



Policy Paper:

European Citizenship Academy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The future of the European Union (EU) rests on the shoulders of an informed, engaged, and united citizenry.

This policy paper asserts that comprehensive Education to Europe (E2E), encompassing both formal and non-formal learning, is a necessary foundation for building the resilient, democratic, and prosperous (EU) of tomorrow.

We call upon policymakers, formal education institutions, and non-formal and youth organisations to significantly scale up their commitment and cooperation to embed a deeper, action-oriented understanding of the EU into all learning environments.

This investment is crucial for combating Euroscepticism, fostering active citizenship, and ensuring the continued success of the European project.

The European Citizenship Academy (ECA) project was launched to develop methods, resources, and good practices, collected across Europe, in order to propose and support impactful 'Education to Europe' (E2E). Over two years, we collected youth feedback, tested tools, games, and pathways, and identified how and by whom the goal of better education to Europe can be achieved.

THE NECESSITY OF EDUCATION TO EUROPE (E2E)

Education about the European Union is not a niche academic subject; it is a core civic competence vital for democratic survival and societal cohesion.

Why E2E is crucial for tomorrow's EU

1. Strengthening democracy and active citizenship: A lack of knowledge about (EU) institutions, policies, and their direct impact on daily life fuels apathy and vulnerability to misinformation. E2E equips citizens, particularly young people, with the knowledge to make informed electoral choices, critically evaluate EU developments, and engage in democratic processes (e.g., European Citizens' Initiatives, participation in EU elections). This is essential for reinforcing the democratic legitimacy of the Union.
2. Building a European identity and cohesion: The EU is more than a single market; it is a shared project based on common values. E2E fosters a sense of European identity alongside national and local ones, promoting mutual understanding of diverse cultures, histories, and perspectives across Member States. This intercultural competence is key to social cohesion and solidarity, especially in the face of internal divisions and external pressures.

THE NECESSITY OF EDUCATION TO EUROPE (E2E)

3. Preparing for a globalised future: The (EU) is a major global player. Education that addresses the EU's role in global issues - from climate action and sustainable development to digital transition and foreign policy - prepares young people to be effective, globally aware citizens ready to address complex transnational challenges that no single Member State can tackle alone.

4. Enhancing employability and mobility: E2E, particularly through programmes like Erasmus+ and the European Education Area (EEA), promotes learning mobility and the acquisition of transversal skills (like language proficiency, teamwork, adaptability) valued across the (EU) labour market. Understanding (EU) policies on professional recognition and digital skills is a fundamental advantage for future generations.

EDUCATION TO THE EU. CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED:

Despite overall positive engagement, we have identified recurring obstacles:

- Perceived distance and complexity of EU institutions make it difficult for young people to relate to the concept of citizenship.
- Misinformation and low trust in political structures reduce youth motivation to participate.
- Socio-economic issues and local concerns often take precedence over abstract European topics.
- Limited resources and time hinder the ability of organizations to prepare interactive, appealing educational content.

Language and cultural barriers complicate dissemination across diverse communities.

EDUCATION TO THE EU. CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED:

Good Practices and Tools

To counter these challenges, organizations employ:

- Non-formal education tools such as role-playing, debates, workshops, and simulations.
- Digital and gamified learning, including quizzes, apps, and online platforms.
- Collaborative projects like Erasmus+ exchanges and local partnerships with schools and NGOs.
- Use of social media to communicate EU values in relatable and visual ways.

These methods encourage critical thinking, foster dialogue, and build a sense of belonging among young participants.

ACROSS THE ECA PROJECT, SEVERAL RECURRING PRIORITIES EMERGED:

1. Education and Awareness - A strong call for integrating EU citizenship education into both formal and non-formal learning, making it engaging, inclusive, and accessible to all.
2. Youth Participation - Desire for more meaningful roles for young people in EU decision-making, not just consultation but co-creation of policies.
3. Communication and accessibility - Need for clearer, more creative communication about the EU, its purpose, rights, and opportunities.
4. Digital and creative tools - Emphasis on innovation through games, social media, festivals, and technology to make learning about the EU relatable and fun.
5. Sustainability and Green citizenship - Linking EU citizenship education to environmental awareness and responsible, community-oriented behavior.
6. Inclusion and equality - A shared belief that EU citizenship education must reflect equality, diversity, and solidarity.
7. Mobility and Exchange - Calls for more accessible and equitable cross-border learning and volunteering opportunities.

THE ROLE OF FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

Achieving comprehensive E2E requires a strong, synergistic partnership between formal (schools, universities) and non-formal education (youth work, civil society organisations).

Formal Education's contribution

Formal education must integrate (EU) topics into curricula across various subjects —history, civics, economics, and languages — not as an add-on, but as a core component of 21st-century citizenship education.

- Curricular integration: Move beyond teaching basic facts about institutions. Focus on critical analysis of (EU) policy debates, successes, and challenges.
- Teacher training: Invest in mandatory, quality professional development for educators to ensure they possess the necessary expertise and pedagogical tools to teach complex (EU) issues in an engaging, non-partisan manner.
- Promoting mobility: Ensure that student and teacher mobility through programmes like Erasmus+ is accessible, inclusive, and recognised as a vital part of the learning pathway.

THE ROLE OF FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

Non-Formal Education and youth work's dynamic role

Non-formal education (NFE) organisations, including youth associations, have a unique capacity to deliver E2E through participatory, experiential, and learner-centred methods.

- **Experiential Learning:** NFE excels at translating abstract EU concepts into tangible experiences, fostering critical thinking and soft skills essential for active citizenship. This includes youth exchanges, volunteer projects (European Solidarity Corps), simulations, and youth participation structures.
- **Reaching Marginalised Youth:** NFE often reaches young people disengaged from formal education or democratic processes, offering a crucial pathway to inclusive civic engagement.
- **Training Youth Leaders:** Equip youth workers and volunteers as multipliers to facilitate discussions about the EU that are relevant to young people's lives and concerns.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

To translate this vision into reality, we propose the following concrete recommendations, addressing the distinct roles of key stakeholders:

FOR (EU) INSTITUTIONS AND NATIONAL POLICYMAKERS

- Establish a shared (EU) competence framework for European Citizenship education: Develop a non-binding but widely-adopted framework, building on existing initiatives (e.g., Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, to guide Member States on the learning outcomes for E2E across all levels.
- Ensure adequate and targeted funding: Ring-fence funding within the EU programmes (Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps, European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)) to specifically support cross-sectoral E2E projects involving formal schools and NFE partners, with a focus on European citizenship. Simply moving abroad, even if it's a powerful catalyst, isn't enough to establish a European sense of belonging.
- Mandate (EU) civic literacy: Introduce, or strengthen, a mandatory civic education component in national curricula that includes substantial, current, and critical content on the (EU).
- Develop a comprehensive EU Strategy for citizenship education, integrating formal, non-formal, and digital learning frameworks across all members and partner states.
- Link environmental and citizenship education within Green Deal initiatives, making sustainability part of civic identity and responsibility.
- Ensure policy coherence across DGs (Education, Environment, Youth, and Employment) to make European citizenship a cross-cutting theme in all youth-related initiatives.

FOR FORMAL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

- Integrate (EU) Perspectives Across Disciplines: Train teachers to highlight the European dimension in diverse subjects—from understanding (EU) laws in civics to European heritage in history and (EU) economic policies in business studies.
- Prioritise European Teacher Mobility: Actively promote and financially support teacher participation in Erasmus+ mobility to allow them to experience (EU) diversity firsthand and enrich their teaching methods.
- Develop training courses on European Union (EU) education for teachers

FOR NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AND YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

- Systematise collaboration: Establish formal mechanisms at local and regional levels for schools to partner with youth organisations to deliver E2E (e.g., joint projects, mentorships, exchange programmes).
- Focus on youth-driven dialogue: Design and deliver educational activities that empower young people to shape the agenda and discuss the EU's future through their own issues and values (e.g., climate, mental health, social inclusion).
- Promote democratic participation tools: Actively use NFE settings to teach practical skills for democratic engagement, such as structured debating, advocacy, and navigating digital public spheres.
- Integrate European citizenship education into national curricula, focusing on democratic participation, rights, and European values.
- Support teacher training and professional development in European studies, civic engagement, and non-formal education methodologies.

FOR NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AND YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

- Dedicate structured time to European learning, such as annual “European Citizenship Weeks” or themed modules on EU rights, democracy, and sustainability.
- Promote active learning through debates, model EU simulations, community projects, and participatory learning methods.
- Design and deliver non-formal education programs that translate EU values into local action and community engagement.
- Develop accessible educational materials (videos, toolkits, games, workshops) in all European languages.
- Provide feedback to policymakers based on grassroots experiences with young people’s learning and engagement.
- Encourage green and digital volunteering opportunities that link civic participation with sustainability.
- Build networks across borders to share methodologies, good practices, and tools for European citizenship education.

CONCLUSION

To build a generation of informed, engaged, and responsible European citizens, the European Union and its member states must adopt a coordinated, inclusive, and forward-looking approach to education on European citizenship. This requires moving beyond abstract concepts and fragmented initiatives toward a systemic, participatory model of learning that connects young people directly with the values, rights, and opportunities of the European Union.

Education on European citizenship should be integrated across all levels of learning, from schools and universities to non-formal education and community projects, using innovative, interactive, and creative methods that make the EU tangible and relevant to everyday life

Education to Europe is the long-term strategic investment necessary to inoculate the EU against fragmentation and ensure the continued success of the European project.

By empowering the next generation with knowledge, critical thinking, and a sense of shared responsibility, policymakers and educational stakeholders together can build a Union that is more resilient, democratic, and truly united. The time for comprehensive, coordinated action is now.



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