioning of the EU, just as the Europe Direct offices across EU member states do. However, as it is prepared by an EU body, these are communications materials rather than materials specifically made for teaching purposes.

Provide digital infrastructure and trainings for digital methods and tools

The Agency should give grants to small-scale education organisations to ensure access to digital infrastructure, such as cloud capacities and web conference tools, in conformity with the European standards on data protection and cybersecurity. This way, smaller CSOs would not be disadvantaged in situations such as the one we face now, where remote working and learning is a necessity. The Agency should also provide training for the efficient and effective use of the digital infrastructure it provides to organisations. This way, digital learning methods and tools will be fostered to provide innovative and digital citizenship education across Europe. Finally, to combat fake news and disinformation, the EACE should also distribute grants to organisations that provide training on digital media literacy, which would be in line with the Commission's Digital Education Action Plan.

The Agency should give grants to small-scale education organisations to ensure access to digital infrastructure, such as cloud capacities and web conference tools.

TASKS OF THE EUROPEAN AGENCY FOR CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Coordination tasks:

- Establish a platform for long-term dialogue on citizenship education
- Coordinate capacity-building activities

Operational tasks:

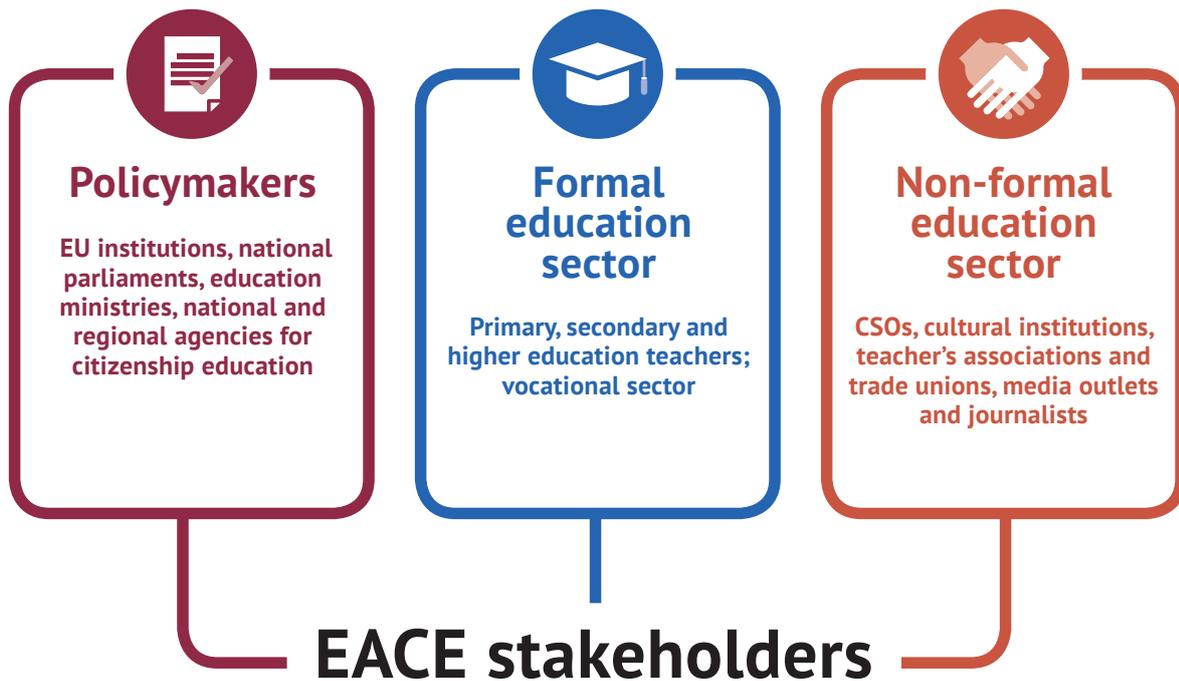
- Establish long-term research on and monitoring of citizenship education
- Establish an operational grant for non-formal and informal citizenship education
- Provide easily accessible information and teaching materials
- Provide digital infrastructure and trainings for digital methods and tools

2.5. ORGANISATIONAL PRINCIPLES AND GOVERNANCE

2.5.1. Reflecting European values in the organisational structure

A typical hierarchical organisation will not fit with the Agency's objectives to foster democratic decision-making, citizen engagement, critical thinking and individual responsibility. Instead, the organisational structure should reflect the values promoted, both in its structure and its daily functioning. This means that the EACE should internally boast a diverse staff composition; critical thinking; democratic and fair decision-making; and active, engaged and responsible employees. Such an organisational structure might seem radical and innovative, especially compared to the current functioning of public bodies. However, given the profound changes required to reform democracies and improve the links between the EU and its citizens, new forms of internal organisation must be reflected in the Agency's institutional set-up.

The organisational structure of the Agency should reflect values of democratic decision-making, citizen engagement, critical thinking and individual responsibility, both in its structure and its daily functioning.



In addition, this agile structure of governance could counter the criticism that the creation of the EACE would result in even more bureaucracy at the EU level. A coordinated structure for citizenship education at the EU level could decrease bureaucracy by creating a hub for the existing programmes and initiatives on the topic and ensuring that there is no duplication of efforts across policy fields.

2.5.2. Organisational principles

Self-governance

The EACE should be based on self-governance, trust and responsibility. This means that employees can take on different roles in the organisation. Organisational tasks, such as human resources or legal services, should not be performed by specialised departments, but by employees with the appropriate competences, skills and motivation. The team members shall decide the distribution of tasks at any given moment. Within the Agency, everyone is encouraged to participate, share ideas and take decisions.

Within the Agency, everyone is encouraged to participate, share ideas and take decisions.

Decentralisation & digitisation

The Agency's decentralised functioning would be closely linked to its digitised working method. The COVID-19 pandemic has obliged organisations to reassess traditional working methods. This should also be reflected in the EACE. To support the creation of a truly European staff, the Agency should allow its employees to work remotely from anywhere in Europe. This way, knowledge and close relations to local stakeholders working on citizenship education can also be ensured. Flexible working conditions adapted to the employee's individual situation will allow for diverse teams. To manage this new working method, a considerable investment in IT infrastructure and a user-friendly intranet will be necessary. Some office spaces would be accessible in certain EU countries, but most of the work would take place remotely. Physical meetings would still take place regularly.

Transparency

The Agency should have an enhanced transparency policy. Staff members would be asked to work with their colleagues transparently, independently of their roles. This would empower the employees and ensure that they all work responsibly. Little information should be confidential within the organisation, as trust should be the main pillar. In addition, the Agency would also ensure transparency towards the general public concerning its funding, organisational structures and principles, projects, and methodologies.

Inclusion & diversity

The Agency would promote inclusion and diversity in all its policies, programmes, funding and internal functioning. This means that recruiting mechanisms would ensure a wide diversity of socioeconomic profiles, age groups, gender and ethnic backgrounds. The Agency should enforce a non-discriminatory policy in its structures and functioning and promote this policy in its programmes and communications. It should also be family-friendly, barrier-free, and ensure that all its employees have equal opportunities. A peer-to-peer approach to citizenship education should be promoted within the EACE as well as the organisations it funds.⁴²

Agility & impact orientation

The EACE should regularly monitor and evaluate its mode of functioning to remain agile, flexible and relevant. The Agency should include all employees into the processes that define the organisation's strategic orientation, in close cooperation with the Management Board and the Director. The EACE should embrace organisational development methods, such as 'theory of change', which would enable it to "identif[y] the desired long-term goals and then [work] back from these to identify all the conditions [...] that must be in place [...] for the goals to occur."⁴³ In addition, the Agency should have a strong impact orientation to ensure that project results have a positive impact on society.

2.5.3. Governance structures of the EACE

The Agency's main organisational form would be based on self-governed teams of roughly 10 to 12 people. The abovementioned activities and tasks of the Agency would not be separated into departments, but rather be distributed among employees based on their competences, knowledge and motivation. One employee should be able to take over multiple tasks. To ensure smooth coordination with other EU institutions and multiple partners, as well as the legal requirements for an Agency, some employees will take over official roles. However, they would not reflect those in their daily work life, as this would be incompatible with the Agency's self-governed work structure. The EACE would have to carefully select its employees to ensure a balance between different EU member states and the various skills required, including project management, communications, research, training and teaching, and pedagogy. Ensuring diversity within the teams and leadership would be crucial, not only from gender and



ORGANISATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF THE EUROPEAN AGENCY FOR CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

- Self-governance
- Decentralisation & digitisation
- Transparency
- Inclusion & diversity
- Agility & impact orientation

socioeconomic lenses but also ethnically. Each team would recruit its own colleagues, following the broad agency guidelines to ensure diversity.⁴⁴

To ensure the functioning of the organisation, the EACE would provide permanent coaching to ensure that the employees have the necessary competences and skills to work in self-governed teams. In addition, the EACE would establish a user-friendly and comprehensive intranet, which would enable employees to share their knowledge, expertise and experiences with others. This platform would be crucial to managing internal work processes and ensuring that the employees can work in a decentralised manner.

Strategic decision-making processes (e.g. concerning annual working programmes) should be based on an advisory process, rather than a top-down one. Decisions should be taken collectively by the teams after having gone through an advisory process, allowing other employees that are considered experts in their field to also give their views on the issue. The regular interactions with a number of stakeholders will help to ensure that strategic decisions include all perspectives. In addition, the EACE should establish and work with several set procedures: evaluation and monitoring mechanisms for the Agency's grant-making functions, an internal conflict resolution mechanism, and a set of guidelines to establish a productive and constructive meeting culture.

Lastly, the EACE could establish a number of non-permanent consultative bodies, such as an academic sounding board, to include the latest research findings in its programmes and policies. Or, ad-hoc working groups to provide specific advice on certain fields.

3. What's next? Potential steps towards a European Agency for Citizenship Education

Establishing an EACE is a long-term objective and an ambitious task; certain EU governments would be reluctant to establish such an agency. They will cite

reasons of national sovereignty in the field of education and the subsidiarity principle, arguing that there is no need for the EU to act in this policy field. They might

also believe that the EU aims to harmonise citizenship education and destroy the cultural diversity of Europe by doing so. Those criticisms can be assuaged by pointing out the clear objective set out in Article 165 TFEU, which states to invest much more in citizenship education at the EU level.

Certain EU governments would be reluctant to establish such an agency. They will cite reasons of national sovereignty in the field of education and the subsidiarity principle, arguing that there is no need for the EU to act in this policy field.

The EU should also emphasise the need to safeguard European values and the lack of coherence in certain areas, for instance in the available opportunities to exercise EU citizenship rights across the EU. The EU could also demonstrate the support function of the EACE, which would not duplicate existing structures and organisations at national, regional or local levels. Finally, critical voices concerning the independence of the EACE can be reassured by the fact that the Agency would be independent of other EU institutions, be decentralised, and have dedicated reporting mechanisms.

Given the current priorities at the EU level and the political set-up within the European Council, the implementation of this proposal is not likely to take place before the next European election in 2024. However, this should not stop us from considering different pathways and the next steps to put citizenship education on the EU's agenda, making progress to ensure better access to and quality of citizenship education, strengthening the European dimension of citizenship education, and fostering innovative and digital learning methods.

We fully support the recommendations set out by the NECE's recent Declaration, "A watershed moment for citizenship education in Europe".⁴⁵ We would like to stress the following points outlined in the Declaration in particular:

- The European Commission should make citizenship education a priority in the Next Generation EU recovery package and foster a comprehensive approach towards citizenship education.
- The Erasmus+ programme should promote citizenship education for all ages and ensure it does not only reach mobile Europeans with higher education qualifications.

- The Commission's plan to achieve an EEA until 2025 should include concrete measures on citizenship education and initiatives, to strengthen the European dimension of citizenship education.
- The European Commission should promote the implementation of the CoE's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture as a standard for the development and evaluation of educational curricula by national authorities.

Furthermore, these NECE recommendations should be complemented by the following additions:

- Make the monitoring of citizenship education through the Eurydice network more regular, using more diverse and independent sources. For this purpose, additional personnel focusing specifically on citizenship education should be assigned to Eurydice.
- Include citizenship education in the Digital Education Action Plan to foster innovative learning methods in citizenship education.
- Launch a European strategy for citizenship education to identify gaps in the existing programmes and activities, as well as complement and coordinate them.
- Set up a unit within the European Commission's DG EAC that focuses exclusively on citizenship education, and/or a permanent ET 2020 working group on citizenship education.
- Develop a Jean Monnet research project that develops benchmarks and evaluation criteria for researching and monitoring citizenship education. This would pave the way towards the envisioned comprehensive understanding of the state of play in all member states.
- Nurture close collaboration between existing platforms and organisations that promote citizenship education in the EU member states, especially in the non- and informal sectors (i.e. the NECE, ECAS, local and national organisations).
- Make citizenship education a part of the agenda of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE), acknowledging that citizenship education is a stepping-stone for European democracy. Citizens should be given the ability to discuss citizenship education and further develop the proposal of the EACE.

Besides the European Commission, there are several other actors relevant to the promotion of citizenship education in the EU. The European Parliament, European political parties and parliamentary groups should put citizenship education on their agendas and raise awareness of the topic when discussing European values, political rights and education. In addition, national governments play a crucial role, as in most EU member states they are responsible for formal education policies. We fully support recommendations that aim to

improve citizenship education in the national context, such as the Institut Jacques Delors' latest report on the European dimension of French education.⁴⁶ Finally,

cities, regions and local authorities, as well as society as a whole, bear an important responsibility in ensuring that citizenship education is considered a priority.

Conclusion

Establishing an EACE is an ambitious task. It would require political backing not only from EU decision-makers but also national governments. Despite the clear objectives set out by EU education ministers to strengthen active citizenship, education policy is still seen as a traditional national competence. This means that national capitals might be wary of ambitious EU policies in this area. In addition, to consider citizenship education a priority in times of a public health and economic crises would require a shift of perspective, despite the importance of investing in the democratic resilience of societies.

Establishing an EACE is an ambitious task. It would require political backing not only from EU decision-makers but also national governments.

However, the EU should seize this window of opportunity to enhance citizenship education for a couple of reasons:

1. The last few years have shown the escalation of the rule of law crisis in the EU and the continued discontent of citizens with the Union, while liberal democracies have come under severe pressure globally. There is a clear need to come up with more innovative ways to deal with violations of European values and improve the EU's democratic set-up. Recognising the relevance of EU citizens to support democratic values could prove effective in safeguarding European values in the long-run.

2. Establishing an EACE would be an opportunity to tackle threats like fake news and disinformation at EU and national levels, while strengthening citizens' ability to deal with structural change, such as climate change and the digital transformation. The establishment of the EACE would enable EU citizens to participate in deliberative activities, such as the CoFoE. It could also potentially lead to an increase in election turnout, increasing the democratic legitimacy of both national and EU democratic institutions.

Citizenship education should be an intrinsic part of the COVID-19 recovery strategy. The EU should not only be focusing on the economy but also use this crisis to invest in social and European cohesion. There will not be a 'return to normal' in the coming months or years. It is time for EU institutions and national governments to strengthen their core values – and do so through citizenship education.

- ¹ For more about the in- and outgroup phenomenon of European identity, see Rohde-Liebenau, Judith (2020), "[Raising European Citizens? European Identity in European Schools](#)"; *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, pp.1-19.
- ² Gehrke, Laurenz, "[Hungary no longer a democracy: report](#)", *Politico*, 06 May 2020.
- ³ *Reporters Without Borders*, "[Slovakia](#)" (accessed 02 December 2020); *Reporters Without Borders*, "[Malta](#)" (accessed 02 December 2020).
- ⁴ For further information on the impact of public health measures on democracy, the rule of law and human rights in the EU, see Marzocchi, Ottavio (2020), [The impact of COVID-19 measures on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights in the EU](#), PE 651.343, European Parliament.
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VALUES UNITE is an initiative advocating for the establishment of a European Agency for Citizenship Education. It was founded in June 2020 by Susanne Zels and Sophie Pornschlegel with the support of JoinPolitics, a German start-up which provides funding to political talents and their ideas.



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