



Concept Note

I. Context

The [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) is a global roadmap envisioning a world where people and the planet thrive in peace, free from poverty and hunger. It recognises that sustainable development depends on peaceful, just, and inclusive societies with effective institutions (SDG 16) and on equitable access to quality education (SDG 4).

Similarly, the Council of Europe's [New Democratic Pact for Europe](#) calls for a renewal of democratic life through a stronger civic engagement, increased democratic participation, and a renewed commitment to the shared values that sustain democratic and pluralist societies.

Despite a spread consensus on shared goals and collective commitments to build a more sustainable, just and peaceful world, a significant gap remains between ambition and implementation. Progress has been made, but it remains insufficient in pace, scale and equity¹. At the same time, the institutions and frameworks established to protect rights, uphold democracy and advance sustainable development are under increasing pressure and facing an unprecedented threat. Awareness of risks and urgent need for change is no longer the main obstacle; what still needs to be reinforced is the collective capacity and political will to turn that awareness into action.

Education can be a decisive lever in bridging this gap. In this context, global education provides the broader perspective needed to foster mutual understanding, shared responsibility, empathy and the ability to engage effectively across cultures and generations. These competencies must be cultivated and practised to support effective collective action. This effort finds its normative foundation on human rights, which provide a shared set of values and principles to guide collective action and encourage shared responsibility. Far from being abstract ideals, human rights are enshrined in legal instruments, such as the [Universal Declaration on Human Rights](#) and the [European Convention on](#)

¹ See the [UN Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025](#)

[Human Rights](#). They represent concrete commitments to dignity, equality, freedom and justice, setting the minimum standards of an inclusive society and providing a shared framework for collective action.

The Global Education Week (GEW) 2026 offers an opportunity to reaffirm the transformative power of education and to bring together educators, learners, civil society and policymakers around cohesive collective action for a shared future.

II. The Global Education Week 2026

Individual voice is strengthened when it is grounded in awareness and supported by the capacity to think critically about the realities that shape our lives. The Global Education Week 2026 rests on the premise that education must equip learners to understand the world critically, question dominant narratives, and form informed and independent judgements.

Critical thinking is not simply an intellectual skill. It is a civic and democratic competence that enables individuals to identify the roots of conflict and injustice, distinguish evidence from manipulation, and resist ideologies that thrive on passivity and fear. It supports the ability to question institutions when they fail in their purpose, challenge practices that sustain exclusion, and recognise power when it is obscured by claims of neutrality or inevitability. This is both a collective and personal process. As Nawal El Saadawi observed², education can challenge unexamined assumptions, and the discomfort this creates, when combined with vision, integrity and a commitment to human dignity, becomes a powerful driver of personal and social change.

The ability to think critically is especially important today. In a digital environment shaped by algorithmic filtering and AI-generated content, the capacity to assess information has become a condition for effective participation in democratic life. This involves recognising manipulation, understanding how narratives are constructed and circulated, and practising responsible digital citizenship.

Cultivating these capacities requires a holistic approach to education that engages not only knowledge and analytical skills, but also values, emotions, relationships and identity. The Council of Europe's [Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture](#) reflects this vision, recognising that democratic citizenship must be developed through the integrated growth of the whole person.

In this perspective, democracy is intended as a living practice to be learned, exercised and renewed. Every learner should be equipped with the tools necessary to think critically, constructively engage

² Nawal El Saadawi, Egyptian writer and activist: "Good education means creating dissatisfaction and disobedience."

with differences and contribute responsibly to a shared future in more just and inclusive societies. Critical thinking is therefore the starting point of democratic life and what makes meaningful collective action possible, enabling individuals to move beyond passive acceptance, engage with complexity, and make informed decisions together in pursuit of shared goals.

This is the message of the Global Education Week 2026: moving from individual awareness to collective action. The future we need will not emerge on its own. It is one we must choose, shape and build together through education.

III. Motto of the Global Education Week 2026

The Global Education Week 2026 is guided by the motto “My Voice, Our Action, A Common Future”. This slogan is intended as a pedagogical and political statement: from the individual to the collective, from awareness to action, and from the present to the future.

“My Voice” reflects the starting point of democratic engagement and civic participation. Every person brings a perspective shaped by their experiences, identity, and values. Education cultivates these voices building the knowledge and critical awareness that allow individuals to understand their place in the world, to name injustice, and to articulate an alternative.

“Our Action” acknowledges that individual voices have an impact when translated into collective action. Shared values and dialogue create the bridge that connects personal perspective to collective engagement.

“A Common Future” is the horizon that gives the motto its purpose. It reflects the central idea of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: our futures are interconnected, and the choices we make today shape the world of tomorrow.

IV. Objectives

The GEW 2026 pursues the following objectives:

- To raise awareness among education stakeholders of the potential of Global Education in addressing contemporary global threats.
- To promote holistic, transformative approaches to learning that develop the full range of competences required for democratic participation and global responsibility.
- To strengthen the capacity of educators and institutions to integrate critical thinking, human rights education and civic engagement into curricula and learning environments.
- To foster connections and solidarity among practitioners, policymakers, civil society and learners committed to education as a force for peace and justice.

- To contribute to the implementation of SDG 4.7³ and the values enshrined in the Council of Europe's New Democratic Pact for Europe and the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture.

V. Target audiences

The GEW 2026 is addressed to a wide community of practice and advocacy:

- Teachers, educators and trainers at all levels of formal, non-formal and informal education.
- Youth workers and youth organisations engaged in learning and civic participation.
- Education policymakers and authorities at national, regional and local levels.
- Civil society organisations working in the fields of human rights, peacebuilding, democracy and development.
- Researchers and academics in education, peace studies, political science and related disciplines.
- Young people, as both the primary beneficiaries and as active agents in the transformation of education.

The Global Education Week is an international campaign implemented by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe and the [Global Education Network](#) in the framework of the [iLEGEND III](#), a joint programme of the European Union and the Council of Europe: co-funded by the European Union and the Council of Europe. It aims to raise awareness on Global Education as a tool for solidarity and change and contribute for a more sustainable, peaceful and equitable world. The activities organised in the framework of Global Education Week are the sole responsibility of the organisers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union or the Council of Europe.



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³ [SDG 4.7](#): Education for sustainable development and global citizenship.