

**ACHIEVING DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION THROUGH GCE**

**POLICY ROUNDTABLE**

**EESC & ONLINE, 21.05.2024, 10.00-12.00**

### *Welcoming and opening remarks*

**Elisa Gambardella, Education & Lifelong Learning Coordinator, [SOLIDAR Foundation](#),** presented the speakers and outlined the agenda. She introduced the Foundation's multiannual policy thematic cycle and highlighted the 2024 focus on Global Citizenship Education (GCE) and democratic participation. She outlined the aim of the roundtable: without access to GCE, the interconnectedness of national, European, and global issues, as well as the role of democratic institutions, remains unclear. This lack of knowledge makes it unlikely for people to vote in national and especially European elections, as they cannot relate the institutions' functioning to their own reality. At this crucial moment of European politics, **it is essential to recognize the importance of educating people about how the system works and their agency within it, to be able to fully understand your political rights and the impact of voting.**

The results of this discussion feed in the policy paper to be presented at the Thematic Annual Conference in October, concluding the advocacy cycle and culminating with policy recommendations and a joint declaration for advocacy.

**Tatjana Babrauskiene, EESC, Workers Group,** provided opening remarks on behalf of the Committee. She praised the initiative and its importance for the EESC, explaining its functions and working methods.

## ***GCE & democratic participation in the local context***

**Rocío Moreno, awareness raising officer and project manager, [MPDL](#)**, shared the work of the organisation on education and particularly GCE. She explained that their approach features a socio-affective methodology, promoting learning through experiential and emotional engagement. Additionally, MPDL emphasises peacebuilding, focusing on **developing skills for non-violent conflict resolution and dialogue**.

The departments of MPDL that are most active in GCE are International Action, Social Action (see the [School of Peace](#) project) and Awareness Raising. MPDL's activities span 15 regions in Spain and 11 countries internationally, with a strong focus on youth engagement. Notable initiatives include:

- Formal and non-formal educational interventions for vulnerable youth and their families.
- Exchange of good practices between young professionals and national and [international volunteer projects](#).
- The radio program "[Compartiendo Ondas](#)" linking Spanish and Colombian youth in shared views and concerns.
- Meetings, forums and activities for the [exchange of experiences](#) between rural women and young people in countries such as Colombia and Nicaragua.
- Various awareness-raising campaigns and digital platforms like the [Sahel Resilience](#) and [Realities in Transformation](#) websites.

MPDL's actions aim to empower citizens, particularly young people, to actively participate in civic life and political advocacy for social justice. Their awareness-raising efforts target migrant women, violence survivors, at-risk youth, and people facing racial or ethnic discrimination, providing safe spaces and tools for social participation.

## ***Discussion of the preliminary research question***

**Elizaveta Ebner, researcher at SOLIDAR Foundation, detailed the definition of GCE: political education on a global scale which prepares learners to develop a sense of belonging to the global community.** It is essential for encouraging active societal participation and strengthening democracy through a human rights perspective. This approach to citizenship education is vital for achieving [SDG 4.7](#) and ensuring quality education. Democratic participation would be then composed by **actions and values, the first being voting and civic engagement, the second being for trust in democratic institutions and meaningfulness of citizen's participation.**

In this regard, young people are an important target group that should receive attention in the long term. Nonetheless, there are great discrepancies in EU countries for youth voting. Identifying the gaps through the existing policy is a significant step forward, starting at the local level with teacher training, as highlighted by SOLIDAR Foundation's [Policy Paper on Global Citizenship Education](#). For this, **a study on GCE at EU level** that covers understanding of democratic values and active participation would be useful. It could provide valuable insights and recommendations to strengthen youth participation and counteract the challenges associated with the disappointment and decline of democracy.

### ***Discussion on the challenges and opportunities of GCE in connection to Democratic Participation***

**Daria Arlavi, Policy Officer, European Commission (DG EAC), noted that while the sense of belonging and European identity is increasing among young people, their willingness to participate in EU elections is not following suit,** according to the [2022 ICCS study](#). Hence the importance of GCE, with students with high levels of GCE reporting positive attitudes towards the EU in general, mobility and sustainability. **To truly develop a global identity, it is crucial for young people to engage in global issues, such as human rights, climate action and social issues,** for which education plays a vital role in equipping them with knowledge, skills and attitudes.

A Commission initiative she mentioned was the Youth check, as introduced by the [Communication on the European Year of Youth](#), an instrument that includes the

assessment of initiatives for young people with the support of youth correspondents and the Youth Network. Also, this year's edition of the European Youth Week had a focus on democratic participation with the initiative [Voice your Vision](#), including the [Voice Platform](#), an interactive website for youth to raise their voices and share their demands and perspectives on EU elections and politics.

**Tatjana Babrauskiene emphasised the importance of co-designing curricula with the local community.** This holistic approach, which involves the community in education, underscores the importance of values and key competences, pointing out that today's education system often prioritizes knowledge and skills over attitudes.

In this comprehensive view, **students should be active participants in shaping their own learning journey**, adopting a systemic approach that extends beyond isolated projects to truly embody global values. To achieve this, teachers need training in skills that enable them to mobilize both themselves and their students, including linguistic skills. Generally, students lack sufficient teacher support and face challenges in personalising their learning beyond the standard curriculum. Additionally, children in rural and remote areas must have access to quality education, with Romania serving as an example.

Therefore, engaging students with GCE from an early age is crucial. However, it is also essential to ensure decent living conditions, such as affordable housing and fair wages, to build youth's trust in democratic institutions.

**Rilli Lappalainen**, chair of [Bridge 47](#) and President of [CONCORD](#), stated that education should be included in every level and step of sustainable development, including non-formal and informal education as referred in the 2023 UNESCO [Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development](#). However, he underscored the need for a legally binding framework that incorporates GCE.

**GCE is vital to fight against discrimination and misinformation by promoting critical thinking skills, to prepare learners to react to changes in society from a systemic approach.** In these times of conflict, States should remember the spirit of the [1974 UNESCO Recommendation](#) (now revised, see previous link) and cooperate for peace building, for which peace education is a vital tool. As EU Member States are also members of UNESCO,

they should implement this recommendation in their education sectors through a multistakeholder approach.

**Jo McAuley**, Head of Research and Peer Review, [GENE](#), referred to the [European Declaration on Global Education to 2050](#), also known as the Dublin Declaration, as a key instrument for advancing GCE across the EU: **the declaration unified diverse topics (citizenship, peace, sustainability, etc.) under the term Global Education, and was founded on international agreements and provides a strategic framework focused on commitments, aiming to make Global Education a political priority.** The secretariat is following up on the declaration, with a particular focus on youth and youth-led initiatives, as well as research on GCE.

At national level, GENE supports member policymakers through policy learning, strategy development and institutional training on Global Education. They are working with various stakeholders on decolonisation education, and they plan to engage with the Hungarian Presidency to further implement the Dublin Declaration. However, political and ideological challenges remain. GENE aims to develop a strategy, in collaboration with civil society, to overcome these obstacles, recognising the diverse contexts and voting behaviours of different countries.

**Raffaella Kihrer**, Head of Policy and Deputy Secretary General, [EAEA](#), emphasised that the goal for adult learners is to be able to tackle future challenges and build sustainable communities, with GCE playing a pivotal role. The Dublin Declaration and the [UNESCO Marrakech Framework for Action](#) on Adult Learning and Education (ALE) includes GCE under the quality of education learning, committing to incorporate it to curricula and learning materials. **Adult learning supports emancipatory learning and encourages political practice through engagement in social action.**

As projects, she shared:

- EAEA's member [Yuva Association](#) leads the [SMALEI project](#), which aims to enhance the sustainability of ALE providers across Europe. It focuses on raising awareness of environmental and climate issues and enabling ALE institutions to pursue

sustainable growth. The project will develop green competences for educators and staff, encouraging behavioral changes for environmental sustainability within the EU. The project is an example of achieving global impact from a local level, where the beneficiaries become trainers through a peer-to-peer learning process.

Another project, launched in 2013, called "[\*Naturally We Are Young!\*](#)", was Turkey's first ecological literacy project for young people. The program provided insights into the history of life on Earth, current environmental issues, and potential solutions. It fostered an understanding of the human-nature relationship and the right to a healthy environment, encouraging participants to become active citizens. Trainers aged 18 to 25 shared their knowledge with peers through a two-day training program.

- [\*Urban X-change Network\*](#), run by EAEA's member [\*Association of Adult Education Centres in Schleswig-Holstein\*](#) adopted an institutional approach to studying policy-making by various actors. The aim was to develop policies crafted by citizens, NGOs, and CSOs from a human rights and diversity perspective. The project enabled nine German Adult Education Centres and their counterparts in Great Britain, Ukraine, and USA to collaborate on cross-border cultural and educational activities. These activities were conducted in partnership with city administrations and local civil societies, guided by the 2030 Agenda.

To truly build a solid foundation for GCE, **there is a pressing need for an agreed definition, policy coherence, a comprehensive policy framework, better connections among institutions and with stakeholders, established benchmarks, and teacher training.** However, she noted as one of the challenges the reluctance from education providers to include GCE in the curriculum due to other priorities, frequently driven by labour market needs. She agreed that the learning context also presents difficulties in implementing GCE, particularly in adult education, and in empowering adult learners to effect change in their reality.

As **Kelsey Beltz, Global Partnerships and Education leader**, [\*The Good Lobby\*](#) said, the provision of GCE **should adopt a bottom-up approach. It needs to be clearly explained and broken down to ensure accessibility for everyone.** While this is more straightforward

in school settings, it presents challenges in adult learning, also linked to the urgent need to engage young people in politics. A primary challenge for The Good Lobby, as with many other organisations, is the limitation of human resources dedicated to raising awareness.

### Q&A

**Stefan Grasgruber-Kerl**, [Südwind](#), and **Claudio Dondi**, [EIP Lab](#) c/o IHL, underscored that the challenge lies in engaging with youth that is interested in politics, but doesn't feel represented. Dondi also noted that GCE must extend beyond promoting democratic participation: it is inherently valuable for the personal development of individuals. **Ekaterine Gogoberishvili**, [WindEurope](#), pointed to the reality of overworked teachers and the responsibility of implementing GCE falling on them. She wondered how to move then from awareness to action, involving the community, including students, teachers and parents, and how coordinate GCE provision among states.

**Tatjana Babrauskiene** reiterated that one of the challenges is that schools are not oriented to build full competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes). More practice-oriented education would help students to acquire these competences, vital for GCE. **Daria Arlevi** mentioned the [European Citizens Panels](#) as an example of citizens pushing institutions to think creatively and be truly in touch with citizens reality and demands. In the [recommendations](#), education in diversity, education in key competences, civic education, or enabling channels for children participation in schools were included, showing citizenry's interest in this topic.

For **Raffaella Kihrer**, and as other speakers and participants agreed, **social action from an intergenerational approach is needed**, as well as a systemic change in the education system and building a common understanding. **Elizaveta Ebner** suggested that the recommendations of this advocacy cycle presented later this year should include clear definitions, concrete pedagogical recommendations, and examples of good practices.

### Concluding remarks

**Elisa Gambardella** highlighted the interconnectedness of local, national, and global issues, stressing the need for GCE to make democratic institutions and processes relatable to

individuals. The roundtable emphasized that without GCE, the complexities of European politics and the impact of voting remain unclear to many, especially the youth.

In an era of interconnected global crises, GCE is becoming increasingly relevant. **All learners have the right to access an education that prepares them to develop a sense of belonging to the global community**, while promoting a culture of democratic participation and democratic values. Policymakers and civil society need to acknowledge this and a step towards implementation, for a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach to embed GCE across education systems (formal, non-formal and informal), as well as an educational approach that is not only skill-oriented but also value-driven, promoting critical thinking and active citizenship. For it to be truly implemented, there is a need for **concrete measures, awareness raising, policy coherence, comprehensive frameworks, multi-stakeholders partnership, teacher support and social action**. Only through these efforts can we ensure that GCE fosters a well-informed and engaged citizenry, capable of navigating and influencing the complexities of our interconnected world.