CHALLENGES AND GOOD PRACTICES RELATED TO PROMOTING CITIZENSHIP AND VALUES OF FREEDOM, TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION THROUGH EDUCATION

RESEARCH REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the framework of the EU CONVINCE project (COmmoN Values INClusive Education) (2018-2020) a research was conducted in 2018 on **challenges and good practices related to promoting citizenship and the universal values** of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education. An advisory group, coordinated by ETUCE (European Trade Union Committee for Education), EFEE (European Federation of Education Employers) and ESHA (European School Heads Association), oversaw the project.

All members of the three organisations were invited via online data-gathering to share their views and challenges as well as their good practices on six topics:

1. Civic education and democratic-school culture.

2. Teaching in multicultural learning contexts for intercultural dialogue.

3. Teaching controversial and sensitive issues.

4. Digital citizenship and E-safety.

5. School-leadership and 'the whole school approach'.

6. Inclusive education as a tool to prevent radicalisation, violence and extremism.

91 professional organisations represented by 107 respondents coming from 46 regions/ countries in Europe responded to the online survey. This resulted in a wealth of data to be used to encourage exchange on the teaching of universal values and promoting citizenship, with a focus on secondary education, both within curricula of education institutions (formal learning) and in extra-curricular activities (non-formal learning).

Common values are currently embedded in several ways in education settings according to the replies received: in value-oriented subjects (such as human rights education), in related subjects (e.g. history or philosophy) or transversally integrated across the curriculum. Different approaches may co-exist in some countries. Approaches may also vary according to regional specificities, different organising authorities, the level of education, between individual schools or even between teachers.

The research confirms that the various components of the education system (e.g. school policy, curriculum, partnerships) interlink and truly function as a 'system': the constituent parts interrelate and changes in one part lead to changes in the other parts. This calls for a '**whole school approach'** to bring about sustainable and systemic changes in educational settings to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education for all. The whole school approach is based on the greater professional autonomy coupled with supportive accountability mechanisms, enabling schools to identify the best solution to cater for specific needs of the school community,

distributed leadership, school evaluation processes allowing improvement, and the involvement of a wide range of local stakeholders, including parents/carers. The research shows that parts and pieces of the whole school approach are implemented across countries, but further attention and support are needed, amongst others **supportive policy frameworks.**

The **conclusions** of the research presented in the report are at the same time **recommendations**. These recommendations include the practices presented by respondents to handle the challenges identified and are a mixture of 'emerging', 'promising' and 'good' practices that contribute to providing teachers, educators and the educational institutions with tools and methods to better deal with citizenship related issues both in the classroom and in extra-curricular activities.

To **effectively foster inclusive education,** including citizenship education and universal values, the following points need to be carefully examined.

- **Supportive policy frameworks** should exist, delineating the responsibilities of schools leadership and staff on key issues such as digital citizenship and e-safety, who is in charge of communicating with parents/carers and other stakeholders to ensure trust and respect. Inclusion and equity are considered to be core principles to guide educational policies and plans. In various countries, top level strategies (like national strategies), frameworks on citizenship education, or action plans are developed to support citizenship education.

- These supportive policy frameworks **need to be accompanied by adequate resources** (time, staff, financial, technical) in order to be effective and need to encompass all levels. **Full commitment of all stakeholders**, including education employers, school leaders, and teachers, in taking up responsibilities is necessary in order to face the challenges identified.

- **Supportive policy frameworks for democratic citizenship and inclusive education need to be developed with the involvement of education social partners**, which fits well with the demand for cooperation between various stakeholders and shared governance. In this context, the involvement of teachers in all education-related issues at policy and practice level seems to be crucial.

- To **narrow down implementation gaps**, evidence-based policy making is suggested, with **robust assessment systems** in the areas of citizenship and inclusive education recommended as a possible strategy. Suitable assessment systems would identify the most effective practices to address the complex issue of implementation. These assessment systems would need to encompass different levels, i.e. from the student to the school level.

- **Support to teachers** in the delivery of citizenship education, to handle diversity, controversial and sensitive issues in the classroom as well as digital citizenship should be available. Based on the survey, **it is clear that all respondents value training and professional development and view support to teachers and other education personnel as crucial for them to be able to perform in a diverse educational setting**. Moreover, establishing meaningful communication between teachers and students is essential to the teaching and learning process. Supporting teachers in dealing with demanding situations in the classroom needs to be a combination of: an appropriate policy framework stipulating responsibility of senior management and staff on key issues like behaviour, discipline, communication with parents/carers and external organisations and (2) opportunities for

teachers to express their concerns, receive support from peers, and exchange on good practices. **Initial and continuous professional development of teachers** to better deal with controversial and sensitive issues, to create a positive and safe climate in and beyond the classroom, to raise awareness about diversity and to teach critical thinking are key, but still not sufficiently part of teacher training.

- **A stronger involvement and networking of teachers and educators, school leaders, parents and learners within the school life** ('whole-school approach') supporting more democratic learning environments to allow learners to experience democracy and mutual respect ('democratic school culture') is seen as an effective approach in promoting inclusive education. At the same time, training/counselling for school leaders and teachers to improve cooperation between schools and parents/carers from various (cultural) backgrounds would be also useful. Furthermore, working closely with parents/carers on issues relating to individual students' well-being is considered an effective strategy to support the more vulnerable students.

- A **democratic school culture** values diversity, allows space for debate on controversial issues and relies on the **active participation of students and teachers** Training to empower teachers to manage differences and diversity in classrooms is considered by respondents to the CONVINCE survey as an effective way to value diversity. Establishing clear policies and programmes to address and prevent discrimination and exclusion, and **student-centred and participatory learning approaches** are also pointed out as effective. To guide discussions on controversial issues in the classroom, a '**balanced approach'** whereby the teacher presents students with a wide range of alternative views on an issue and an approach where the teacher him/herself decides the method depending on the educational context are considered most effective. Since controversial issues are highly contextual, there is no guarantee that a strategy which works in one setting will necessarily work in another. Respondents emphasise the importance of the educational setting and circumstances in which the discussion takes place to determine the approach.

- **Committed school leadership** is a key element of the whole school approach, and a challenge at the same time. Therefore, the school leadership should be supported with adequate resources, including professional development. Distributive leadership needs to be accompanied by the development of leadership capacity of the school staff.

- Knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to become an active citizen are not only taught in the classroom and therefore, relevant policy frameworks should **link curricular and extra-curricular activities.** The most popular extra-curricular activities are excursions or cultural trips, art or sport related activities and student councils. A specific challenge formulated is the organisation of these extra-curricular activities, which often depends on the personal engagement of school leaders and teachers.

- **Digital citizenship**: supporting children and young people to participate safely, effectively, critically and responsibly in a world with social media and digital technologies has emerged as a priority for educators all over the world. Various initiatives have been taken at EU level to support Member States in further developing open, tolerant and diverse societies through education. Discussions in the classroom on the use of ICT, sharing the process of problem solving by presenting and reacting to misinformation found in the (social) media as well as developing classes using ICT and social media in which students can ask and

answer real life questions in an open discussion, are considered as effective approaches by a majority of respondents. **Developing critical thinking and understanding** are viewed as essential for children and young people to thrive in a digital world and are considered to be key in relation to citizenship education and digital citizenship.

- **Extremism and the underlying forces of radicalisation** are among the most pervasive challenges of our time. Young people are vulnerable to the messages of extremist organisations. Respondents to the survey recommend a mixture of curricular and extra-curricular activities to prevent radicalisation and extremism amongst students, e.g. joint work of students from diverse backgrounds in the classroom, promotion of local youth, sport or cultural organisations, visiting exhibitions and discuss relevant societal issues, as well as invite recognised figures from different communities in the classroom to talk about their work.

The CONVINCE research shows that initiatives exist and can help teachers, school leaders and the educational community as a whole to better deal with citizenship related issues, human rights and fundamental values both in the classroom and in extra-curricular activities. These initiatives provide tools and methods which vary from 'projects' (emerging and promising practices) to legal frameworks for inclusive education and promoting citizenship. Complementary research would be valuable to further analyse the good examples and practices in their local context and to further analysis transfer potential of the most promising good examples/practices.