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**2022 Review**  
of the implementation of the  
Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic  
Citizenship and Human Rights Education - CM/Rec(2010)7



**SUMMARY**  
**of Main Findings and Conclusions**

**DRAFT**

The opinions expressed in this work are the responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe.

The following summary presents the main findings in terms of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education implementation review.

The Charter is a recommendation that contains the main principles and standards needed to implement education for democratic citizenship (EDC) and human rights education (HRE) in both formal and non-formal education sectors. This review is aimed at analysing the progress of the Charter implementation in Europe made in the last five years and at defining new priorities for EDC/HRE policies and practices. The data presented below was collected in January-March 2022 through surveys, focus groups and literature analysis.

The full and final texts will be published on the Council of Europe website in June 2022.

## Contents

<b>I. Policies and practices</b> .....	2
<b>II. Key transversal challenges to the implementation of the Charter on EDC/HRE</b> .....	5
<b>III. Training and professional development</b> .....	7
<b>IV. COVID-19</b> .....	8

### I. Policies and practices

1. Concerns about the policy/practice gap on the implementation of EDC/HRE remain, but survey data collected reflects a rather positive perception among respondents with regards to the progress made since 2016.
2. When it comes to **provision** of EDC/HRE, a positive perception is predominant about the progress made in the last five years. The key sectors of action are pre-primary and compulsory primary and secondary education, as well as continuing professional development (e.g. for teachers, educators, school/university staff. However, in relation to higher education and initial teacher education (ITE), the replies revealed a rather mitigated perception.
3. In terms of **quality** of EDC/HRE, examples refer to curricular reforms introducing EDC and/or HRE as a school subject (Slovenia); the development of school projects using the RFCDC (Georgia); the mainstreaming of EDC/HRE in vocational education and

training (VET) educational institutions (Armenia); and the implementation of the RFCDC through a whole school approach (Montenegro), to name a few.

4. Although these initiatives reflect that progress is being made to promote EDC/HRE in European education systems, it's difficult to assert whether the increase in quality is directly proportional, **mostly due to the lack of monitoring and evaluation data specifically focused on EDC/HRE.**
5. Data collected outside the surveys point to a **persisting lack of policy frameworks or strategies explicitly promoting EDC/HRE in European countries.** This may be explained partly by the focus on education and training as a means to improve access to employment and citizenship education taking a secondary role in education policy.
6. Also, while citizenship education might have been 'boosted' in European Union countries through the progressive adoption of the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (Council of the European Union, 2018), a systemic approach specifically addressing HRE is still absent in most education policy frameworks.

#### Formal general education and VET

7. Respondents to the survey for the education policy sector showed a rather positive outlook on the progress made towards provision of EDC/HRE across educational levels.
8. The RFCDC offers a competence framework showing how EDC/HRE can be integrated into formal education through a competence-based approach. **This shift, however, poses the question regarding whether schools, teachers, and educational staff are adequately prepared for it.**
9. Among respondents to the education policy survey for this review cycle, 16 countries out of 20 indicated that progress has been made in the provision of EDC/HRE in VET. This outlook is not necessarily supported by data collected through the focus groups: a number of participants indicated that VET schools are "not as open" to including EDC/HRE in the curriculum, and if it does happen it's implicit in subjects related to social sciences. **The unbalanced provision of EDC/HRE in VET could have a stronger impact on vulnerable groups due to the lack of access to opportunities for learning for VET students.**

#### The school community: key actors and democratic governance

10. The **whole school approach** has the potential to strengthen the presence of EDC/HRE at school, by encouraging democratic practices at all instances of the school community. Several countries provided examples in the education and youth policy surveys. Further examples from the focus group participants show that the RFCDC has helped to implement EDC/HRE in primary and secondary schools using the whole school approach.

11. Respondents to the education policy survey provided some examples of the measures undertaken to foster **student participation** in the school community through student councils or student bodies that promote pupils' participation. With regards to **parents** and **school leaders**, data collected paint a different picture. Though respondents to the youth policy survey indicated that legislation and policies promoting parental involvement in schools are in place, when it comes to the existing co-operation between the government and parents' groups was pointed out as a key challenge by the focus groups participants.
12. Data collected about **school leaders'** involvement in EDC/HRE activities or training opportunities is scarce. Participants to the focus groups stressed on the importance of providing them with more learning opportunities on EDC/HRE topics and of involving them in the process of creating a more democratic environment at school.
13. Research points to the persisting challenge of supporting **teachers** in the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will enable them to address EDC/HRE in the classroom. With regards to the provision of relevant training on EDC/HRE for teachers, respondents to the education policy survey for this review show a positive perception. However, data collected from reports from the last five years, as well as qualitative data from our focus groups, is rather mitigated in this regard.
14. Data collected for this review points to a challenge lying on the 'policy to practice' translation of EDC/HRE; teachers are expected interpret the policy and introduce these contents in their lesson plans, regardless of their level of preparation and the support they may receive. Hence, teacher training policies that specifically address the provision of EDC/HRE for teachers in ITE and CPD are crucial to reduce the risk of EDC/HRE being only a 'declarationist' practice at school.

#### Higher education and Research

15. Data collected from the education policy survey shows that respondents have a mixed perception about the progress made in terms of provision of EDC/HRE in **higher education**. Out of 19 replies, 12 countries indicated that progress had been made to a moderate extent, whereas five respondents stated that it had been to a small extent. One of the factors that could explain the mixed perception is that, given that HEIs enjoy high levels of autonomy in most European countries, governments have a limited control over the provision of EDC/HRE in university-level curricula.
16. Although there is a growing support for EDC/HRE across member states, more **research** is needed to understand the current gaps and avenues for improvement, in particular at the school level. Data collected point to the need of more research at the national and regional level and the sharing of experiences about EDC/HRE at the policy level. Focus group participants were keen to highlight the importance of "fresh" research on the challenges to the implementation of EDC/HRE at school, as well as on the use of the RFCDC in formal education and teacher training.

#### Assessment and Evaluation

17. Much like in the last review cycle, the findings of this review reveal that **assessment** in EDC/HRE remains an area for further improvement. Very little information is made available by countries in this regard, in particular with regards to student assessment in VET.
18. In terms of the instruments and tools used for student assessment, it is worth noting that national examinations are often subject to criticism in the area of EDC/HRE. Focus group participants emphasized that countries should be careful in implementing national examinations to assess learners' attitudes.
19. With regards to **evaluation**, since 2017 the situation hasn't substantially changed. Research on this matter has underlined the lack of monitoring and empirical data on the quality of citizenship education, as well as a lack of common evaluation criteria and/or benchmarks across countries.
20. This trend appears to be confirmed by participants to the focus groups, that highlighted the need to have also "non-official" monitoring and evaluation processes to corroborate what governments are reporting on the access and quality to EDC/HRE.
21. Another important aspect of evaluation in EDC/HRE is **internally appraising the quality of the initiatives delivered by NGOs and youth organisations**. When asked whether they have clear procedures and criteria to evaluate the quality of EDC/HRE initiatives, the surveys yielded slightly different results. While an average of 43% of NGOs stated they do have procedures and criteria for evaluation, only about a third of youth organisations do so. It's worth noting that almost a third of the respondents from youth organisations *do not know* whether procedures and criteria for evaluation have been developed in their institutions.

## II. II. Key transversal challenges to the implementation of the Charter on EDC/HRE

### Access to EDC/HRE for vulnerable groups

22. The provision of EDC/HRE to vulnerable groups is an important area where the policy/practice gap became visible in this review. Although most respondents both to the survey for education policy representatives (21) and the youth policy bodies (12) stated that measures and activities put in place in the last five years have ensured that vulnerable groups have access to EDC/HRE, data collected from the focus groups and literature review point into a different direction.
23. Most of the organisations that responded to the questionnaire implement initiatives aimed at improving access to EDC/HRE for girls and women. Interestingly, the responses do not correlate with any concrete regions in Europe, but they do with other vulnerable groups that the respondents work with. Around half of the respondents work with people with disabilities, as well as refugees and migrants. Approximately a third of respondents work with Roma communities.
24. With regards to improving access to EDC/HRE for vulnerable groups, **the availability of the Charter and RFCDC in minority languages** might play a role in countries

where these instruments have not been translated yet. The findings from the surveys among education and youth policy representatives present a mixed outlook. According to respondents to the youth policy survey, the Charter is not available in the minority language(s) of six out of 11 countries that replied. For the education policy survey, the Charter is not available in minority language(s) in 15 countries out of 20. As for the RFCDC, the instrument is not available in the minority languages of 18 countries out of 20 according to the respondents to the education policy survey.

### Conceptual controversies

25. Democratic citizenship and human rights are still very loaded, sensitive and “highly politicised” within some European societies. Often, they require to introduce controversial topics in the curriculum, and teachers need additional training to address them. There is a potential of using other concepts or topics as ‘entry points’ to discuss human rights in the classroom – such as education for sustainable development, global citizenship education, critical youth citizenship, etc.

### Contextual factors

26. Data collected for this review confirms the need to consider the **complex and varied political landscapes across Europe**. Indeed, the political organisation of some member states (centralised/decentralised) may have an impact on the dissemination and sharing of good practices.
27. One of the big challenges is the **attention given by the media and the general public to EDC/HRE**. For respondents from the youth policy sector the lack of media and public interest and support are two of the most important challenges to the promotion of EDC/HRE, followed by the reduction in funding and the lack of priority among decision makers.
28. **Another contextual issue not less important is the phenomenon of shrinking spaces**, that has widely affected the NGO sector in recent years. When a conservative political agenda is dominant, the space for the EDC/HRE work of civil society organisations starts shrinking. Also, an increasing pressure is put on human rights advocates and NGOs working in this field due to potential legal issues.

### Co-operation across and within sectors

29. The preceding two reviews demonstrated that EDC/HRE in Europe has been mainly implemented by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including youth organisations. It remains to be the case according to the data obtained. Often, it was the expertise of the non-governmental that put EDC/HRE instruments to practice on the state level. The role of NGOs is sometimes recognized on the legal level. However, the level of recognition of the important role of NGOs and youth organisations in the provision of citizenship and human rights education remains limited.
30. According to the respondents, co-operation is an important condition for assuring the accessibility of EDC/HRE for all and for better Charter implementation.

31. The cooperation of formal (e.g., schools, and higher education institutions) and non-formal educational organisations (NGOs and youth organisations) remains at a moderate level, but when it comes to policymakers as such the level of cooperation is lower. Youth organisations and NGOs cooperate with schools, but only sometimes or rarely with other formal education institutions (vocational and higher education, pre-primary education etc.).
32. Regular exchanges among the authorities responsible for education and youth policies are rare. This means that if progress on EDC/HRE implementation is achieved in one policy area, it does not necessarily concern the other.
33. The divide between formal and non-formal, youth, and education sectors is a persisting issue to be addressed. The equal ownership of EDC/HRE provision on the national level is yet to be achieved. However, the data also show that the tools necessary for establishing systematic collaboration are in place – such as the common language provided by RFCDC, as well as the cooperation among schools, universities, and NGOs.

## Funding

34. One of the key recommendations from the previous review was to support the EDC/HRE policies implementation with sufficient resources. The availability of funding for EDC/HRE initiatives has an impact on both formal and non-formal education sectors. Lack of funding can lead to issues of provision and quality, sustainability, and lack of visibility of the NGOs in research on EDC/HRE implementation. NGOs remain to be the ones implementing EDC/HRE policies at the state level. However, rarely any funding is made available by the state. The provision of funding for EDC/HRE initiatives is the least common way of co-operation between non-formal education actors and policymakers. The level of financial support offered to non-governmental actors remains as low as in 2016.

## III. III. Training and professional development

35. Capacity-building in EDC/HRE is the most critical mechanism for EDC/HRE policies implementation. Both NGOs and youth organisations consider the lack of training opportunities for educators and youth workers to be a fundamental challenge for the EDC/HRE implementation. NGOs are still the leading providers of capacity-building opportunities on the national level in Europe.
36. Lack of political will and co-operation with the authorities is the main challenge for universal, sustainable, and high-quality training provision.
37. Just like in 2016, training opportunities are still primarily available to youth workers, teacher trainers, students at schools, and teachers.
38. **Pre-primary.** Access to EDC/HRE training is perceived as being on the same level as school teachers, but when NGOs are asked how often their own organisations work

with the same target groups, pre-primary teachers appear to be at the bottom of the list.

39. **VET and higher education.** Training opportunities seem to be available to students, but not to teaching staff. Young people educated in vocational programs are significantly less politically engaged than the ones who studied at universities. This can have significant negative effects on the equality of civic and political participation in Europe. NGOs and youth organisations consider that Council of Europe materials are scarcely useful for VET, higher education, and pre-primary education. The RFCDC "Guidance document for higher education" can be seen as the first step towards closing this gap.
40. **Parents and policymakers.** Just like in 2016, their involvement in EDC/HRE training is very limited. The implementation of the whole school approach (WSA) promoted by RFCDC is not possible without the participation of these two target groups. At the moment, the educators are poorly equipped to work with the WSA.
41. **Educators** are equipped to a fair extent to address such traditional EDC/HRE topics as gender equality, inclusion, and the development of democratic competences. This can be related to the long-term focus on the competences approach in education in general and to the role of RFCDC. Nevertheless, digital citizenship and media literacy that the youth organisations name as highly relevant for young people today is one of the topics that educators are the least prepared to work with.
42. The respondents see the most important role of the Council of Europe in the provision of capacity-building opportunities. A European network of trainers is suggested under the auspices of the Council of Europe.

#### IV. COVID-19

43. Unfortunately, very little information can be found on the place of EDC/HRE during the pandemic and the role of EDC/HRE in addressing the COVID-19 aftermath.
44. There were three main types of developments regarding EDC/HRE provision during the pandemic: the provision stopped completely. EDC/HRE was taught exclusively in terms of one subject – civics was dropped for giving more time to STEM subjects; the continuation of the EDC/HRE provision in terms of civics; and a cross-curricular approach if it was introduced at schools before the pandemic. Only this option allows for the systematic and sustainable provision of EDC/HRE.
45. Continuation of EDC/HRE provision was assured through new formats. Online courses were the most common type of developed EDC/HRE resources in the last five years. However, educators are generally equipped to promote EDC/HRE online only to a small degree. It is related to the low level of digital literacy of many teachers in Europe but also to the lack of understanding of if and how certain topics can be addressed in the digital format. The face-to-face format remains the most common for the promotion of RFCDC and the Charter for the following reasons:



- lack of digital literacy or lack of access to necessary equipment by the participants
  - not all donors are flexible enough to reimburse the NGOs for the organisation of online events
  - many learning outcomes especially when working with young people cannot be achieved in a purely online format.
46. Blended learning is the most unpopular among all the formats used for the EDC/HRE implementation. Educators need more information about various options for organising blended learning environments and about the ways that blended learning can support EDC/HRE implementation.

The pandemic induced other developments that are strongly related to the EDC/HRE objectives.

47. EDC/HRE is an essential means to address such consequences of the pandemic as disruption in continuous education, further exclusion of vulnerable groups, as well as transition to new formats of teaching and learning.
48. Whole school approach in action. The schools that developed civic competences of their students through WSA before the pandemic continued to do so in the online format without significant disruption. These schools also had better communication with their students and parents. In many communities, schools have become the centres of support for their students' families, particularly for vulnerable groups.
49. The involvement of youth in their communities, as well as their political literacy, has increased both face-to-face and digitally. The question is how to make this effect sustainable and address the needs of young people through EDC/HRE to ensure that their engagement is based on the values of human rights and democracy.
50. The well-being of young people and their mental health. The data from all over the world confirm that COVID-19 has had a horrific effect on young people's mental health. Health professionals are calling for including young people in the decision-making processes related to their well-being.
51. Digital inequalities and the digital dimension of citizenship. The divide between digital citizenship and citizenship as such is no longer relevant because now digital inequalities are an inalienable component of actual social inequality. The exclusion of vulnerable groups at schools was visualized through the digital divide. However, the educational approaches and teaching methods promoted on the national level enable young people to critically assess the information they encounter in the media or online only to a small or moderate extent.