



EAEA BACKGROUND PAPER

ADULT EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

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The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) is the voice of non-formal adult education in Europe. EAEA is a European NGO with more than 130 member organisations in 43 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide. EAEA promotes adult learning and access to and participation in non-formal adult education for all; particularly for groups that are currently underrepresented.



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1 INTRODUCTION

The European Association for the Education of Adults and its members are strongly committed to, and supportive of Europe and its values. We believe that democracy, intercultural dialogue, social justice and cooperation are vital for a Europe of respect, participation and cohesion (EAEA Manifesto, 2019).

Contemporary society presents several challenges. Growing inequalities at all levels seem to produce mistrust towards European values. Citizens increasingly react with disengagement, or open hostility, by voting for xenophobic and anti-European parties. The rise of populist and authoritarian tendencies constantly threatens liberal democracy and its principles.

The development of democracy and adult education have common roots, since adult education influenced the development of democratic societies, and many adult education institutions were established as a result of emancipatory and democratic movements.

For this reason, EAEA believes that adult education has a fundamental role for active citizenship, through the development of citizenship education, by providing space and opportunities to create a sense of individual and common responsibility,

fostering civic engagement, tackling social exclusion and developing critical thinking.

Critical thinking is considered particularly important as it is central to understanding politics and policy-making at various levels. Moreover, it enables citizens to exercise their own judgment in order to overcome European issues such as radicalization, xenophobia, social inequalities, and fake news.



In light of this, EAEA promotes adult education as a means to strengthen and regenerate civil society by building responsibilities and commitment to democratic values, as well as a feeling of belonging to Europe.

2 THE CONCEPT OF CITIZENSHIP

In light of the current political context active citizenship is pivotal for strengthening democratic values. However, one of the most controversial and challenging issues about citizenship education is the multifaceted concept of citizenship itself. Numerous approaches to citizenship result in a heterogeneity of contents and methodologies as well as related educational activities.



Source: Shutterstock

Schugurensky (2006) identifies four different dimensions of citizenship: citizenship as status, identity, civic virtues, and agency.

He observes that citizenship education activities are mostly carried out on the basis of one or more of those dimensions.

Citizenship as status could be considered a synonym of nationality. It refers to issues of membership to a specific political community, with related political and legal rights.

Citizenship as civic virtues refers to values, attitudes and behaviours that “good citizens” should have. This dimension is controversial, first, because it assumes a judgment on how a good citizen should be, and second, because this judgement is rooted in the subjective understanding of citizenship promoted by the state and/or society within certain historical, ideological and political contexts.

Citizenship as agency sees citizens as social actors, and implies that the collective or individual exercise of citizenship occurs in concrete social relations mediated by power.

Finally, citizenship as identity refers to issues of feelings of belonging, and is rooted in factors like a common history, language, religion, values, traditions and culture, which often do not coincide with the territory of a nation-state.

This fourth dimension of citizenship is particularly relevant when looking at the efforts of the European Union in promoting European citizenship, not only inviting people to vote for a common parliament, but also fostering a sense of common belonging through programmes, projects and initiatives.

3 DEFINING CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Citizenship education has been defined by UNESCO (1998) as “educating children, from early childhood, to become clear-thinking and enlightened citizens who participate in decisions concerning society”.

In academic literature, authors have formulated different definitions of citizenship education, which, as observed by Peterson et al. (2016), refer to formal, non-formal and informal educational activities aiming to raise awareness about injustice and inequality.

The importance of citizenship education in contemporary society has been highlighted throughout the research done into this topic, and Osler and Starkey (2006) single out six factors that explain the interest that it has received both at the European and international level.

The first factor assumes that citizenship education should help people understand, address, and challenge global injustice and inequality.

The second factor sees it as a response to the challenges related to globalization and subsequent migration. In an increasingly multicultural society, citizenship education is considered a valid means to promote social cohesion through democratic values and ideals.

The third and fourth factors relate to the perceived disinterest of young people towards political and civic engagement, and their “lack” of morals and values. The fifth factor’s approach traces the beginning of citizenship education back to the end of the Cold War, as a measure to support the development of new liberal democracies across the world. Finally, citizenship education, specifically in Europe, is seen as an important tool to fight the rise of racist and antidemocratic movements.

'Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education' – Paris, March 2015

The Declaration defines common objectives for Member States and urges the EU to ensure the sharing of ideas and good practice with a view to:

- Ensuring that children and young people acquire social, civic and intercultural competences, by promoting democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion and non-discrimination, as well as active citizenship.
- Enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, particularly in the use of the Internet and social media, so as to develop resistance to all forms of discrimination and indoctrination.
- Fostering the education of disadvantaged children and young people, by ensuring that our education and training systems address their needs.
- Promoting intercultural dialogue through all forms of learning in cooperation with other relevant policies and stakeholders.

The Paris Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education, drafted in 2015 following the terroristic attacks in France and Denmark by ministries of education and European commissioners, draws particularly on the sixth approach identified by Osler and Starkey.

The declaration can be considered a milestone of the Member States of the

European Union to support fundamental values such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect of human rights. It calls for increased cooperation to promote a European society, adhering to pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality.

4 CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN THE EU CONTEXT

In 2001, the European Commission's Communication: *Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality* (2001) identified active citizenship as one of the four "broad and mutually supporting objectives" of the lifelong learning strategy.

The Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning (2006), issued by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, highlighted the importance of strengthening active democratic citizenship through education by including in the framework of key competences for lifelong learning a civic competence which "equips individuals to fully participate in civic life, based on knowledge of social and political concepts and structures and a commitment to active and democratic participation".

The revision of the framework, published in 2018, includes a citizenship competence defined as "the ability to act as responsible citizens and to fully participate in civic and social life, based on understanding of social, economic, legal and political concepts and structures, as well as global developments

and sustainability" (Council of the European Union, 2018).

Citizenship education has also been the theme of the Education and Training Monitor 2018 (European Commission), which highlights the role of education in sharing and teaching fundamental values and civic rights and obligations, as well as promoting social inclusion, critical thinking, and exercise of democratic rights. The monitor, which has a strong focus on young people, suggests that if individuals acquire these values and competences through education, this has the power to strengthen the cohesion of European societies.

The European Agenda for Adult Learning (2010) names active citizenship one of the main reasons why participation of adult learners in formal, non-formal, and informal activities should be increased, alongside the acquisition of work skills, and personal development and fulfilment.

While an awareness about the central role of active citizenship for the European project has been building up for more than a decade, the Paris Declaration on

Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination, signed by all EU education ministers in 2015, put citizenship education into the spotlight. It focused specifically on the need of educating young people to become adults capable of critical thinking and of engaging actively in society.

Since then, member states have worked on implementing citizenship education in school curricula, as highlighted by the Eurydice report “Citizenship education at school in Europe 2017”. This report provides a comparative overview of how citizenship education is approached across Europe, focusing on the existing regulations and recommendations regarding citizenship education in public schools.

Despite being focused on school education and formal learning, the report tries to address the question ‘can citizenship skills be developed outside the classroom?’. This is particularly relevant for adult education and learning as a marginalised sector within the field of education, it seems to open a window of opportunity to put a stronger emphasis on lifelong learning in the European educational discourse, specifically addressing participatory and democratic competences among the whole population.

Examples of successful initiatives promoted by the EU are the programmes *Erasmus Plus*, in which fostering active citizenship is considered a transversal goal of all its actions, and *Europe for Citizens*, which aims at contributing to citizens’

understanding of the EU, its history and diversity, and improving conditions for civic and democratic participation at the EU level.

Europe for Citizens includes two main funding streams: firstly, “European Remembrance”, which supports projects reflecting on the causes of totalitarian regimes in Europe’s modern history and projects concerning other defining moments in recent European history, and secondly, “Democratic engagement and civic participation”, which supports projects allowing citizens to participate in the democratic life of the EU, ranging from local democracy to empowering citizens to play a full part in EU policy.

Finally, citizenship education is promoted within the DEAR programme of the European Union on development education and awareness raising, with a particular focus on *global* citizenship education. Its main objectives include “to inform EU citizens about development issues and foster awareness and understanding of global development and recognition of interdependence” as well as to “change attitudes, provide the European public with tools to engage critically with global developments and support the emergence of new ideas on development issues.”

However, as opposed to Erasmus Plus and Europe for Citizens, the DEAR programme supports actions that have a development angle and are implemented with partners from outside the European Union.

5 CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

Citizenship competences and skills have also found their way into a number of other global policies and strategies. A number of concepts have emerged to address these competences and skills, including global citizenship education and global education. While the terms and concepts behind them may differ, depending on the source and stakeholder, they are often used synonymously.

Global Citizenship Education aims to empower learners to engage and assume active roles, both locally and globally, to face and resolve global challenges and ultimately to become proactive contributors to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world. (UNESCO, 2013)

Notably, Global Citizenship Education (abbreviated as GCE or GCED) is UNESCO's response to global challenges such as human rights violations, inequality and poverty which still threaten peace and sustainability. It addresses learners of all ages with the aim to empower them to take on active roles both at a local and global level, to guide society towards a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, and secure future.

GCE, with its lifelong learning perspective, is central to the Sustainable Development Goals, a global agenda promoted by the United Nations and adopted by countries in 2015, which includes 17 universal targets

set with a vision of ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

Specifically, the SDG 4.7 calls for ensuring that “all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development”.

GCE is built on other educational experiences such as human rights education, peace education, education for sustainable development, and it is conceived as a transformative experience for learners, to empower them to exercise their rights and obligations consciously and powerfully, promoting fundamental values and shaping society based on democratic principles.

Key players in the field of citizenship education in Europe and worldwide are the UNESCO, alongside the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe, the Global Education Network Europe (GENE) and Networking European Citizenship Education (NECE), among others. Bridge 47, a DEAR project started in 2017, aims to bring together the key stakeholders to coordinate efforts in implementing SDG 4.7.

6 ADULT EDUCATION AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Adult education plays a fundamental role in providing citizens a space to practice active citizenship and to reflect on societal situations and challenges.

However, as opposed to the formal sector, where Member States have made efforts to introduce citizenship education as a core subject in primary and secondary schools, in the non-formal learning sector, and specifically in adult education, there are no standardised curricula.

Still, citizenship education is a crucial component of adult education. Apart from being provided as a subject on its own in many adult education centres, citizenship education is commonly understood as a transversal goal of most activities carried out by adult education institutions. Consequently, the target group of citizenship education within adult education and learning is very broad: it includes people with low basic skills as well as adults with higher levels of formal or non-formal education. The individual objectives may vary, but generally range from developing capabilities to participate actively in society, to challenging and supporting learners in dealing with the continuous challenges and demands linked with being a citizen in contemporary society.

Citizenship education practices can address a variety of themes, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, intersectionality, disability, refugees and asylum seekers, and issues, such as globalization and global justice, peace, intercultural and

interreligious dialogue, as described in the 'Handbook of Education for Citizenship and Social Justice' (Peterson, Hattam, Zembylas, Arthur, 2016). The authors also evidence a distinction between the socializing and transformative aspect of citizenship education practices. The first referring to people learning to assume roles in different communities, thus to citizenship as status and the second referring to the ways people actively and democratically respond to issues of inequality and injustice, thus to citizenship as practice.

In the adult sector, citizenship education can be seen under two different perspectives and related functions, as commented by David Mallows during the EPAL podcast "What is the role of adult learning in active citizenship?" (May 2017). On one hand, it can have a remedial function and be addressed to adults whose school curricula did not include citizenship education and therefore need a space to learn about politics and institutions, improve their knowledge and practice their participatory skills.

On the other hand, society's demand changes continuously and citizens can find themselves living in societies where democratic processes are different or at different stages. Therefore, citizenship education is also a transversal objective of adult education offers, and is integrated into a large variety of courses and programmes. It is closely linked with the promotion and development of other life skills, particularly social skills.

7 ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP AND LIFE SKILLS

The ability to actively participate and engage in society belongs to those “civic capabilities” which are considered part of the so-called Life Skills, defined as “a constituent part of capabilities for life and work in a particular social, cultural and environmental context. The types of life skills emerge as a response to the needs of the individual in real life situations” (Life Skills project, EAEA, 2016).

As highlighted in Vandenaabeele, Reyskens, Wildemeersch (2011), in contemporary society citizens are increasingly encouraged to participate actively, not only with regard to policy issues but also to issues related to everyday life.

Adult education, on the one hand, promotes learning as a necessary prerequisite to access participation in democratic processes. It addresses different needs, ranging from the improvement of basic skills such as literacy and numeracy, to trainings and discussions on political and societal issues and challenges.

This perspective implies that individuals should first acquire participatory skills, before they can speak and act as citizens (Vandenaabeele et al., 2011). Moreover, it suggests that they are encouraged to activate and acquire the competencies identified by the “rational community” to be good citizens. As commented in Biesta and Lawy (2006), this vision implies the existence of a norm of what it means to be a good citizen. This norm, however, is highly contextual and variable.

On the other hand, adult education promotes a vision in which learning itself is considered a form of participation in the community and not just a means to prepare for participation (Wildemeersch & Berkers, 1997). This perspective promotes citizenship as commitment to the “community of practice” and participation in joint activities.

8 GOOD PRACTICES

Good examples from adult education and learning practices illustrate the approaches outlined above.

Providers of community education in Ireland, such as organisational members of AONTAS, Ireland’s National Adult Learning Organisation, provide citizenship education, in the spirit of commitment to the community of practice. Developing the

methodology of community education has proven effective in engaging learners and provides quality learning experiences that meet the learner’s educational and training needs.

Community education is a learner-centred approach, tailored to the requirements of a specific local community. In community education programmes, learners work

together with members of the community they belong to, or are about to be integrated into. Groups are normally heterogeneous in terms of nationality, religion, language and learning needs.

Community education pursues the goal of engagement, involvement and empowerment of the individuals and consequently of the community itself, addressing mainly those who are at risk of social exclusion for their economic status, which is often linked to unemployment, poor health, limited general aspiration and expectations, lack of access to service and education. Offering short, part-time courses and programmes, community education can therefore act as a first positive step towards education, and lead to many possibilities for learners and communities, including skills development, confidence building, greater community involvement and progression to further education or employment.

critical analysis, and ultimately active participation in all aspects of our society. The initiative provided a Welcome to Belgium kit on different themes relevant to everyday life in Belgium: living together, housing, health, education, employment and social security, everyday life, residency statuses and migration, and institutions.

The organisation also runs training for associations dealing with migrants' literacy, which provides educators not only with practical information to use the tool, but also the space to self-reflect on their approach to and opinions on the different topics addressed by the kit.

Often, initiatives and projects in adult education are developed in a way that the two perspectives are interconnected: participation itself is seen as a step towards active citizenship. At the same time, learners are challenged in practicing their participatory skills and getting new knowledge and information.

The International Democracy Festival Association, which represents eight democracy festivals from the Nordic and Baltic regions, as well as a European-wide festival, aims to support and promote the establishment of other democracy festivals as a vehicle for democratic change. Democracy festivals are platforms for democratic dialogue between civil society, politicians, business, media, universities and citizens.

Zakia Elvang, Chair of the International Democracy Festival Association, says that *"The vision of the Association is to revitalise democracy by strengthening the link between a political system and citizens as well as creating spaces for dialogue and participation"*.



In Belgium, the association *Lire et Ecrire*, a member of EAEA, launched an initiative aimed at newcomers to Belgium, but also for people with Belgian origins, and young people, thought of as a tool to generate reflection on the society, with the aim to encourage or develop the capacity for



Source: International Democracy Festival Association

The democracy festival "The People's Meeting - "Folkemødet", occurring since 2011 in Bornholm, Denmark, is a special opportunity to celebrate, promote and develop ideas about democracy, active citizenship and non-formal adult learning. It aims to strengthen democracy and dialogue in the country, with seminars and meetings free of charge and organised in informal settings.

Although the initiative is coordinated by the authorities of Bornholm, it is organised on a practical level by organisations, political parties and groups, who express a wish to

be involved. In this sense, the participants are also the organisers, as an example of democracy in real life.

The Danish Association for the Education of Adults, a member of EAEA, is actively involved in the festival, along with its members.

9 CONCLUSION

Evidence shows that education, formal, non-formal, and informal, is a means to foster the development of active citizenship. In particular, non-formal learning has a key role in giving individuals the space and competences to develop critical thinking and participatory skills.

In this context, adult education offers a unique space for learning how to address the continuously changing challenges of society, both for those who were not provided adequate learning opportunities in formal education, and for anyone aiming to acquire new skills and knowledge.

It is important to keep in mind that, while in the formal sector citizenship education is generally an independent subject, in the non-formal sector it is often a transversal goal of the different activities implemented by the providers.

Also, due to the ambiguity of the concept of citizenship itself, it is difficult to come up

with a standardised model of citizenship education, either for young people and adults, at the European and global level.

While the multi-dimensionality of the concept can be a benefit, allowing education providers to choose which dimension they want to address, according to the needs of their target group, it is important to keep the debate open: what is citizenship and what are the goals of citizenship education. We need to encourage critical thinking and keep in mind that in an increasingly multi-cultural society, it is important to develop inclusive democracies, and challenge racist and xenophobic movements.

Citizenship education clearly appears to be something that should not be limited to being part of the school curriculum, and should support the development of a society where active citizenship is considered a lifelong learning commitment.

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Recommendations for policy-makers

- Ensure that citizenship education is made a priority by the European Union and its member states, aiming to build a society where all citizens are able to think critically and constructively address the challenges they face
- Recognise the importance of non-formal learning in the development of active citizenship
- Support the professionalization of adult educators as well as the development of new methods in order to better address learning needs of marginalised and disadvantaged groups

- Promote initiatives that enable individuals to practice their participatory skills, as well as provide them with knowledge and competences to address the challenges of contemporary society
- Create opportunities for people to practice citizenship, and support the development of learning resources for this
- Put the adult learner and her/his learning needs at the centre and promote tailored programmes
- Support the provision of citizenship education in adult education
- Relate citizenship education to transversal issues such as fighting poverty, social exclusion, racism and discrimination, and promoting social justice and gender equality
- Make sure information on citizens' rights and duties is accessible

10.2 Recommendations for education providers

- Use non-formal education methods as an approach to citizenship education
- Use participative and innovative methods that improve individuals' self-confidence and awareness of their own capacities and skills
- Encourage the development of participatory skills and provide spaces to train them
- Encourage the active participation of the target group, with role models and peer-learning groups in a bottom-up approach
- Use these methods in particular to address marginalised and disadvantaged groups that need the most support

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European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)
Rue de l'Industrie 10, 1000 Brussels, Belgium