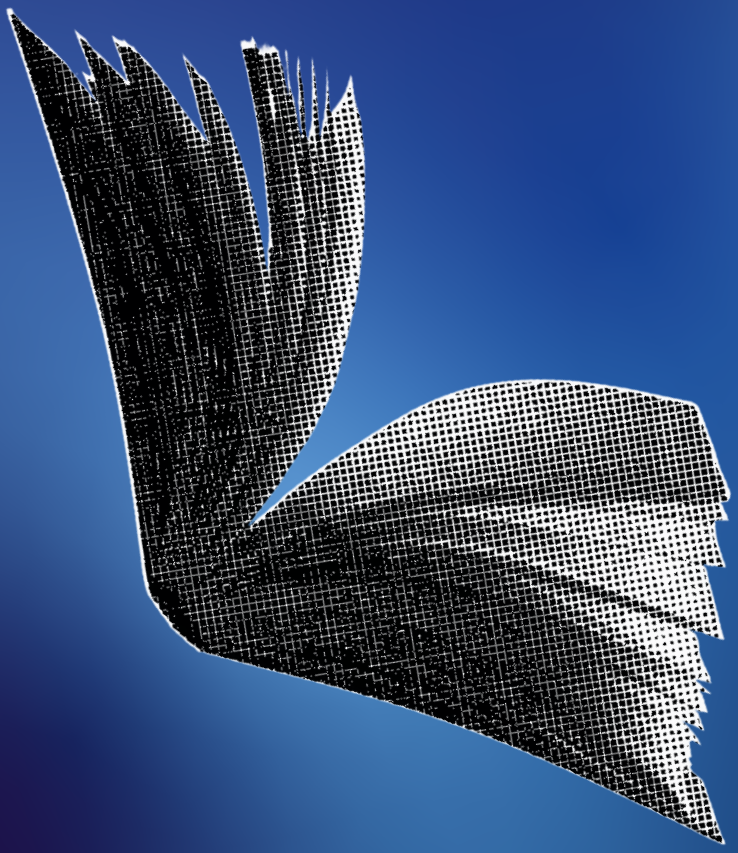
EUROPEAN SPACE FOR CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION





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EUROPEAN SPACE FOR CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

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FOREWORD



Every generation is given the chance to breathe new life into democracy, and education is where that chance begins. For almost three decades, the Council of Europe has worked with its member states to help learners seize that chance, from the launch of the Education for Democratic Citizenship programme at the Second Summit of Heads of State and Government in 1997, through the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education in 2010, to the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) in 2018.

Today, this work takes on a new urgency. Across Europe, trust in democratic institutions is being undermined, disinformation and polarisation are reshaping public debate, and digital technologies and artificial intelligence are transforming how people learn, communicate and participate. In some places, democracy itself is being questioned. In this context, citizenship education can no longer be taken for granted. It calls for reimagining education and innovating for democracy.

The European Space for Citizenship Education (ESCE) is our response. Rooted in the Reykjavík Declaration and its Principles for Democracy, the ESCE is a key action of the Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024–2030 "Learners First" and contributes directly to the New Democratic Pact for Europe and its commitment to protecting, innovating and learning democracy.

The ESCE rests on three mutually reinforcing pillars. The Principles for Education for Democratic Citizenship articulate the Council of Europe's acquis into a shared foundation that guides, legitimises and protects citizenship education, while encouraging member states to shape their own approaches. The Quality Framework for Education for Democratic Citizenship offers a flexible, self-evaluation-based tool that supports continuous improvement without ranking or standardising. The Co-operation pillar, including the ESCE Platform, connects ministries, educators, researchers, civil society and young people so they can learn from each other, test new approaches and respond together to shared challenges. Together, these pillars cover all levels and forms of education, from early childhood education and care to vocational, higher and non-formal education.

The European Space for Citizenship Education is the result of a broad, participatory process. It draws on international conferences in Berlin in 2024 and Montenegro in 2025, on the contributions of the Education Policy Advisors Network, and on reviews by leading experts in the field. In December 2026, the Ministers of Education will launch the ESCE at the 27th Session of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education in Podgorica, marking the beginning of its implementation in member states.

The European Space for Citizenship Education is an invitation to renew the democratic mission of education in Europe and contribute to the strengthening of democratic security of our societies. I encourage all those who share responsibility for education to make use of it, contribute to it, and help bring it to life in education institutions, youth centres and communities across our continent.

Marja Ruotanen
Director General of Democracy
and Human Dignity
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The European Space for Citizenship Education (ESCE) is a Council of Europe initiative to strengthen democratic resilience in Europe through renewed and future-orientated Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC).

Building on more than three decades of Council of Europe work in citizenship education, human rights education, intercultural dialogue, digital citizenship, and democratic culture, the ESCE provides member states with a coherent framework to support democratic values, human rights, and the rule of law across formal, non-formal, and informal education settings. It is a direct contribution to the Council of Europe's New Democratic Pact for Europe.

The ESCE is structured around three mutually reinforcing pillars. Firstly, it establishes a shared conceptual foundation through 10 Principles for Education for Democratic Citizenship, offering guidance, legitimacy, protection, and innovation for EDC policies and practices. These principles emphasise universal access, responsiveness to societal change including digital and technological transformation, democratic governance, inclusiveness, professional support for educators, and strong stakeholder co-operation. Digital citizenship education and media education are integral dimensions of contemporary democratic participation, reflecting the role of digital environments in shaping communication, information, and civic engagement.

Secondly, the ESCE introduces a flexible, improvement-orientated Quality Framework for EDC. Rather than ranking countries or imposing standardised benchmarks, it promotes self-evaluation, reflection, and continuous improvement. It is organised around five interconnected quality areas: integration of EDC and the RFCDC into policies and practices; teaching, learning, and assessment; democratic governance and culture; professional development; and co-operation and partnerships. The framework applies across early childhood, primary, secondary, vocational, and non-formal education settings, supporting member states in identifying strengths, gaps, and inspiring practices while respecting national diversity and ownership.

Thirdly, the Co-operation pillar is a direct response to the New Democratic Pact for Europe and focuses on protecting, innovating and learning for education for democratic citizenship through peer learning, dialogue and knowledge sharing in formal and non-formal education settings. However, co-operation in the ESCE focuses on not only exchanging and disseminating what is already known and what works, but also provides new responses and tests new innovative approaches to shared challenges.

Through partnerships among ministries, schools, universities, civil society, researchers, and international organisations, including the active participation of youth, the ESCE seeks to develop quality citizenship education as a strategic priority across Europe to address pressing challenges, such as democratic disillusionment, school violence, mental health of students and educators, disinformation, and climate change. A central feature will be the ESCE Platform, a digital ecosystem that includes country profiles, inspiring practices, videos and podcasts, featured resources, self-evaluation findings, advances in EDC, and policy developments, enhancing visibility, mutual learning, and collaboration among stakeholders.

This work reflects extensive consultations with policymakers, practitioners, researchers, civil society organisations, and students, including two international conferences held as part of the consultation process: one in Berlin in 2024 and one in Montenegro in 2025, alongside workshops and broader stakeholder engagement activities.

Overall, the ESCE seeks to reimagine education as a central democratic project for Europe by strengthening the capacity of education systems to innovate, foster participation, inclusion, critical thinking, and democratic culture in increasingly complex and digital societies.

GLOSSARY

ACTORS are all those involved in providing EDC, including teachers, curriculum developers and policy makers.

EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP means "education, training, awareness-raising, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping participants with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, to empower them 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."[1] (CM/Rec(2010)7, point 2.a)

FORMAL EDUCATION means the structured education and training system that runs from early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education. It takes place, as a rule, at general or vocational educational institutions and leads to certification.[2]

INFORMAL EDUCATION means "the lifelong process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from the educational influences and resources in his or her own environment and from daily experience (family, peer group, neighbours, encounters, library, mass media, work, play, etc)."[3] (CM/Rec(2010)7, point 2.e)

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION means "any planned programme of education designed to improve a range of skills and competences, outside the formal educational setting."[4] (CM/Rec(2010)7, point 2.d)

PARTICIPANTS are the children, young people and adults who take part in EDC.

PRINCIPLES provide guidance for action and for the evaluation of action. They are more concrete than values and can be seen as ways in which values are operationalised for practical action. Principles do not prescribe action and therefore leave space for actors to develop local and national policies and practices based upon principles.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP (EDC) concerns the extent to which an education system integrates, promotes and supports EDC across all its dimensions, creating, maintaining and protecting formal and non-formal educational environments that foster a culture of democracy. This concept is at the core of the Quality Framework for EDC.

STAKEHOLDERS are all the parties that have an interest in and/or a responsibility for EDC.

VALUES are general beliefs that individuals, groups or legal entities hold about desirable goals and about what in itself is considered to be of value (such as the inherent value of each person or the inherent value of the planet). Values motivate action and give direction to action.

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1 Council of Europe (2010). Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, Appendix, point 2.a.

2 This definition is based on the Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, Appendix, point 2.c. This adapted definition includes advanced vocational and professional education.

3 Council of Europe (2010). Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, Appendix, point 2.e.

4 Council of Europe (2010). Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, Appendix, point 2.d.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE EUROPEAN SPACE FOR CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

The European Space for Citizenship Education (ESCE) represents a comprehensive and forward-looking intergovernmental initiative aimed at strengthening democratic resilience across Europe by renewing and reinforcing Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) across the Council of Europe's member states. It builds on over three decades of the Council of Europe's pioneering work in:

EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP AND HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

EDUCATION FOR A CULTURE OF DEMOCRACY

HISTORY EDUCATION, THE REMEMBRANCE OF THE HOLOCAUST AND PREVENTING CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

ETHICS AND TRANSPARENCY IN EDUCATION

PLURILINGUAL, INTERCULTURAL AND GLOBAL EDUCATION

INCLUSION, GENDER EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



Over time, this body of work has contributed to a rich and coherent acquis. However, evolving societal challenges require an updated, consolidated and future-proof approach that can guide member states in the next decade. The ESCE responds to this need by providing:

- a shared conceptual foundation through renewed commitment to a set of principles for EDC;
- a flexible, improvement-orientated quality framework to support member states in assessing and enhancing their EDC policies and practices;
- a European platform for sustained co-operation that fosters innovation, peer learning and the exchange of inspiring practices in formal and non-formal education settings.

Together, these components form a coherent architecture designed to support member states in developing, implementing and continuously improving quality citizenship education across formal, non-formal and informal settings.

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document serves three main functions:

1

To present the structure of the European Space for Citizenship Education (ESCE) including its rationale, components and added value. The European Space is directly contributing to the Council of Europe's New Democratic Pact for Europe.

2

To outline 10 Principles for *Education for Democratic Citizenship*, developed on the basis of a broad analysis of Council of Europe documents and instruments. Intended for policy makers and practitioners, these principles codify key elements of the acquis of the Council of Europe, while offering forward-looking vision and practical guidance to address the evolving context of education for democratic citizenship and future challenges.

3

To outline the structure of the *Quality Framework for EDC and Co-operation pillars*, whose main goal is to support countries in reflecting on and self-evaluating their progress towards quality EDC over time, promoting a common vision for Europe around our shared values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, without divided lines. The Quality Framework for EDC encourages continuous improvement across education systems, based on self-evaluation and reflection, allowing for a flexible approach to developing quality EDC, aligned with national priorities. The framework adopts a formative, flexible and participatory approach, enabling member states to collect and analyse evidence from diverse formal and non-formal education contexts, while retaining ownership of the process. The ESCE's *Co-operation pillar* aims to support exchanges at national, regional and European levels, promote innovation and peer learning to address common challenges, foster dialogue among practitioners, policy makers and civil society, and create platforms for sharing knowledge, evidence and inspiring practices.



OVERVIEW OF THE EUROPEAN SPACE FOR CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

The European Space for Citizenship Education is built on the Council of Europe acquis in the field of education for democratic citizenship, which has been progressively established since 1997. This means that the ESCE includes and promotes the principles and standards developed through numerous Committee of Ministers recommendations, education policy instruments, the tools and the materials that the Education Department has developed in the field of citizenship education, such as the Charter EDC/HRE, the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) and its guiding documents for implementation.

The European Space seeks to continue supporting member states in the implementation of the Charter EDC/HRE and the RFCDC, with the conviction that these instruments contribute to the advancement of a culture of democracy in education.

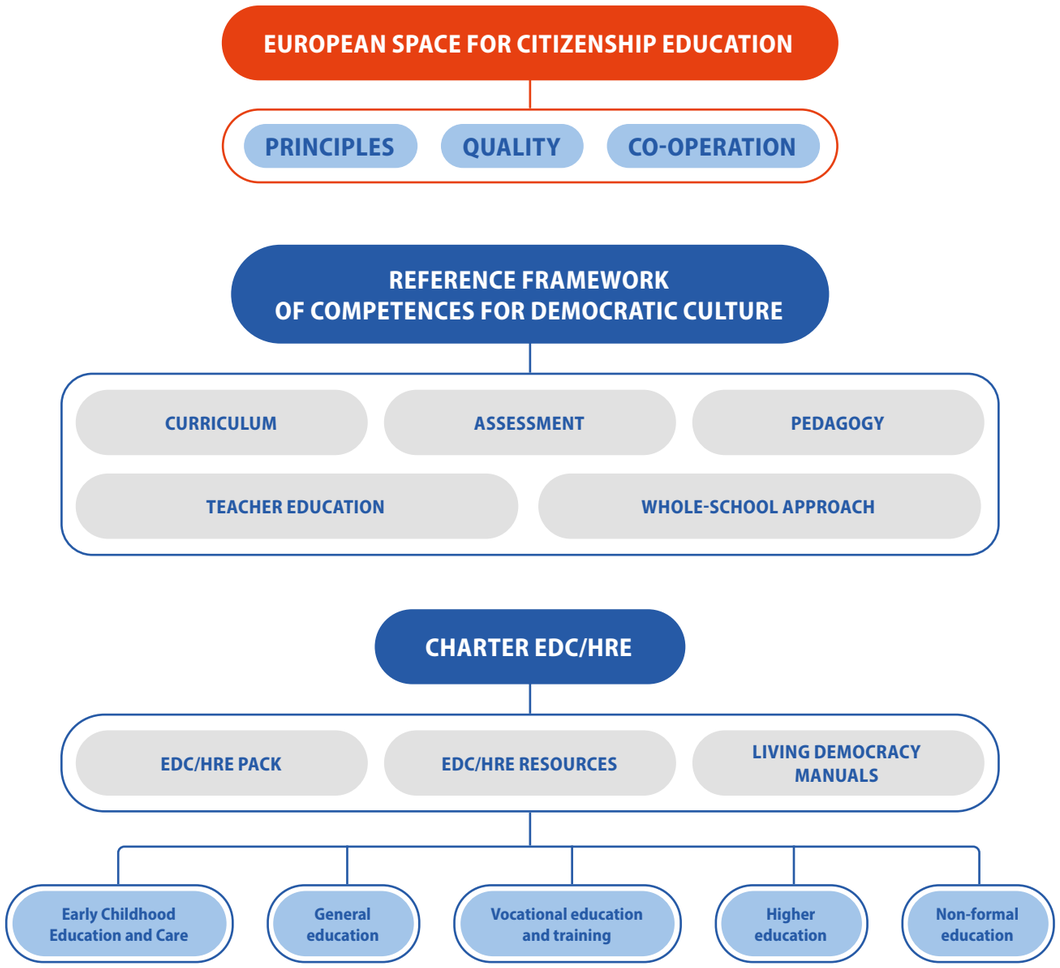
In this context, the Competences for Democratic Culture as developed through the RFCDC are fundamental. The model of Competences for Democratic Culture (CDC) and its descriptors provide clarity in identifying and recognising the learning outcomes and the learning descriptors that can orientate curriculum development; teaching, learning and assessing the progress of the qualities of a democratic citizen through education. Furthermore, the RFCDC advocates effective approaches for a culture of democracy in education, such as the whole-school approach to deepen democratic governance and student participation. It recommends educators to adopt democratic pedagogical methods and congruent approaches to assessment. It also encourages member states to integrate CDC and RFCDC approaches into initial teacher education programmes and into the continuous professional development of education professionals.

The ambition of the European Space for Citizenship Education is to cover both formal and non-formal education, and all levels of education. Special attention should be given to vocational education and training and early childhood education and care, as well as to the non-formal education sector.

In our current digital times, with the rapid evolution of digital technologies and artificial intelligence, Digital Citizenship Education is fundamental to defining the way we act and interact online, and to providing opportunities to practise CDC when participating in a democratic society as digital citizens, online and offline. In order to deliberate and participate in decision-making processes, media education is key to addressing disinformation and manipulation of information, supporting more informed decisions. Both digital citizenship and media literacy are inseparable for the development of quality citizenship education.

In this sense, the promotion of quality citizenship education can be amplified through the potential links that can be established between the European Space and the work of the Education Department on history education[5], language and intercultural education[6], ethics in education[7], and human rights education[8]. Moreover, the European Space can serve as a platform for contributing to key educational policies through citizenship education, such as education for sustainable development, digital transformation in education, as well as other related social policies, including children's rights, youth policies, and gender equality.

Figure 1 Overview of the European Space for Citizenship Education



5 See, for instance, the works on history education in the digital age, historical thinking and civic online reasoning; and the relation between the RFCDC and the principles and guidelines for establishing democratic, diverse and inclusive history curricula and pedagogy; or the importance of multiperspectivity for citizenship education, just to mention a few important links.

6 See, for instance, the works on plurilingual and intercultural education in curricula, and the importance of mediation for citizenship education, among other important links.

7 See, for instance, the contribution of the ETINED platform to promoting ethical principles for public and professional life and in developing a culture of democracy in education and higher education.

8 See, for instance, the implementation of the Charter EDC/HRE and the youth sector, as reflected in key tools and resources on HRE, such as the Compass and Compasito.

PRINCIPLES FOR EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP



PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

The Council of Europe seeks to safeguard our shared democratic values and principles, such as human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law, which constitute the common European heritage and its unity. European unity is forged through shared democratic values, fostering co-operation and civic engagement that uphold common standards in education and social cohesion.

To this end, education for democratic citizenship aims to develop a critical understanding of political, social, economic, and cultural knowledge; to equip participants to act according to the values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law; and to contribute to building and sustaining safe and peaceful democratic societies.

The European Space for Citizenship Education is rooted in the work that the Council of Europe has done over the past decades in the field of education for democratic citizenship, human rights education, intercultural education, history education, ethics in education and digital citizenship education. The proposed principles for education for democratic citizenship can be considered a synthesis of this work.

The principles are intended to provide a new vision, guidance and support for EDC in a context in which EDC and the values that it seeks to promote can no longer be taken for granted, and in which societies have changed and are changing in new and unprecedented ways. The principles, therefore, intend to safeguard and enhance the quality of EDC policies and practices.

The Principles for Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) articulate a coherent, comprehensive, and future-orientated foundation for citizenship education across Europe. They synthesise key elements of the Council of Europe's acquis and reflect contemporary educational and political needs and challenges. Designed for policymakers, educational practitioners, and other actors in EDC, the principles seek to:

FACILITATE EDC
by providing clarity, direction and coherence to policies and practices.

PROTECT EDC
by safeguarding EDC and its actors against undue pressure, politicisation, misrepresentation of its erosion.

LEGITIMISE EDC
by anchoring EDC in shared democratic values, international standards and the public responsibility of states.

INNOVATE EDC
by establishing the shared foundations for collectively reimagining education and innovating democracy through EDC.

The principles are interdependent and must be considered collectively. They apply across formal, non-formal and informal educational settings, from early childhood to adulthood.

A NEW NARRATIVE FOR EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

> Reimagining education, innovating for democracy

A NEW CONTEXT

Ever since John Dewey put the relationship between democracy and education on the agenda of educational research, policy and practice with his 1916 book Democracy and Education, it has been understood that education has a critical role to play in the maintenance and renewal of democracy. Democratic citizens, after all, are not born but 'made'. Education is uniquely placed for fostering the conversation between the generations about the importance of the democratic life, of democratic values and institutions, and of human rights and the rule of law.

The best argument for democracy is a well-functioning democracy itself. But the maintenance and renewal of democracy need support from education, so that the new generation can come to a critical understanding of the history of democracy, its successes and failures, and of the reasons for its importance, also in light of contemporary challenges. This is at the heart of the work that all who are involved in education for democratic citizenship (EDC) are doing day in, day out in schools, colleges and universities, in early childhood and vocational education and in adult and continuing education, through formal curricula and programmes, and in non-formal and informal educational settings.

EDC has never been without contestation, rooted in tensions between the public and the private sphere and between parental and children's rights, and in differing visions about the role and scope of the school. Also, EDC has long been framed as a crucial response to democratic backsliding, growing levels of political and civic apathy, a lack of confidence in democratic institutions, and by the prevalence of corruption, racism, xenophobia, aggressive nationalism, violent extremism, intolerance of minorities, discrimination and social exclusion, backlash on gender equality and human rights, and a growing incapacity for dialogue among different groups and positions. All of this poses major threats to the security and stability of democratic societies.



A NEW URGENCY

What gives the work of EDC an entirely new urgency in our time, but also has fundamentally altered the context for EDC, is that the ideal of democracy itself is increasingly being criticised and contested. In its most extreme form, democracy is depicted as the preference of liberal elites rather than as the equal right of everyone to have a voice in collective decision-making. Also, EDC is often no longer seen as a public good but as a battlefield to visualise political differences and mobilise citizens around particular agendas and ideologies rather than with reference to democracy itself.

Building on the principle that children, young people and adults are entitled to citizenship education and its core component of human rights education, and that educators carry the responsibility to make this right a lived reality, there is a need to reaffirm a crucial message. This is that it is not sufficient merely to recognise the importance of democracy or to ensure its visibility in curricula and policy papers. What is needed is a truly enabling environment in which EDC is not only taught, but experienced, practised, and embedded in a culture of democracy.

This requires strengthening the conditions both inside and beyond formal educational settings, establishing the institutional frameworks, documents, and procedures that legitimise EDC, and ensuring coherent implementation that makes EDC sustainable. Strengthening EDC means defending schools and other educational institutions as safe, informed, and democratic spaces which should not reproduce social inequalities or silence minority voices, but instead foster and facilitate democratic engagement, ethical development, and inclusive participation without discrimination. This involves protecting and supporting teachers and other educators in their pedagogical mission and ensuring that children, young people and adults have access to reliable, rights-based education, also as a way of protecting children and young people in their access to democratic practices and rights.



DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP AND DIGITAL DEMOCRACY

The unprecedented rise of digital information and communication technologies has significantly impacted social processes and practices and therefore poses important challenges for democracy itself and for education for democratic citizenship. Digital technologies influence and increasingly shape what we see as true and as real, who creates information, how public debate happens, and how people interact and take part in society. These changes bring opportunities but also new risks and inequalities. Artificial intelligence adds another layer of complexity. It influences how information is selected, how decisions are made, how identities are shaped, and how people interact with institutions and each other. It raises questions about transparency, fairness, bias and accountability.

Effective democratic participation in digital spaces requires not only functional digital literacy but also the development of critical consciousness in order to be able to navigate digital spaces with an awareness of potential exclusions and inequalities. Digital citizenship highlights the importance of defending human rights and human dignity in digital spaces, as well as holding digital systems and institutions accountable to democratic values and priorities. Herein lies an important new challenge for education for democratic citizenship. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the rise of the digital world has also created new spaces of agency and participation for citizens, not only as consumers but also as producers and creators of new contexts and narratives. Such spaces can also offer protection and promote the inclusion of marginalised individuals and groups. There are, therefore, also new opportunities for individual and collective democratic participation and decision-making which can provide impetus for the development of a truly digital democracy.

WHY PRINCIPLES?

The 10 Principles for Education for Democratic Citizenship seek to capture the essence of the work the Council of Europe has been doing in the field of citizenship education and human rights education. They articulate a coherent, comprehensive, and future-orientated foundation for citizenship education across Europe. They synthesise key elements of the Council of Europe's acquis and reflect contemporary democratic needs and challenges. The principles do not prescribe action but provide the space for policy makers and practitioners to develop meaningful approaches at local and national level. The principles offer guidance and provide a foundation for the evaluation of the quality of education for democratic citizenship.

Taken together, the principles perform four critical functions. Firstly, by setting out non-negotiable parameters for education for democratic citizenship, they seek to facilitate local and national policies and practices. Secondly, the principles provide a legitimation for policy and practice, highlighting why and how education for democratic citizenship matters for all involved. Thirdly, the principles offer protection, first and foremost to teachers and other educators and students in all their diversity, but also to curriculum and programme developers. More than just supporting the status quo, the principles are also a critical reference point for the ongoing renewal of education for democratic citizenship in light of ongoing, new and as yet unforeseen challenges.

A PLURALITY OF PRACTICES

The 10 Principles for Education for Democratic Citizenship are not intended as a curriculum framework but provide parameters for EDC policy and practice. It is crucial that within these parameters a significantly wide range of different approaches and practices should come to fruition. This is first of all important because different countries will have made and will be making their own decisions about meaningful EDC, in response to local, regional and national needs and in light of national legislation and educational and political priorities. A truly democratic approach to EDC also needs to acknowledge the importance of professional judgement and teacher agency in developing and enacting EDC, both in formal and non-formal settings, and needs to be concerned about academic, pedagogical, and intellectual freedoms. Teachers and other educators, as the central educational professionals in EDC, need to have an important voice in the development of EDC and should work in consultation with the children, young people and adults they encounter, ensuring equal participation between EDC actors, stakeholders, and participants in all their diversity.

All this also requires diversity of co-operation across educational contexts and between schools, colleges and universities and community organisations, trade unions, employers and other actors in the public sphere.

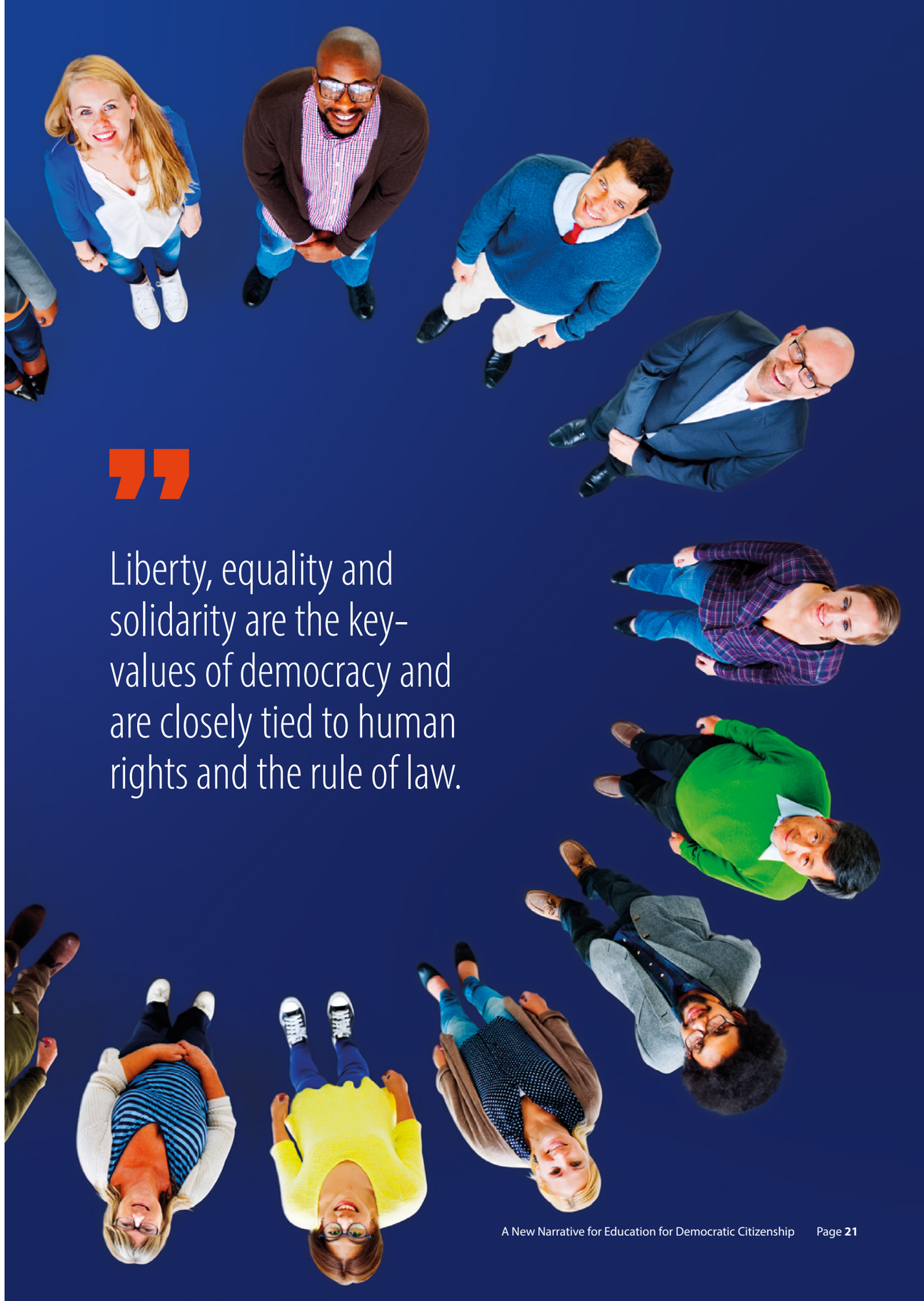
Whereas some countries may favour a focus on competences and outcomes of EDC and thus opt for a more convergent approach to EDC, others may find inspiration from transformative and more divergent approaches to EDC. Meaningful diversity of practices within and across countries will make EDC more sustainable and more resilient to societal change and more coherent with democratic values. It also will provide fertile ground for professional learning and development across contexts and settings, which will remain a lifelong challenge. Diversity of ways of thinking and doing is a strength and should be encouraged, also to ensure that EDC remains future-proof and can be sensitive to new local, regional, national and global challenges, and up to date with recent and evolving research and scholarship.

CARE FOR THE DEMOCRATIC PLAYING FIELD

Liberty, equality and solidarity are the key values of democracy and are closely tied to human rights and the rule of law. Popular support for these values is therefore of crucial importance for democracy, and EDC has an important role to play in motivating the new generation to actively support the values of the democratic 'project.' A key challenge in our time is that popular support for the values of liberty, equality and solidarity can no longer be taken for granted.

There are individuals and groups within democratic societies who have a preference for other, non- or even anti-democratic values. Moreover, they argue that in a democratic society everyone should be free to choose their own values and conceptions of the 'good life.' This suggests, however, that a values-based justification of democracy is vulnerable.

The risk, after all, is that if popular support shifts to other political values, it may look as if democracy can be democratically undermined or even abolished. Instead of seeing the democratic values of equality, freedom, and solidarity as the preferences of a temporary majority, they should actually be seen as the values that constitute the 'playing field' upon which living-together-in-plurality becomes possible. Anyone, therefore, who claims room for their own values and preferences within a democratic society, also needs to be concerned about and care for the values that make it possible to have such preferences in the first place. The values of liberty, equality and solidarity are therefore not one normative preference amongst other preferences within a democratic society but are the very foundation upon which peaceful co-existence becomes possible.



THE 10 PRINCIPLES FOR EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

1

THE **PURPOSE** OF EDC

EDC should promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

2

UNIVERSAL AND LIFELONG **ENTITLEMENT**

Every person within the territory of a state should be provided with access to and meaningful lifelong opportunities for EDC, irrespective of age, gender, language, disability, health status, social and other status, and citizenship.

3

SENSITIVITY TO **CONTEXT**

EDC should be sensitive to local, regional, and national contexts and to the values and preferences of different groups and communities, while upholding democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

4

RESPONSIVENESS TO CHANGE

EDC should be responsive to relevant societal changes, including geopolitical, socio-economic, cultural, environmental, and digital-technological developments.

5

FLEXIBILITY AND DIVERSITY OF **PROVISION**

EDC should be provided in a wide range of different settings, covering the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal, and informal education in real, virtual and hybrid environments, and through a wide range of different practices, approaches and modalities.

6

CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS

EDC programmes should provide participants with opportunities to acquire and deepen their understanding, appreciation, and engagement with the values and practices of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, their histories and contemporary challenges, while enabling them to develop competences for democratic culture.

7

AWARENESS OF **PLURALITY**

EDC should be designed and enacted with an awareness of and sensitivity to the plurality of social roles, positions and identities of participating children, young people and adults and how these intersect and matter for their experiences of citizenship.

8

CONGRUENCY

EDC should be organised, governed and enacted in ways that are consistent with the values it seeks to promote.

9

PROFESSIONALISATION, RESOURCING, AND **SUPPORT**

Educators, participants, and educational organisations should be sufficiently resourced and supported to ensure quality provision of EDC. Education professionals should be sufficiently educated for EDC and must receive adequate opportunities for further professional development and collaboration across sectors and modes of provision.

10

PARTNERSHIP AND **CO-OPERATION**

EDC should be developed, organised and enacted by means of inclusive and democratic stakeholder engagement and participation, whilst acknowledging the differing roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders.

THE 10 PRINCIPLES IN DETAIL

1 THE PURPOSE OF EDC



EDC should promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

The purpose of EDC is the promotion of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. This purpose implies that EDC should promote the associated values of liberty, equality and solidarity, alongside the values of inclusion, participation, pluralism, respect and tolerance. EDC also promotes the value of the integrity, unalienable value of the person, justice, fairness, transparency and accountability. In all of this it is explicitly assumed that EDC is a public responsibility and a public good that should benefit democratic living together.

2 UNIVERSAL AND LIFELONG ENTITLEMENT

Every person within the territory of a state should be provided with access to and meaningful lifelong opportunities for EDC, irrespective of age, gender, language, disability, health status, social and other status, and citizenship.

EDC is a universal entitlement. This means that everyone has a right to take part in EDC, that this right is not a one-off entitlement restricted to age but is a lifelong right applicable to everyone within the territory of a state, irrespective of their official citizenship status. A key implication of this principle is that there is a duty for policy makers to ensure meaningful provision of EDC for all.





3 SENSITIVITY TO CONTEXT

EDC should be sensitive to local, regional, and national contexts and to the values and preferences of different groups and communities, while upholding democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

EDC policies should be implemented and enacted in ways that are meaningful for and sensitive to local, regional, and national contexts and settings, including the values of different groups and communities within societies. Nonetheless, under no circumstances can these values and preferences override the purpose and values of EDC.

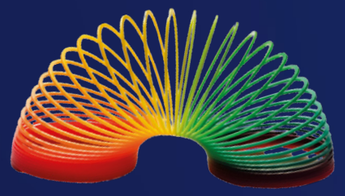
4 RESPONSIVENESS TO CHANGE

EDC should be responsive to relevant societal changes, including geopolitical, socioeconomic, cultural, environmental, and digital-technological developments.



EDC is not ahistorical and cannot be static. EDC policies and practices need to respond to different times and geopolitical, socioeconomic, demographic, digital, cultural, digital-technological, and/or environmental conditions. This includes, for example, taking into account the significance of digitalisation, Artificial Intelligence, and online life for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law when designing and implementing EDC policies and practices. A broader implication of this principle is that at a time of relevant societal shifts, including political and economic uncertainties, the rise of disinformation and inequalities, migrations, climate and technological developments, EDC needs to be open to change and innovation to appropriately address the purpose of promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

5 FLEXIBILITY AND DIVERSITY OF PROVISION



EDC should be provided in a wide range of different settings, covering the whole spectrum of formal and non-formal education in real, virtual and hybrid environments, and through a wide range of different practices, approaches and modalities.

EDC is not just a matter for schools and the foundational stage of education, but needs to be part of education in colleges, universities and other institutions of higher education, both publicly funded and privately funded. EDC is also to be embedded in vocational and professional education and be part of early childhood education. In addition, non-formal educational settings (such as youth work, social work and adult education) provide important settings for meaningful EDC. In formal education, EDC should combine subject-based and transversal provision that permeates the curriculum and educational provision widely, for instance through cross-curricular or whole-school approaches, promoting meaningful student participation. For EDC to have the impact it seeks, it is important that there is a wide range of practices, approaches, modalities, and environments, including direct, participatory face-to-face, and online, and that there is ongoing reflection on the quality of the provision.

6 CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS

EDC programmes should provide participants with opportunities to acquire and deepen their understanding, appreciation, and engagement with the values and practices of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, their histories and contemporary challenges, while enabling them to develop competences for democratic culture.



EDC should offer participants in formal and non-formal settings opportunities to engage with relevant knowledge, skills, and values that allow them to enhance their understanding and awareness of the rights and responsibilities of everyone living in a state's territory. It should enable participants to develop multiperspectivity; media, AI, and digital literacy; analysing, interpreting, and generating information critically and responsibly; and reflecting on their identities considering local, regional, national, European, global, and digital dimensions. The focus on democracy, human rights and the rule of law also implies that EDC should provide participants with the relevant knowledge, skills, and values to increase their appreciation and critical understanding of equality, including gender equality and intersectional perspectives, and of differences between faith and ethnic groups, to build intercultural dialogue, mutual respect and combat all forms of discrimination, bullying and harassment, hate speech, and violence. The content of EDC should empower all participants to recognise threats to democracy, exercise and defend their rights and responsibilities, and pro-actively contribute to democratic life.

7 AWARENESS OF PLURALITY

EDC should be designed and enacted with an awareness of and sensitivity to the plurality of social roles, positions and identities of participating children, young people and adults and how these intersect and matter for their experiences of citizenship.

EDC is not a one-size-fits-all approach. EDC policies and practices need to honour and be responsive to diverse participants, recognising that different participating children, young people and adults are unequally positioned in society and have different levels of financial, social and cultural capitals. EDC, in other words, needs to be mindful that existing inequalities between participants, for example, gender, ethnic, and economic inequalities, influence participants' experiences of engagement with democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, and their opportunities to make their voice heard. All aspects of education should be tailored to participants' needs and experiences to ensure relevant EDC opportunities are available to all.



8 CONGRUENCY

EDC should be organised, governed and enacted in ways that are consistent with the values it seeks to promote.

EDC should offer participants opportunities to practise democracy. It is important that EDC does not just provide knowledge about democracy, human rights and the rule of law, but also that participants can experience the practicalities, complexities and difficulties of democratic life in environments where conflicts, controversial issues, and disagreements are addressed in alignment with EDC values. This includes enacting the values of inclusion, equality, fairness, transparency, accountability, for instance by providing inclusive spaces free of algorithmic-bias and influence of private companies and platform providers and ensuring that the potential use of AI in EDC does not lead to new forms of exclusion or standardisation. It also implies facilitating meaningful of participation of children, young people and adult stakeholders, bearing in mind that in educational settings and practices educators have unique and distinctive roles and responsibilities that are different from the roles and responsibilities of other participants. This also means that educational cultures and modes of governance, resources, evaluations, and EDC curricular, pedagogical, teaching, learning, and assessment practices should reflect and enact democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and all the values these imply and entail.

9 PROFESSIONALISATION, RESOURCING, AND SUPPORT

Educators, participants, and educational organisations should be sufficiently resourced and supported to ensure quality provision of EDC. Education professionals should be sufficiently educated for EDC and must receive adequate opportunities for further professional development and collaboration across sectors and modes of provision.

All educators, participants and settings in which EDC takes place should be adequately equipped with material, digital, and pedagogical resources. The success of EDC also depends on educational organisations having sufficient staffing levels, where it is important that those with a responsibility for EDC have academic freedom and sufficient subject and pedagogical expertise. This requires that EDC is part of the initial curriculum in teacher education and the curriculum for all professionals in education such as youth workers, social workers, adult and early years educators. All educators are also entitled to have sufficient opportunities for professional development, networking, collaboration, and participation in research and innovation activities. Given that EDC is a public responsibility and a public good, it is expected that funding for EDC comes from public funds. Where EDC is supported by other funding, it is essential that funding allocation is transparent and accountable and supports the values of EDC.

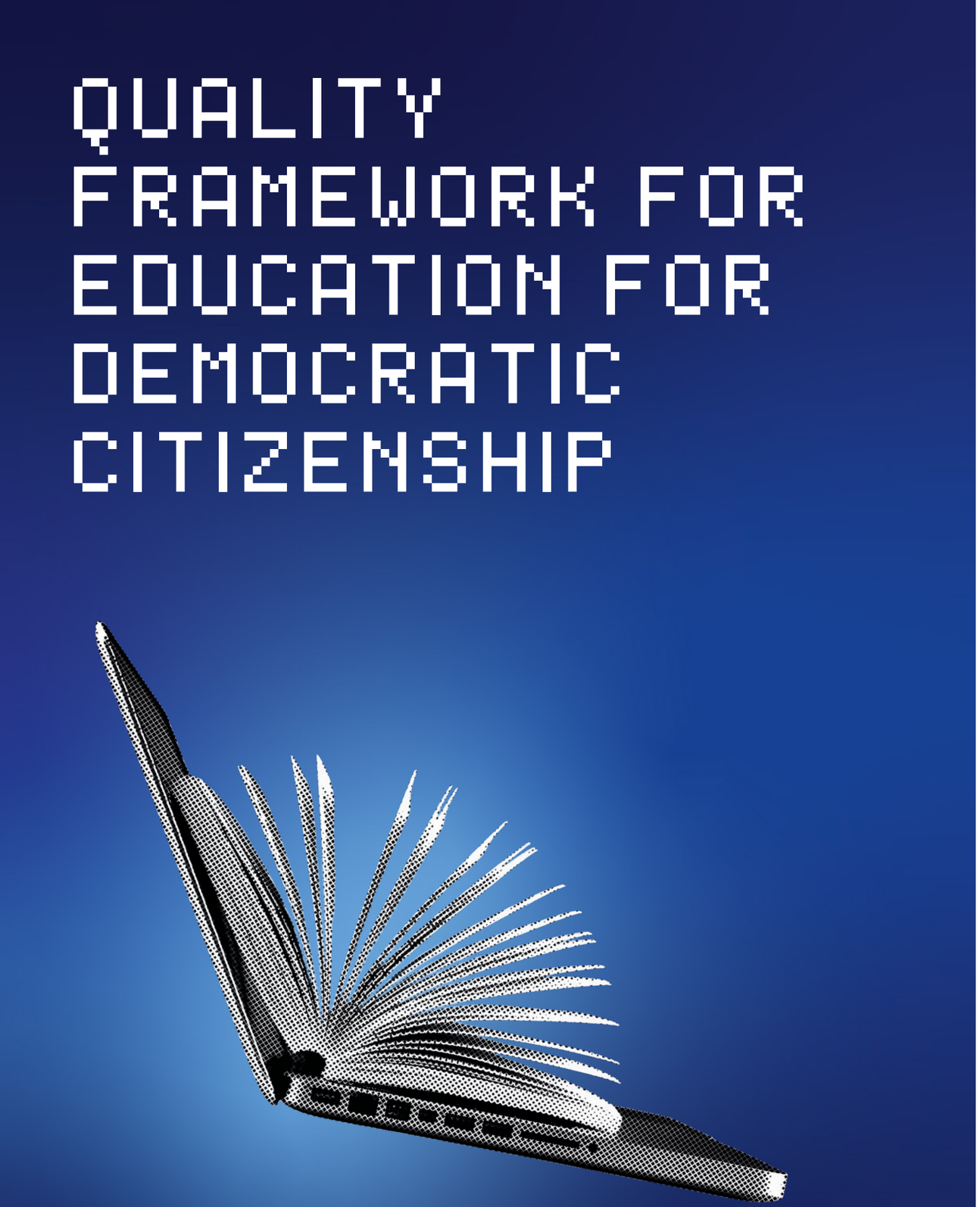


10 PARTNERSHIP AND CO-OPERATION

EDC should be developed, organised and enacted by means of inclusive and democratic stakeholder engagement and participation, whilst acknowledging the differing roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders.

For EDC to be enacted consistently with its guiding and foundational values, it is important that EDC is developed, organised and implemented in ways that are inclusive and democratic so all relevant stakeholders can play their part, considering gender balance and equal participation. EDC has a wide range of potential stakeholders operating at local, regional, national, European and/or global levels, including, among others, politicians, policy makers, educational institutions, educational professionals, NGOs, youth organisations, the media, business and enterprises, and the wider public. All are differently positioned in relation to the provision and enactment of EDC and need to collaborate in ways that are respectful and democratic and in which differing expertise and responsibilities are acknowledged in transparent and accountable ways. To strengthen EDC partnership and co-operation, there should be digital and non-digital spaces and resources for meaningful communication, dissemination, knowledge exchange and collaboration between stakeholders.

QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP



1 PURPOSE AND VISION

The Quality Framework (QF) for Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) is a core component of the ESCE.

It is designed to support member states in reflecting on, self-evaluating and continuously measuring their progress towards quality EDC over time, while promoting a shared vision that values meaningful efforts to enhance citizenship education across Europe.

The quality framework is not intended to assess the quality levels of general and vocational education institutions and of learners' achievement in the field of EDC. Unlike external evaluation frameworks or instruments, the QF:

- adopts a self-evaluation approach;
- ensures maximum flexibility for member states to focus self-evaluation on their national education policy priorities;
- triggers improvement;
- supports dialogue, not ranking;
- enhances autonomy and congruency, not standardisation;
- respects national diversity while offering shared European guidance;
- values the perspectives of all actors in the education ecosystem.

Its ultimate goal is to strengthen the capacity of education systems to promote quality citizenship education and a culture of democracy across different levels and contexts.

2 SCOPE AND APPLICATION OF THE QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR EDC

The QF applies across all education settings from Early Childhood Education to ISCED level 3, whether in general or vocational educational settings:

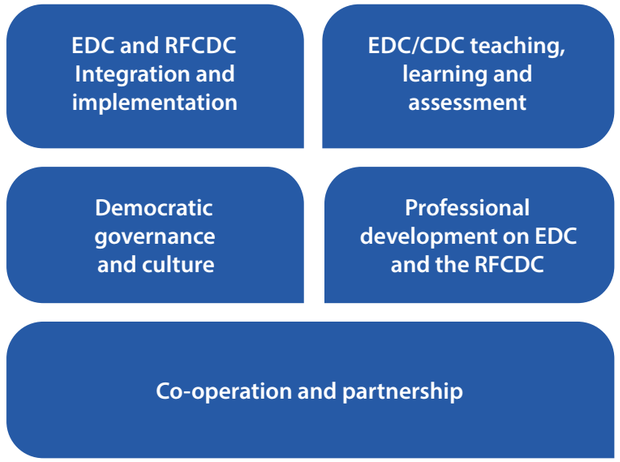
- Early Childhood Education[9] (ECE) (ISCED 0)
- Primary and Lower Secondary Education (ISCED 1 and 2)
- Upper Secondary Education (ISCED 3) — general and vocational
- Non-formal education settings, including civil society organisations and youth work

It addresses the interconnections between policy design, institutional structures, governance cultures, pedagogy, community and local government partnerships and learner experience.

9 Early childhood education (ECE) refers to children until the compulsory school age. It is classified as ISCED 0 – early childhood education, including sublevel 0.1 early childhood educational development (below age 3) and 0.2 pre-primary education (from age 3 to the start of primary education). ECE varies greatly across different countries, as a split system 0-3 and 3-6 or comprehensive system, public and private institutions, types of professionals involved, and qualifications required.

3 QUALITY EDC: TURNING PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE

Figure 2 The five areas for quality EDC

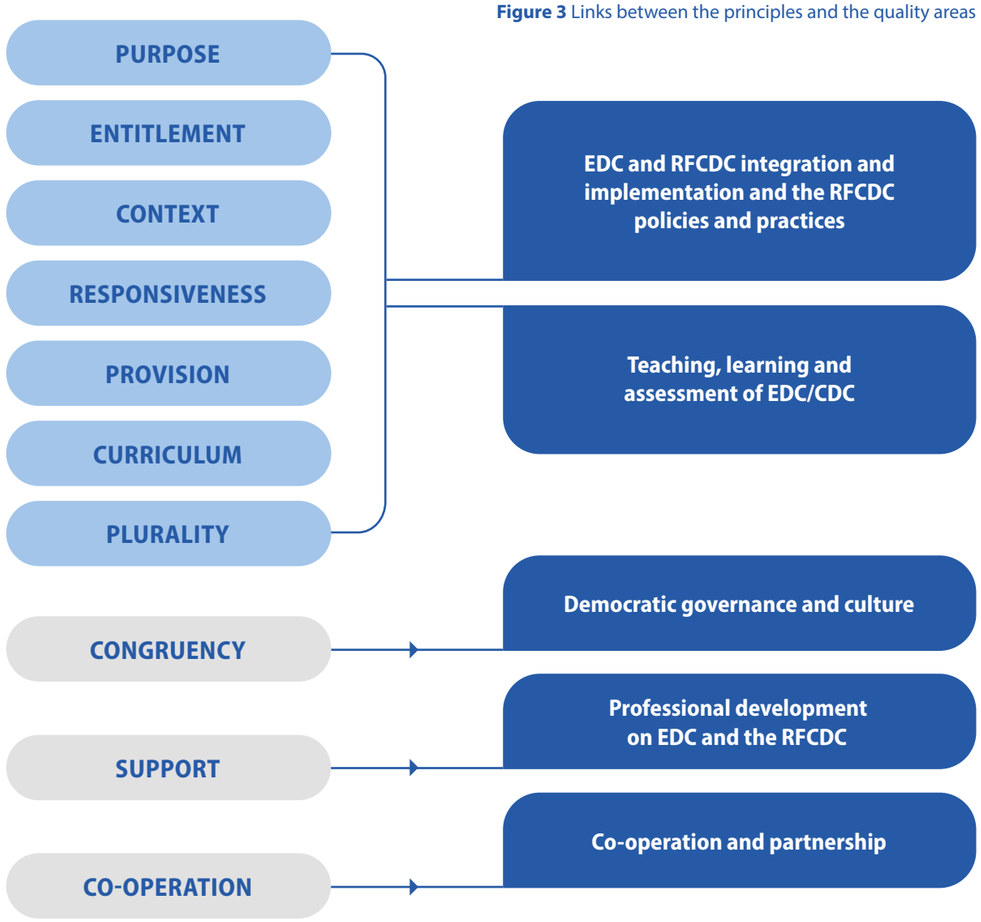


The framework is centred on the concept of quality EDC. Quality EDC is not a single programme or subject; it is a systemic endeavour grounded in Principles for EDC and the Council of Europe acquis (e.g., the Charter EDC/HRE and the RFCDC). Accordingly, the self-evaluation process is structured around this understanding of quality EDC.

With reference to the definition included in the glossary, the term "quality" is to be intended as a process of continuing self-evaluation and improvement aimed to facilitate, legitimise, protect and innovate EDC among members states. The adoption of such a reflective and inclusive approach can fuel an internal dynamic of continuous improvement in education, promoting sustained progress. Countries can benefit from this process by raising awareness, encouraging reflection, and inspiring action within different segments of the education system.

Quality EDC develops across five interrelated areas **[Figure 2]**. Taken together, the five areas encompass the practical implementation of the 10 Principles for EDC **[Figure 3]**. Each area is supported by indicators for reflection, inquiry and improvement.

Figure 3 Links between the principles and the quality areas





1 EDC AND RFCDC INTEGRATION AND IMPLEMENTATION AND THE RFCDC POLICIES AND PRACTICES

This area focuses on the inclusion of Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) whose purpose is to promote democracy, human rights, and the rule of law and the integration of the EDC curriculum, including the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC), in key documents at different levels of implementation: policy level (legislation/national guidelines, recommendations), education institution level, and non-formal education level. EDC is intended to be flexible and open to change to address contemporary societal changes, such as sustainable development and the impact of digital technologies on democracy, human rights and engagement.

This area also stresses the commitment to flexibility and diversity of provision, ensuring that all relevant stakeholders in formal and non-formal education provide meaningful EDC opportunities tailored to the plurality of experiences of different participants, ultimately ensuring universal and lifelong entitlement by law. It highlights the importance of key documents to acknowledge that EDC provision should be sensitive to local, regional, and national contexts and to the values of different groups within these societies.



2 TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT OF EDC/CDC

This area seeks to examine whether the EDC purpose of promoting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law is firmly anchored within teaching, learning, and assessment. It focuses on the current diversity of EDC provision across diverse settings and spans the full spectrum of formal and non-formal education through flexible online, offline, and hybrid approaches, modalities, and environments. This area examines whether all participants, no matter their age, gender, status, and citizenship, benefit from their entitlement to continued opportunities to engage with an EDC curriculum. It examines whether pedagogical practices are designed and enacted in ways that are sensitive to context, responsive to societal developments, and tailored to the plurality of social roles, positions and identities of participants. This area also covers the assessment practices that are in line with the Principles for EDC and coherent pedagogical approaches.

3 DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND CULTURE

This area focuses on the consistency and congruency between EDC governance, practices of participation and the principles of democracy and human rights it seeks to advance. It stresses the importance of democratic governance and the culture of democracy as key elements that contribute to quality EDC in formal and non-formal learning contexts. This area addresses open educational environments for discussion, democratic decision-making processes and procedures, and those practices that foster the recognition, inclusion and participation of all stakeholders, taking into consideration their diverse identities and backgrounds. It also highlights the importance of democratic leadership styles and participatory management to support EDC and the RFCDC.





4 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON EDC AND THE RFCDC

This area addresses the support, education of professionals, and resources required to ensure quality EDC provision. It focuses on the inclusion of education and training provisions for EDC and the RFCDC in initial teacher education (ITE) and through continuing professional development (CPD) initiatives for in-service teachers, trainers and other educators, school-heads and other education leaders in education, training and civil society organisations.

5 CO-OPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

This area emphasises the importance of co-operation initiatives and partnerships to foster EDC and CDC, by means of inclusive and democratic stakeholder engagement and participation, involving school education institutions, non-formal education providers, national or international authorities, and organisations from the wider community.

Every area of quality EDC includes quality indicators, that are strongly interconnected and aim at the triangulation of data and information collected, highlighting the links between formal inclusion in national regulations and practices (in education institutions, programmes and non-formal education). The areas of quality EDC and its indicators reflect the key features of quality citizenship education. Their overall aim is to provide guidance and criteria for judgment to support dialogue and critical reflection among professionals at different levels in a particular educational system, within the self-evaluation process.

These quality areas imply:

- The effective integration and implementation of EDC and RFCDC in policies, legislation, curricula and practices.
- The teaching, learning and assessment processes aimed at fostering EDC/CDC.
- Democratic governance and participation at school, based on human rights and the practice of democracy.
- The initial and continuing professional development of teachers and educators, school principals and other key actors in the educational system and non-formal education regarding EDC and the RFCDC.
- The capacity to cooperate systematically with external organisations, local communities and educational networks to share and experience different perspectives and opportunities.

4 THE SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS

The QF adopts a self-evaluation process, conducted on a regular basis, every three years, enabling member states to:

REFLECT SYSTEMATICALLY ON THEIR EDC ECOSYSTEM

GATHER DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

GENERATE SHARED OWNERSHIP

IDENTIFY STRENGTHS, PROGRESS AND GAPS

INFORM STRATEGIC PLANNING AND IMPROVEMENT

The process is guided by **four overarching questions**, that refer to all five quality areas:

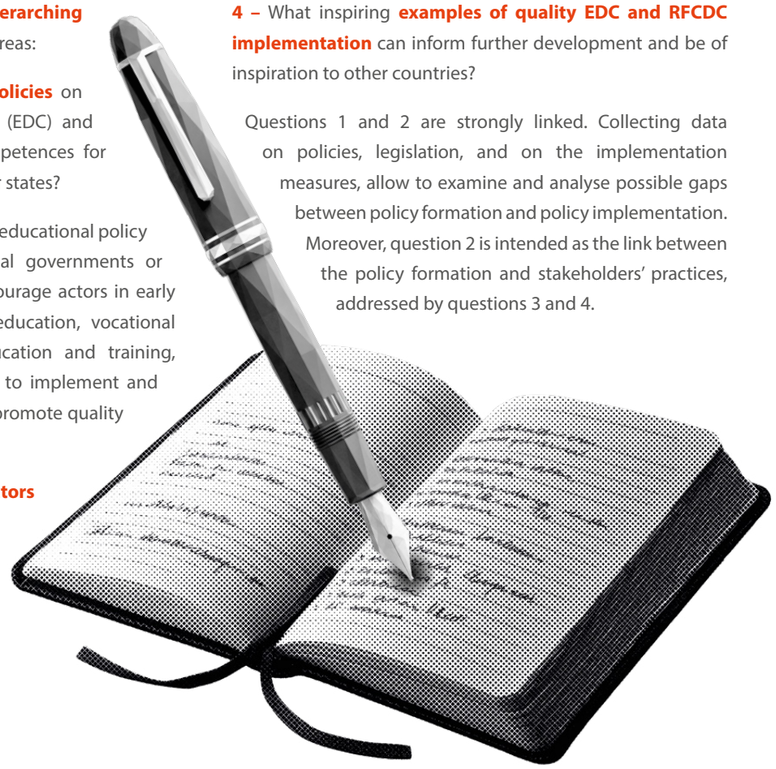
1 – What are the **current national policies** on Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) and on the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) in member states?

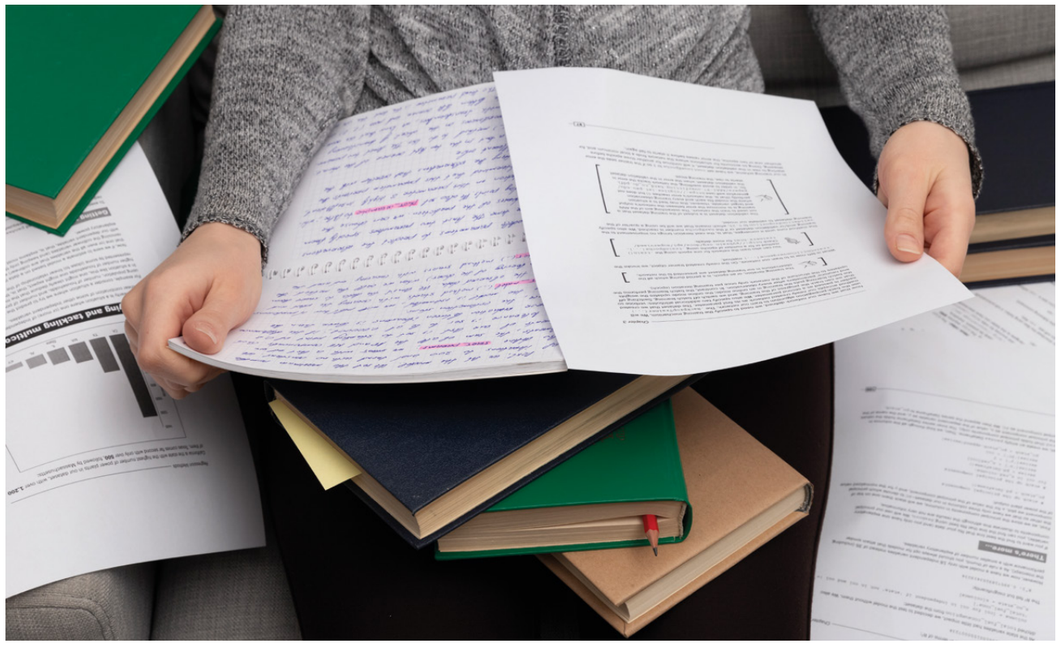
2 – What **policy measures** are taken by educational policy authorities (whether they are national governments or federal authorities) to ensure and encourage actors in early childhood education (ECE), general education, vocational education and training, teacher education and training, and civil society organisations (CSOs), to implement and develop EDC and RFCDC, in ways that promote quality of provision?

3 – What are **the perspectives of key actors and stakeholders** on the development of quality EDC and of the RFCDC in formal (ISCED 0, 1, 2, 3, and ISCED-T) and non-formal education (CSOs) and **how do they experience it?**

4 – What inspiring **examples of quality EDC and RFCDC implementation** can inform further development and be of inspiration to other countries?

Questions 1 and 2 are strongly linked. Collecting data on policies, legislation, and on the implementation measures, allow to examine and analyse possible gaps between policy formation and policy implementation. Moreover, question 2 is intended as the link between the policy formation and stakeholders' practices, addressed by questions 3 and 4.





5 CORE FEATURES OF THE SELF-EVALUATION APPROACH

The self-evaluation process aims to value diversity of approaches and to highlight the richness of policies, implementation measures, and experiences across countries. It also aims to foster a culture of reflection and improvement in and between countries.

Data will therefore be collected with support from the Council of Europe primarily through questionnaires, focus groups and/or group interviews, which allow for in-depth description and analysis of specific contexts and triangulation of the different data sources.

Self-evaluation findings will be supplemented by findings from national evaluations (where they exist), countries' own research, research at the European level (e.g., Eurydice Reports), and large-scale comparative assessments, such as the IEA-ICCS, integrating the data gathered through the self-evaluation process with additional data concerning those areas that are linked to the Council of Europe values, principles and quality framework for EDC.

Considering the above, the self-evaluation process, which represents the process underlying the Quality Framework for EDC, is characterised by:



FOCUS ON LEARNING

The self-evaluation is orientated towards meaningful learning in the process of improving quality EDC and RFCDC implementation. The self-evaluation cycle of learning (evidence from the field, data from education institutions and service providers, CSOs, communities, teachers and educators) nurtures reflection amongst stakeholders and learning from EDC/RFCDC implementation successes and challenges. Policy makers, school staff, community representatives, CSOs have the opportunity to reflect systematically and critically on initiatives and actions, compare their observations with data, and consider perspectives that might be useful for further improvement.

FLEXIBILITY

Each member state's commitment is flexible and can be varied depending on national priorities and available resources to focus on relevant indicators and to involve different stakeholders and target groups. Each member state can decide at a national level how to organise the self-evaluation process, in terms of scope, levels of education to evaluate, target groups to involve, whether to include the non-formal sector, and so on (e.g., it could be focused on early childhood or primary education, rather than on other target groups included in this framework). Thus, the evaluation process provides maximum flexibility, facilitating member states' collection of data, information, and views of key actors and stakeholders on areas of EDC development that are relevant to the national context and policy priorities. The framework provides guidance and criteria for judgment, and supports dialogue and critical reflection among professionals at different levels. This flexible approach also allows implementing diverse methods of data collection based on the characteristics of the education systems (i.e. centralised vs. federal systems).

OWNERSHIP AND SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES

The self-evaluation process involves specific steps such as gathering evidence and information from key stakeholders, analysing current policies and practices, making informed judgments and creating an EDC development, improvement, and innovation plan. Member states will decide who to involve and to what extent. Different stakeholders can be engaged for different purposes and at different phases of evaluation planning and implementation through dialogue and critical reflection.

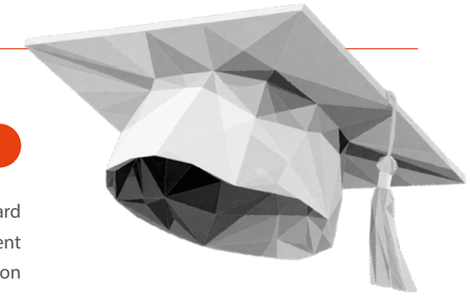


ITERATIVE DATA COLLECTION

It is recommended that policy makers, education institutions, and non-formal education organisations contribute, exchange information and data, and reflect on it for the evaluation process periodically, every three years. As an ongoing process of formative evaluation, the involvement of different stakeholders allows feedback to be implemented more effectively, can better inform planning and implementation, raising awareness of stakeholders and co-ownership of evaluation results. Data collected/ generated at the national level can be used for collective analysis, insight or evidence for deciding on further steps (e.g. changing the priority areas or specific foci at the policy level, involving more or other stakeholders, using different methods and instruments, reporting in various formats, initiating collaboration with other member states to exchange experience and good practices).

INSPIRATION AND MUTUAL LEARNING ACROSS EUROPE

Country-based data and results can be posted on the ESCE Dashboard (please see the Co-operation Pillar below), that will provide different possibilities for member states to make visible their self-evaluation results. According to country priority areas, self-evaluation posts/outputs can include examples of new regulations or policies, numerical data, statistics, graphics showing evolution in time, real-time data applications, case studies, learning logs, reflective journals, goal setting, questionnaires and self-reflection sheets, testimonials from students, teachers, CSOs, multimedia showcasing school/community projects, etc.







6 EVALUATION CYCLES

Three-year evaluation cycles are envisaged, starting with a 'year zero' dedicated to preparing the tools, conducting trials, and developing the digital platform of the European Space for Citizenship Education, that includes a Dashboard to present the data and results.

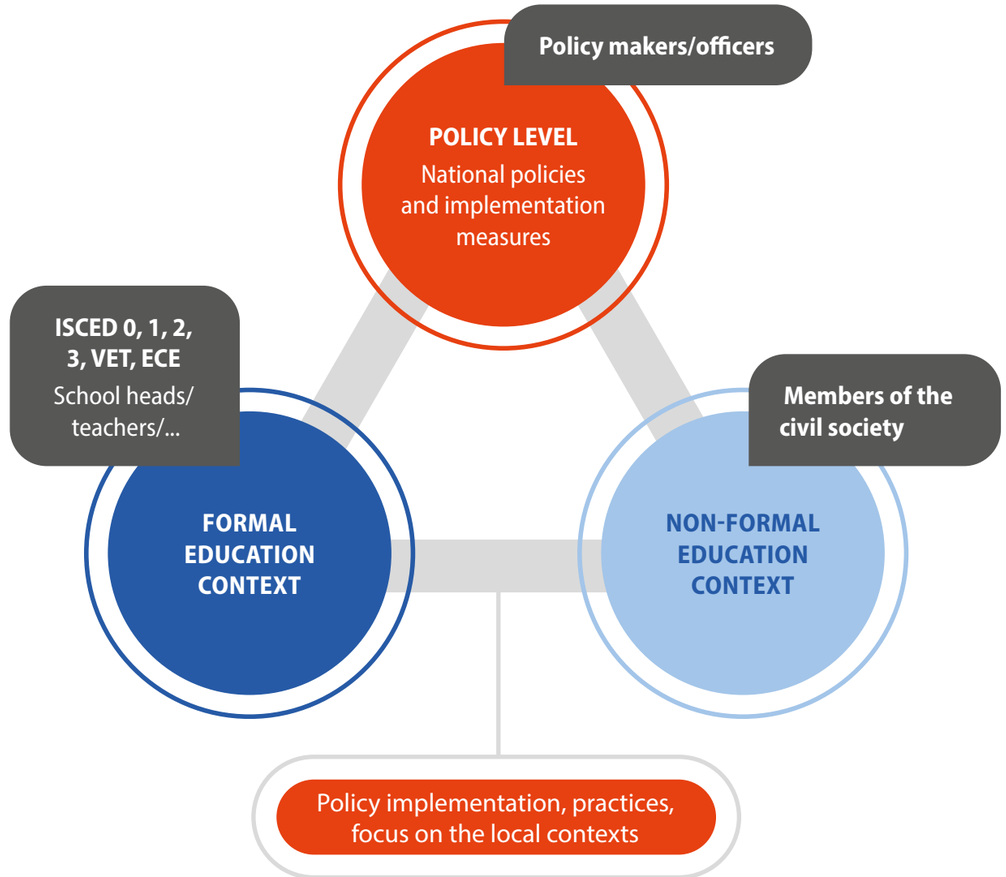
Each three-year cycle may include the following actions: data collection on policies and legislation; data collection on practices in formal and/or non-formal education settings; analysis and presentation of results.

At the beginning of each cycle, the instruments will be updated and revised, while maintaining a core set of questions to ensure continuity over time. Each instrument must take into account the latest developments in the field of EDC and the progress in implementing the RFCDC.

7 DATA AND EVIDENCE SOURCES

Information for self-evaluation can be collected from different sources that aim to provide an overview of EDC within its multiple contexts of development and implementation (policy makers, education institutions, and non-formal education). In this view, the self-evaluation process will enable the outlining and analysis of the advancement of quality EDC policy, the implementation of the RFCDC and the development of practices at national, education institution and community levels.

Figure 4 The self-evaluation process: contexts and target groups



Key actors in education institutions include school-heads, teachers, students and other relevant actors across the different levels of education, as recognised by the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels:

- **ISCED 0** · 0.2 pre-primary education (from age 3 to the start of primary education)
- **ISCED 1** · primary education
- **ISCED 2** · lower secondary education, general and vocational
- **ISCED 3** · upper secondary education, general and vocational

Table 1 The self-evaluation process: target groups' key actors, contexts, related QA questions and instruments

Key actors (target groups)	Contexts	Related QA questions	Instruments
Policy makers/officers	National level (education policies)	Questions 1 and 2	Country profile Questionnaire and follow-up interview
Heads of ECE institutions, teachers, pedagogues, assistants, parents	Early Childhood Education institutions (formal education[10])	Questions 2, 3 and 4	Form on inspiring practices and follow-up interviews
School-heads, teachers, teacher educators, trainers, students	ISCED 1, 2, 3 and ISCED-T (formal education)	Questions 2, 3 and 4	Form on inspiring practices and follow-up interviews
Representatives of civil society organisations, and parents' associations	Non-formal education[11]	Questions 2, 3 and 4	Form on inspiring practices and follow-up interviews
Researchers/experts[12]	Higher Education Institutions at national level, experts at the institutional, and community levels	Question 1 and 2	Interviews

The self-evaluation process will adopt a mixed-method approach, aiming at the triangulation of data gathered from the wide range of actors who deal with EDC in different contexts. Every target group can provide data to answer the self-evaluation questions contributing to a more comprehensive analysis of quality EDC and RFCDC implementation at the country level. In addition to the target groups, researchers and experts in the field from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) will also be involved to provide research insights on the country's educational policies and practices (Table 1).

As well as supporting core evaluation processes and wider research on the quality of citizenship education, HEIs can also be involved in disseminating the results of the self-evaluation process through their networks and research communities. They can also use the information and results derived from the ESCE to review or provide additional inputs for their study programmes dedicated to the training of future EDC teachers.

10 "Formal education" is the structured education and training system that runs from pre-primary and primary through secondary school and on to university; it takes place, as a rule, at general or vocational education institutions and leads to certification (Council of Europe, 2018).

11 "Non-formal education" is any planned programme of education designed to improve a range of skills and competences and educational experiences, outside the formal educational setting (Council of Europe, 2018).

12 Researchers and experts are included in italics to indicate that they are not a direct target group, but an indirect source of information related to questions 1 and 2. They could be involved in providing additional insights on the national scenario in terms of policy development and implementation.

8 THE INSTRUMENTS

COUNTRY PROFILES

Before the evaluation cycles begin with collecting data, it is essential to gather a core set of information on countries' formal provision of EDC and CDC, including the basic features of EDC/RFCDC policymaking through a country profile. The country profile is a short document that includes the key background information for understanding EDC and RFCDC at the country level. It represents a reference point for the collection of data and its analysis. The country profile includes information on: the names used to designate EDC/CDC in the formal curriculum; the coverage of the education system (ECE, ISCED levels 1, 2, 3, and VET); the approach(es) to EDC and CDC delivery, and the place of EDC and CDC in the formal curriculum; the allocation of teaching hours for EDC/CDC; the teachers responsible for teaching EDC/CDC (Specialist teachers/Teachers specialised in other subjects); the provision of specific training on EDC/CDC for pre-service teachers within HEIs' programmes. This step can be undertaken through a desk review, including the analysis of policy documents and available research papers and studies. The desk review can be conducted by the Council of Europe and can be integrated with findings from the questionnaire and follow-up interview.

This country profile will be visible on the dashboard of the ESCE and can be updated according to developments and changes at the country level.

QUESTIONNAIRE ON NATIONAL POLICIES AND FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW

The questionnaire on national policies will be designed to collect evidence on the indicators across the five quality areas of the quality framework. This questionnaire will aim to gather data that support reflection on the following aspects:

- Integration of EDC and CDC main goals, dimensions (knowledge and critical understanding, attitudes, skills and values) in policy and legislation, regulations and recommendations.
- Policy measures for quality EDC and RFCDC implementation.
- EDC and RFCDC integration in curricula.
- EDC/CDC suggested teaching and learning approaches, and assessment method(s) in national legislation, regulations and recommendations.
- Principles and processes to promote schools' democratic governance and culture in national legislation, regulations and recommendations.
- Training and professional development on EDC and the RFCDC in national legislation, regulations and recommendations.
- Co-operation initiatives and partnerships on EDC and RFCDC in national legislation, regulations and recommendations.

The questionnaire will consist of approximately 15-20 questions and will only include closed-ended questions. The follow-up interview aims to supplement the information gathered through the questionnaire, exploring specific aspects in greater depth and providing examples of educational policies or implementation actions.

The questionnaire is developed and administered by the Council of Europe, as well as the follow-up interview. Participating countries are requested to provide support by filling in the questionnaire, and by participating in the follow-up interview.



FORM ON INSPIRING PRACTICES AND FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS

The form on practices has two purposes: to describe experiences in formal and/or non-formal education contexts (in terms of teaching activities, and also of community projects, training experiences, and democratic governance processes); and to offer guidance and inspiration for implementation by stakeholders in other countries. The follow-up interviews are intended to provide additional complementary information, useful for understanding the experiences and facilitating inspiration to other countries. The data from the forms and the information collected through the interviews will be uploaded to the ESCE dashboard. Inspiring practices can refer to all target groups of the framework (ISCED 1, 2, 3, VET, ECE and non-formal education providers). Countries will decide which target group to involve, based on their priorities and feasibility.

The Council of Europe provides the form to collect inspiring practices and conducts the follow-up interview. Participating countries are requested to provide support in filling-in the form on those inspiring practices that they deem relevant in their national context and are interested in sharing and to contact the stakeholder(s) for the interviews.

9 OUTPUTS OF THE QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR EDC AND ADDED VALUE FOR MEMBER STATES

The Council of Europe will collect and collate data from member states and use them to consolidate and make available the main outputs of the self-evaluation process for quality EDC. These outputs will be:

GUIDANCE TOOLS AND SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Providing tools and resources to strengthen practice.

REVIEW REPORTS

They will examine cross-cutting trends across member states based on the findings from the questionnaires, and follow-up interviews.

ESCE DASHBOARD

It will be included in the platform of the ESCE where countries can share progress and developments on EDC, the results from analyses and findings, and the information collected through the inspiring practices forms. The ESCE dashboard will be developed depending on resources and interest of member states.

OPTIONAL OUTPUTS OF THE QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR EDC

Depending on the availability of resources, the Council of Europe can also consider additional outputs, such as:

PEER-LEARNING EVENTS AND WORKSHOPS

Providing opportunities for capacity building, exchange and collaboration.

IN-DEPTH SELF-EVALUATION WITH ADDITIONAL ACTIONS, THAT INCLUDE

Support in conducting group interviews with relevant stakeholders for some or all the target groups envisaged in the quality framework, selected by countries.

FIELD VISITS TO CONDUCT CASE STUDIES

By Council of Europe experts in specific formal and/or non-formal contexts. The case studies could include document analysis, focus groups with stakeholders, direct observation, and interviews.

CO-OPERATION PILLAR OF THE EUROPEAN SPACE FOR CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION



PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

The co-operation pillar of the ESCE is the operational heart, delivering a dynamic European platform that promotes ongoing collaboration, innovation, peer learning, and the sharing of inspiring practices across both formal and non-formal educational settings. Through this multidimensional approach, ESCE co-operation aims to strengthen democratic resilience throughout Europe by revitalising and enhancing high-quality Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC). This work is grounded in the principles for EDC, the Quality framework for EDC, and relevant Council of Europe documents and instruments.

The principles for EDC offer a strong conceptual foundation, while the quality framework provides practical tools for member states to improve EDC through national self-evaluation. The co-operation pillar builds the European infrastructure necessary to sustain, connect and amplify these efforts across Europe.

Co-operation will focus on exchanging knowledge, experiences, and identifying emerging innovative trends, while effectively tackling both current and future challenges by improving EDC policies and encouraging the integration of innovative practices. Co-operation in the ESCE focuses on not only exchanging and disseminating what is already known and what works, but also provides new responses and tests new approaches to shared challenges. To ensure that member states and the wider education community can use ESCE in concrete, practical ways, the co-operation pillar will especially address pressing issues affecting schools and young people today. These include disillusionment with democratic institutions, disengagement, violence and bullying in schools, the mental health of students and educators, disinformation, the ethical and democratic implications of technology and artificial intelligence, discrimination and inequalities, diversity management, and climate change.

By adopting a holistic approach, the co-operation pillar addresses the many facets of education for democratic citizenship, such as human rights education, inclusive education, digital citizenship education, education for sustainable development, and the democratic mission of education. These areas will evolve in response to political priorities and the outcomes from implementing ESCE and its quality framework for EDC, ensuring Europe's education systems remain resilient and relevant to citizens' needs.

Co-operation in the context of the ESCE will invite education stakeholders from across Europe – including young people themselves, as active participants and not only as passive beneficiaries – to collaborate on quality citizenship education, thereby contributing significantly to counteracting backsliding in democracy and upholding democratic values and principles. Stakeholders from all fields of education – including policy, advocacy, academia and civil society, as well as practitioners – actively collaborate in shaping the ESCE and bringing it to life.

This collective approach ensures that EDC is not pursued in isolation, but through mutual encouragement and shared learning. This makes it possible to develop robust citizenship education that builds resilience against democratic backsliding and against societal fragmentation, including backsliding on human rights and gender equality.

By fostering co-operation, the ESCE aims to ensure that citizenship education remains a priority in European educational policies and practices. Co-operation is both a means and an end: it enables the development of quality EDC and embodies the values of dialogue, participation and solidarity that EDC seeks to promote.

OBJECTIVES OF THE CO-OPERATION PILLAR

The role of co-operation in the ESCE is multifaceted and essential for the initiative's success and sustainability and contributes directly to the pillars of the New Democratic Pact for Europe – protecting, innovating and learning. It serves the following key functions towards these objectives:

Engagement and collaboration to rebuild trust in democratic institutions

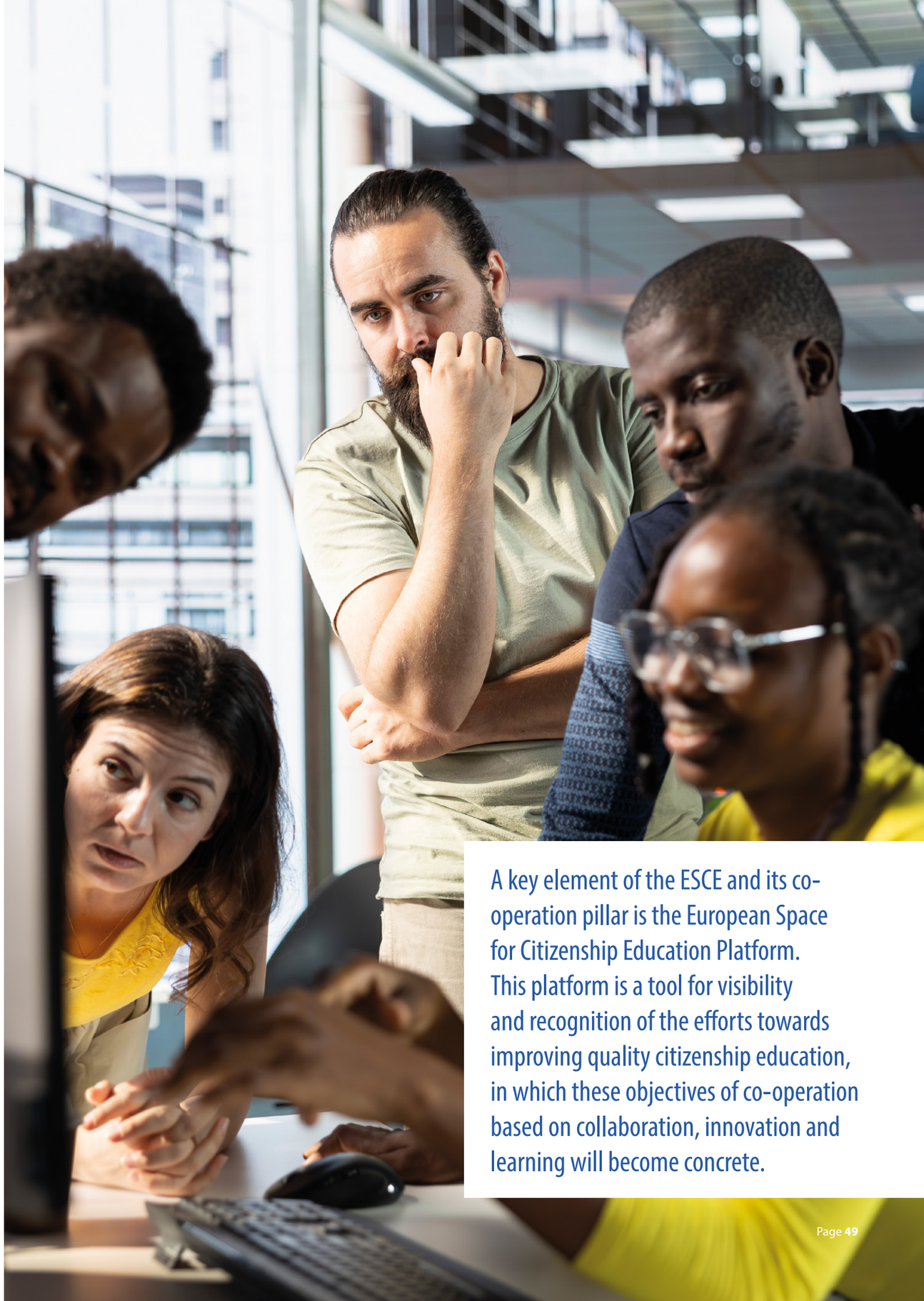
Education for Democratic Citizenship is a shared responsibility between education authorities, education providers, and the education community in member states. It is also a European endeavour based on shared democratic values and principles.

Innovation and exchange

EDC in Europe involves diverse and pluralistic approaches that emerge from sharing knowledge and experiences, the exchange of information on effective practices in formal and non-formal education settings, the innovation and experimentation of new practices and approaches, and the reflection on evidence-based practices, innovations and research.

Peer learning and reflection

Education systems reflect on their practices with education stakeholders and peers, informed by self-evaluation, based on the evidence from diverse formal and non-formal education contexts, and engage in constructive dialogue about effective policies, innovative practices, and the challenges we need to confront. In order to develop quality EDC, it is important to understand what works and why it works in specific contexts and under what conditions. For this reason, it is important to connect practitioners with researchers and policy makers who analyse, innovate and reflect on practices to produce insights and evidence that can inform the development of policies and practices.



A key element of the ESCE and its co-operation pillar is the European Space for Citizenship Education Platform. This platform is a tool for visibility and recognition of the efforts towards improving quality citizenship education, in which these objectives of co-operation based on collaboration, innovation and learning will become concrete.

MECHANISMS OF CO-OPERATION

The Co-operation pillar will use diverse complementary mechanisms, organised around the three pillars of the New Democratic Pact:

PROTECTING
education for democratic citizenship through engagement and guidance.

LEARNING
through peer reflection and capacity building.

INNOVATING
through experimentation and exchange.

The development of these mechanisms will be subject to the availability of resources.



PROTECTING EDC Exchange and knowledge sharing for developing quality

The Education Policy Advisors Network (EPAN): The co-operation body of the ESCE

The Council of Europe would continue to support EPAN as a key component to ensure commitment to the ESCE and its implementation in member states. EPAN members, who mostly represent ministries and educational institutions, will play a crucial role in implementing the European Space for Citizenship Education and developing quality education for democratic citizenship in member states.

EPAN's mandate will be updated in March 2027, after the adoption of the European Space for Citizenship Education, to address the needs and tasks related to its implementation including its role in setting annual thematic priorities for co-operation (see 3.2).

EPAN will contribute to effective reforms and developments in the field of education for democratic citizenship and related political priorities in member states. Specifically, EPAN will:

- Contribute to the implementation of the ESCE, including the RFCDC, the Charter EDC/HRE, and other Council of Europe instruments;
- Pilot the development of quality EDC through thematic priorities, based on trends identified during the self-evaluation processes of the Quality Framework, promoting innovative approaches and practices;
- Collect evidence and share experiences and inspiring examples within the Quality framework for EDC, on implementing the Principles for EDC, the RFCDC, the Charter EDC/HRE and other Council of Europe instruments in education systems;
- Liaise with public authorities responsible for early childhood education and care, primary, secondary, vocational and higher education, supporting them in implementing the ESCE, the RFCDC and the Charter EDC/HRE;
- Support the development of safe learning and teaching environments (physical and digital) as the foundation for quality citizenship education.

Forum for a European Space for Citizenship Education

In addition to engaging directly with ministry officials through EPAN, co-operation under the ESCE will involve a broad range of stakeholders in EDC, including:

- schools, universities and educational institutions;
- research groups and research institutions specialised in citizenship education;
- civil society organisations, including youth organisations and other rights-holder organisations from an intersectional perspective;
- local authorities and community actors;
- social partners and private sector bodies;
- socio-cultural institutions, museums, archives and libraries.

The ESCE encourages inclusive, respectful and transparent collaboration, recognising the diverse expertise and responsibilities of all partners.

An **annual Forum for a European Space for Citizenship Education** will be held to advance and strengthen partnerships among EDC stakeholders. A dedicated space will be reserved in the Forum for young people, ensuring that learners can actively participate in shaping the co-operation agenda that affects them.

Furthermore, the ESCE will explore establishing partnerships with other international organisations, research organisations, and groups dedicated to advancing citizenship education in Europe. The Council of Europe will create partnerships with universities and higher education institutions to incorporate the ESCE in teacher education programmes. The Council of Europe will also encourage students to conduct research on relevant issues related to EDC, RFCDC, and Education for Democracy.

INNOVATING EDC From new ideas to tried and tested innovative practices

Beyond circulating existing practices, the co-operation pillar will connect member states that face shared challenges with peers that have already responded to it. Each year, drawing on the self-evaluation findings and on EPAN, common priority challenges will be identified. Volunteering member states may pilot responses, evaluate them against the Quality Framework, and share what works.

This turns the ESCE Platform from a repository for resources into an active brokerage between a need and a tested response and gives the pillar the innovation function it sets out in its objectives. The mechanism reuses instruments already in place — the self-evaluation cycle, the Quality Framework, and the volunteering-state pilot model — and is phased in line with available resources.

The use of digital technologies and AI can trigger and support EDC:

- widening participation, including educational professionals and young people, to engage them in deliberation processes and dialogue;
- providing support to building competences for democratic culture for critical understanding of the world and build sustainable futures;
- advancing teaching and personalised learning in EDC; and
- connecting actors and participants in cooperating in innovative projects and practices on EDC.

This approach will also build upon the results of the 27th session of the Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and contribute to its implementation of the Resolution.

LEARNING EDC Capacity Building and Professional Development

The Council of Europe would continue to support its member states by providing guidance on policy and practice to facilitate the implementation of the European Space for Citizenship Education. Examples include:

- Information notes and updates: short, accessible summaries of new developments, publications and research to keep practitioners and policymakers informed. Together with the ESCE Platform, these notes and updates ensure continuous access to updated materials and inspiring practices;
- Policy briefs;
- Thematic publications;
- Tools and guidance on implementing the ESCE and developing quality EDC;
- Guidance on EDC pedagogical and innovative approaches, inclusive practices, digital citizenship, and other relevant topics is also provided, based on the results of the evaluations, including guidance drawn from the innovation practices described in 3.2.

These resources strengthen capacity and coherence across educational sectors.

Co-operation activities will include:

- webinars and online thematic forums on pressing societal and educational issues on EDC;
- multilateral, regional and national projects.

Depending on funding and the level of engagement of the relevant parties, the following could also be included:

- peer-learning workshops;
- training seminars for policymakers and practitioners;
- training on competences for democratic culture, digital citizenship, EDC pedagogical approaches, and democratic school governance, among other relevant topics.

These initiatives would enhance knowledge, skills, exchange, sharing experiences, and professionalism across the education system.

THE ESCE PLATFORM: A LIVING SPACE FOR EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP



The Co-operation pillar builds on and expands the Council of Europe's existing digital ecosystem. As well as providing visibility and recognition, the ESCE platform is expected to promote transparency, accessibility, and peer learning. It will enable policymakers, school leaders, teachers, educators, trainers, civil society actors and researchers to quickly access information and learn from one another's approaches, innovations and practices.

The ESCE platform and dashboard will be developed through a step-by-step approach. It will provide a living space where education stakeholders can access information and training and contribute to advancing quality citizenship education by sharing new policies, legislation, successful activities, educational plans, projects and innovative practices.

1ST PHASE

Information about the European Space for Citizenship Education;

Country-based profiles containing general information on EDC and its advances at the national level for formal and non-formal education sectors. The country profiles will summarise the state of the policies and practices in each member state;

Inspiring examples of policies and practices on EDC priorities, innovations, issues and challenges in selected areas (such as the curriculum, assessment, teacher education and continuing professional development of education professionals, and democratic governance) in formal and non-formal education. A map and a database will be created to allow filtering information by country, education level, education sector, themes or issues, and target groups, and to connect a stakeholder seeking a response to a challenge with those who have addressed it, allowing users to identify and find relevant examples;

Videos and podcasts on how the European Space for Citizenship Education can help to encourage discussions to address pressing issues on EDC and related topics, ranging from violence in schools to participation;

Featured resources, a curated collection of online resources, documents and publications relevant to EDC, including case studies, research, practical guides and policy tools. This section will provide easy access to selected resources available and will be part of the Knowledge Hub of the Education Department;

e-Democracy Lab is a digital learning platform offering MOOCs and online training on Council of Europe instruments, pedagogical and innovative approaches, democratic competences, and citizenship education.

2ND PHASE

Dashboard

A dashboard will be created to capture the results of the quality framework review, including policies, curriculum, teaching and learning and democratic governance. The findings of the national self-evaluations will be published around the quality areas for EDC. Consistent with the no-ranking principle of the Quality Framework, the Dashboard is designed to make progress visible without producing country scores or comparative performance tables. After every cycle of self-evaluation, the advances in EDC can be examined over time, and trends can be identified. Thematic reviews can be based on the findings to explore challenges and provide pointers for future action based on evidence. The identified trends on EDC in Europe and highlight areas where improvements are needed will inform the Council of Europe's future work.

Co-operation is thus not only a support mechanism, but also a democratic practice in itself-one that models the very ethos that the ESCE aims to cultivate in education.



NEXT STEPS AND FUTURE WORK



The development of the European Space for Citizenship Education (ESCE) is a multi-stage process designed to combine conceptual clarity, national ownership, and broad stakeholder involvement.

In preparation for the official launch of the ESCE by Ministers of Education at the 27th session of the Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education (3-4 December 2026 in Montenegro), the next phase will focus on preparing the ESCE implementation.

In preparation for the ministerial conference, the work proceeds in several phases: finalisation of the text, including the comments made by the CDEDU (October 2026); targeted communications ahead of the ESCE launch (autumn 2026); launch of the ESCE at the ministerial Conference (December 2026); and phased implementation in member states from 2027.

The next steps for the Secretariat and the Working Group in preparing the ESCE implementation, from October 2026 to July 2027, are the following:

1 Develop Guidance for Policy and Practice

This includes:

- guidance document on the Principles for Education for Democratic Citizenship;
- collect inspiring examples on these principles for policy and practice.

2 Design of Tools and Instruments for Implementation

This includes:

- instruments and methodological guidance for national self-evaluations;
- templates for reviewing and collecting examples of policies and practices in relation to the quality areas for EDC;
- preparation of country profiles.

3 Piloting of Tools and Instruments for Implementation

In line with the CDEDU's request of March 2026 to consider a piloting phase for the Quality Framework, a limited number of volunteering member states will trial the self-evaluation instruments during a preparatory 'year zero', so that the instruments are tested and refined before full ESCE implementation. The findings will inform both the final instruments and the first cycle of implementation from 2027.

4 Digital Infrastructure of the European Space for Citizenship Education

The Secretariat will develop the first phase of the ESCE platform, and the dashboard in a second phase, including the link with the Knowledge Hub and the e-Democracy Lab. To ensure that it is user friendly, it will be shared with users for feedback before its finalisation.

5 Communication on the European Space for Citizenship Education

To promote the European Space for Citizenship Education and engage stakeholders, the Secretariat hired a communications company in September 2025. Together, they developed a creative strategy featuring a key visual element, three hero visuals and the tagline: **Reimagining education: Innovating for democracy**. Planned communications include creating a message house with main statements, arguments, and audience-specific facts, forming the basis for a 12-month content plan. The content plan will draw on concrete results from implementation — pilots, inspiring practices and self-evaluation findings — so that the innovation objective is evidenced rather than asserted. Messages will be shared via the Education Department's X and LinkedIn channels, especially ahead of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education in December 2026.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the European Space for Citizenship Education (ESCE) aims to strengthen education for democratic citizenship in Europe by consolidating the Council of Europe's achievements, supporting continuous improvement in member states, and fostering sustained co-operation. It directly contributes to the Council of Europe's New Democratic Pact for Europe.

The three pillars of the ESCE – principles, quality and co-operation – form an integrated architecture that enables member states to renew citizenship education during a period of profound societal transformation.

THE ESCE

- provides a shared vision and narrative for education for democratic citizenship;
- strengthens policy and practice through the Principles for EDC;
- supports systematic reflection and progress through the Quality Framework for EDC;
- enables innovation, solidarity and mutual support through the co-operation Pillar with learners and young people as active participants in the democratic life it seeks to cultivate.

By doing so, it addresses the urgent need to reinforce democracy, human rights, and the rule of law at a time when these principles are under unprecedented threat.



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