

Teaching basic skills: Citizenship

Citizenship – The ability to act responsibly and participate fully in civic life, grounded in an understanding of social, economic, legal and political structures. This involves understanding and evaluating civic and democratic concepts, institutions and processes, including democracy, media literacy, crisis preparedness, respect for others and freedom of speech.

Citizenship education helps young people to understand their rights and responsibilities, think critically, act democratically and in a socially responsible way. Active citizenship is grounded in democratic values, enriched by civic knowledge and developed through practical participation. It's shaped by what pupils learn and how they engage in school life. Lack of comprehensive citizenship education often results in limited political and social awareness, vulnerability to disinformation, limited understanding of democratic structures and low engagement in democratic processes and civic duties such as voting.

In the EU:



38%

of young people consider voting in local, national or European elections the most effective way of making their voice heard by decision-makers



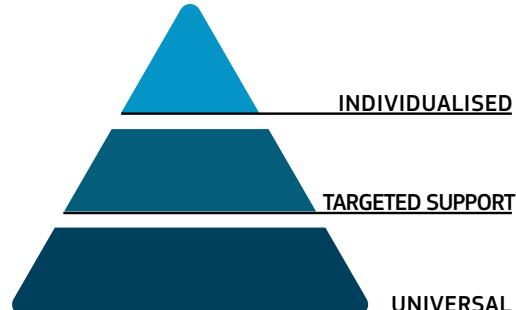
49%

of young Europeans have taken action to change society

several countries recorded a **decline in eighth graders' civic knowledge** and in pupils' trust in most institutions from 2016 to 2022

The different levels of support in the whole school approach can be used for enhanced citizenship acquisition:

- universal approach: all pupils benefit from high-quality, inclusive citizenship education
- targeted support: in small groups or at individual level, for learners who need personalised approaches



BUILDING A CULTURE OF CITIZENSHIP FOR ALL

Every learner should benefit from high-quality, inclusive citizenship education that develops knowledge of democratic institutions, skills for active and socially aware participation and a strong sense of European values, including respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights. This includes:

- **building inclusive, whole-school cultures** that reflect democratic values in the school curriculum, development and strategic plans, e.g. supporting pupils' voice through pupil councils and grassroots initiatives
- **interdisciplinary approaches** including real-life scenarios, debates and role-plays to explore civic concepts
- **project-based learning** where pupils collaborate on social issues, combining critical thinking and active participation
- **community engagement** through partnerships with municipalities, youth clubs, NGOs, libraries and local authorities
- **use of digital tools** to develop media literacy, navigate online (dis)information and encourage positive participation through interactive platforms
- **supporting teachers' capacity** to manage open classroom climates, foster democratic discussion and integrate citizenship education across subjects
- **international cooperation**, like participation in Erasmus+ programmes, job-shadowing and EU learning mobility for professional growth



Explore further

[Issue paper](#) and [policy brief on citizenship education](#): created by the European Commission's Working Group on Equality and Values in Education and Training (2021-2025)

[Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture \(RFCDC\)](#): created by the Council of Europe, it is a set of materials to teach about taking action to defend and promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law.



PROVIDING ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS IN DEVELOPING THEIR CIVIC AND DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT

Not all learners start with the same level of experience, confidence or access to democratic knowledge and civic opportunities. Some learners can be less engaged due to disadvantaged backgrounds, lack of trust in institutions or other barriers that make participation more difficult. With the right strategies, schools can help them become active and confident citizens. This involves:

- **early intervention** to encourage pupil voice, participation in class discussions and awareness of rights from an early age
- **boosting civic confidence and motivation** through pupil-led projects, volunteering or enabling pupils to decide on how to spend a budget (participatory budgeting)
- **peer support and group work** to build engagement in a safe environment
- **creative, cross-curricular projects** with real-world outcomes (e.g. environmental campaigns, media productions)
- **good-practice sharing** within and across schools to strengthen democratic culture
- **learning communities** in schools and local communities to support collaboration, project-based learning and cross-curricular approach



Explore further

The [IMCITIZEN project](#) identifies strategies to favour increased rates of citizenship initiation, decision-making and engagement in child participation mechanisms and aims to raise awareness and create knowledge about children's rights.

PERSONALISED PATHWAYS FOR ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Certain learners benefit from more tailored and focused support to strengthen their democratic competences and civic engagement. This involves:

- **tailored individual support** from trained educators in citizenship education
- **inclusive, age-appropriate teaching materials and assistive tools**, such as simplified resources on human rights, digital simulations of democratic processes or interactive tools for expressing views and participating safely
- **close collaboration** with families, community organisations (e.g. NGOs) and social services to address barriers that may prevent learners from democratic and civic engagement
- **professional development** for teachers focusing on citizenship skills



Explore further

[Law in everyday life](#) is an educational model designed to promote and advocate for basic legal literacy by creating materials and training programmes for teachers and pupils, adapted to the needs of 14–18-year-olds.

[Strategies for Inclusion](#) is a collaborative initiative by EuroClio that developed inclusive, adaptable learning materials and teacher guidance for pupils with special educational needs in history and citizenship education.

Explore the [European School Education Platform](#) and discover how active citizenship skills open doors to democratic participation and an inclusive society.

Via eTwinning – the community for schools in Europe – teachers can join featured groups to exchange with peers:

- [Citizenship education: celebrating what unites us](#)

More learning resources online

- [EU Democracy in Action – Have Your Say with the European Citizens' Initiative](#) – teaching materials to help secondary school pupils understand and engage with the European Citizens' Initiative (all EU languages).
- [EU Children's Participation Platform](#) – a platform where children have the right to express their views, have their opinions considered in important decisions and have their say on the European laws and policies that concern them (all EU languages).
- [European Parliament Ambassador School programme \(EPAS\)](#) – an educational programme for secondary schools and colleges in the EU run by the European Parliament, offering learning resources and activities.
- [#GetInvolved project](#) – empowers vocational pupils and raises awareness among vocational education and training (VET) teachers, institutions and companies. It has developed reports, training and interactive tools to develop students' democratic thinking, participation and awareness of discrimination to strengthen common values in society.
- [Networking European Civic Education](#) (NECE) – Europe's largest platform for non-formal and informal civic education.



Bibliography

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[Teachers Have Their Say: Motivation, Skills and Opportunities to Teach Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship](#), UNESCO, 2022

[Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture](#), Council of Europe

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