

TRACKING PROGRESS, SHAPING FUTURES

Insights from the First Implementation Review of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture

INTRODUCTION

This information note presents key findings and strategic insights from the first comprehensive review of the implementation of the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) across member states. Conducted between March and December 2023 and endorsed by the Steering Committee for Education (CDEDU), the review assessed the extent to which the RFCDC has been integrated into national education systems since its adoption in 2016. The findings confirm that significant progress has been made in embedding democratic competences into educational policies, curricula, and teacher training—particularly in primary and secondary education. However, the review also highlights areas requiring greater attention,

including vocational education, higher education, early childhood, and adult learning. Challenges in assessing democratic competences and in ensuring sustained implementation call for targeted actions. This brief outlines evidence-based recommendations to help policymakers, educators, and stakeholders build on the momentum of the RFCDC and reinforce the democratic and civic mission of education. These insights contribute directly to the implementation of the Council of Europe's 2024–2030 Education Strategy "Learners First" and support the shared goal of preparing all learners to become active, responsible citizens in diverse democratic societies.



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

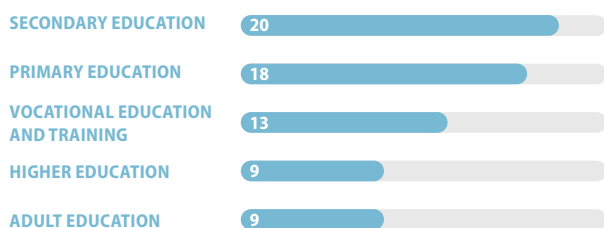
FACTS AND FIGURES

The Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) is a model of competences for democratic culture that consists of 20 values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding that learners need for life in democratic and diverse societies. Since the approval of the RFCDC by European ministers of education in April 2016, guidelines on the implementation of the RFCDC were developed and cooperation projects to support the RFCDC integration in select member states were implemented.

This review found the RFCDC widely integrated into education policies, curricula, resources, and teacher training in member states. However, more effort is needed to extend its use in vocational training and higher education:

Integration of RFCDC by education sector

OUT OF 23 SURVEYED COUNTRIES



↘ RFCDC · 2023

Review of the implementation of the Council of Europe

KEY FINDINGS

- 01 There is notable progress in integrating the RFCDC into education policies and legislation, although challenges remain.
- 02 There is substantial integration of the RFCDC within education systems, impacting policies, curricula, educational resources, and training and professional development. However, more attention needs to be paid to integrating the RFCDC into early childhood education, vocational education and training, higher education and adult education.
- 03 There is a significant level of RFCDC integration in education institutions, particularly in countries where they have a greater degree of autonomy.
- 04 The integration of the RFCDC in the assessment of learners remains a challenge, underscoring the complexity of assessing competences as outcomes, as opposed to assessing subject knowledge, and requiring new approaches to CDC assessment.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS


Strategic Priorities for Implementing the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture.

To bridge implementation gaps and support further the implementation of the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture in member states' national education policies and practice, the Council of Europe proposes the following actions for ministries, institutions, educators and others:


01 Implementing the RFCDC in education to confront challenges. Policy makers and education professionals should adapt the RFCDC to a variety of contexts, including VET and higher education, and use the RFCDC to address current and emerging issues in education. The following measures are proposed:

 **Implementing RFCDC in vocational education and training (VET).** Integrate RFCDC into VET curricula and qualifications and foster collaboration between VET stakeholders to develop a culture of democracy.

 **Implementing RFCDC in higher education (HE).** Support research schemes on citizenship education and promote student voice and participation in higher education.


 **Using the RFCDC to address current and emerging issues and challenges in education.** Address current political and social issues and future challenges, such as combatting misinformation and fake news with a human rights-based perspective of digital and media education; enhance emotional and social learning to support well-being.

02 Evaluating the implementation and development of the RFCDC in Europe. Governments and institutions should establish mechanisms to track the progress and impact of policies related to the RFCDC. These should entail, in particular:

 **Establish education accountability mechanisms.** Define a new model of education accountability mechanisms of the Council of Europe to ensure that member states are effectively implementing and developing policies and practices, based on Council of Europe recommendations.

 **Create a Council of Europe Knowledge Hub.** Develop a Knowledge Hub at the Council of Europe to facilitate ongoing data collection regarding the latest developments in education legislation, policies and practices related to the RFCDC.


03 Enhancing participation and co-operation among education stakeholders. Creating platforms for dialogue and participation of all education stakeholders is essential to foster better RFCDC implementation. The following measures are recommended:

 **Foster collaborative networking between formal and non-formal education sectors.** Encourage the formation of networks and partnerships between formal and non-formal education stakeholders through the support and use of the RFCDC and acknowledge and leverage the unique strengths and contributions of both formal and non-formal education sectors.

 **Support local and regional initiatives on RFCDC.** Encourage and support local and regional initiatives that align with the RFCDC goals, facilitating grassroots level dialogue and implementation and ensure that educational tools and resources are accessible in multiple languages to cater to a diverse European audience.

 **Create (online) platforms for dialogue, knowledge sharing and co-operation.** Develop, in person and online, platforms that enable continuous dialogue and exchange of information among stakeholders for policy deliberation, allowing stakeholders to contribute to the shaping of education policies related to democratic education across different countries and regions.

04 Fostering opportunities to learn and practice CDC among education professionals and the education community. Opportunities for the development of CDC among education professionals and the education community need to cover initial teacher education, continuing professional development and strategies to support the learning and practice of CDC.

 **Integrate CDC into initial teacher education (ITE).** In order to equip new teachers with the knowledge and skills to foster and model these competences in their classrooms. Encourage and train educators to use student-centred learning approaches that actively engage students in developing competences for democratic culture.

 **Resource development, dissemination and international exchanges.** Support/accompany the translation of the RFCDC, guidance documents and educational materials in different languages, with an effort to adapt to the cultural meanings of the concepts to facilitate interpretation and appropriation.



Support teachers and education professionals in implementing the RFCDC and teaching competences for democratic culture. Principals and school leaders need to embrace transformative leadership and support teachers and education professionals in adopting advanced pedagogies, teaching CDC, especially when teaching controversial issues, and in taking a position towards democratic education.



Ongoing development on RFCDC for education professionals, stakeholders and the entire education community. Provide ongoing professional development opportunities related to CDC for education professionals, school leaders and key stakeholders of the education community, including national and local policy makers, and families.



Foster democratic governance and participation of the entire education community. Foster and develop democratic processes in decision making within the education institutions, involving the entire education community, especially learners and their families.

GOOD PRACTICES & FURTHER READING

↳ VOL. 1



↳ VOL. 2



↳ VOL. 3



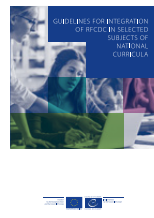
↳ COUNCIL OF EUROPE · 2018

Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture



↳ COUNCIL OF EUROPE · 2022

Guidelines for integration of RFCDC in selected subjects of national curricula, Institute for Improvement of Education



INSPIRING EXAMPLES FROM ACROSS EUROPE

01 Using the RFCDC in higher education ANDORRA

In 2021, the University of Andorra introduced a compulsory track on Democratic Culture within their master's programme in education. This track aims to offer educational responses based on the interpretation of the needs and conflicts of the current social, cultural and economic reality, in line with the values promoted by the Council of Europe. The Democratic Culture track equips students with specific competences to facilitate the teaching and learning of competences for democratic culture in formal education and is a good practice of RFCDC integration in higher education.

02 Using the RFCDC for learner assessment REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Following the introduction in schools of the new RFCDC based civic education subject "Education for society" in September 2018, the formative assessment based on RFCDC descriptors was introduced as a key element in the development of learners' competences for democratic culture. During the gradual implementation of the subject in different school grades, the assessment methodology continued to be developed and finetuned through a participatory process of feedback and reflection with teachers, experts and learners.

03 Using the RFCDC in curriculum reform REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

Following the official inclusion of the RFCDC in the Government Strategy of Education Development 2030, a thorough process of establishing a systemic correlation between the RFCDC and the national curriculum was initiated in 2020. The aim was to integrate the Framework into selected subjects of national curricula to be available as an "off-the-shelf tool" for the entire education system. As a result, 10 subjects across three education cycles (lower primary, upper primary and secondary) were connected with the RFCDC.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE EDUCATION STRATEGY 2024-2030 "LEARNERS FIRST"

The results of the RFCDC review supported the preparation of the Council of Europe Education Strategy "Learners First" and were fed into the 26th session of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education of the Council of Europe on 28 and 29 September 2023. The further development and implementation of the RFCDC falls into Pillar 1 of the Strategy: Renewing the Democratic and Civic Mission of Education.



↳ LEARNERS FIRST

Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024-2030

