



Presidency of Latvia  
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Présidence de la Lettonie  
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

## Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education

### TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON A EUROPEAN SPACE FOR CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

#### 1. Why a new instrument?

The Council of Europe has been working on democratic citizenship and human rights education since 1997, with recommendations to strengthen democratic culture. However, there are still shortcomings in the practice of citizenship education in European education systems, particularly in the European dimension of vocational education and training, adult education and digital citizenship education. The recent crises on the European continent have exacerbated these shortcomings, as learners do not have sufficient opportunities to benefit from an empowering education that prepares them to become active and informed citizens in democratic societies. The democratic values of respect for human dignity, human rights, cultural diversity, democracy, justice, equity, equality and the rule of law remain essential.

To address these issues, education must engage in the renewal of its civic mission and prepare learners to live as active citizens in a democratic society, where democratic values and competences are increasingly recognised as an important element of personal and professional development. This requires a more proactive and European approach to the provision of quality citizenship education at all levels of education and increased cooperation between Member States.

#### 2. What would be the content of this new instrument?

The Council of Europe's response to the renewal of the civic mission of education in Europe in the current context would be the creation of a framework convention to establish a European Space for Citizenship Education. This binding instrument aims to provide a comprehensive framework for quality citizenship education in Europe and to create a "European space" for cooperation between Member States committed to democratic values and principles. The instrument will not replace legal instruments such as the Charter for Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE) and the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC). It will codify and identify key principles from existing instruments and all programme areas of the Department of Education, bringing together the basic principles and shared commitments of education for democracy. This framework can serve as a "one-stop-shop" for the promotion of democratic values in education in Europe and provide Member States with targeted or multilateral actions.

### **3. What would be the added value of such an instrument?**

A new framework convention offers a more integrated approach to the development of a culture of democracy through education, thus creating a higher level of commitment among Member States. The Convention should be comprehensive, up-to-date, applicable to all levels of education and respect subsidiarity, with the aim of improving the quality of citizenship education and providing a stable and long-term platform for dialogue and cooperation between all Member States.

The new instrument will also aim to establish new standards and practices across Europe, identify future indicators and commit to research and development. A monitoring mechanism would encourage states to implement their commitments, provide support and expert assistance, and address gaps in implementation.

The new framework convention should recognise the specific role of civil society, youth and student associations, as this would boost the morale and effectiveness of people already working in this field in member states. The Council of Europe's relative cohesion and shared values, combined with its experience in standard-setting conventions, can provide leadership to the international community, particularly in the current climate of political uncertainty and instability.

### **4. What obligations does a framework convention impose on Member States?**

Traditional conventions developed within the Council of Europe contain specific obligations for the parties, including positive obligations and individual rights. An "a la carte" or framework convention, with core provisions and optional provisions, may be more flexible and attractive for a new instrument on a European Space for Citizenship Education. The Convention would then be open for signature by the Member States and other organisations involved in its elaboration. It is estimated that a minimum of around ten ratifications by Member States is required for a framework convention on education to be meaningful.

## **FACTS AND FINDINGS**

“While substantial progress was observed in terms of the inclusion of EDC/HRE in European education systems, a systemic approach specifically addressing HRE is still absent in most education policy frameworks.”

“Lack of monitoring and evaluation data: An important challenge reported in the last review cycle (2016) was that gathering information from various actors was difficult due to the lack of established channels of communication and the absence of planning with regard to data collection. Based on the findings from the surveys and focus groups, the situation hasn't changed substantially”.

***“3<sup>rd</sup> Review Report on the implementation  
of Council of Europe charter EDC/HRE 2022”***

“Taking the broadest definition, the Eurydice 2017 report finds that citizenship education was part of the national curricula for general education in all countries. In most Member States there is a focus at the policy level on concepts such as democracy, freedom, justice and inclusion. These curricula combine classical approaches on citizenship education fostering a better understanding of political institutions and processes, with multidimensional skills and competences [...]

The ICCS study concludes that there is a predominant national focus in teaching citizenship education, while the international dimensions (European and global) is not so strong. [...]

Moreover, the EPRS report highlights that citizenship education easily falls prey to politicisation, which impacts the content, methods and hours devoted to the subject. [...]

Some experts point out that overloaded curricula, traditional teaching and highly centralised education systems create discrepancies between the curriculum prescriptions and actual practice in schools. [...]

Regarding preparedness to teach citizenship education, in 2017, half of countries [in EU] did not have regulations or recommendations in place concerning citizenship education competences through initial teacher education (ITE). [...]

Importantly, there is a lack of understanding on how to evaluate effectively citizenship education, stemming from a lack of guidance by education authorities. In 2017, a third of the countries surveyed did not provide any central level regulations or recommendations on the assessment of citizenship education. [...]

***From the REPORT of the European Parliament  
on the implementation of citizenship education actions (2022)***

“The ICCS study showed an increase in average civic knowledge scores between the previous edition in 2009 and 2016. The results from the 2016 ICCS show a wide variation within and among the EU Member States participating in the study, with the majority of participant countries’ students showing competences above the threshold. Only 35% of students showed a holistic knowledge and understanding of civic and citizenship concepts and demonstrate some critical perspective. Additionally, the study showed gendered differences, with the female student population scoring statistically higher than their male counterparts. Experts warn that the threshold level will probably be insufficient to address the above-mentioned challenges and changes<sup>1</sup>; which highlights the need to devise new strategies for teaching citizenship education.

Regarding European citizenship education, the ICCS concludes that in 2016, 83 % of surveyed students reported they had opportunities to learn about the history of Europe in school. On average, only 50 % of students reported having opportunities to learn about Europe in school. Importantly, the report concluded that students’ support for

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/edc/pdf/european\\_union\\_postet2020\\_expert\\_panel\\_inclusion\\_and\\_citizenship\\_issue\\_paper.pdf](https://www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/edc/pdf/european_union_postet2020_expert_panel_inclusion_and_citizenship_issue_paper.pdf)

cooperation among European countries was positively associated with higher levels of civic knowledge.

Both civic knowledge and civic self-efficacy when undertaking civic actions are predictors of students' perceptions of democratic institutions. However, this does not always translate into greater trust in democratic institutions with only 50 % of students trusting civic institutions, while 70% of students trust the European Union and 72 % the European Parliament”.

***Keys finding from the REPORT of the European Parliament  
on the ICCS report 2016 (2022)***