

# REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE REFERENCE FRAMEWORK OF COMPETENCES FOR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE (RFCDC) 2023



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

**REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION  
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE  
REFERENCE FRAMEWORK  
OF COMPETENCES  
FOR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE (RFCDC) 2023**

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# Executive summary

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This report presents the main findings from the first review of the implementation of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC). The review process took place between March and December 2023.

The main aim of this study was to understand the extent to which the RFCDC has been used in formal education systems of member states since 2016, including its influence on policies and practices. Moreover, this review was intended as an opportunity for policy learning among member states. The results have supported the preparation of the Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024-2030 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.

Chapter 1 of the report offers an overview of the conceptual definitions guiding the study and the research design used. Chapter 2 analyses the main findings in the implementation of the RFCDC in the following areas: 1) education policy development; 2) education systems; 3) school; 4) addressing current and emerging issues such as: violence in schools, violent extremism and radicalisation; climate change; media and informational literacy; ethical implications of artificial intelligence (AI); and education in times of crisis; 5) main opportunities and challenges related to the integration of the RFCDC in education systems. The concluding chapter (Chapter 3) presents policy pointers for improvement with regard to the implementation of the RFCDC in key areas of action, and how to support further member states in undertaking this task.

The findings presented below were drawn from the analysis of evidence collected through:

- ▶ a literature and document review conducted in English and French;
- ▶ two online surveys: one for the Education Policy Advisors Network (EPAN) members (25 responses received), and one for education stakeholders across levels and sectors of education (42 responses received);
- ▶ peer learning workshops with EPAN held in May 2023;
- ▶ online focus groups (15 participants in five online focus groups);
- ▶ individual interviews with EPAN members (five).





# Key findings

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## I. Progression in education policy development

There is a positive trend in legislation and education policy development with regard to integrating the RFCDC. Many countries have adopted, or are in the process of adopting, policies aligned with the Framework. The main findings in educational policies and practices of participating countries in the survey are summarised in various categories as follows.

- 1. Education reforms and legislation.** There is notable progress in integrating the RFCDC into education policies and legislation, although challenges remain. Government and governmental agencies are key in formulating and developing policies that incorporate the RFCDC. Policy makers are engaged in adapting the Framework to national and regional contexts, ensuring its alignment with existing education policies.
- 2. Integration of RFCDC into education systems.** There is substantial integration of the RFCDC within education systems, impacting policies, curricula, educational resources, and training and professional development. However, there is a need to dedicate more attention to integrating the RFCDC into early childhood education, vocational education and training, higher education and adult education. There is an effort to translate the RFCDC materials to provide guidance and facilitate the implementation of the Framework in formal education.
- 3. Institutional autonomy and integration.** There is a significant level of RFCDC integration in education institutions, particularly in countries where they have a greater degree of autonomy. Education institutions are fundamental in integrating the RFCDC into their curricula and teaching practices. There is a high level of activity in developing teaching resources, such as handbooks and guidelines, to aid integration. There is an effort to develop contextualised educational resources related to competences for democratic culture (CDC) in the languages of schooling, as a means to integrate CDC into the curriculum. The commitment of education institutions and education professionals is central to the practical implementation of the RFCDC in classroom and institutional settings. Their involvement includes adapting advanced teaching and learning methodologies and developing educational materials and resources to incorporate CDC.

## II. Enhancing education stakeholders' engagement and co-operation

Some key aspects of the involvement of diverse education stakeholders are as follows.

- 1. Involvement of the education community.** The education community, including parents and local authorities, is recognised as an important stakeholder group in the implementation of the RFCDC. Engaging a broader education community helps to create a more supportive environment for implementing a democratic culture and democratic practices in education.
- 2. Collaboration between formal and non-formal education.** There is active collaboration between formal and non-formal education sectors, highlighting the importance of multisectoral approaches.
- 3. Role of non-governmental organisations.** Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are significantly involved in the promotion and implementation of the RFCDC, particularly in non-formal education settings. Partnerships between NGOs, educational institutions (of all levels of education) and government bodies play a pivotal role in advancing the Framework and its principles. NGOs act as crucial partners in providing capacity-building opportunities for educators and in reaching out to vulnerable groups.
- 4. International and regional co-operation.** Co-operation among member states and international organisations helps in sharing best practices, resources and experiences in implementing the RFCDC. Such co-operation facilitates a more co-ordinated response and effective adoption of the Framework across different countries.

### III. Challenges in implementing the RFCDC

The report identifies significant challenges in implementing the RFCDC, especially in assessment of CDC in learners, in vocational education and training, and in higher education. These areas require further attention in terms of effective integration of the Framework. Some of the challenges in assessment, vocational education and training, and higher education as identified in the implementation of the RFCDC are as follows.

- 1. Difficulties in assessing learners' competences for democratic culture (CDC).** There is a lack of knowledge and clarity about how the RFCDC is being used for assessing CDC in learners. The assessment of CDC is not widespread or at least is underdeveloped, indicating a gap in assessing these competences effectively within educational systems. A significant challenge lies in the assessment of recognising values and attitudes, which are key components of CDC. Questions remain about whether and how attitudes can be effectively assessed and if values can be really assessed at all. The complexity of assessing competences as outcomes, as opposed to assessing subject knowledge, requires new approaches and methods to assess CDC.
- 2. Further implementation of the RFCDC into vocational education and training and in higher education.** The integration of the RFCDC into vocational education and training (VET) and in higher education needs further attention. Integrating the RFCDC into existing VET and higher education curricula presents challenges (even resistance), especially in integrating the CDC to fit VET diplomas and academic disciplines in higher education. Teachers, trainers and professors lack the training, support and resources to effectively integrate the RFCDC. There is a need for professional development programmes and research schemes that specifically target CDC.

# Key recommendations

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The following recommendations are prioritised to address the immediate needs in diverse areas of implementation of the RFCDC, aiming to enhance the integration and effectiveness of CDC in education systems.

- 1. Implementing the RFCDC into 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.
- 2. 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. This includes having timely information about effective strategies and areas that require improvement.
- 3. Fostering opportunities to learn and practise CDC among education professionals and the education community.** There is a need for the provision of opportunities for the development of CDC among education professionals and the education community. These opportunities should cover initial teacher education, continuing professional development and strategies to support the learning and practice of CDC in learners and their families. Especial attention should also be given to vulnerable groups, such as out-of-school children and young people.
- 4. Enhancing participation and co-operation among education stakeholders.** Creating platforms for dialogue and participation of all education stakeholders is essential to foster a better understanding of the importance of CDC. The Council of Europe's new legal instrument for a European Space for Citizenship Education will be a significant opportunity to facilitate co-operation among member states.



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

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This report presents the main findings of the first review of the implementation of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC). Drawing on the [Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education \(Recommendation CM/Rec\(2010\)7\)](#), in which member states committed themselves to “the aim of providing every person within their territory with the opportunity of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education”, the Council of Europe’s [Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture](#) was developed and adopted at the 25th session of the Council of Europe Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education in April 2016.

Since its adoption in 2016, the RFCDC has become the flagship tool that has shaped the main themes of the Council of Europe’s Education Programme. Member states have been strongly encouraged to use the Framework to shape their own education systems’ policies. The Council of Europe has supported countries through guidance and policy development, the Education Policy Advisors Network (EPAN), the Democratic Schools Network and a number of co-operation projects in selected countries. In addition, the three RFCDC volumes have been translated into different languages of the member states, and guidance documents have been written to support several areas of policy implementation in formal education.

### 1.1. Aims and objectives of the review

The main aim of this review is to understand the extent to which the RFCDC has been used in formal education systems of member states since 2016, including its influence on policies and practices. Moreover, this review is intended as an opportunity for policy learning among member states. The results have supported the preparation of the Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024-2030 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 proposed objectives for the review are to:

- ▶ identify areas in education policy where the RFCDC (and/or key competences of the RFCDC) is/are being used (for example education legislation, curriculum, assessment, training);
- ▶ highlight good practices from member states;
- ▶ understand if and how the RFCDC is used to address broader issues related to democratic culture, such as countering violence in schools and combating violent extremism and radicalisation;
- ▶ identify areas where the RFCDC could be useful in addressing current and future challenges, for instance tackling climate change and preparing schools for the green transition, and the ethical implications of using artificial intelligence in education;
- ▶ use the results to demonstrate more broadly how the Education Programme contributes concretely to the overall goals of the Council, including the conclusions of Heads of State Summit, and the priorities outlined in the new Council of Europe’s Education Strategy;
- ▶ support the 26th session of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education of the Council of Europe and in particular the pillar on the renewal of the civic mission of education;
- ▶ explore ideas on how to support further member states, for example through the new legal instrument on the creation of a European Space for Citizenship Education.

The review takes into consideration the following strategic documents and reports.

- ▶ The [Reykjavik Declaration and the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy](#), issued at the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Reykjavik, Iceland, 16-17 May 2023), in which one of the principles is “invest in a DEMOCRATIC FUTURE by ensuring that everyone is able to play their role in democratic processes. Priority will be given to supporting the participation of young persons in democratic life and decision-making processes, including through education about human rights and core democratic values, such as pluralism, inclusion, non-discrimination, transparency and accountability”.

- ▶ The [26th Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education](#) was held in Strasbourg on 28-29 September 2023 on the topic of “The transformative power of education: universal values and civic renewal”. The conference brought together ministers of education and high-level officials from 43 member states of the Council of Europe who set new priorities and actions to implement the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy by launching the new Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024-2030 and adopting five resolutions to reaffirm the critical role of education in promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law; recognise the need for decisive action to address global challenges; strengthen the Council of Europe’s education implementation mechanisms; and focus on the democratic future for all learners.
- ▶ The [Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024-2030 “Learners first’ – Education for today’s and tomorrow’s democratic societies”](#), in which the three pillars will support the Council of Europe’s mandate to strengthen democracy, human rights and the rule of law and reinforce the values underlined in the 4th Heads of State and Government Summit: 1) renewing the democratic and civic mission of education; 2) enhancing the social responsibility and responsiveness of education; and 3) advancing education through a human rights-based digital transformation.
- ▶ The [Strategic Framework of the Council of Europe \(SG Inf\(2020\)34\)](#) in which one of the key strategic priorities identified is “Education for democratic citizenship and empowerment and strengthening of young people’s role in decision making. This constitutes an investment in the future democratic development of European societies and a strong guarantee of future generations’ commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights, democratic values and the rule of law. This is also crucial in the context of action against radicalisation/extremism in our societies.”
- ▶ [State of democracy, human rights and the rule of law: an invitation to recommit to the values and standards of the Council of Europe – Report of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe \(2023\)](#).
- ▶ [Report of the Third Review \(2022\) of the implementation of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education \(“Torino report”\)](#).
- ▶ [CM\(2022\)108](#) – Terms of reference of the Steering Committee for Education (CDEDU): monitoring report on the implementation of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture – due 31 December 2023.
- ▶ [Council of Europe Programme and Budget 2022-2025](#) – Total number of member states participating in the implementation of the Reference Framework of Competence for Democratic Culture.

## 1.2. Conceptual definitions

For the purpose of this review, we will refer to the definitions provided by the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (hereafter “the Charter”) and the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture.

- ▶ **Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC)**: according to the Charter, EDC “means education, training, awareness raising, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners 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” (Council of Europe 2010).
- ▶ **Human Rights Education (HRE)** means “education, training, awareness raising, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, to empower learners to contribute to the building and defence of a universal culture of human rights in society, with a view to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms” (Council of Europe 2010).
- ▶ The **Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC)** is “intended for use by educationists in all sectors of education systems from pre-school through primary and secondary schooling to higher education, including adult education and vocational education. The Framework offers a systematic approach to designing the teaching, learning and assessment of competences for democratic culture (CDC), and introducing them into education systems in ways which are coherent, comprehensive, and transparent for all concerned. The heart of the Framework is a model of the competences that need to be acquired by learners if they are to participate effectively in a culture of democracy and live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse democratic societies. The Framework also contains descriptors for all of the competences in the model” (Council of Europe 2018b).

### 1.3. Research design

As noted above, the purpose of this study was to carry out a review of the extent to which the RFCDC has been used in formal education systems of member states since 2016, including its influence on policies and practices with the above-mentioned objectives in mind. Tasks of the review included, for example, identification of the ways in which the RFCDC has been used/is being used by policy makers to shape specific education legislation, initiatives, guidelines etc., and whether the RFCDC is a resource used by education stakeholders in their practice – including school leaders, teachers, educators and students.

Building upon the comprehensive results of the Torino report (Council of Europe 2022b) regarding the state of citizenship and human rights education in Europe, the review assesses the current situation, opportunities and challenges, good practices and lessons learned for RFCDC implementation in member states; and identifies priorities for the future policy and capacity-building work of the Council of Europe on the RFCDC.

Given that this is the first formal review of RFCDC implementation, the research design is based on four main data collection methods, which are described in more detail below. The data collection was conducted concurrently among members of the European Policy Advisors Network (EPAN) of the Council of Europe and a purposeful sample of key education stakeholders representing the diversity of sectors encompassed in the RFCDC – namely policy makers working in governmental institutions and bodies in the field of education; school education and VET stakeholders (for example teacher associations, student organisations and parent organisations); higher education stakeholders; and adult education stakeholders. Representatives from non-governmental and civil society organisations were also included in this group as they are involved in educational initiatives in co-operation with the formal education sector.

#### Data collection methods

The following methods have been used to collect quantitative and qualitative data for this review.

1. **A literature and document review on the implementation of the RFCDC since 2016.** The geographical scope includes all the state parties to the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe. Sources for the literature review include commentary or analysis of education laws, articles and grey literature (for example reports, policy documents and working documents) available in English and French. The time span covered the last seven years since the adoption of the RFCDC.

The research questions guiding the literature and document review were the following.

- ▶ To what extent is the concept of “competences for democratic culture” (as defined in the RFCDC) explicitly referred to in the sources consulted?
- ▶ To what extent is the concept of “competences for democratic culture” (as defined in the RFCDC) indirectly referred to in the sources consulted – for example through proxy terms such as “democratic citizenship” and “democratic education”?
- ▶ Based on the above questions, what are the main issues identified in the literature related to the development of competences for democratic culture? What are some of the opportunities and challenges that have been identified in the literature with regard to the RFCDC?

A first round of analysis was conducted to narrow down the sources identified. In total, about 180 articles, 25 books and 60 documents (policy papers, reports from projects funded by the Council of Europe and the European Union, etc.) were analysed. A second round of analysis was conducted together with the data collected through peer learning workshops, focus groups and individual interviews.

2. **Online surveys.** Short questionnaires (of about 10 items) to gather preliminary survey data were developed based on the main findings from the literature review. The questions were intended to identify key themes for further research during the peer learning workshops, keeping in mind what is important for the different stakeholders in relation to the use of the RFCDC. The questionnaires were shared online with the following groups between May and June 2023:
  - ▶ Education Policy Advisors Network (EPAN) members. The surveys, available in English and French, were disseminated in May 2023 and remained open until the end of June. A total of 25 responses were received by the end of the survey period: 23 replies through the online platform Survey Monkey, and two other questionnaires via e-mail, but only containing replies to the open-ended questions. For the purpose of data analysis, only the replies received through the online platform are considered;
  - ▶ education stakeholders including policy makers working in governmental institutions and bodies in the field of education; school education and VET stakeholders; higher education stakeholders; adult



education stakeholders. Members of the CDEDU (Steering Committee for Education at the Council of Europe) also responded to this survey. A total of 170 people were contacted across member states; 42 responses were received by the end of the survey period through the online platform Survey Monkey.

3. **Peer learning workshops and focus groups.** These were intended to collect in-depth qualitative data to allow a triangulation of the findings from the literature review and the online surveys. The peer learning workshops were organised with members of EPAN and provided a space to discuss the barriers and enablers in relation to the use of the RFCDC, as well as suggestions for improvement. For countries that have already introduced the RFCDC into their education systems, information about the lessons learned, the main education actors involved in the process, and the common barriers and enablers was collected.
  - ▶ For EPAN, the workshops were facilitated by the team of experts using guiding questions developed beforehand. The workshops were held on 25 and 26 May 2023, at the EPAN meeting in Strasbourg, France.
  - ▶ For education stakeholders, a purposeful sample group of stakeholders was invited to participate in a series of online focus groups. Representatives from the following sectors were considered: public officers in the education sector; experts in the field of EDC/HRE; school education and VET stakeholders; higher education stakeholders; adult education stakeholders; and civil society and non-governmental organisations' stakeholders. A total of 15 people participated in five online focus groups that were organised online between June and July 2023.

The peer learning workshops and the focus groups were planned to last for a maximum of two hours and to gather no more than six to eight participants per session to facilitate the exchanges that were part of the data collection process. Both the peer learning workshops and online focus groups were facilitated in English and/or French.

No audio or video recordings were made during the peer learning workshops, but two note-takers were appointed to each group to produce a written report of the discussions held, to be used during data analysis. In the case of online focus groups, video recordings were made following the release of an informed consent of participants. Moreover, a written summary of the discussion was shared with the participants to ensure that the data collected reflected the participants' views.

4. **Individual interviews.** Although these were not initially included in the research design, after the peer learning workshops at the EPAN meeting in Strasbourg members of EPAN were invited, on a voluntary basis, to participate in online individual interviews to further explore the RFCDC implementation in their countries. Five individual interviews were conducted in June 2023 with representatives from EPAN. For confidentiality reasons, the interviewees' identities are not disclosed in this report.

Respondents to the surveys as well as participants of the focus groups, peer learning workshops and individual interviews were informed about the data privacy policy applied to this study. No personal identifiers were collected or requested at any point of the data collection in order to ensure that confidentiality issues were addressed. In cases where audio or video recordings were made, participants were asked to provide informed consent. Audio and video recordings were accessible only to the main researcher during data analysis and were deleted after the report writing process concluded.

Table 1 provides a summary overview of the data collection methods described above and the participation by country. Individual interviews have not been included for confidentiality purposes.

**Table 1 – List of countries represented by data collection method**

<b>Council of Europe member states</b>	<b>EPAN survey</b>	<b>Education stakeholders' survey</b>	<b>Peer learning workshops</b>	<b>Focus groups (online)</b>
Albania	X		X	
Andorra	X		X	
Armenia	X	X	X	
Austria	X		X	X
Azerbaijan			X	
Belgium		X	X	

Bosnia and Herzegovina		X	X	X
Bulgaria				
Croatia				
Cyprus		X	X	
Czech Republic		X		X
Denmark	X		X	
Estonia		X	X	
Finland	X		X	
France	X	X	X	
Georgia	X	X	X	X
Germany	X	X	X	X
Greece		X		
Hungary		X		X
Iceland	X	X	X	
Ireland	X		X	
Italy		X	X	X
Latvia		X		
Liechtenstein				
Lithuania	X		X	X
Luxembourg				
Malta		X	X	
Republic of Moldova			X	
Monaco		X		
Montenegro		X	X	X
Netherlands	X		X	
North Macedonia	X	X	X	
Norway	X		X	X
Poland				X
Portugal				
Romania	X		X	
San Marino	X			
Serbia	X	X	X	X
Slovak Republic		X	X	
Slovenia	X		X	
Spain		X	X	
Sweden			X	
Switzerland	X		X	
Türkiye	X		X	
Ukraine	X	X	X	X
United Kingdom	X	X	X	
<i>Other:</i>				
Belgium (Flemish community)		X		
England		X		
Holy See			X	
Scotland	X		X	

## Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the thematic analysis method, which is used in the social sciences for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data” (Braun and Clarke 2006) beyond a mere descriptive account of the information gathered. The purpose was to account for the participants’ experiences and views and to contextualise them in a broader social context, bounded to a specific period, while considering its influence on the participants’ views.

Three levels of analysis were proposed (see Table 2). These levels were used to build an a priori codebook to categorise data across the literature review, the online surveys, the peer learning workshops and the individual interviews. *In vivo codes* (codes that are identified during the data analysis) were added during the data analysis process, to include emerging trends that were not considered at the beginning. In order to code the large amounts of data collected through the literature review, the focus groups, the peer learning workshops, the individual interviews and the surveys, the researcher used the qualitative data analysis software QSR International’s NVivo.

**Table 2 – Levels of analysis for the data analysis phase**

Levels of analysis	Subsectors of education and training
<p><b>Policy</b></p> <p>Educational policies and legislation/reforms; curriculum development; initial and continuing professional development; teaching methods; learner assessment.</p>	<p>Pre-school education</p> <p>Primary and secondary school</p> <p>Adult education</p>
<p><b>Stakeholders</b></p> <p>Government bodies and agencies; education and training institutions; teachers and educators; learners; parents; academics.</p>	<p>Vocational education and training</p> <p>Higher education and research</p>
<p><b>Transversal</b></p> <p>Current and emerging issues (for example climate change, controversial issues); inclusiveness; accountability; sustainability; context-specific factors; etc.</p>	

## Ethical considerations and limitations

The final report for this review was written keeping in mind the following challenges that came up during the data collection and analysis. First, quantitative and qualitative data were collected using only the two working languages of the Council of Europe (English and French), which left out a sizable number of resources available in other European languages. Second, even though for peer learning workshops, focus groups and individual interviews participants were present on a voluntary basis, the recruiting method relied on purposeful sampling using contacts within the network of the Council of Europe’s Education Department and the researcher herself.

A third important limitation is in regard to the surveys. On the one hand, about a half (54%) of the countries represented in EPAN sent their replies to the survey (25 out of 46 member states), which makes it difficult to generalise the findings presented in this report. Hence, qualitative data collected during the peer learning workshops organised in Strasbourg and the subsequent individual interviews with EPAN members were crucial to ensure that there was enough relevant and reliable information for conducting the analysis.

On the other hand, several EPAN members and members of the Steering Committee for Education (CDEDU) of the Council of Europe answered the education stakeholders’ survey. Since these instruments were different in terms of the questions asked, it was not possible to merge the replies. This particular issue was considered during the data analysis in order to avoid an overrepresentation of the policy makers’ perspective, and therefore the collection of these data through the focus groups was fundamental to gather information from practitioners.

It is worth noting that the variety of qualitative data collection methods used in the research design was developed keeping in mind potential challenges and the importance of triangulating the findings, so as to avoid generalisations exclusively based on data gathered through the surveys.

## Chapter 2

# Main findings

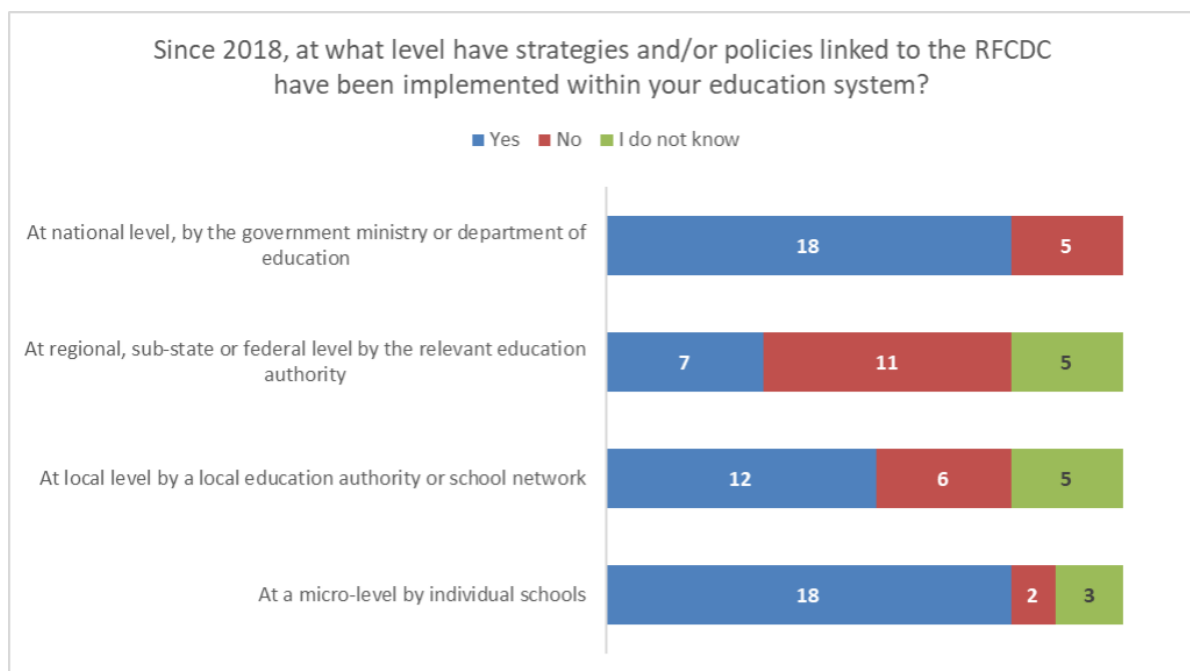
This chapter is structured around the following areas of implementation and use of the RFCDC: 1) education policy development; 2) education system; 3) school; and 4) addressing current and emerging issues, such as violence in schools, violent extremism and radicalisation; climate change; media and informational literacy; ethical implications of artificial intelligence (AI); and education in times of crisis. This chapter also presents the main opportunities and challenges related to the integration of the RFCDC into education systems.

### 2.1. The RFCDC in education policy development

The RFCDC is intended as a tool to support education policy makers to design the teaching, learning and assessment of competences for democratic culture (CDC) across levels and sectors of education (Council of Europe 2018c). According to the Torino report (Council of Europe 2022b), substantial policy developments to promote Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE) had taken place. The report noted a positive perception among policy makers and other stakeholders from the formal and non-formal education sectors, although some major challenges were identified in higher education, VET and initial teacher education in relation to the provision of EDC/HRE for all. Also, a significant number of countries (15 out of 22) indicated the RFCDC as one of the key resources that had supported the promotion of EDC/HRE at policy level.

The findings from surveys conducted for the present report among members of EPAN and other education stakeholders (see Chapter 1 for details) seem to confirm this positive perception to a certain extent. Among respondents from EPAN, the RFCDC is mostly reported as being integrated within national education systems in relation to the training of teachers and school leaders (14 countries out of 23 country respondents); the development of teaching resources for schools (14 countries); school curricula – including vocational education and training (13 countries); and education policies (13 countries). More than three quarters of countries (18 out of 23 countries, see Figure 1) reported that they had created policies linked to the RFCDC at the national level since 2018, and the same number reported that individual schools also had created their own policies and strategies using the Framework. The picture was more mixed for regional and local levels (7 countries at regional/federal level and 12 at local level), while other countries pointed out that these levels are not applicable to their political context (for example no relevant entities at a regional or local level).

**Figure 1 – Levels of implementation of strategies and/or policies linked to the RFCDC, EPAN survey**



Source: author, using respondents' data.

Results from the education stakeholders' survey suggest a similar trend: over half of respondents indicated that they had knowledge about the RFCDC being integrated into their area of practice such as education policy (23 out of 42), whereas for school curricula (19 out of 42), training of teachers and school leaders (19 out of 42), and the development of teaching resources (18 out of 42) it is a mixed outlook. It is worth noting that both EPAN members and education stakeholders reported less knowledge about the RFCDC being integrated into student assessment and higher education, two areas where progress has been slower, as will be discussed in the following sections.

While the survey findings show that the RFCDC has been integrated at policy level in a number of countries, this does not necessarily mean that education legislation and policies across European countries explicitly mention CDC. A number of respondents to the surveys stated that the RFCDC was considered as "not relevant" or that simply there is "no explicit effort" at integrating the RFCDC in education legislation, due to recent reforms having already been approved at the time the Framework came out or differing policy priorities of governments. This variation between education policies and legislation may indicate that, even though there has been progress in this area since 2018, more efforts from member states are needed to promote the integration of CDC at all levels of education. However, two challenges are to be addressed in relation to 1) how the RFCDC is being disseminated and understood by policy makers and practitioners, and 2) competing priorities and "reform fatigue". Both will be discussed in section 2.4 of this chapter.

## 2.2. The RFCDC in the education system

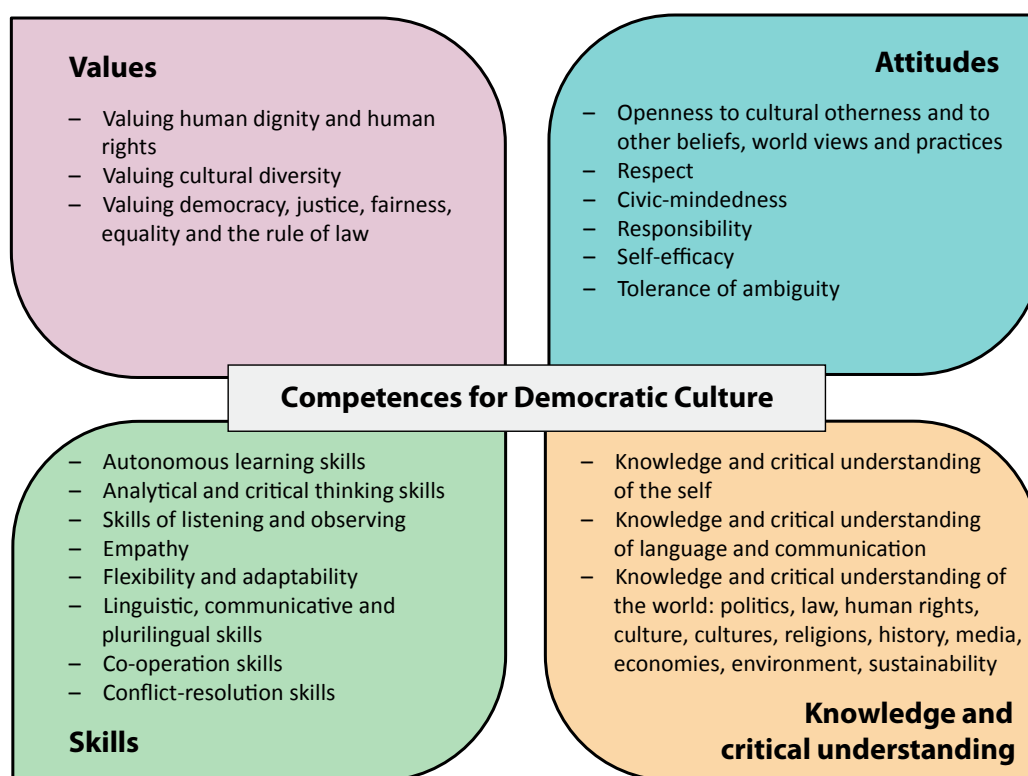
As a model of competences, the RFCDC offers a systematic approach to CDC across sectors of education – from pre-primary through secondary education, to VET and higher education – to help education policy makers and practitioners support learners in developing democratic competences. The findings presented in the Torino report (Council of Europe 2022b) underlined a positive trend towards the provision of EDC/HRE across educational levels. These results align with those presented by the 2017 Eurydice report on citizenship education at school, which found that, in a majority of European countries, citizenship competences are covered in the national curricula of formal general education: primary and lower secondary education (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice 2017). However, in school-based initial vocational education and training (VET) there is less evidence of progress being made in comparison to general education (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice 2017). The findings from this report confirm these trends – curricula for VET put less emphasis on the development of CDC, and the RFCDC is not necessarily considered as a key resource in this education sector.

The influence of the Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC) on European education systems has translated into a progressive shift towards competence-based curricula, emphasising not only learners' knowledge acquisition but also the development of skills and attitudes needed "for personal fulfilment and development, employability, social inclusion and active citizenship".<sup>1</sup> An updated version of this recommendation (Council of the European Union 2018), which explicitly includes the citizenship competence, was published around the same time as the RFCDC. Both reference documents may have helped countries to start thinking about how to integrate CDC in the national curricula – for instance, using the CDC model (see Figure 2) consisting of 20 competences organised into values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding.

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1. <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/improving-quality/key-competences>.

Figure 2 – The model of competences for democratic culture (CDC)



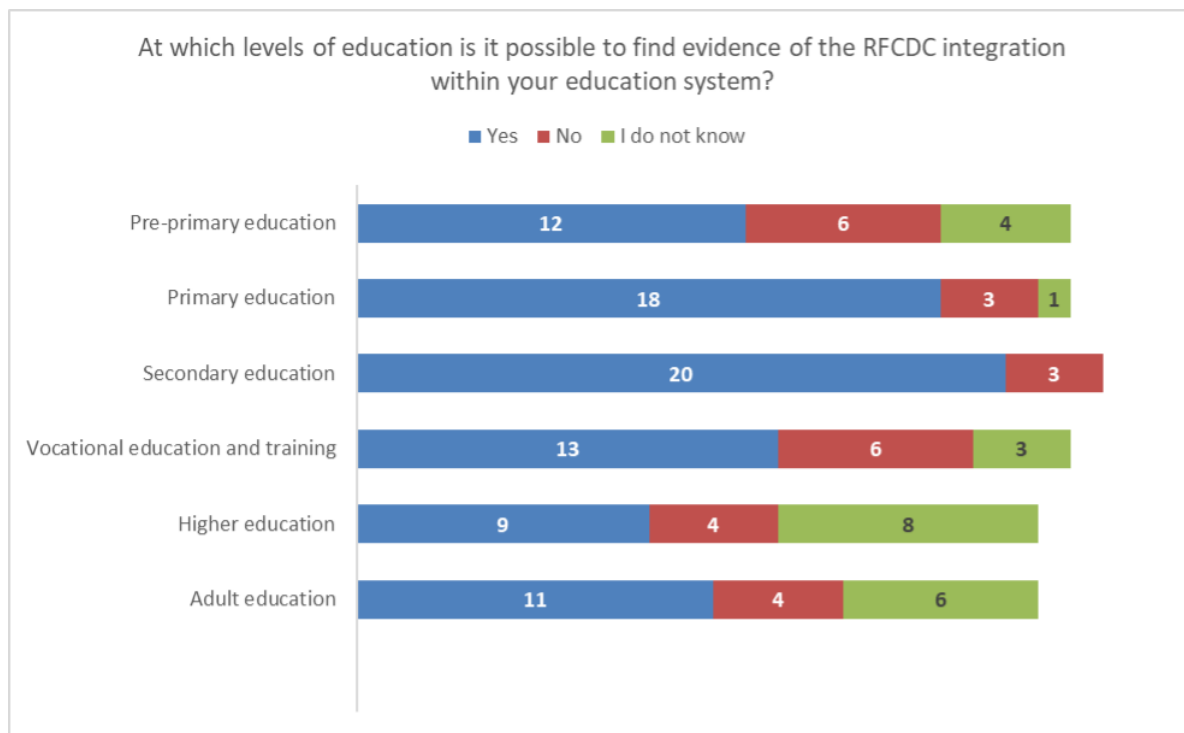
*Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture*

Source: Council of Europe 2018a.

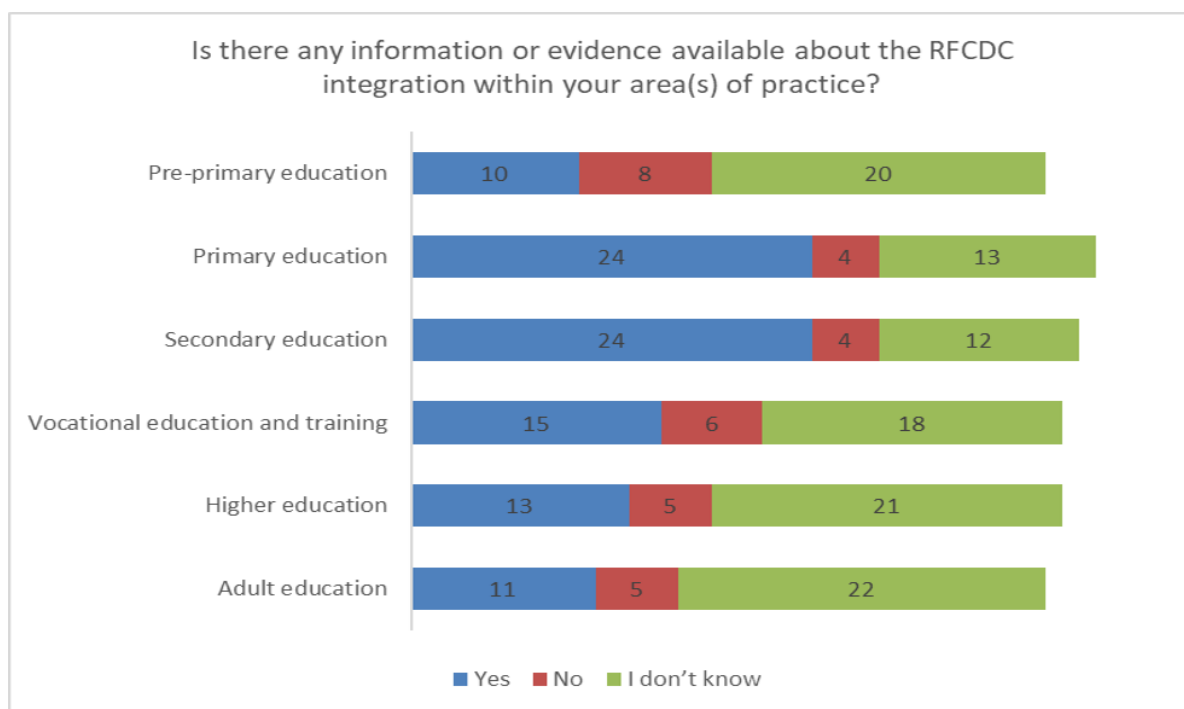
### Integrating the RFCDC into levels of education and the curriculum

Responses to the survey from the EPAN members mirror this influence when it comes to integrating the RFCDC into curricula from pre-primary to university-level education. Within national education systems, it is in secondary education that the RFCDC is mostly applied, and this is the case in almost all countries that responded (20 out of 23 countries). This is followed by primary education (18 out of 22 countries) (see Figure 3). The use of the Framework is similar in terms of the number of countries in pre-primary (12 countries), adult (11 countries) and VET (13 countries). Higher education comes lowest in nine countries. The results from the education stakeholders' survey echo these findings – over half of respondents (respectively 24 out of 41 and 24 out of 40) indicated that the RFCDC is integrated into both primary and secondary education. It is worth noting that a large number of these respondents did not know whether the RFCDC has been integrated into pre-primary (20), adult (22) and higher education (21) (Figure 4). Considering that this number comes from representatives of different sectors of education and training, this finding may reveal that, while there is high awareness and effective integration of the RFCDC in primary and secondary school curricula, more dissemination efforts are needed to reach stakeholders in pre-primary, adult and higher education. Since access to pre-primary and adult education is uneven across member states – for example in many European countries pre-primary education is not compulsory – this uneven access could also help to explain a lesser degree of awareness about the RFCDC within these levels of education.

**Figure 3 – Evidence of RFCDC integration across levels of education, EPAN survey**



**Figure 4 – Evidence of RFCDC integration across levels of education, education stakeholders' survey**



Even if countries reported a general coherence between the content and principles of their national curricula and the RFCDC, some stakeholder respondents explained that the terminology used was different and/or that the coherence was not a result of deliberate effort on behalf of the country to integrate the RFCDC. Context is an important factor when it comes to integrating CDC in the curriculum and country approaches to curricular design vary. In some countries these competences can be identified in proxy subjects such as citizenship education, democracy, civics, education for sustainable development, global citizenship education, and so on. In others, CDC are addressed through a cross-curricular approach. Box 1 illustrates some examples of curricular development using the RFCDC, shared by the respondents to the surveys.

## Box 1 – Recent examples of curricular developments integrating the RFCDC

**Armenia:** the new (educational) standards are based on competences. The RFCDC was fully used in the description of competences (in the Armenian curriculum).

**Georgia:** the RFCDC is part of the recent Georgian National Education Strategy (2022-2032), together with the Sustainable Development Goals. Based on the National Strategy, the RFCDC is integrated into the national curriculum.

**Hungary:** the National Core Curriculum was modified in 2020, and education for democracy is a priority topic. There is a new compulsory subject called Civic Studies (grades 8 and 12).

**Italy:** since 2019, civic education has been included as mandatory in the school curriculum (33 hours per school year). The RFCDC was not explicitly mentioned, but it is seen as a “natural” reference in training and professional development for teachers and school leaders. Also, the RFCDC is mentioned within the ministerial document “Indicazioni nazionali e nuovi scenari” [linked to the National Curriculum Directions].

**Moldova:** the new curriculum is aligned with the Charter on EDC/HRE and the RFCDC. The “Education for society” curriculum (for grades 5 to 12) is competence-based, rather than content-based.

**Montenegro:** the RFCDC was integrated into the Montenegrin framework programme of key competences (2020) under citizenship competences.

**Netherlands:** the aspects regarding knowledge and skills in the RFCDC are used in the curriculum renewal currently taking place. These aspects are integrated and used as a reference point for the development of a coherent curriculum for citizenship. Since the law on citizenship was amended in 2021, more emphasis has been placed on fostering the values component as stipulated in the RFCDC.

**North Macedonia:** reforms have been taking place in primary education for the past two years, and the curricula for all subjects in primary education are changing. In this reform, it is indicated that the creation of curricula is mentioned on the basis of national standards from certain areas; one of those areas is democratic culture, in which essential competencies of RFCDC are based.

**San Marino:** since 2018, the RFCDC has been explicitly referenced in the national education system (San Marino), along with the other major international references on democracy skills.

**Serbia:** the RFCDC is now part of the Education Development Strategy 2030, and thus it has been integrated into selected subjects of the national curriculum.

**Slovakia:** the country is preparing the new state curriculum for primary and lower secondary education; specific sections and descriptors from the RFCDC were used as guidance when designing the social and emotional skills performance standards. The new state curriculum was approved by the Ministry of Education in 2023, and it will be followed by a piloting phase in the first grade of primary education in 40 schools from September 2023.

**Slovenia:** the RFCDC was among the “triggers” for creating a special advisory group of experts to the minister of education for the area of civic and social competencies, and it represented one of the references in the preparation of expert input for the integrated curriculum of Active Citizenship in Upper Secondary Schools.

**Ukraine:** the National Standards in education have integrated the RFCDC (including its descriptors). This was already implemented in the primary school curriculum, and the one for upper secondary schools is under way.

This is a strong starting point for countries to move forward towards a deeper integration of CDC in the national curricula, across all levels and subsectors of education, providing that the challenges related to the implementation of the Framework (discussed in section 2.5 of this chapter) are addressed.

### Vocational education and training (VET)

As noted above, in school-based initial VET there is less evidence of countries emphasising the introduction of CDC in the curricula. Already in the Torino report (2022b) there were contrasting results between data collected through surveys and through focus groups – participants in the latter had indicated that VET schools are not necessarily open to including CDC in the curriculum, and teachers in VET schools seem to have fewer



opportunities for professional development in this area. The findings for the present report reveal some differences as well: while in the survey for EPAN members 13 out of 22 countries reported that there is evidence of RFCDC integration within the VET sector, in the survey for education stakeholders only 15 respondents out of 39 reported the same – and 18 did not know if there was such evidence available. It is worth noting that a guidance document for integrating the RFCDC into VET is being prepared by the Education Department at the Council of Europe, which will be published by the end of 2024. The experts in charge of this document have acknowledged the complexity of the task – starting with the wide diversity of VET systems across European countries.

The following are findings from the literature in relation to citizenship education and CDC, with only a handful of studies including VET schools as part of their sample. Piedade et al. focused on how secondary school teachers and students perceived their experience of teaching/learning critical thinking as an essential component of active citizenship in Portugal. Out of four participating schools, one represented the vocational track; here, the authors found that even if both teachers and students recognised that having more time for developing activities oriented to the improvement of the learners' critical thinking, "this opportunity seems to be wasted by the teachers' lack of training on how to implement these activities in their classes" (Piedade et al. 2020). Most importantly, the authors observed that the tendency to emphasise less on critical thinking skills in VET "probably stems from the idea that these courses are destined to professional training and can dispense the social imperative of educating critical citizens ... leaving these students without a real education for critical democratic citizenship" (ibid.: 8). Another example is found in the report from the NECE (Networking European Citizenship Education) focus group on CDC, provided by MBO Raad (VET Council) in the Netherlands and their "Citizenship Agenda" which supports VET schools in improving their offer on citizenship education using the RFCDC as a tool for advocacy (NECE 2020).

Respondents to the surveys also shared some examples illustrating how CDC are embedded in VET curricula. The FEDE (Federation for European Education)<sup>2</sup> has three modules on European culture and citizenship that are part of their work–study training programmes, regardless of the professional sector and profession targeted by the diploma or certification prepared. These programmes are built using indicators and competences from the RFCDC and from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In Georgia, since 2015 the Civic Education module has been a mandatory component of the modular VET programmes; in 2020–2021, the module was revised, and the new module includes not only knowledge of democratic values, but also their understanding, analysis and perception.

## Higher education and research

Higher education institutions (HEI) are important stakeholders in the provision of training opportunities regarding CDC, but also in fostering research to support policy makers with relevant and up-to-date evidence. The following findings should be read keeping in mind that, in many member states, HEI depend on specific ministries other than their ministry of education. Data collected from the surveys show that respondents have a mitigated perception about the integration of the RFCDC in HEI: in the EPAN members' survey, 9 out of 21 respondents indicated that the RFCDC has been integrated at the higher education level; and in the education stakeholders' survey, 13 out of 39 respondents indicated a similar response. As explained in the Torino report (Council of Europe 2022b), one of the possible reasons behind these responses is that HEI have high levels of autonomy and therefore it is difficult to have a general overview of their actions towards integrating CDC in their programmes. Another possible reason according to a focus group participant is "the many levels it takes to get to HEIs" in some countries (for instance, in a decentralised, federally organised state). However, some respondents to the surveys highlighted that the RFCDC is being used in university-based teacher education programmes (for example in Cyprus, Georgia, Norway and Switzerland) and in social work programmes (Austria).

With regard to the research addressing CDC or the RFCDC specifically, there have been interesting developments in the past five years related to its use as a component of the theoretical framework and/or as part of the research methodology for collecting and analysing data. For the purpose of this review, academic publications from 2016 to 2023 were analysed. These works encompass the use of the RFCDC in higher education programmes in the Netherlands (Bruni 2019), in Norway (Areskoug Josefsson et al. 2022; Biseth, Madsen and Christensen 2018), in Spain (Sanz et al. 2023), and in the UK (Woodin, Castro and Lundgren 2022). It has also been used as part of studies with secondary school teachers in Georgia (Malazonia et al. 2023), Greece (Liagkis, Skordoulis and Geronikou 2022) and Spain (Campillo and Miralles 2022); with

2. [www.fede.education/en/](http://www.fede.education/en/).

secondary school students in Albania and Belarus (Sianko et al. 2022), in primary schools in Croatia (Žnidarec Čučković 2021), and as part of an Erasmus+ project in primary schools in Bulgaria, Italy, Norway, Spain and Romania (Ingoglia et al. 2021; Tenenbaum et al. 2022). Rauschert and Cardetti (2022) developed a teaching concept based on the RFCDC, to be implemented with mathematics and TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) students from the USA and Germany participating in a virtual exchange project.

Further research works have focused on more conceptual aspects of the RFCDC. Casadellà et al. (2022) used the RFCDC as a starting point to develop a theoretical framework “that includes the imagination of democratic and sustainable futures as one of its main conceptual axes” in the Iberian Peninsula. Fondazione Intercultura (2023) used the RFCDC to build a theoretical framework for exploring “the relationship between pupil mobility programs and their potential impact on civic and citizenship education for both the students and their classmates”. Dedousis, Garcia Raga and Bares Partal (2021) analyse the RFCDC to discuss Republican and Democratic ideals in our current context. Shuali Trachtenberg (2022) argues that the RFCDC is “the optimal choice for teacher education towards a new paradigm of intercultural and democratic competence”, while Tourbier (2020) discusses how the values component of the RFCDC could be “vulnerable to misuse and instrumentalization”. Finally, Zembylas (2022) analyses the RFCDC and the concept of democratic competences as “conflated” with emotional competences, as well as the potential implications this could have for education policy.

## Adult education

Findings from surveys show differing views regarding adult education: about a half of education stakeholders reported not having information or evidence about the RFCDC being integrated into adult education (22 out of 38), while among EPAN members, only 6 out of 21 indicated not knowing whether there is evidence in this sector (see Figure 3).

Several authors have highlighted the importance of citizenship education in adult education from a lifelong learning perspective (Alt and Raichel 2017; Nuissl and Sava 2018; Schweighöfer, Gartenschlaeger and Thöne 2022), in particular in “nurturing self-confidence, social awareness and social responsibility, and in shaping the overall direction of society in order to allow adults to engage proactively in community and societal decision-making” (Alt and Raichel 2017).

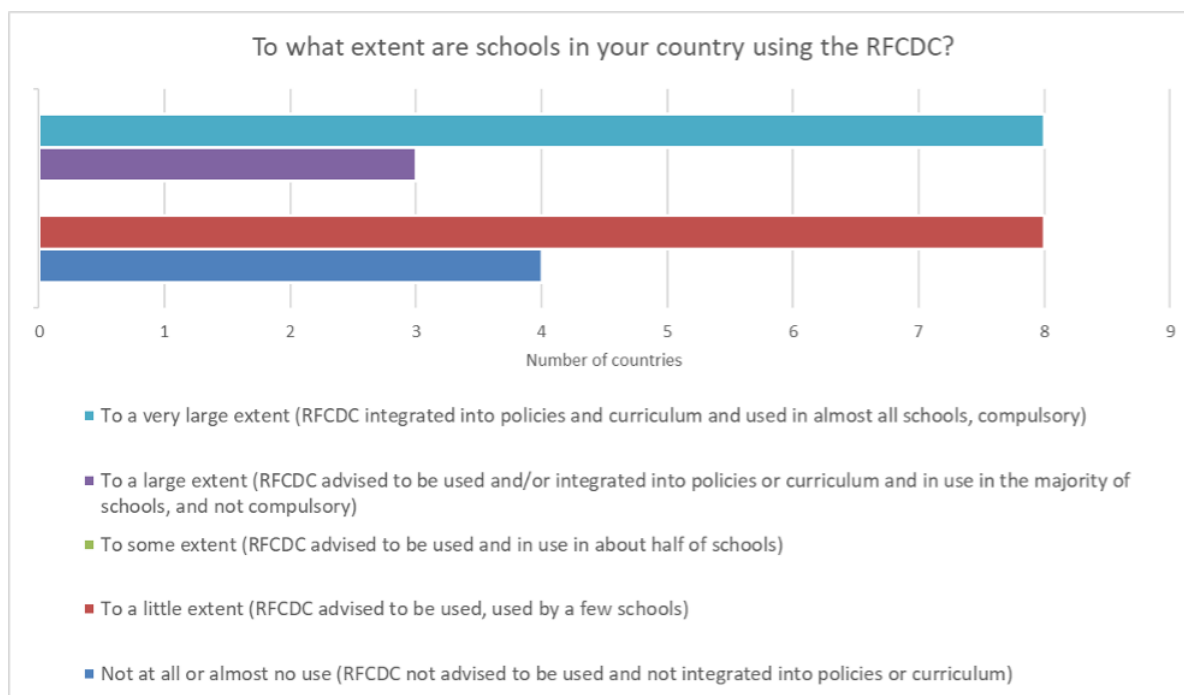
However, there is a scarcity of evidence about the ways in which CDC are being integrated into formal or non-formal adult education. Some respondents to the surveys shared examples of adult education initiatives that involve the development of CDC in the non-formal sector: for instance, the Intercultural Institute (Romania) is using the RFCDC in adult education activities aimed at NGOs, social workers and intercultural mediators, and in capacity building for school teams and for local authorities. In Germany, the national agency Bibb (Erasmus+ national agency for adult education) has initiated efforts to contextualise and introduce the RFCDC mainly in a chapter of its brochure “Erwachsenenbildung” (adult education). Training and professional development opportunities in formal education will be covered in a later section.

## 2.3. RFCDC implementation at school

Education institutions such as schools are among the first spaces of socialisation for children and young people, and where they can start developing knowledge, skills and attitudes about democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Teachers, educational and administrative school staff, parents and learners themselves are the main stakeholders in the school community, and as such they have a key role to play in promoting CDC. Research in the field of citizenship education shows that most young people learn CDC between the ages of 11 and 16.

The survey for EPAN members asked to what extent schools are using the RFCDC in their countries: the highest responses, each from 8 countries out of the 23, were “to a little extent” (RFCDC is advised to be used and is used only by a few schools) and “to a very large extent” (RFCDC is integrated into policies and the curriculum, used in almost all schools and is compulsory) (Figure 5).

**Figure 5 – To what extent are schools using the RFCDC, EPAN survey**



This mixed picture could indicate that even though there is a tendency towards a high integration of the RFCDC in education policies, curricula and materials for teaching, when it comes to implementing the Framework in practice it depends also on the level of school autonomy and the extent to which schools are keen on integrating the RFCDC as a key reference point. As shared by a respondent to the educational stakeholders’ survey, in contexts with a high degree of school autonomy “the Ministry has no oversight of the materials, training policies, and assessment practices in schools”. In Italy, some schools mention the RFCDC as one of the main references in one of the school’s most important documents: the “PTOF – Piano Triennale dell’Offerta Formativa” (Three-year educational offer plan); this is a compulsory document comprising educational, didactic and management objectives for the school over three years. In the Netherlands, schools have a fair amount of freedom regarding the activities and materials they use to foster CDC, and so they use the RFCDC “in a way which they see fit[s] the identity of the school”. In Montenegro, although the educational system is centralised schools have a high degree of autonomy, and thus “it’s hard to know how the RFCDC is being used in schools... schools are free to adapt the teaching, textbooks and pedagogical approach according to the contextual needs”.

A key contribution from the peer learning workshops revolves around the degree of school autonomy in the curriculum (“what”) and the pedagogical aspects (“how”). For the participants, it was important to address the “what” in the curricula to a certain extent, by setting learning outcomes or attainment goals. However, regarding the “how”, the question of providing enough support to teachers on how to integrate the RFCDC became apparent – in particular regarding student assessment.

### **Empowering teachers to implement the RFCDC**

Data from the EPAN survey indicate that, according to respondents, teachers have been the third largest group (14 out of 23 responses) involved in integrating the RFCDC within their school systems (see Figure 8). Countries also provided examples of this involvement, including through in-service teacher training about the RFCDC (Cyprus, Georgia, Montenegro and Romania); development of professional standards for teachers that include civic competence as a necessary prerequisite for becoming a teacher (Ukraine); and provision of self-evaluation tools for teachers regarding the integration of the RFCDC in the curriculum (Serbia). In Slovenia, a series of projects implemented under the programme “Enhancing social and civic competencies of professional staff in education” (financed by the European Cohesion Fund) aimed at “empowering teachers for ensuring that children and young people acquire social and civic competences, and at promoting intercultural understanding through all forms of learning”, as shared by one of the survey respondents. The activities included direct educational activities with migrant children, their families and local communities, in co-operation with teachers and students. The programme has provided opportunities for disseminating the RFCDC, such as the project

“We are only the others”, implemented by the Slovenian Migration Institute operating within the SRC SAZU (Research Institute of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts). And in Austria,<sup>3</sup> an explanation video of CDC was made for teacher training (available in German, Romanian and English).

Teachers may be confronted with a lack of their own competences to deal with an increasing diversity in the classroom (Shuali Trachtenberg et al. 2020), as well as the polarisation of beliefs of the parents of their students and the communities from which they come. This challenge can be addressed if initial teacher education (ITE) and continuing professional development (CPD) programmes are offered to all teachers (UNESCO 2020). When it comes to CDC, however, it is essential for such training opportunities to take into consideration the diversity of teachers and learners and the intersections of genders and sexualities, abilities and disabilities, nationalities, socio-economic status, religions, ethnic background, etc. This will be further discussed in section 2.4.

Research on EDC/HRE recognises the key role that teachers play as enablers in the frontlines of learning (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice 2017; Santibanez 2019; Fernández-Corbacho and Cores-Bilbao 2023). An important issue is providing them with adequate support and training so that they can also develop CDC, and this remains a crucial factor for enabling the integration of the RFCDC in classroom practices. However, training is only one of the aspects that come into play in relation to fostering a democratic culture at school: teachers’ beliefs, professional background and lived experiences (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson 2015) will also influence a teacher’s agency when addressing CDC in the classroom.

Further, teachers’ perceptions, beliefs, lived experiences and professional backgrounds may influence the way they teach about, through and for CDC. The context in which they work also plays an important role – as emphasised by one of the study participants, “(teachers) don’t have enough head space, thinking time and professional development time built into their job descriptions. You know they’re there to teach, assess students, get them ready for the exam ... and schools are dealing with that complexity”. According to Abs (2021), in more polarised contexts “the expectations placed on teachers are being debated... whether teachers are allowed – or even obliged – to stay neutral in a debate (that is, on human rights); whether teachers are allowed to take a stand; whether they are expected to make their own opinion transparent” (Abs 2021). Other contextual factors such as historical and religious issues may influence the extent to which teachers feel free to address democracy, human rights, etc. As noted by Butler (2019) in her study about EDC in Ireland, “while it is clear that the aspirations set out in a range of Irish educational policy documents support the development of the types of democratic competences set out by the Council of Europe’s (2018) framework, the reality on the ground seems to be that teachers are not always in a position to ensure that students fully develop these values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding” (Butler 2019).

Undoubtedly, teachers are considered as central to the integration of CDC in learning practices “as long as educators are active professionals who embody democratic culture” (Liagkis, Skordoulis and Geronikou 2022). However, during the peer learning workshops questions about their role were raised: is every teacher a citizenship/civic education teacher? There seemed to be a general agreement about the need to provide adequate teacher training so that teachers learn about different pedagogical methods and design curricula, and participate in the development of the whole-school approach: “If you don’t invest in your teachers, it does not work. We have very different education systems, but we all agree that the teachers are the key.” This question touches on another important aspect about the role of teachers – its definition versus the expectations about it. Participants in the peer learning workshops acknowledged that integrating CDC into the curricula is a foundational step, and that all teachers need some degree of competence to address them in the classroom (regardless of their subject). As one of the participants pointed out “(there is) a difference in learning about democracy and learning through democracy”; hence, having the policy is an important starting point, but the classroom practice is fundamental for CDC to “become alive”.

Another issue raised related to the “resistance to change” that is linked to the shift from knowledge-oriented towards a competence-based approach. This would affect the integration of CDC as well – a perspective that was shared by several participants of the peer learning workshops. Feedback elicited referred to teachers seeing the RFCDC “as a new curriculum (competing with the existing one)”, “a model too big, hard to digest”, and implying “a lot of energy and reflection on current practices (that teachers do not necessarily have)”. This feedback was echoed during the online focus groups – participants brought up issues such as teachers being “fed up, tired of learning about new resources or tools”, “not satisfied with the training arrangements (about the new tool)”, “lacking motivation (to teach CDC)”. Importantly, a participant from a European student association argued that “young people don’t think they can change this outdated system”, which would have an impact on whether they choose the teaching profession at all; for the participant, this means it is crucial for young student teachers to have role models so that motivation about their future career increases.

3. <https://youtu.be/mLw6loAdWJo>.

## Educational materials and resources

There is evidence that the RFCDC is considered part of the educational materials and resources (textbooks, manuals, etc.) to be used for teaching in schools. At least 14 out of 23 countries that replied to the EPAN members' survey reported this was the case, and a similar trend was observed in the education stakeholders' survey (18 out of 42 respondents said they had knowledge about the RFCDC being used in their area of practice). A number of examples shared by the participants of the surveys and focus groups illustrate this finding: in Spain, the RFCDC is used in "learning situations"; as materials offered in the Spanish curriculum for each subject and level of education; these materials incorporate aspects of the "butterfly" model (Figure 2) and are free and available online on the website of the INTEF (National Institute of Educational Technologies and Teacher Training). A respondent from Iceland shared that the Directorate of Education "has used the framework in developing teaching materials for the schools, especially at the compulsory level", which is also the case in Armenia.

In Serbia, since the RFCDC was introduced as a key resource for educational policies "a package of materials was created, such as a Handbook with examples of good practice of implementation of CDC; Developing competences for democratic culture in the digital age; Teaching competences for democratic culture through online teaching; as well as the manuals for teachers, including Guidelines for the implementation of the RFCDC in schools". In Ukraine, a variety of resources translated in the national language linked to the RFCDC have been made available online, such as a Toolbox for teachers providing activities that help teachers to develop CDC in every subject. This platform was created with the support of the European Wergeland Centre and the Council of Europe. And as reported by Austria, the multicountry Erasmus project "CITIZED – Policy implementation support and teacher empowerment for CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION"<sup>4</sup> builds on the RFCDC to develop a toolkit for democratic school development and citizenship education training modules for teachers based on the Framework, involving five partner countries: Malta, Italy, Belgium, Austria and France.

## Assessment of CDC in learners

For the purpose of this review, assessment is defined as "the systematic description and/or measurement of a learner's level of proficiency or achievement, the interpretation of the resulting description or measure, and the expression of a judgment concerning the learner's competences" (Barrett et al. 2020: 36). When it comes to the extent to which the RFCDC is used for assessment purposes, results from the surveys show that generally, there is less reported use. Just over one third of countries responding to the EPAN survey indicated that they have included it since 2018 (9 countries out of 23 countries who answered this question), and among education stakeholders, only 12 out of 40 respondents reported a similar answer. These results are aligned with the findings from the Torino report (Council of Europe 2022b), where student assessment was underlined as an area where further improvement is required.

Undoubtedly, assessment is an important component of the learning process. According to Barrett et al. (2020), there are four main reasons behind this claim.

First, assessment "needs to be used to obtain information about the learning process and about the progress that individual learners are making in the development of their competences, so that teachers can make appropriate decisions about how best to facilitate learners' ongoing development".

Second, "learners themselves can also be taught to understand the purposes, techniques and processes of assessment. This helps them to view assessment not as a hurdle but as a source of insight into their own learning process and achievements, which can help to foster their autonomy in learning."

Third, assessment "is also beneficial because it influences the behaviours of learners and teachers through the so-called 'washback effect', in which both learners and teachers pay more attention to areas of the curriculum that they know are going to be assessed ... If competences for democratic culture are not assessed, it is likely that they will be neglected by both learners and teachers".

Fourth, "learners' parents or caregivers are important stakeholders in the education system, and they have a significant impact on their children's learning and development. This impact occurs through their encouragement of their children's educational endeavours, their provision of educational experiences, activities and resources for their children outside the school, and their interest and involvement in the educational experiences that their children receive at school" (Barrett et al. 2020: 33-4).

Even though the RFCDC states that "[The RFCDC] descriptors cover only those values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and understanding which are learnable, teachable and assessable" (Council of Europe 2018b: 12), one of the key challenges identified during this review is that the RFCDC descriptors are not necessarily well understood either by policy makers or by education practitioners. Yet a coherent approach encompassing

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4. [www.citized.eu/](http://www.citized.eu/).

curriculum, pedagogy and assessment is needed so that intended learning outcomes are achieved by learners (Barrett et al. 2020). More information from practitioners is needed to understand the reasons for the misalignment between the RFCDC being used in schools as a resource for teaching and the fact that it is not widely used for assessing learners' progress in relation to CDC.

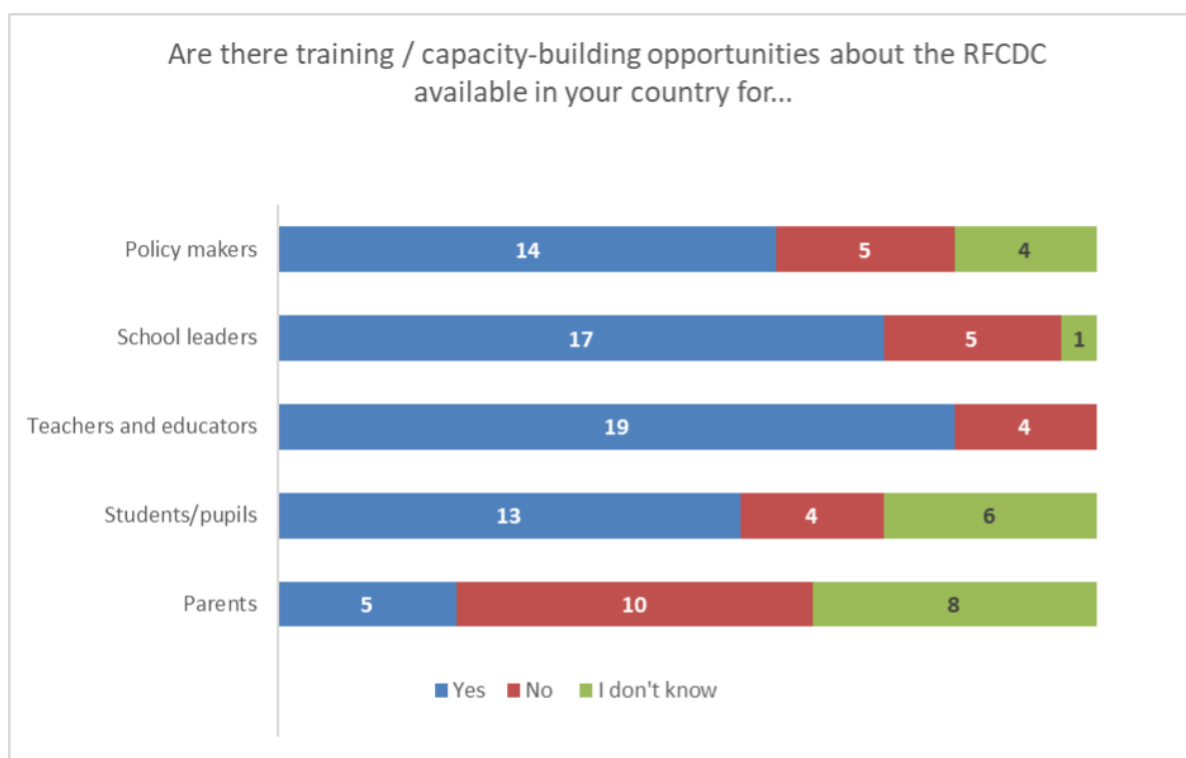
Nonetheless, some respondents to the surveys shared examples illustrating how the RFCDC is a useful tool for assessment purposes. In Greece, the Institute of Education Policy has used the Framework to develop student assessments in a new course in primary and secondary education named "Skills workshops". In Slovenia, the RFCDC is mentioned in the starting points for the preparation of a National Programme (Master Plan) in the area of pre-school, primary and secondary education (NPVI 2023-2033), as a tool for implementing and assessing competences for democratic culture. In France, the RFCDC was integrated into the self-evaluation documents for students within the project "Lycée d'Europe". Other examples shared highlight the importance of formative assessment for CDC, and how in certain contexts this approach can be challenging; as shared by a Ukrainian respondent, "assessment practices need the most work and support as formative assessment is rather new to general pedagogic culture".

The assessment of CDC, including the list of descriptors described in the butterfly model (Figure 2), was identified as a key issue during the peer learning workshops conducted with EPAN members as well as among participants of the focus groups. The general perception is that the assessment of CDC is a "weak" or "underdeveloped" area, and often CDC are not assessed at all because these "are taken for granted" – as inherently developed by learners through the learning process. One of the key issues is that assessing CDC seems to be a "hard task" to undertake, in particular because CDC are not only subject-oriented, but rather outcome-oriented, an issue already identified in the Torino report (Council of Europe 2022b). Several participants of both peer learning workshops and focus groups raised the question of how to assess values and attitudes – "are these assessable?" was a common question across discussion groups.

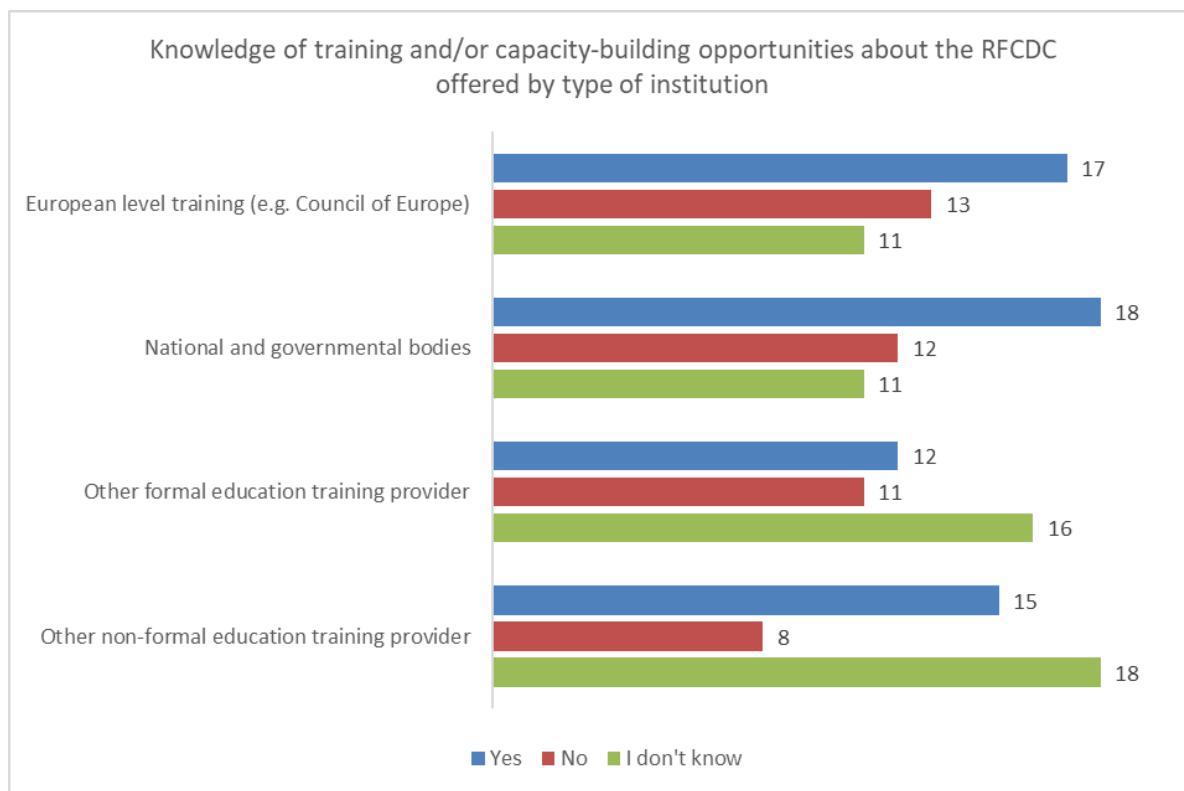
### Training and professional development

Data from the surveys for EPAN members and education stakeholders show a similar trend in relation to training or capacity-building opportunities about the RFCDC. The training on offer in countries for stakeholders on the RFCDC was mostly reported as being available for teachers (19 countries), school leaders (17 countries) and then policy makers (14 countries). Interestingly, 5 countries reported having training for parents while 13 countries also had training for students (see Figure 6). It is worth noting that in terms of training on the RFCDC for policy makers, few examples were reported, so it is difficult to establish a clear picture of the format and content of the training these individuals receive in regard to the RFCDC.

**Figure 6 – Training or capacity-building offer on the RFCDC by target groups, EPAN members' survey**



**Figure 7 – Knowledge about training or capacity-building offer on the RFCDC by type of institution, education stakeholders’ survey**



Education stakeholders responding to the survey (Figure 7) point to an offer coming mainly from national or governmental bodies (18 out of 41 responses), European organisations (17 out of 41 responses), other non-formal education training providers (15 out of 41 responses), and finally, other formal education training providers (12 out of 39 responses). These results were confirmed by feedback given by participants of the peer learning workshops and focus groups from Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Spain and Türkiye. When it comes to training for teachers and/or school leaders, co-operation with the Ministry of Education and teacher training institutions (or universities) has been crucial for disseminating and making the RFCDC model known. Projects implemented in co-operation with the Council of Europe and other international funds (European Cohesion Fund, Erasmus+, etc.) are also an important element in the training and capacity-building landscape on CDC. In some cases (such as the Czech Republic), NGOs also have an active role in providing in-service training for teachers on EDC and civic education. Also, in examples provided which do not focus explicitly on the RFCDC, respondents underlined that “there are many courses dealing with the underlying principles” of the Framework, including initiatives on global citizenship education and climate change (for example, Ireland).

Studies in the field of EDC have focused mostly on the provision of training opportunities for teachers and/or students to develop CDC (Biseth, Madsen and Christensen 2018; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2017; Ingoglia et al. 2021; Piedade et al. 2020; Shuali Trachtenberg 2022; Shuali Trachtenberg et al. 2020; Tenenbaum et al. 2022). However, according to the 2017 Eurydice report on citizenship education at school, regulations and recommendations on the development of citizenship education competences through initial teacher education (ITE) and continuing professional development (CPD) is still far from being the general approach taken across European countries. For teachers and students in the VET sector, the offer is even lower. Further, training for school leaders and parents is still limited (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice 2017).

Digital platforms have proven useful for organising training that reaches a larger number of participants, in particular after the Covid-19 pandemic. In Ukraine, the RFCDC is a component of five MOOCs (massive open online courses) developed by the Schools for Democracy programme in co-operation with the European Wergeland Centre. In Romania, the national in-service teacher training programme CRED is the largest recent programme co-ordinated by the Ministry of Education (40 000 teachers in lower secondary have graduated already). The RFCDC was used in designing the learning activities for the training of teachers in social education.

The German-speaking countries (Austria, Germany and Switzerland), in October 2023, and the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), in November 2023, organised online RFCDC introductory courses. Thirty-seven education professionals attended these two courses.

In spite of current initiatives tackling training and professional development of teachers and school staff, participants in this study also shared specific challenges they have identified in their context. One of the key questions raised is whose responsibility is it to ensure that training opportunities are available for all members of the school community, and how and whether the training provider would impact the learning process so that is “truly democratic”. In the same spirit, another participant emphasised the importance of having training for teams (including school leaders, staff and teachers) instead of separating them by target groups. Another common issue that many participants identified was how to “convince” policy makers and school communities of the usefulness and relevance of the RFCDC – a challenge to be discussed in a later section. There was general agreement on the fact that training for teachers should not be short term, so that teachers 1) understand how to use the descriptors, and 2) have a better overview of their students’ progress (through assessment). As one participant put it “people learn about the RFCDC... then everyday life comes back, and this is forgotten”. The Teacher Reflection Tool (Lenz et al. 2021) was developed to support teachers to connect CDC with their own experiences through self-observation and reflection, as well as to further develop personally and professionally. Importantly, a key area for improvement in training and capacity building on the RFCDC is increasing access for VET teachers and school staff, policy makers and parents.

### **RFCDC and the whole-school approach**

The RFCDC highlights the whole-school approach as a key approach to strengthen the development of CDC in schools, as a way of actively involving all members of the school community in three areas of school life: teaching and learning, school governance and culture, and co-operation with the community. Feedback from respondents to the surveys, as well as from participants of the focus groups and peer learning workshops shows that there is awareness about the importance of promoting the whole-school approach to integrating the RFCDC in schools. About half of the EPAN survey respondents indicated that the RFCDC is being used as part of whole-school approach strategies (14 out of 23). As for education stakeholders, 19 out of 42 respondents reported that their organisations use the RFCDC for the same purpose.

A participant in the peer learning workshops highlighted the importance of the whole-school approach “because without the involvement of parents and community, it would only be knowledge [about CDC]”. Collaboration with organisations such as the Council of Europe or the Oslo-based European Wergeland Centre, among others, has been a key support in countries such as Ukraine to progress in this direction. In Andorra, giving access to training to school staff about the RFCDC has helped them to strengthen a whole-school approach and democratic practices at school. A representative from Scotland stressed the importance of having “the whole system on board” so that the RFCDC is integrated as part of a whole-school approach. Moreover, participants in the peer learning workshops emphasised that issues such as climate change, education for sustainable development and global citizenship education should be considered for a wider definition of the whole-school approach. However, for the whole-school approach to be transformative “it has to be an action-oriented approach”, as stated by one of the key informants interviewed for this study. A focus group participant summarised: “schools and teachers look up to other schools and teachers, so for the whole-school approach to work inspiring each other is quite important”.

Effective school leadership is an essential element for developing a whole-school approach and a democratic culture at school, as school leaders “are the creators of the organizational culture” (Higuera-Rodríguez and Mártires 2018). When it comes to integrating CDC at school, data collected through surveys present a positive outlook – schools and school leaders are the second main stakeholder group being involved in integrating the RFCDC (19 countries out of 23 positively responded to this group involvement). Participants in the peer learning workshops and focus groups recognised the importance of having “the school principal on your side” and the importance of transformative leadership when integrating CDC at school. For instance, in Italy Fondazione Intercultura has used the RFCDC in all teacher and school leaders’ training courses and, on the occasion of the Italian translation of Volume 1 of the Framework, a webinar was dedicated entirely to it. In Ukraine, since 2020 the professional standards of school leaders contain civic competence as a necessary prerequisite for working professionally. And in Romania, school leaders are seen as a priority target group for future training programmes related to the RFCDC. However, qualitative data offers little evidence of initiatives including school leaders besides involving them in training opportunities.



Although providing training opportunities for school leaders is a key action to advancing towards a more democratic culture at school (European Commission 2018), several countries participating in the peer learning workshops and focus groups underlined that most capacity building is oriented to improving administrative skills and developing leadership.

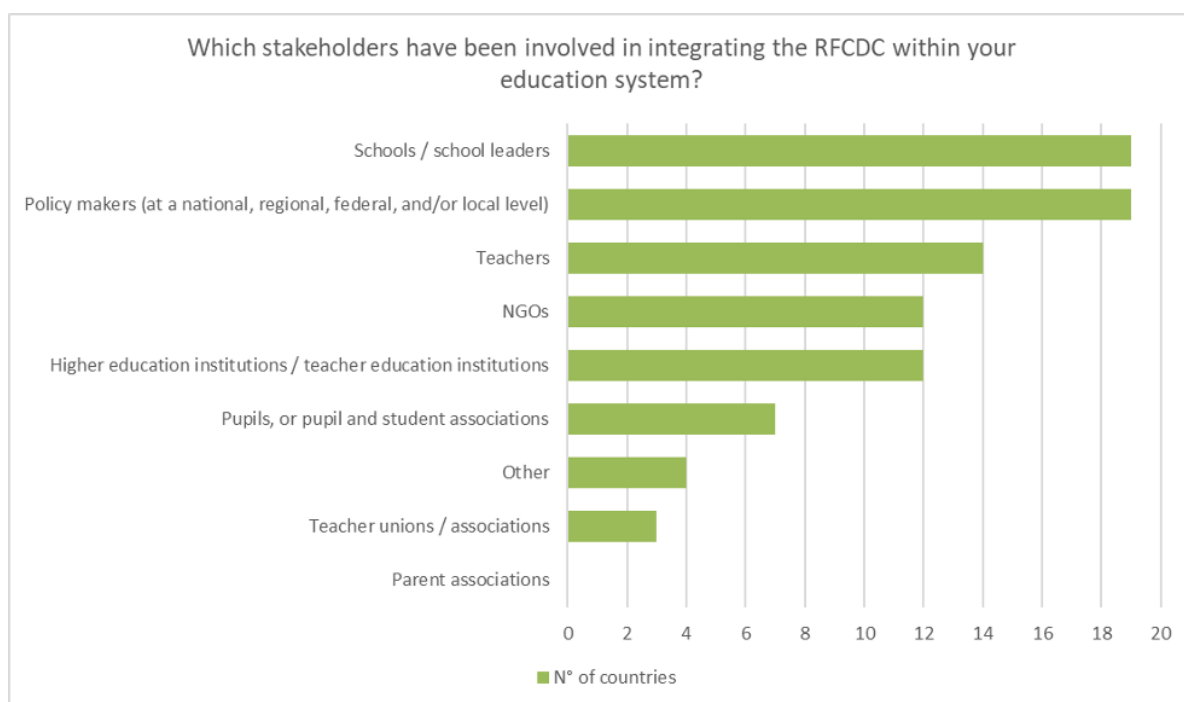
### *The engagement and participation of learners*

“It is not only selecting students’ representatives; you have to do something with them.” This statement from a participant in the peer learning workshops highlights two key aspects of learner involvement as a main stakeholder in the school community: taking part in student participation instances (school boards, parliaments, etc.) and actively participating in their own learning process. The EPAN survey shows that only seven countries identified the involvement of pupils/students in integrating the RFCDC within the school systems (the main two stakeholder groups are policy makers at all levels and schools/school leaders, with 19 countries positively responding to these groups’ involvement – see Figure 8). A possible explanation is the fear that, by giving more opportunities to students to put CDC into practice, “education will become politicised” (Bergan 2022). On the other hand, there is a risk that education ends up focusing only on employability skills, namely, “more traditional school subjects, and that preparation for democratic participation is not a core education mission” (ibid.).

Respondents to the surveys provided several examples of student participation at school – for instance, in Germany, a VET school member of a network of schools for participation and democracy developed with their students a questionnaire for the evaluation of democratic action in their school. In Ireland, there is a strong focus on student action at the Junior Cycle level, “aimed at giving students an experience of active citizenship”; student associations also have been consulted on recent curricular changes. In several countries, project- or problem-based learning is used in secondary schools to provide students with opportunities to explore topics “including issues of democracy”.

Further, the Irish case provides an interesting take on the topic of learner well-being as a key component of a democratic culture. The ongoing reform at primary and secondary levels has a common emphasis on well-being, which has been included as a core element in the Junior Cycle. Along with well-being, student voice and student agency have been given a greater emphasis, with documents such as the new National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development developed to increase emphasis on a democratic culture. While the Council of Europe’s RFCDC is not explicitly referenced, nearly all its components can be mapped onto the current curriculum, many of which were developed prior to the introduction of the RFCDC.

**Figure 8 – Stakeholder involvement in integrating the RFCDC, EPAN members’ survey**



### *The engagement of parents*

Within the whole-school approach, parents are considered as important contributors as teachers, school leaders and staff, and learners; if they are involved from the beginning, there is less likelihood of backlash from parents regarding initiatives addressing CDC. However, data collected through the surveys show that this is an area where greater efforts are needed so that parents are truly involved in creating a democratic culture at school. When asked about stakeholders involved in integrating the RFCDC within their educational systems, no respondents to the EPAN survey reported having parent associations as part of the process. Moreover, parents are also the target group with least access to training opportunities (see later in this section for more details).

The Torino report (Council of Europe 2022b) highlighted that parental engagement is fundamental to create a positive school environment, and parents' motivation to get involved is considered as important as teacher motivation for advancing EDC/HRE. However, participants in the peer learning workshops and focus groups shared the perception that engaging parents is a complex task, either because they oppose changes that they perceive as threatening the quality of education or show no interest in participating in the school community.

### *The role of non-governmental organisations*

NGOs are included in this section as key partners of the school community when it comes to providing capacity building to young people and educators. Training opportunities that NGOs offer usually bring non-formal education pedagogy and methods to the schools, which can encourage the development of CDC. Data from the surveys show that the RFCDC is also being used in non-formal education: just under half the countries (11 out of 23) reported RFCDC use within non-formal education in their country in the survey for EPAN members, a trend shared among education stakeholders (15 out of 42 respondents indicated that the RFCDC is being used in non-formal education). Even if the RFCDC is oriented towards formal education, the Framework can be used as a "mediator" between non-formal educators and teachers. As explained by Hladschik, Lenz and Pirker (2020: 49), "the RFCDC can help non-formal educators find a more specific language for communicating what they want to achieve with their activities. The choice of competences can set a frame and a focus for the activities. The set of descriptors, in turn, can help non-formal educators describe the impacts that they seek to achieve with a certain activity".

Survey respondents provided examples of collaboration between NGOs and educational institutions (for instance schools and universities). Box 2 provides an overview of recent initiatives where both formal and non-formal education sectors have worked together on CDC.

#### **Box 2 – Examples of collaboration between NGOs and educational institutions**

**Cyprus:** the "Imagine" educational programme run by the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (a bi-communal NGO based in Cyprus). "Imagine" is an educational programme on anti-racism education/education for a culture of peace, within which numerous training courses are offered to students, teachers and school principals from the two communities in Cyprus. Teachers and school principals have participated in training for the implementation of the RFCDC.

**Czech Republic:** the National Pedagogical Institute together with NGOs performed an experimental verification of Systematic Support of Civic Education in Schools (2016-2018), involving 21 pilot schools. The experimental verification was supported by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, and it was based on RFCDC ideas. Moreover, NGOs prepared a summary of the RFCDC in the Czech language and also informally translated a set of key descriptors for the needs of their projects.

**Georgia:** the RFCDC is actively used as a tool by several youth organisations such as the Human Rights Association and DRONI. As the National Centre for Teacher Professional Development (TPDC) translated and distributed RFCDC materials into Georgian, TPDC remains a main partner for the other organisations in the implementation of RFCDC.

**Germany and Austria:** between 2019 and 2021, German-speaking regions in Germany and Austria and organisations such as the Association of German Educational Organizations (AdB), Evangelische Trägergruppe für gesellschaftspolitische Jugendbildung (e.t.) and Schwarzkopf Stiftung Junges Europa participated in a focus group project led by Austrian Zentrum polis and financed by the Federal Agency for Civic Education (BpB), regarding the use of the RFCDC in the non-formal context.

**Italy:** Fondazione Intercultura participated in the CI SEI LAB project, funded by the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy; the RFCDC was one of the main references for both teacher and school leaders' training (150 attendees) and in workshops for high school students (more than 2 100 pupils).

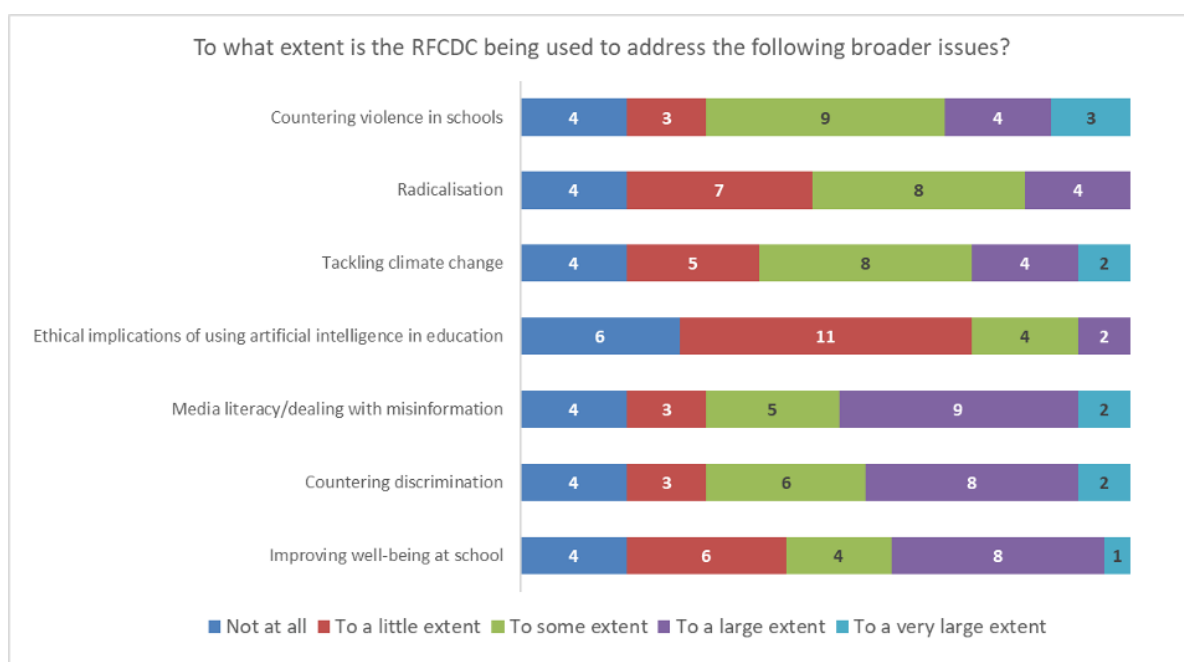
## 2.4. The use of RFCDC in addressing current and emerging issues

The RFCDC was adopted at the 2016 Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and the model of competences was adopted in March 2016. At that time, European countries were still dealing with the consequences of several recent terrorist attacks. Thorbjørn Jagland, former Secretary General of the Council of Europe, stated that “education is a medium- to long-term investment in preventing violent extremism and radicalisation, but the work must start now” (Council of Europe 2018c). This section presents findings on the extent to which the RFCDC and the development of CDC have proven useful in tackling these current as well as emerging topics – namely, countering violence in schools, violent extremism and radicalisation; climate change; media literacy and informational literacy; ethical implications of artificial intelligence (AI) and its use; and education in emergency and crisis situations.

### Countering violence in schools, violent extremism and radicalisation

Published in 2018, Volume 3 of the RFCDC (Guidance for implementation) covered the issue of building resilience to radicalisation. In the chapter dedicated to this topic, the guidelines emphasise a “preventative (rather than reactive)” approach (Council of Europe 2018c). Data from the survey for EPAN members (see Figure 9) show that further efforts are needed to encourage countries to use the RFCDC in addressing these issues: only 4 out of 23 countries reported that the Framework is used “to a large extent” to address radicalisation (about half of the responses are situated between “not at all” and “a little extent”).

Figure 9 – Use of the RFCDC to address broader issues, EPAN survey



This trend might be explained by what de Alda and Merino-Arribas (2023) call “a secondary and residual emphasis on education as a preventive measure”. In their analysis of 10 European countries’ governmental strategies to combat radicalisation (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom), the authors conclude that in spite of the role given to education “as a preventive measure”, anti-terrorism strategies barely include elements “that define a democratic and interculturally competent citizenship” (ibid.). According to the authors, early detection of radicalisation should be coupled with “a multifaceted educational task that fosters integration and personal and social development, especially of young people, families, and those from the most vulnerable surroundings” (ibid.).

An interesting example of how the RFCDC has been used as a tool to build a framework for project implementation is the Erasmus+ funded project PROVA (2016-2018), aimed at “preventing the radicalisation of juvenile offenders in prison and probation”. The project had a particular focus on avoiding the stigmatisation and exclusion of migrant youth on the basis of religion or background (Meringolo 2020).

Another project addressing violent extremism and radicalisation was REDE (Resilience Through Education for Democratic Citizenship, 2020-2021). Financed through the European Union/Council of Europe joint programme

DISCO (Democratic and Inclusive School Culture in Operation), REDE used the RFCDC dimensions and indicators to develop methods for strengthening CDC, focusing on resilience against violent radicalisation and extremism. The target groups for this project were university teachers, trainers and social workers working with young people outside the school environment.

A further example provided in the EPAN member survey is the 2019 Nordic forum on education for all and democracy in schooling organised under Iceland's presidency programme in the Nordic Council of Ministers and was held in collaboration with the Nordic Network on Democracy, Validation and Security, which was set up by the Council of Ministers. Its main goal is to prevent the rise of extremism by promoting a positive school atmosphere, democracy, and safety for all in schools for all.

As for countering violence in schools, data reveal a relatively positive outlook: 7 countries out of 23 reported using the RFCDC from a large to a very large extent, and 9 out of 23 indicated that it is used to some extent (Figure 9). Qualitative data collected through peer learning workshops and focus groups confirm this positive trend – several participants mentioned that the RFCDC is used in anti-bullying strategies at the school level, even though the Framework is not present in the national curriculum.

A key issue highlighted by participants in the focus groups from the non-formal education sector is the need to recontextualise the RFCDC. As mentioned before, the Framework was published in a context in which combating radicalisation and violent extremism through education was a priority in several European countries. However, the RFCDC is considered to be “much more than that” and limiting the focus on these issues “is met with some scepticism by NGOs”, as shared by focus groups' participants. Notwithstanding the relevance of these issues, other phenomena have added to the sense of urgency on the need to promote CDC: a democratic backsliding, the polarisation of the political landscape, threats to freedom of assembly, increasing presence of fake news and disinformation, and so on (Council of Europe 2023). Bearing in mind that the RFCDC is a flexible competence model that can be adapted to different contexts, the task of “recontextualising” its focus would make it even more relevant for addressing emerging issues, including those mentioned above.

## Climate change

Climate change is happening, and children and youth are among the most vulnerable to unfolding events. In recent years, increasing numbers of young people have joined climate activism in order to call for countries' rapid and aggressive action to limit the impact of the climate catastrophe. Education is seen as having a crucial role in raising awareness about the impacts of climate change, but also to enhance the adaptive capacities of societies. Considering the need to make education relevant for today's and future challenges, the Council of Europe is currently preparing a new guidance document to use the RFCDC in education for sustainable development (ESD), highlighting the relevance of the competence model to address issues connected to environmental sustainability.

Responses to the EPAN survey show that the topic of tackling climate change has gained traction in recent years. Six out of 23 countries reported that the RFCDC is being used to address this issue from a large to a very large extent, whereas eight countries indicated that it is being used to some extent (Figure 9). Respondents also provided some examples of how this issue has been integrated into the national curricula, often as part of ESD. In Ireland, since 2018 there have been significant developments in areas such as student voice, ESD and the SDGs. In Scotland, the newly refreshed action plan Learning for Sustainability 2023-2030 aims to “build an inspiring movement for change so every 3-18 place of education becomes a Sustainable Learning Setting by 2030” including a fourfold concept encompassing curriculum, culture, community and campus. In Belgium (Flemish Community) the programme Eco-Schools is a network of primary and secondary schools that are committed to sustainable development. In 2022, this international programme of the FEE (Foundation for Environmental Education) included more than 59 000 schools from 73 countries in 2022. In England, an increased emphasis on climate and sustainability has created a favourable environment for NGOs working on this topic: for example, ACT (Association for Citizenship Teaching) is working alongside other subject associations on climate and sustainability, including the Geography Association and the Association for Science Education. In Spain, the citizenship competence included in recent educational reforms is organised around four main pillars: civic knowledge; democratic culture; ethics and common values; and sustainability. ESD was integrated as an intrinsic element of civic education, including the critical analysis of the major eco-social problems that govern the world agenda (the degradation of the planet, climate change, the loss of biodiversity, and so on), as well as the practical consideration of the objectives of sustainable coexistence, ensuring the survival of a dignified human life in harmony with the environment.

## Media and informational literacy

Media literacy and fighting disinformation have become two issues associated with the development of critical thinking skills, considered essential for effective citizenship education (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice 2017). According to the results from the EPAN survey, the RFCDC has proven to be useful in tackling these issues: about half of the respondents (11 out of 23 countries) indicated that the Framework is being used from a large to a very large extent in media literacy/dealing with misinformation (Figure 9). According to Vysotska (2020), the four areas of competence of the RFCDC are “directly or indirectly related to media literacy education”, and therefore could be used as the basis for media literacy initiatives that aim at allowing citizens “to use media effectively and safely” (ibid.).

Qualitative feedback from the study surveys, peer learning workshops and focus groups confirms this trend towards a greater emphasis on media literacy and, in particular, fighting misinformation, hate speech and fake news. A key question raised by participants in the peer learning workshops is how the RFCDC will cope with the “challenges to democracy” posed by fake news and propaganda online, pointing to the need to make the competence framework “flexible” enough to address these challenges. According to the 2021 report by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe 2021), several countries have focused on strengthening critical thinking skills through media and information literacy initiatives, in particular during the Covid-19 pandemic. Some examples provided by study participants show how contents on media literacy have been integrated into the curricula (for example in the UK) covering online behaviour, including the implications of sharing private or personal data (including images), harmful content and contact, cyberbullying, an over-reliance on social media, and where to get help and support for issues that occur online.

Research on digital citizenship education provides evidence on the importance of going beyond giving young people tools and skills to use information and communication technologies, as part of a broader effort for educating responsible digital citizens (Fernández-Prados, Lozano-Díaz and Cuenca-Piqueras 2020; Richardson, Martin and Sauers 2021). According to Soriani (2018), “if the aim of the school is to educate future citizens of a digital age society ... it’s essential to work also for an education to their use which is responsible, which does not forget ethical, socio-relational and political-participatory reflections” (ibid.: 110). Empathy, respect for each other, and the ability to defend human rights are thus essential components of digital citizenship education strategies that aim at helping learners to become active citizens.

## Ethical implications of AI and its use

The increasing integration of AI in education has opened the debate in recent years about the opportunities and threats it brings (Holmes et al. 2022). In 2019, Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)10 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on developing and promoting digital citizenship education stated that:

AI, like any other tool, offers many opportunities but also carries with it many threats, which make it necessary to take human rights principles into account in the early design of its application. Educators must be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of AI in learning, so as to be empowered – not overpowered – by technology in their digital citizenship education practices. AI, via machine learning and deep learning, can enrich education ... By the same token, developments in the AI field can deeply impact interactions between educators and learners and among citizens at large, which may undermine the very core of education, that is, the fostering of free will and independent and critical thinking via learning opportunities. Although it seems premature to make wider use of AI in learning environments, professionals in education and school staff should be made aware of AI and the ethical challenges it poses in the context of schools (Council of Europe 2019).

In this regard, Holmes et al. (2022) raise a fundamental question – “how do we ensure that AI&ED<sup>5</sup> protects and does not undermine human rights, democracy and the rule of law?” (Holmes et al. 2022: 74). Although there is a rapidly growing interest in understanding AI and its use in the education sector (Gulson, Sellar and Webb 2022; Holmes et al. 2022; Miao et al. 2021; Pedro et al. 2019), research on the ethical implications of this technology is still at an initial stage, including potential impact on learners’ cognition, mental health and human rights (Holmes et al. 2022).

Data from the EPAN survey show that, with regard to AI, countries are starting to grapple with the implications for the education sector, but that the RFCDC has not proven as useful as for other issues. A majority of countries (17 out of 23) reported that the RFCDC is used to a limited extent or not at all to address the ethical implications of using AI in education (Figure 9). Comments provided by respondents reveal the growing importance

5. Artificial intelligence and education.

of AI for education, although “it’s not truly possible to assess it yet”. One of the key challenges identified is that the RFCDC does not explicitly tackle how to use the Framework in relation to AI or its ethical implications.

### **Education in times of crisis**

At the time of writing this report, the war in Ukraine, which began in 2022, is still ongoing with devastating consequences for its population – in particular children and youth. As noted in the Torino report (Council of Europe 2022b), this event had immediate negative effects on EDC/HRE participants in Ukraine, both in formal and non-formal education sectors. Moreover, in 2020-2021 the Covid-19 pandemic led to a total disruption of the educational process worldwide. In Europe, school closures affected millions of children and young people, and in particular systematically marginalised groups that did not have the necessary equipment for accessing education online (UNESCO 2020).

These recent events call into question the role of CDC in emergency and crisis situations. The Torino report (Council of Europe 2022b) showed that, during these types of events, there are three possible scenarios for EDC at school: first, a full pause in the provision; second, an online provision based on knowledge-oriented lessons; and third, the use of a cross-curricular approach. The shift towards online learning is a key step, but as noted before, it does not necessarily ensure equal access to education for all. Moreover, teachers and educators do not always have the competences required to teach EDC in an online environment.

Although participants in this study were not explicitly asked about the impact of Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine on the integration of the RFCDC, examples provided in the surveys and the focus groups illustrate the ways in which some countries have ensured the continuity of their work towards implementing CDC. In the case of Ukraine, the new school year 2022/23 started as usual in September 2022; however, many internally displaced children continued their education elsewhere, and most schools shifted to full-remote or hybrid learning. In spite of the dire consequences of the Russian aggression, the association of civic education teachers Nova Doba has managed to stay active online and offline. Civic education has been retained as a subject in the curriculum, and according to the participants in the focus groups “Ukraine consolidated as a nation against the aggression”. Nova Doba was a stakeholder in the state curriculum revision in 2022, and between January and May 2023 work was under way to prepare an updated civic education textbook for the 10th grade. An online platform for in-service training of civic education teachers was developed – the first winter training course for civic education teachers was held in 2022, and the second spring in-service training course in the first semester of 2023.

## 2.5. Opportunities and challenges of the RFCDC implementation

This section discusses the main opportunities and challenges identified in relation to the integration of CDC in education systems. In order to illustrate the findings, a table confronting the key issues revealed by the analysis displays both “sides”, including examples provided by the participants of this study.

### Context-specific aspects

Opportunities	Challenges
<b>Organisation of the education system</b>	
<p>In countries with centralised education systems, the integration of the RFCDC in education policies has been facilitated through its induction in national standards (for example Ukraine), in co-operation with the Council of Europe.</p> <p>In countries with decentralised systems, schools and teachers have a higher degree of autonomy, which according to participants “empowers them (teachers) as well to do many things and activities with the students”.</p>	<p>Centralisation/decentralisation were both perceived as a potential challenge for the integration of the RFCDC in national education systems. In federal states where education is decentralised, monitoring the implementation of initiatives related to CDC is sometimes difficult and progress across cantons/states may be uneven.</p> <p>Participants coming from centralised systems note that the conservative turn governments have taken since 2015 has meant that EDC and intercultural education “have been replaced by subjects such as patriotic education”.</p>
<b>Policy priorities and political support</b>	
<p>In countries that started shifting towards a competence-based approach before the RFCDC was launched, the process of integrating or adapting CDC was somewhat less difficult – the language and the structure were already in place to incorporate a new set of competences specifically focusing on democratic culture.</p>	<p>A key challenge that emerged from the discussions in peer learning workshops and focus groups was that there is a strong “re-emphasis” on basic skills (that is reading, writing and maths) and knowledge-based curricula. For several participants, the main question is how to encourage the integration of CDC in schools without “getting into competition” with basic skills that are perceived “as more valuable and higher status”.</p> <p>Changing political support is another challenge. According to some participants, the introduction of CDC in the policy agenda “relies on political support of the highest level”. As argued by Joris, Simons and Agirdag (2022), “it takes time, political commitment and governments taking their responsibility to create consistency between what we say about democracy and what we put into practice”.</p>

### Socio-political context

Several participants emphasised the importance of the “national climate” around democracy, “which is then reflected in the type of education for democracy and citizenship that children are receiving”. Soares and Lopes (2020) highlight that “trust in democratic institutions and effectiveness of political action” are essential to developing active citizenship.

Participants also shared the perception of a “general dissatisfaction” among young people with national politics, which has in turn favoured “a growth in activism and trying to do politics differently through grass-roots models, online models ... some forms of political action that are really interesting, meanwhile our education systems are going into the opposite direction”.

In spite of challenging socio-political contexts, some countries have addressed the need to foster EDC and CDC in recent educational reforms (for example Spain) by highlighting both ethical and critical thinking as key competences to be promoted through their education laws.

If a national climate is favourable for advancing CDC, in increasingly polarised contexts the challenge is to support schools in their educational mission. Many participants emphasised the role that social media has played in this polarisation and raise the question of how to address “political” or “controversial” topics at schools in such a context.

Further, participants from civil society organisations (CSOs) and NGOs highlighted the struggle in contexts where spaces are shrinking as a result of this polarisation: “[there is] a democratic backsliding, targeted attacks and shrinking spaces for CSOs and groups non conformed with so-called ‘traditional values’”. The RFCDC is seen as a tool to understand the complexity of democratic systems and address this retrogression.

Some participants from Eastern European countries also underlined that the fact that CDC are not fully embraced and integrated into their education systems is related to their recent past – “those values were good on paper, but [people] remember the oppression”. In some countries, teachers that are still in service undertook their initial teacher education in Soviet times: “the values promoted at the time were different, and even though teachers should be an example for learners they end up doing something different to what they are teaching”.



### Conceptual controversies

The concept of citizenship itself “is a contested term with a variety of iterations” (Dan-sholim 2022). Developing competences to encourage active citizenship is an ongoing task that also requires a broader environment that is favourable to it. Power relations and institutions can enable or hinder a citizen’s sense of agency to actually put these competences into practice (Joris, Simons and Agirdag 2022). In this regard, Soares and Lopes (2020) suggest that instead of standing on an “institutionalised citizenship education” that overemphasises democracy and digital skills, encouraging spaces for critical questioning and social justice may help foster an active citizenship approach. Even if conceptions and definitions of citizenship vary according to the context, the RFCDC is a model of competences flexible enough so that member states can decide to adopt it entirely or focus on some of the competences suggested. This flexibility opens a number of possibilities for education policy makers and practitioners to use the Framework, even in contexts where specific topics related to democracy and human rights could be considered controversial.

The challenge of conceptualising citizenship and CDC was discussed in the Torino report (Council of Europe 2022b) as a key transversal challenge in EDC. The highly politicised nature of these concepts contrasts with the teachers’ duty of remaining “neutral”. Most participants acknowledged that “there are different views on what citizenship entails”, with interpretations that are influenced by social, political, historical and economic factors (Soares and Lopes 2020). Another challenge related to the conceptualisation of CDC raised by participants from the NGO sector is that the RFCDC is used only “theoretically” and so the development of these competences remains as “pure rhetoric”.

## Implementation

Opportunities	Challenges
<p><b>Methodology and pedagogy</b></p> <p>“Taking the time” to work with schools that have been involved in initiatives related to democratic citizenship was reported by participants as a key opportunity for advancing in the integration of the CDC in formal education: “they realise the potential behind it; then it [the RFCDC] becomes true and real”; one participant from Germany emphasised. As noted by Campillo and Miralles (2022) in their study using the flipped classrooms approach for democratic education, “participants’ impressions of the impact of various techniques and resources on their self-perception of democratic education were overall quite favourable”.</p>	<p>Regarding pedagogy, participants of the peer learning workshops and focus groups expressed concerns about the fact that textbook developers do not always meet the requirements expressed in the curriculum, “not only in terms of content, but also pedagogy which doesn’t serve the purpose of teaching and competence-based learning”.</p> <p>Another issue is that in teacher training institutions the competence-based approach has not been fully adopted, with a prevalence of a knowledge-oriented approach in most general disciplines. A respondent from Montenegro (education stakeholders’ survey) explained: “many of my university colleagues are not teachers – they are historians, mathematicians, engineers, etc. and they sometimes do not understand basic pedagogical, psychological and methodological terms”.</p>
<p><b>Information, dissemination and understanding of the RFCDC</b></p> <p>Participants of this study recognise the RFCDC as a useful tool for different areas of education policy – for example curriculum development, teacher training, development of materials and resources. In some countries the RFCDC descriptors have been “translated” into more practical ones adapted to the context: “the big words and principles can then be put more into action and understood in the classroom and outside the classroom”, said one participant from Sweden.</p>	<p>Although it has been recognised as a useful tool, the RFCDC is not necessarily known in all education systems across levels of education and training. The feedback provided by participants of this study reveals that more efforts to disseminate, inform and explain the usefulness of the RFCDC are needed, especially among teachers.</p> <p>Even though the 20 competences put forward in the RFCDC are present in most of the national curricula in Europe, the descriptors were highlighted as a key area for improvement. In the survey for EPAN members, descriptors are not reported to be widely used, with just over half of countries (13 countries out of the 23) saying that the descriptors are not used at all. Feedback from the focus groups and peer learning workshops brought up the concern that teachers see the Framework as “impossible to achieve (because it’s too big)”, “inapplicable”, “a bit abstract”, “not fitting all needs and age groups”. Participants highlighted that more support needs to be provided to teachers so that they understand CDC and how to integrate them into their own disciplines.</p> <p>More dissemination and understanding are needed also at the policy level; according to several participants, there is not enough awareness about the RFCDC and, therefore, targeted promotion at policy level is fundamental to having top-down support. For instance, in some countries, having “a figure of authority coming to the classroom” is the most effective communication tool. Ultimately, there is a need for a “CDC-friendly” ecosystem, that does not put all the burden onto schools and teachers.</p>

## Inclusiveness

Opportunities	Challenges
<p><b>Language</b></p> <p>Upcoming translations of the RFCDC in national languages (including the descriptors and the guidelines for implementation) will undoubtedly help countries in their efforts to mainstream CDC at school. An important factor to keep under consideration is that translations of the RFCDC should be reviewed by educational experts at the local level so that key concepts related to CDC are adequately adapted to the context and do not get “lost in translation”. The process of the translation of the RFCDC into German reflects the efforts made by education experts from Austria, Germany and Switzerland to adapt rather abstract concepts to the current educational discourses and debates within the German-speaking context. Also, regional courses in German-speaking regions as well as in Nordic countries will provide policy makers, schools, teachers and school leaders with capacity-building opportunities.</p> <p>Moreover, having the RFCDC and its associated materials in national languages is seen as an important support for the work carried by EPAN members at the policy level. As one participant explained, “it’s definitely important to have resources in your own language. Not everyone has a level of English that will allow them to grasp the kind of layers of talking about values and attitudes. Values based education needs to be closer to home; it cannot just be in a foreign language.” As for inclusion of systematically marginalised groups (for example refugees, migrants, Roma, unemployed youth), having the RFCDC available in several languages can help practitioners to ensure that every learner develops CDC. For instance, in Slovenia the teacher training programme “Enhancing social and civic competencies of professional staff in education” aimed at promoting intercultural understanding through all forms of learning. The activities included direct educational activities with migrant children, their families and local communities, in co-operation with teachers and students. The programme has provided opportunities for disseminating the RFCDC, such as the project “We are only the others” implemented by the Slovenian Migration Institute operating within the SRC SAZU (Research Institute of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts).</p>	<p>Quantitative and qualitative data collected for this study reveal that language remains a key issue when it comes to integrating the RFCDC in education systems. Six countries out of the 23 that responded to this question do not have a translated version of the RFCDC. An Italian-speaking participant explained: “One of the great current limitations of the RFCDC is the absence of materials translated into Italian. This fact discourages many teachers who may want to know.” Given that dissemination is also a major challenge, the lack of RFCDC-related resources in national and minority languages undermines a truly inclusive learning experience: 17 out of the 23 countries that responded to the EPAN survey do not have it translated into minority languages. Closely linked to language, using the RFCDC to work with systematically marginalised groups becomes difficult if the descriptors are too complicated or exclude a particular group of learners. The Torino report (Council of Europe 2022b) highlighted this challenge – what is written in legal and policy frameworks is not always what ends up being implemented, and systematically marginalised groups are among the most vulnerable to the shortcomings of policy implementation.</p>

## Accountability

Opportunities	Challenges
<p data-bbox="331 1765 360 2085"><b>Monitoring and evaluation</b></p> <p data-bbox="400 1146 555 2085">Having robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms helps not only to track the progress and impact of policy implementation, but also to have timely information about what is working and what needs to be improved. For participants in the focus groups, these mechanisms would also foster “critical reflection” which is fundamental to promoting a democratic culture.</p> <p data-bbox="576 1146 1050 2085">Some country-level initiatives are already in place to help schools evaluate their work with CDC using school self-evaluation (SSE). In Denmark, schools submit a report explaining how they are working with democratic skills and a dedicated office identifies low-performance schools in these areas. Low performance is calculated based on the data that are gathered on the involvement of students in the school planning, how democratic it is in terms of whole-school approach, and so on. Low-performance schools are advised on how to improve, and some go into supervision and a strategy is devised together with the municipality for the next two to three years on how to improve the school performance. In Montenegro, as part of the Quality Education for All project (implemented within the joint programme of the European Union and the Council of Europe Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye), experts developed a manual for schools to support them in SSE initiatives focusing on CDC. The manual suggests descriptors for work in the classroom, in school as a whole, and for cross-cutting issues, including 14 quality topics in the three quality areas (Council of Europe 2022a).</p>	<p data-bbox="400 170 555 1106">Participants of the focus groups indicated that one of the key challenges for the RFCDC is that, so far, the Council of Europe retains accountability mechanisms to ensure that member states are implementing the recommended policies. As one participant shared, “[integrating the RFCDC in education policies,] it’s a matter of people who think it’s important”.</p> <p data-bbox="576 170 730 1106">Another difficulty highlighted in the surveys, peer learning workshops, and focus groups is the lack of monitoring at the country level to keep track of actions at the policy and practitioner level in relation to the RFCDC. Several EPAN members expressed the need to have a sort of “database” compiling initiatives, projects and programmes across levels of education illustrating how the RFCDC is being used.</p>

## Sustainability

Opportunities	Challenges
<p><b>Funding, networks and multistakeholder partnerships</b></p> <p>“Creating sustainable co-operation opportunities” was identified as a key factor for advancing the integration of CDC into education systems. Co-operation should also include the non-formal education sector as an important proponent working to foster CDC, in particular with children and young people that are out of school. A participant from North Macedonia shared that the Ministry of Education is working on the RFCDC “because they have a huge collaboration with NGOs, and they are using their international resources to implement CDC”:</p> <p>Multicountry projects and programmes financed by the Council of Europe, the European Commission, the European Wergeland Centre and other international organisations have been a key support for integrating CDC in schools. Coupled with the creation of networks focused on the topic of democratic citizenship, these projects have made important contributions with evidence of “what works” across levels of education and stakeholders.</p> <p>At the national, regional and local level, participants of this study underlined the importance of having enough funding to implement top-down reforms – for example to develop more training and capacity-building opportunities related to CDC for school leaders and teachers. Endorsement from ministries of education was considered a good starting point as well.</p>	<p>For some participants, if there is not a strong co-operation between formal and non-formal education sectors the risk is that “schools are isolated in their responsibility for practising CDC”. In several countries where schools have the autonomy to decide over the school goals, curricula, teacher training and other essential aspects of policy, co-operation with non-formal education organisations has been useful to integrate CDC. Moreover, in centralised systems where there are not enough CPD opportunities for school leaders and teachers, non-formal education providers are helping schools to bridge the gap in relation to CDC.</p> <p>Even if multicountry projects financed with European funds (by the Council of Europe and/or European Commission) have been a key factor for success when it comes to integrating CDC into education systems, the sustainability of projects after the funding period ends is usually at stake, affecting the possibility of further disseminating the outcomes. As one participant of the focus groups argued, “project outcomes stay sitting on a shelf after the project ends”. This is an important challenge in particular for the exchange of good practices within and across countries.</p>

## Advocacy

Data collected from surveys, peer learning workshops and focus groups show that sustained advocacy efforts from EPAN members, policy makers, NGOs and school networks have been crucial for the advancement of CDC (Abs 2021). The task of convincing people about the usefulness of the RFCDC as a tool in formal education was identified as essential – for instance, having specific people or personalities advocating at different levels (for example policy, schools, teachers, school leaders and parents).

The Council of Europe, as the leading organisation promoting and protecting human rights, democracy and rule of law, has a fundamental role in supporting EPAN members and other individuals advocating for CDC to gain the support from policy makers at the national level in member states, keeping in mind that the implementation capacities are not the same across countries (Halász and Michel 2011).

Participants also highlighted CSOs and NGOs as important advocates for CDC: “When international organisations started to talk about international, global citizenship is because CSOs pushed for this, and then these topics entered the debate.” Cross-sectoral co-operation between formal and non-formal education was identified as a key opportunity, as highlighted in the Torino report (Council of Europe 2022b).

The major challenge identified by participants of this study (including respondents to the surveys, participants in the focus groups and interviewees) with regard to advocacy is that members of the school community might perceive the RFCDC as “competing with other frameworks” and therefore it is important to make clear the “added value” of CDC, starting with policy makers all the way down to learners.



## Chapter 3

# Pointers for policy development

A series of recommendations have been developed based on the research findings. In the following sections, we endeavour to articulate a comprehensive set of guidelines and strategies for each of the recommendations of this report.

These key pointers are meticulously designed to serve as a valuable resource for the diverse range of stakeholders involved. Our focus is not only on the national level but also extends to encompass the broader European context. This approach is critical for fostering a cohesive and effective implementation of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC). By delving into these guidelines, stakeholders from various sectors – including education, policy making and community engagement – will gain insights to facilitate a meaningful and impactful adoption of the RFCDC principles, thereby contributing to an informed, inclusive and democratic society.

### Recommendation I – Implementing 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 challenges such as crises and emergencies in education.

#### Implementing RFCDC in vocational education and training (VET)

By focusing on the following key areas, policy makers can effectively guide the integration of the RFCDC into VET, thereby fostering a more democratic, inclusive, innovative and competent society.

##### 1. Integrate RFCDC into VET curricula and qualifications

- ▶ Recognise and address the unique challenges and opportunities in implementing the RFCDC in VET, such as linking competences for democratic culture with specific vocational skills and companies' requirements. Policy makers should work on integrating the RFCDC into the VET curricula for both general education and technical training in VET. This includes adapting the Framework to fit the specific needs and contexts of different educational systems, avoiding introducing CDC as an addition and creating an overloaded curriculum.
- ▶ Align the integration of the RFCDC with existing educational standards and competences for VET qualifications. This ensures that the implementation is cohesive and complements existing educational goals.

##### 2. Foster collaboration between VET stakeholders to develop a culture of democracy

- ▶ Engage a wide range of VET stakeholders, including teachers, education institutions, learners and apprentices, and company representatives in policy making to ensure and improve democratic processes.
- ▶ Encourage collaboration between formal general education and VET sectors.
- ▶ Develop policies to attract all types of learners promoting excellence in VET and include those from vulnerable or disadvantaged backgrounds.

#### Implementing RFCDC in higher education (HE)

By focusing on the following key areas, policy makers can effectively guide the integration of the RFCDC into higher education, thereby fostering a more democratic, inclusive, innovative and competent society.

##### 1. Support research schemes on citizenship education

- ▶ Support research initiatives on democratic culture and citizenship education and disseminate findings widely to inform stakeholders.

##### 2. Promote student voice and participation in higher education

- ▶ Develop a student charter to promote and support student voice and participation in decision-making processes in higher education.



- ▶ Specifically engage youth and student groups to incorporate their views and perspectives in the democratic dialogue and conversations on their education, ensuring that their needs and ideas are represented, listened to and taken into consideration.

## Using the RFCDC to address current and emerging issues and challenges in education

Using the RFCDC to analyse and respond to past, current and emerging issues in European societies and education systems is vital for its relevance and effectiveness.

By focusing on these pointers, the implementation of the RFCDC in education systems can remain dynamic and responsive to the evolving landscape of European societies.

### 1. Address current political and social issues and future challenges

- ▶ Adapt the RFCDC to address past and current social and political issues and challenges such as migration, human rights, digitalisation and artificial intelligence, social inequalities and environmental issues. This involves integrating CDC into the teaching and learning on these issues, including topics to equip learners with the competences to actively engage with and address controversial issues and challenges.
- ▶ Place a strong emphasis on developing analytical and critical thinking and problem-solving skills to prepare learners for confronting the complexities and uncertainties of contemporary European and global society, including the ones related to environmental education and sustainability.
- ▶ Anticipate future societal challenges and adapt the RFCDC accordingly. This could involve imagining future scenarios in which to learn CDC, by studying the past and the present.

### 2. Combating misinformation and fake news with a human rights-based perspective of digital and media education

- ▶ Incorporate digital citizenship education, digital literacy and critical media education into the RFCDC to equip learners with the competences needed to navigate the digital world, discern misinformation and fake news, and engage responsibly in online spaces.
- ▶ Utilise advanced technology and promote innovation in education implementing the RFCDC, ensuring that educational practices are up to date with technological advancements that respect human rights and the human dignity of learners, education professionals and the entire education community.

### 3. Enhance emotional and social learning to support well-being

- ▶ Focus on the development of emotional and social learning competences, which are crucial in navigating complex social dynamics and fostering political self-efficacy, empathy and understanding of oneself and others.
- ▶ Incorporate aspects of mental health and well-being into the RFCDC, acknowledging the increasing importance of these aspects in educational settings.

## Recommendation II – Evaluating the implementation and development of RFCDC in Europe

Governments and institutions should establish mechanisms to track the progress and impact of policies related to the RFCDC. This includes having timely information about effective strategies and areas needing improvement, follow-up, support and evaluation.

By focusing on these pointers, policy makers can ensure that the impact of the RFCDC is periodically monitored and evaluated, leading to informed decisions and improvements in policy and practice.

### 1. 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. The education accountability mechanisms aim to track the progress on RFCDC integration at different levels and sectors of education and can be operationalised through a new legally instrument. The education accountability mechanisms should be based on principles and indicators in response to educational needs and issues on citizenship education in Europe. This requires establishing indicators based on democratic principles of citizenship education, such as freedom, equality, inclusiveness, plurality and diversity.

- ▶ Ensure that the use of RFCDC helps to address issues related to diversity, equity, exclusion and inclusion in education.
- ▶ Establish regular feedback and consultation mechanisms to gauge the usefulness of dialogues and exchanges and make the necessary adjustments for improving citizenship education.
- ▶ Encourage mechanisms that not only track policy implementation but also the use of the RFCDC to foster critical reflection on education for democratic citizenship among stakeholders. This reflection is fundamental to fostering a democratic culture.

## **2. Create a Council of Europe Knowledge Hub**

- ▶ Develop a Knowledge Hub at the Education Department of the Council of Europe to facilitate ongoing data collection regarding the latest developments in education legislation, policies and practices related to the RFCDC. The data need to be collected periodically by reliable instruments and/or strategies, based on education indicators, to provide relevant information that will then be published and shared in the Knowledge Hub. Examples of such data are initiatives, legislation, projects and programmes that illustrate how RFCDC is being used and stakeholders need to share them with member states to enrich the democratic dialogue and co-operation between member states.

### **Recommendation III – Fostering opportunities to learn and practise CDC among education professionals and the education community**

There is a need to provide opportunities for the development of CDC among the education community. These opportunities should cover initial teacher education, continuing professional development, and strategies to support the learning and practice of CDC in learners and their families. Special attention should also be given to vulnerable groups, such as out-of-school children and young people.

By focusing on these areas, educational policy makers and institutions can effectively foster the development of competences for democratic culture among teachers, students and school leaders, leading to a more robust and vibrant democratic society.

#### **1. Integrate CDC into initial teacher education (ITE)**

- ▶ Integrate CDC into ITE programmes, ensuring that new teachers are equipped 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.

#### **2. 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 it to address controversial issues, and in taking a position towards democratic education. They should also be supported in expressing political perspectives in debates and developing participatory processes in learning and assessing CDC, in order to develop in learners' freedom of speech and freedom of thought, and teaching learners to develop independent thinking. There is a need for political and institutional support for academic and pedagogical rights in education institutions.

#### **3. Ongoing development on RFCDC for education professionals, stakeholders and all the 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.
- ▶ Develop and implement comprehensive training programmes that cover all aspects of CDC. These programmes should be tailored to the specific needs of education professionals, school leaders and stakeholders.
- ▶ Offer specialised transformative leadership training for school leaders focusing on how to cultivate a school democratic culture that supports the development of CDC.
- ▶ Train education professionals and school leaders in designing adapted outcomes for measuring the development of CDC using effective, valid and reliable methods of assessment and programme evaluation.

- ▶ Establish mentorship and peer support programmes for education professionals and school leaders to share experiences and support each other in implementing CDC.
- ▶ Provide support in building an inclusive informed education community.

#### **4. 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.
- ▶ Develop and disseminate teaching resources and materials that support the teaching and learning of CDC.
- ▶ Facilitate international and cross-cultural exchange programmes to broaden the understanding and practice of competences for democratic culture in diverse contexts.
- ▶ Organise professional exchange programmes, study visits and internships for educators and policy makers to learn from different educational systems.

#### **5. Foster democratic governance and participation of all the education community**

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

### **Recommendation IV – Enhancing participation and co-operation among education stakeholders**

Creating platforms for dialogue and participation of all education stakeholders is essential to foster a better understanding of the importance of CDC. The Council of Europe's new legal instrument for a European Space for Citizenship Education is a significant opportunity to facilitate co-operation among member states.

By focusing on these pointers, policy makers can ensure a holistic and cohesive approach to the implementation of the RFCDC, leveraging the strengths of both formal and non-formal education stakeholders and creating open spaces for dialogue and collaboration among all education stakeholders. The Council of Europe can play a pivotal role in creating a conducive environment for open dialogue and co-operation, essential for the successful implementation and sustainability of the RFCDC across Europe.

#### **1. 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.
- ▶ Acknowledge and leverage the unique strengths and contributions of both formal and non-formal education sectors. This collaboration can facilitate the sharing of educational approaches, resources, expertise and best practices in implementing the RFCDC. Non-formal education, for example, can offer more flexible and innovative approaches to teaching CDC, or play an important role with regard to inclusion for out-of-school children and young people that are marginalised.
- ▶ Integrate effective non-formal education methodologies into formal education settings in teaching and learning CDC. This can enrich the educational experience and make the learning of CDC more engaging and practical for learners.
- ▶ Recognise and validate competences acquired through non-formal education. This can include accreditation systems that acknowledge non-formal education learning and experiences.

#### **2. Support local and regional initiatives on RFCDC**

- ▶ Encourage and support local and regional initiatives that align with the RFCDC goals, facilitating grass-roots level dialogue and implementation.
- ▶ Ensure that educational tools and resources are accessible in multiple languages to cater to a diverse European audience.

#### **3. 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.

- ▶ Actively engage diverse groups, including educators, learners, civil society organisations and government representatives, ensuring that a broad range of perspectives is represented in dialogues on education.
- ▶ Host international forums, conferences and symposiums where educators, policy makers and other stakeholders can discuss and share insights on the implementation of the RFCDC.
- ▶ Encourage and facilitate cross-country collaborations and partnerships, allowing the exchange of knowledge, sharing meaningful education experiences, case studies, best and innovative practices and challenges in implementing the RFCDC to inspire future policy development and educational practices.



## Appendix – Case studies in RFCDC implementation

### Using the RFCDC in curriculum reform – Republic of Serbia

Following the official inclusion of the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (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.

This was achieved with the support of the Quality Education for All project within the European Union/ Council of Europe Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye. The tool National Guidelines for Integration of Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture in Selected Subjects of National Curricula was developed to help teachers and education practitioners to integrate the Framework into their everyday teaching and to help them support learners in the development of CDC.

The Institute for Improvement of Education stressed this work as a process of high importance and requested more subjects and education cycles to be connected with the descriptors of the RFCDC. Instead of two initially planned subjects, 10 subjects across three education cycles (lower primary, upper primary and secondary) were connected with the RFCDC. All 447 descriptors were referenced in the guidelines. The tool was presented to the minister of education and heads of school districts by the main partner, the Institute for Education Improvement. Subsequently, the Institute distributed hard copies to 1 800 schools, including all elementary, secondary and VET schools in Serbia.

The integration of the RFCDC in the Serbian curriculum is still ongoing, driven by the Ministry of Education and the Institute for Improvement of Education. The two institutions focused on analysing the RFCDC descriptors and translating them into learning outcomes as defined by the national education standards to be meaningfully used in the classroom around Serbia while maintaining the conceptual model of the RFCDC. The process is supported in the field by 36 school mentors, strategically positioned to cover all 16 school districts, and a network of advisors for democratic culture in schools was established and funded by the Ministry of Education. There is also an official recommendation encouraging the use of the RFCDC and guidelines in the Ministry's Guidelines for schools 2023/24, with reference for VET, and in the *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, among others.

In an impact evaluation conducted in 2022 about the project, a substantial change in terms of the state of antidiscrimination, democratic culture and sensitivity towards vulnerable groups was attained. The results achieved by the schools are observed through a four-level scale used in the research and the main conclusion is that schools achieved a very good grade, on average (3.40), compared to the initial grade (2.87). The progress of schools is most visible in the area of teaching and learning (3.54), then in the area of co-operation with the local community (3.43) and finally in the area of school culture (3.25).

Ms Anamarija Viček, State Secretary in the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia, explained that “having started as a pilot project at the grass-roots level with schools and communities, and having reached the policy level in implementing the RFCDC into strategic and legal documents of the education system, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia is now eager to continue with further development of competences for democratic culture to reach sustainable integration of the concept of democratic culture through our schools into our families and communities”.

## Using the RFCDC for learner assessment – Republic of Moldova

The Republic of Moldova initiated in 2018 a reform of civic education in secondary education, whereby the reconceptualised school subject “Education for society” – aligned to the Council of Europe’s Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) – was introduced in schools from September 2018.

It could be said that the “Education for society” subject marked a “change of paradigm” for the Moldovan education community, encouraging the development of a competence-based curriculum, project-based teaching and formative assessment.

The formative assessment is based on RFCDC descriptors and is seen as a key element in the development of learners’ competences for democratic culture. It aims not only to track learners’ progress in developing these competences, but also to provide feedback to learners on their progress and areas for further development, in a spirit of co-participation, respect and transparency.

The assessment is carried out based on a list of descriptors determined for each grade: for each of the 20 RFCDC competences, two descriptors of competence per grade have been established. These descriptors represent alternative, not cumulative means of expression of specific competencies through observable behaviour. A competence is considered developed if the learner displays behaviour that corresponds to at least one of the two descriptors of competence. For example, in grade 5 the competence “Valuing human dignity and human rights” is assessed on the basis of two descriptors of competence: 1) maintains that the specific rights of children must be respected and protected by all society members; 2) maintains that all public institutions must respect, protect and implement human rights. In grade 12, the same competence is assessed through these descriptors: 1) defends the view that human rights are required for every human being to be able to live with dignity; 2) expresses the opinion that all laws must be compatible with the international human rights standards and norms.

The teacher observes, during each learning unit, the behaviour(s) displayed by the students and records the respective descriptor of competence in the class register. While doing this, the teacher considers other forms of assessment such as peer assessment and self-assessment of students. At the end of the school year, the teacher quantifies the competences developed using a three-item scale: “very good”, “good” and “sufficient”.

This type of assessment represents a shift from the standard forms of summative assessment to a process based on critical reflection using the RFCDC descriptors. For some teachers, it has been challenging to apply in practice. However, some measures have been put in place to support teachers. For example, the gradual development of descriptors of competence for each grade, hand in hand with a progressive implementation of the “Education for society” subject between 2018 and 2023; the update and adaptation of the assessment methodology as a result of reflection and feedback sessions organised at the end of each school year with the teachers and learners; and the regular training sessions for teachers.

According to a civic education teacher from the city of Bălți: “Learners have more freedom to express themselves, and they are not afraid that their answer can be assessed as wrong.”

### Using the RFCDC in higher education – Andorra

Since 2021, the Universitat d'Andorra introduced a compulsory track on democratic culture within their [master's programme in education](#). Students need to choose among various elective itineraries, depending on their previous education and background experience such as: democratic culture; educational intervention (teaching); specialised teaching; project and centre management; learning and communication technologies. This master's degree can also lead to research into education or doctoral studies.

The itinerary on Democratic Culture 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. This itinerary is compulsory to complete the master's degree, regardless of the student's prior studies. It requires a school internship or end-of-module assignment.

The Master of Education is a competence-based programme, and it is organised in modules, during which students need to solve educational challenges. At the end of the masters, students have developed cross-curricular competences (associated with all itineraries) and specific competences (associated with each specific itinerary and the master's degree dissertation). For the Democratic Culture itinerary, the specific competences are as follows.

- ▶ Interpreting the needs and conflicts of a social, cultural and economic reality, in line with the values that promote a democratic culture.
- ▶ Designing programmes to develop competences for democratic culture, human rights education and intercultural education in different educational and social institutions.
- ▶ Proposing improvements to educational practice that promote competences for democratic culture, human rights education and intercultural education, using evaluation mechanisms.
- ▶ Creating participation and decision-making mechanisms for the educational community and society in general based on democratic culture.

The master's programme was revised in June 2023.





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The Council of Europe promotes a culture of democracy through education as a means of building peaceful and democratic societies. With the adoption of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) in 2016, member states committed to fostering democratic values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding in and through education.

This review report examines the extent to which the RFCDC has been used in the formal education systems of member states since 2016, including its influence on policies and practices. Based on the main conclusions of this first review, which took place between March and December 2023, it provides recommendations for future development and implementation.



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