Democracy Education in Europe
A comparative study

VAL-YOU
Education for democratic citizenship

Content

Introduction

Democracy is more than a political system - it is a way of engaging with society, built on participation, dialogue, and respect for diversity. As one of the core European values, democracy is inseparable from human dignity, freedom, equality, and the rule of law.

In an era of increasing political polarization, the rise of misinformation, and challenges to democratic norms, education for democratic citizenship has become more crucial than ever. It equips individuals with the knowledge and skills to navigate complex political landscapes, critically assess information, and actively participate in civic life. Moreover, it fosters social cohesion by promoting mutual understanding, respect, and a shared commitment to fundamental rights and values.

Democracy education is widely acknowledged as a vital component of national education systems across Europe, albeit with varying degrees of emphasis and consistent implementation.

Countries like Germany and Austria, shaped by significant historical events, demonstrate a strong commitment to embedding democratic values within their curricula and fostering active student participation through various initiatives and institutional support. Greece, with its historical connection to democracy, prioritizes civic engagement and human rights from an early age. In contrast, while Italy and Spain recognize the importance of democracy education, they face challenges in ensuring consistent and in-depth implementation across

"Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education."

Franklin D. Roosevelt

all institutions, partly due to regional autonomy in Spain and varying school priorities in Italy. The Netherlands, while legally mandated to promote democratic values, also experiences variability in implementation due to the flexibility afforded to schools in shaping their programs.

Despite these differences, the underlying recognition of democracy education's importance in preparing informed and engaged citizens remains a common thread across these European nations.

The ways in which democracy is taught and experienced in schools however vary significantly across Europe. While some countries integrate democratic education into their curricula through participatory school governance and civic engagement projects, others rely primarily on formal classroom instruction. The extent to which young people are encouraged to think critically, engage in debate, and develop a sense of agency differs depending on historical legacies, political priorities, and educational traditions.

This comparative analysis explores how different European countries—Germany, Austria, Greece, Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands—approach democracy education, shedding light on their unique strategies, common challenges, and the broader implications for the future of democratic participation.

By examining these diverse approaches, we aim to understand what works, what gaps remain, and how education can continue to strengthen democracy in an evolving political landscape.

Democracy education in the selected countries

Key principles, values and objectives of democracy education

 There is one common goal of democracy education across Europe:

To equip students with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed for active and responsible citizenship.

However, the ways in which countries achieve this goal differ, influenced by historical experiences, political systems, and educational traditions.

Germany's democracy education is guided by the Beutelsbach Consensus (1976), which establishes three fundamental principles:

o the prohibition of indoctrination, ensuring that schools encourage independent thinking rather than imposing political views;
o the encouragement of political controversy, requiring that societal and political issues be open for debate to reflect real-world complexities;
o and the empowerment of students, equipping them with the skills to analyse political situations and actively participate in democratic processes.

Schools must present political issues fairly, encouraging independent and critical thinking without promoting specific political ideologies.

Core values concern human rights and dignity, equality and justice, freedom of thought and expression, solidarity and democratic participation. Objectives are transmitting political literacy but also fostering critical thinking and active participation.

Germany's education system is decentralised, with each of the 16 federal states responsible for their own educational policies. The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (Kultusministerkonferenz, KMK) however ensures coordination and harmonization across states to maintain nationwide educational standards. KMK's resolutions, such as the 2018 Recommendation on Democratic Education, guide democratic learning in schools. Education for democracy should not only take place in individual subjects, but should be anchored in all subjects as a cross-curricular teaching principle from first grade on.

Also Italy focusses on fostering democratic engagement beyond theoretical knowledge. The country takes a participatory approach to democracy education, emphasizing civic engagement through debates, student councils, and initiatives like the Children's and Teens' Council, which enables students to propose local community projects and to have representation in relations with the municipal administration. By engaging with municipal authorities on issues such as pedestrian safety near schools, students gain direct experience with democratic decision-making.

While Italy prioritizes hands-on civic engagement, Spain focuses more on classroom discussions and representation. Spain's democracy education framework is built on key principles of pluralism and tolerance, ensuring respect for diverse perspectives, though political tensions—particularly in Catalonia—can influence its teaching. Schools encourage student participation and representation through elected class representatives and school councils, though their influence is often limited. A strong emphasis is placed on critical thinking and debate, but controversial topics may sometimes be avoided. Additionally, human rights and equality, including discussions on racism, gender equality, and

LGBTQIA+ rights, are part of the curriculum, though the depth and focus vary by region. Despite efforts to foster engagement, challenges remain in ensuring meaningful student involvement and addressing sensitive topics effectively.

Greece combines civic knowledge with practical engagement to immerse students in democratic principles in their daily lives. Democracy education is structured around principles such as the rule of law, human rights, participation, pluralism, and critical thinking. The curriculum prioritizes civic knowledge, teaching students about the Greek Constitution, European institutions, and global democratic systems. Also in Greece, schools also encourage active citizenship through student councils, debates, and volunteer initiatives, while promoting ethical awareness and democratic decision-making. A strong emphasis is placed on practical engagement to ensure that students experience democracy in their daily lives.

Like Germany, Austria follows a structured approach to democracy education through the Educational Principle Citizenship Education/General Ordinance Citizenship Education (Unterrichtsprinzip Politische Bildung) and international frameworks like the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education. Like in the German Beutelsbach Consensus, the controversy principle ensures that political and societal issues are debated openly, while the prohibition of overwhelming influence protects students from being guided toward specific ideologies. The system also promotes analytical skills, enabling students to critically assess social structures and power dynamics.

> **Core values are:**
>
> - Human Rights: Promoting equality, justice, solidarity, and freedom.
>
> - Anti-discrimination: Combating prejudice, racism, antisemitism, sexism, and homophobia.
>
> - Sustainability: Encouraging responsible use of resources and promoting equitable distribution.

Austrian schools focus on developing democratic competences, raising awareness of global challenges, and practical implementation through student council elections and parliamentary simulations, encouraging personal responsibility in political engagement.

The Netherlands shares some similarities with Germany and Austria in its structured approach, with a focus on democratic resilience and critical thinking. However, it also places significant emphasis on pluralism and inclusion, fostering respect for diverse perspectives, which aligns closely with the Dutch approach to ensuring active citizenship and participation in local governance.

In the Netherlands, democracy education is deeply embedded in the curriculum, aiming to foster democratic awareness, social responsibility, and active citizenship. The Dutch approach is based on democratic resilience, helping students engage with democratic values and resist misinformation; participation and representation, providing opportunities for decision-making through student councils and (local) governance projects; and pluralism and inclusion, promoting respect for diverse perspectives and cultures. So like Italy, the Netherlands has a strong focus on community

engagement through projects that connect schools with local organizations, giving students hands-on civic experience. The legal citizenship mandate requires, among other things, that schools promote the basic values of the democratic rule of law. Basic values are basic, minimal and widely endorsed values that support the democratic rule of law. Without citizens who support these values, a democracy cannot exist. The government therefore asks education to contribute to promoting them. This is an obligation of effort: schools are not responsible for what pupils think, but they must promote basic values.

In conclusion, while a shared commitment to equipping students for active and responsible citizenship unites democracy education across Europe, the approaches taken by individual countries are shaped by their unique historical, political, and educational landscapes.

Germany and Austria follow structured political education frameworks (e.g., the Beutelsbach Consensus), emphasizing critical thinking and avoiding indoctrination, while Italy prioritizes hands-on civic engagement. Spain focuses on classroom discussions and navigating political tensions, and Greece blends civic knowledge with practical application. The Netherlands emphasizes

democratic resilience, participation, and inclusion, often through community engagement.

While the approaches to democracy education vary, they all share a common goal: to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for active and informed citizenship. Democracy education in all countries strives to ensure that democratic principles remain deeply embedded in society, preparing students to contribute meaningfully to the future of democracy.

European and international frameworks shaping democracy education

The development and implementation of democracy education across European countries are significantly influenced and underpinned by a robust network of European and international standards, reflecting a collective dedication to fostering democratic values, respect for human rights, and the cultivation of active citizenship.

Within the European Union, responsibility for education policy rests mainly with the individual Member States. Even so, several Union-wide documents offer strategic guidance.

A prominent example is the **Paris Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education** (2015), drafted after the terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen.

It was followed by the **Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on promoting common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching**, which encourages schools to foster an understanding of EU values.

Article 2 of the **Treaty on European Union (TEU)**, which enshrines respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights, underpins these efforts.

By contrast, the **Council of Europe**—a separate, pan-European organisation that predates the EU—has cultivated a long-standing tradition of citizenship education aimed at strengthening democracy and human rights across its 46 Member States.

Its **Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education** serves as a foundational framework, urging governments to prioritise civic engagement, critical thinking and respect for human rights in their national curricula.

To operationalise these goals, the Council of Europe released the **Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC)** in 2018. The RFCDC offers a comprehensive set of competences—knowledge, skills, attitudes and values—that can be adapted to different national contexts. Many education ministries use it to shape policies so that young people do not merely learn about democratic values but practise them across subjects ranging from history and social studies to the arts.

Most recently, the **Reykjavik Principles of Democracy** (2023), adopted at the Council of Europe Summit of Heads of State and Government, reaffirm the shared responsibility of national, regional and local authorities to safeguard democracy and good governance, and to enable meaningful public participation.

Beyond European frameworks, democracy education is also aligned with global standards.

The **United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4.7** (SDG 4.7) promotes education for sustainable development and global citizenship. SDG 4.7 aims to ensure that by 2030, all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, a culture of peace and non-violence, and global citizenship. SDG 4.7 advocates for a holistic approach to education, where democracy education plays a central role in fostering active global citizenship. This aligns with the goals of democratic education, which not only focuses on preparing students to participate in local democratic processes but also encourages them to engage with global issues, understand international frameworks, and contribute to a more just and peaceful world.

Furthermore, the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** and the **UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training** (2011) contribute to shaping national educational strategies, reinforcing the principles of dignity, equality, and social justice.

Integrating democracy education and European values

Mapping the integration of democracy education in national frameworks

Having explored the diverse approaches to democracy education across Europe, we now delve into the formal recognition and structural embedding of this crucial field within national education systems. Specifically, we turn our attention to the question of whether democracy education is explicitly mandated or referenced within national education policies and curricula. Furthermore, for those nations where it is included, we will examine its pedagogical placement: is it treated as a distinct, standalone subject, affording it dedicated time and resources, or is it integrated as a cross-cutting theme, woven into the fabric of various subject areas?

In all countries, there is a clear and explicit mandate for democracy education within their national education policies and curricula. While the overarching goal of fostering active and responsible citizenship remains consistent, the structural implementation varies.

In Germany, democracy education, often referred to as "Politische Bildung" (political education), is explicitly mandated and referenced within national education policies and curricula in Germany. Due to Germany's federal education system, each state determines its own curriculum, but nationwide coordination is ensured by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK). The KMK emphasizes that political education should not be confined to a single subject but integrated throughout the curriculum.

Democracy education is embedded across various subjects, including Social Studies, Geography, Ethics, History and also German Language which includes communication, argumentation, and critical analysis of texts related to social and political issues.

In Italy, democracy education, often referred to as "Educazione Civica" (Civic Education), is explicitly mandated and referenced within Italian national education policies and curricula

How is democracy education integrated in the national education policy or curriculum?

	🇩🇪	🇮🇹	🇪🇸	🇬🇷	🇦🇹	🇳🇱
As distinct subject	⊗	⊗	⊗	✓	✓	⊗
As cross-cutting theme	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

(Law No. 92 of 2019). Civic education a compulsory subject across all levels of education, from primary to upper secondary school, focusing on rights awareness, critical thinking, and active participation. Schools incorporate civic education lessons, debates, student councils, and community projects to engage students in democratic life. Initiatives such as the already mentioned Children's and Youth Councils provide students with opportunities to collaborate with local governments and influence real-world decisions.

For Spain, democracy education is explicitly referenced and integrated as a cross-cutting theme. A key reference is the Organic Law on Education (LOE), particularly as amended by the Organic Law 3/2020 (LOMLOE). Elements of democracy education, including democratic values, citizenship education, and European identity, are expected to be woven into various subjects across the curriculum, particularly in social sciences, history, and language arts. The curriculum frameworks at both the national and regional levels outline how these competencies should be addressed within different subject areas.

Also in Greece democracy education is explicitly mentioned and within the Greek national education policies and curriculum. Law 1566/1985 emphasizes the development of responsible citizens with democratic values. A mixed approach is used:

○ As a standalone subject, students take Civic Education (Κοινωνική και Πολιτική Αγωγή), Political Education (Πολιτική Παιδεία), and Contemporary Issues of Democracy and Human Rights (Σύγχρονα Ζητήματα Δημοκρατίας και Ανθρώπινων Δικαιωμάτων), covering topics such as

democracy, human rights, political participation, and European values.
○ Additionally, democratic principles are integrated into other subjects, including History, Social Studies, Philosophy, and Modern & Ancient Greek Language.

Austria has a clear mandate for democracy education, "Citizenship Education" ("Staatsbürgerliche Bildung") has been integrated into the school system since 1978 through the educational principle of cross-curricular teaching. It applies to all school types and levels:

"Citizenship education fosters individual development and contributes to the progress of society as a whole. It plays an active role in shaping society and promoting democracy."
(Grundsatzerlass/General ordinance 2015

Its implementation varies across school types. In vocational schools, citizenship education is a standalone subject, while in other schools, it is combined with subjects such as history, contemporary history, law, or economics. Since 2016, citizenship education has been mandatory from the 6th grade onward. In elementary schools, it is integrated into general studies. Curricula encourage exploration of local, national, European, and global political issues.

In the Netherlands, the Law on the Enhancement of Active Citizenship and Social Integration obligates primary and secondary schools to promote active citizenship and social integration. Schools and institutions must promote knowledge of the basic values of

the democratic constitutional state to their pupils and students in a purposeful, coherent and recognisable way and allow them to develop the social and civic competences necessary for living together in a democratic constitutional state. The law also requires that the basic values are visible at school, that pupils can practice them and that the school provides an environment in which everyone feels accepted and safe. The inspectorate assesses whether schools and institutions meet these legal requirements and whether the board fulfils its duty of care. This assessment is an integral part of inspection supervision. It's important to note that due to the freedom of education in the Netherlands, schools have some flexibility in how they implement citizenship education, but the legal mandate and the integrated approach within the core objectives are clear. Democracy education, often referred to as citizenship education ("burgerschapsonderwijs"), follows a cross-curricular approach, embedded in subjects like History, Social Studies, and Ethics.

Integrating democracy education and European values in concrete school subjects

Democracy education is integrated into various subjects across European countries, ensuring students develop an understanding of democratic principles, institutions, and active citizenship. While each country has its own approach, common themes include civic engagement, critical thinking, and experiential learning.

Social Studies / Civics / Politics ...

play a central role in all countries. Here, students learn the basics of political systems, institutions and democratic processes, engage

with fundamental rights and European institutions.

A German example shows, that through simulations, such as those of municipal council meetings or EU Parliament sessions, students experience democratic will-formation firsthand and grapple with its challenges. Addressing current political topics, researching information, discussing different points of view, and forming one's own opinion are also important components of the lessons.

History ...

lessons illuminate democracy and European values from a historical perspective. Students learn how democracies can emerge and disappear, the importance of human rights, and how European integration has progressed.

The example of the Second World War and the Nazi era highlights the importance of defending democratic values and protecting human rights. The development of the European Union and the associated opportunities and challenges are also addressed.

The study of ancient Greek democracy as a foundation of modern democratic principles, alongside European historical events like the Enlightenment and the development of democratic states is a core topic in Greece.

Ethics and Religion ...

focus on values, norms, moral decisions, and intercultural dialogue. These subjects promote the development of empathy, tolerance, and a sense of responsibility. Students explore different value systems and discuss which values are indispensable for a democratic society. These subjects are not mandatory in

all countries. For example, in the Netherlands, ethics—referred to as philosophy—and religion are not compulsory in some schools.

Lessons in the native or foreign languages

also make an important contribution to democracy education. They focus on promoting critical thinking, argumentation skills, and participation in public discourse. Students analyse political speeches and texts and learn how language can be used to influence public opinion. They also deal with current news and traditional as well as new media formats.

Philosophy

In Greece also philosophy is an important subject to study of the way legal rules contribute to the harmonious life of societies and of democratic and human rights such as freedom, and equality. And also Ancient Greek Literature has elements relevant for democracy education, for example by teaching the Epitaph of Pericles, a work that is a hymn to the Athenian Republic and a monument of world heritage. The goal is, among other things, for students to identify the characteristics and basic values of democracy through comparison with other systems.

In all countries, democracy education is carefully adapted to students' cognitive development, progressing from fundamental values in early years to complex political analysis in later stages. This gradual approach ensures that students engage with democratic principles in an age-appropriate manner, building their understanding over time.

In Germany, democracy education follows a structured progression. In primary school (ages 6-10), children are introduced to basic concepts such as fairness, respect, and decision-making through activities like class rules and school parliaments. As they move into lower secondary education (ages 10-16), they begin exploring political systems, rights, and responsibilities through discussions and critical thinking exercises. By upper secondary school (ages 16-18/19), students engage in advanced studies of political theories, human rights, and global challenges, preparing them for active citizenship.

Austria takes an integrated approach, embedding democracy education across all school levels. In primary school, it is included within Social Studies, while in secondary education, it becomes more structured, starting in the 6th grade, ensuring continuous exposure to democratic principles.

In the Netherlands, democracy education is part of the broader framework of citizenship education, which is mandatory for all schools. While primary education focuses on social interaction, respect, and basic democratic values, lower secondary education introduces more structured discussions on civic rights, political systems, and media literacy. In upper secondary education, democracy education is integrated into social studies and history, where students critically examine political ideologies, governance structures, and contemporary democratic challenges. However, due to the decentralized education system, the extent and depth of democracy education can vary between schools.

In countries such as Italy, Spain, and Greece, democracy education follows a progressive model. During primary school (ages 6-10), students are introduced to democratic values and basic civic duties. In lower secondary (ages 11-15), they explore democratic institutions, governance structures, and civic responsibilities. By upper secondary school (ages 15-18), students engage in an in-depth study of political systems, ideologies, and global governance, developing the analytical skills needed to critically assess democracy in both national and international contexts.
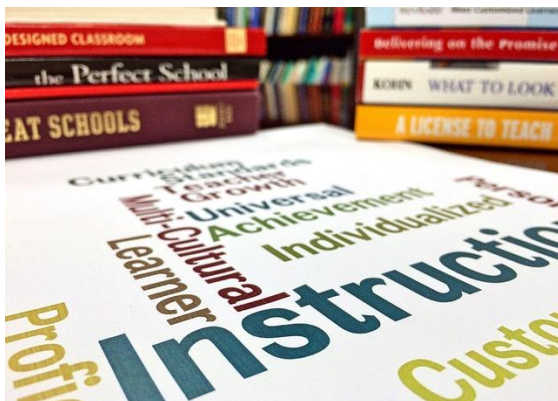
Democracy education in the Curriculum

Across Europe, diverse educational strategies are employed to integrate democracy education into curricula, each aiming to cultivate civic responsibility, active participation, and critical thought in students:

🇩🇪 Germany

German has a federal system of education so that the curricula differ between all 16 states. The list is an example of the curriculum links in Saxony.

German language
Intercultural competence and tolerance:
o Grade 5, Learning Area 3: Reading and Understanding: Students explore fairy tales from different cultures and learn the value of tolerance and intercultural understanding.
o Grade 9, Learning Area 3: Reading and Understanding: Students read and compare literary works of German literature with works from other European and non-European literatures.
Democratic values and participation:
o Grades 11/12, Basic Course, Learning Area 2: Designing Speeches: Students analyse and design speeches and in doing so, engage with rhetorical devices and strategies of opinion formation.

Civics/Law/Economics
European integration and cooperation:
o Grade 10, Learning Area 2: Challenges for Europe in a Global World: Students engage with the goals, structures, and challenges of the European Union.
Democracy and the rule of law:
o Grade 9, Learning Area 1: Political Order in the Federal Republic of Germany: Students acquire knowledge about fundamental rights, the principles of state structure, and

the constitutional bodies of the Federal Republic of Germany.

History
European history and integration:
o Grade 6, Learning Area 1: Roman Civilization and its Formative Impact on Europe: Students learn about the significance of the Roman heritage for European culture.
o Grades 11/12, Basic Course, Learning Area 4: Challenge "Peace": Students investigate the development of European integration as a path to securing peace.
Human rights and democracy:
o Grade 9, Learning Area 2: Germany's Path from Democracy to Dictatorship: Students analyse the development of the Weimar Republic and the threats to democracy.

Ethics
Intercultural competence and tolerance:
o Grade 7, Learning Area 1: Understanding and Communication: Students explore the causes of conflict, which can also arise from different cultural and religious values, and develop strategies for conflict resolution.
Human rights and human dignity:
o Grades 11/12, Basic Course, Learning Area 3: Questions about Justice: Students discuss the universal claim of human rights.

Geography
European integration and cooperation:
o Grade 6, Elective Area 1: Economic Cooperation in Europe: Students gain insights into economic cooperation in Europe and learn the importance of cooperation and exchange.
Sustainable development:
o Grade 11, Basic Course, Learning Area 3: Global Disparities and Interdependencies: Students analyse global disparities and

learn the importance

Across all German states, there is similarly broad anchoring, but the time explicitly devoted to addressing democracy and European values remains limited.

🇮🇹 Italy

In Italy, democracy education is primarily integrated through the mandatory subject of **Civic Education**, which requires at least 33 hours per year. This subject focuses on the Italian Constitution, national and European institutions, electoral processes, and the separation of powers.

History lessons explore the evolution of democracy, including ancient Greece and European integration.

Philosophy in upper secondary school fosters critical thinking on political and ethical issues.

While **Social Studies and Religion** can contribute, they must respect state secularism.

Many schools supplement classroom learning with **interdisciplinary projects and extracurricular activities**, such as simulations of Italian institutions and visits to significant democratic sites, to enhance practical engagement. Key aspects covered include human rights (like the European Convention on Human Rights), the rule of law, sustainability, and global citizenship, with increasing attention paid to media literacy to combat disinformation.

🇪🇸 Spain

In Spain, education for democracy and European values are mainly dealt with in the subject "Education in civic and ethical values"

It focuses on four key competence areas:

1. **Self-knowledge and personal autonomy:** Development of reflection on identity and emotional management.
2. **Understanding of the social and democratic framework:** Understanding of coexistence and commitment to democratic values.
3. **Sustainability and environmental ethics:** Adoption of sustainable attitudes and understanding of interdependence with the environment.
4. **Emotional education:** Development of sensitivity and affections in the face of ethical and social problems.

The curriculum for Education in Civic and Ethical Values in Spain covers various aspects related to democracy and European values, including:

o **Democratic systems and institutions:** Understanding the structures and functions of democratic societies, emphasising the importance of citizen participation.
o **Citizens' rights and responsibilities:** Reflection on human rights, dignity, effective equality and co-responsibility between women and men, as well as respect for diversity and minorities.
o **Contemporary ethical and civic issues:** Analysis of topics such as poverty, violence, the migratory phenomenon and the climate crisis, promoting a critical and engaged attitude towards these challenges.
o **Sustainability and environmental ethics:** Fostering sustainable living habits and understanding the interdependence between human beings and the natural environment.

Civic and Ethical Values Education is only taught in the last stage of the primary cycle, in 5th and 6th grades when children are between 10 and 12 years old.

The total time devoted to the subject is 35h. In total.

🇬🇷 Greece

The main aspects of Democracy and European Values that are covered in the curriculum are the following:

o **Democratic systems and institutions:** In order to provide students with a comprehensive knowledge of modern democratic systems, the types of Democracy, as they operate in various European countries, are presented. Furthermore, for a better understanding, it is necessary to analyse the Democratic institutions that support each democratic system and help it to correct and orderly functioning.
o **Citizens rights and responsibilities:** As Thucydides states in the Epitaph of Pericles, the true citizen is the one who is concerned with public affairs and not the peaceful one who is concerned only with his personal affairs. Therefore, the basic responsibility of every citizen for the smooth functioning of the democratic system is to be involved in and interested in public affairs. Therefore, it is not enough to just know our rights, but mainly the responsibilities we have as active citizens, and this is what the teaching of Democratic and European values aims at.
o **Human rights dignity:** Although most European countries have a democratic system of government, human rights continue to be challenged in the modern era. For this reason, it is essential

to equip our students with the values of empathy, tolerance and respect for the other, in order to create active citizens who will defend and protect these values.

🇦🇹 Austria

Citizenship education in the Austrian school system has been integrated into the school system since 1978 through the educational principle of cross-curricular teaching. It applies to all school types and levels.

"Citizenship education fosters individual development and contributes to the progress of society as a whole. It plays an active role in shaping society and promoting democracy." (Grundsatzerlass/General ordinance 2015)

Since 2016, citizenship education has been mandatory from the 6th grade onward. In elementary schools, it is integrated into general studies. Curricula encourage exploration of local, national, European, and global political issues.

More details are available here.

In the toolkit "EUROPA in der Schule. Aktionsideen, Projekte und Angebote für SchulleiterInnen und Lehrkräfte", published in January 2025, there are 5 pages with references to European and citizenship topics in the different curricula.

Here comes one example for the curricula of citizenship education in the curricula of grade 6 to 8:

o Areas of application grade 6: opportunities for political action in the present and future (levels of political action - local, state, federal, EU - and their impact on everyday life and the world in which pupils live and act politically)

o Areas of application grade 7: identities and politics in the present and future (... building blocks of national and European identities); elections and voting in the present and future.

o Areas of application grade 8: Europeanization (different historical and current concepts of Europe; the EU as an economic and peace project; the end of a divided Europe in 1989 and its effects; Austria's accession to the EU and the subsequent changes in foreign, security and neutrality policy, in society and everyday life; the influence of the EU on the pupils' living environment).

🇳🇱 Netherlands

In Dutch secondary education, democracy education is primarily integrated into the broader framework of citizenship education. Historically, the Netherlands' constitutional commitment to educational freedom has granted schools significant autonomy in shaping their curricula, leading to diverse implementations of citizenship education across institutions. Consequently, there is no standardized number of hours mandated nationally for citizenship education across specific grades. Schools are responsible for integrating citizenship objectives into their programs, often within subjects like social studies, history or through interdisciplinary approaches and project work (e.g. many schools participate in the educational projects of ProDemos - House for Democracy and the Rule of Law). Another example is the European Parliament Ambassador School programme, which aims to enhance students' understanding of parliamentary democracy and European citizenship. This flexibility results in variations in how and when citizenship education is delivered throughout the secondary education years.

Despite differences in their education systems, European countries share key elements in their approaches to democracy education. Rather than being confined to a single subject, democracy education is often integrated across multiple disciplines as mentioned above. This ensures that students encounter democratic principles from various perspectives, deepening their understanding of governance, rights, and responsibilities.

Experiential learning plays a crucial role, with schools employing simulations, student councils, and civic projects to provide hands-on engagement with democratic processes.

Another essential component is media literacy, which equips students with the skills to critically assess information, navigate digital spaces responsibly, and recognize misinformation. Given the increasing influence of social media and digital platforms, fostering critical engagement with information is more vital than ever.

Finally, democracy education in Europe places a strong emphasis on European values, including human rights, sustainability, and civic responsibilities. By highlighting these shared principles, schools help students develop a sense of European identity while reinforcing the democratic foundations that unite the continent.

Actively engaging students

Different European countries use diverse teaching methods to enhance democracy education. Besides being part of regular classroom activities, schools integrate interactive and experiential learning approaches, such as political simulations, student-led debates, and media literacy projects. Extracurricular initiatives, including student councils, Model United Nations, and civic engagement programs, provide further opportunities for hands-on participation. Additionally, partnerships with civil society organizations, visits to democratic institutions, and national programs promoting inclusion and active citizenship help reinforce democratic values beyond the classroom. A democratic school culture plays a crucial role in fostering these values, ensuring that participation, dialogue, and respect for diversity are embedded in daily school life through student representation, participatory decision-making, and a commitment to inclusivity.

Insights into the project countries

🇩🇪 Germany

Beyond the classroom, German schools actively promote democracy education through a variety of interactive and experiential learning methods. Workshops on topics like conflict resolution, media literacy, and political participation help students develop democratic competencies, while extracurricular activities such as student councils, debate clubs, and Model United Nations further reinforce these principles. Students also gain firsthand experience by visiting democratic institutions, including parliament, courts, and historical sites, deepening their understanding of governance and civic responsibility.

Across the curriculum, particularly in Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt, students engage in diverse activities designed to foster democratic values and active citizenship. Social studies classes incorporate simulations of political decision-making, such as mock sessions of the municipal council or the EU Parliament, giving students hands-on experience with democratic processes and consensus-building. History classes utilize role-playing exercises to explore historical events, fostering empathy and an understanding of multiple perspectives. Debates and discussions on current political and societal issues are encouraged across subjects like social studies, German, and ethics, helping students develop research skills, construct arguments, and engage in respectful discourse.

Media literacy is integrated into German classes through project-based learning, including student newspapers and literature magazines, teaching responsible journalism. Geography classes promote active citizenship through research projects on global issues like climate change and migration, encouraging data analysis and the presentation of findings. Additionally, programs such as Schools without Racism – Schools with Courage emphasize inclusion, social responsibility, and democratic engagement, ensuring that these values are woven into both academic and social aspects of school life across all German states.

🇮🇹 Italy

In Italy, students play a fundamental role in democracy education, actively participating in school councils through democratically elected representatives. These councils provide a platform for discussing social and political issues, fostering critical thinking and public speaking skills. While democracy education is primarily integrated into classroom teaching—often in increasingly intercultural settings—third-sector organizations, such as cultural associations and groups promoting democratic values, also contribute by offering educational projects.

On significant national and European democracy-related days, schools organize visits to key democratic landmarks, such as the Italian Parliament and sites of anti-fascist resistance, reinforcing historical awareness and civic engagement. Through these combined efforts, students gain both theoretical knowledge and practical experience in democratic participation. Schools collaborate with third-sector organizations to promote democratic values.

🇪🇸 Spain

Also Spanish democracy education combines classroom teaching with field trips to democratic institutions, ensuring a practical understanding of governance. Pupils are involved in democratic education through a variety of participatory activities that promote engagement, critical thinking and real-life application of democratic principles. For example, pupils elect representatives to participate in decision-making processes alongside teachers and parents, giving them a voice in school policies and activities. Moreover, the curriculum encourages structured debates on ethical and civic issues, which is designed to help students develop argumentative skills and respect for diversity of opinion.

🇬🇷 Greece

In Greece, students actively engage in democracy education through a variety of hands-on activities that foster civic responsibility and critical thinking. School councils provide a platform for student representation, allowing them to participate in decision-making and school governance. Debates on political, social, and ethical issues enhance students' analytical and public speaking skills, while simulations such as the Hellenic and European Parliament and Model United Nations (MUN) offer practical insights into democratic processes and international diplomacy.

Beyond the classroom, students take part in community projects and volunteering initiatives, promoting social responsibility and active citizenship. Schools also organize workshops and seminars on democracy, human rights, and global challenges, often in collaboration with NGOs, universities, and external experts. Programs like the Parliament of Youth and extracurricular initiatives further enrich students' understanding of governance and civic participation. Additionally, digital resources like Photodentro support democracy education by providing interactive learning materials.

Cultural events celebrating diversity and tolerance play a key role in fostering respect for different perspectives and traditions. Through these combined efforts, Greek schools equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to become informed, engaged citizens at both the local and global levels.

🇦🇹 Austria

In Austria, students engage in student parliaments at federal and provincial levels, participate in the Model United Nations Vienna, and visit interactive political exhibitions like *Europa Experience*. Citizenship education is promoted through school partnerships and formal representation of students.

"Schools are spaces where democratic actions are practiced, helping students recognize their right to participation and the impact of active engagement. Sustainable cooperation within school communities, such as through class forums, school forums, and student councils, is vital for fostering democratic experiences in daily school life." (Grundsatzerlass 2015)

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There is a very lively scene of civil society actors coming to school and lots of memorial places that can be visited (most of them providing educational programmes). In Austria there is a very large workshop programme funded by the ministry, which allows schools to invite experts from civil society for workshops (235 offers from 77 different initiatives). The idea is to strengthen democratic competences and resilience:
https://oead.at/de/schule/extremismuspraev ention

Erinnen.at is responsible for the so called "Zeitzeug:innen-Programm (remembrance programme inviting witnesses of the Holocaust to school" of the ministry of education.

Every Austrian school class should visit a memorial site like Mauthausen or Auschwitz. There are lots of educational programmes in the Austrian Parliament and the Parliaments of the "Länder".

🇳🇱 The Netherlands

Dutch schools prioritize media literacy, social studies, and hands-on projects, equipping students with analytical skills necessary for engaging in a democratic society. Beyond the classroom, many Dutch schools offer extracurricular activities like student councils, debate clubs, and youth parliaments, providing students with practical experience in democratic decision-making. Many schools participate in the already mentioned educational projects of ProDemos. Visits to government institutions, participation in simulations of parliamentary procedures, and civic engagement projects further enhance their understanding of democratic values.

Additionally, in all European countries, student participation in European initiatives provides an excellent opportunity to connect with peers from different nations and engage with European principles and values. This experience fosters empathy, tolerance, and critical thinking. More importantly, it allows students to actively practice and develop essential democratic skills, particularly as they gain the right to vote at the age of 17.

Evaluation of democracy education

Evaluating democracy education is essential to ensuring that it effectively equips students with the knowledge, skills, and motivation needed for active and informed participation in democratic society, while also allowing for continuous improvement in teaching methods and curriculum development.

The evaluation of democracy education varies significantly across countries, reflecting different educational priorities and assessment methodologies. In Germany, assessment faces challenges due to its focus on factual knowledge rather than essential skills like critical thinking and political participation. To improve this, alternative methods such as portfolios, presentations, and project-based evaluations should be more widely implemented.

Greece employs a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, including standardized assessments, surveys, classroom observations, and project-based activities. Similarly, Austria integrates democracy education into standardized assessments, including school-leaving examinations. Participation in international studies such as the IEA's CIVED and ICCS provides comparative insights, while the Austrian Democracy Monitor tracks public attitudes toward democracy, including among young people.

In the Netherlands, democracy education is evaluated through a combination of curriculum-based assessments, national surveys, and participation in international studies like ICCS. Schools focus on competency-based evaluation, incorporating discussions, debates, and project-based learning to assess students' democratic skills. They have a lot of room to determine their own content and approach to citizenship education, as long as the requirements of the law are met. This means, for instance, that a school can decide for itself how to interpret the learning objectives or which values it wants to impart, as long as all legal requirements are met.

The Dutch Inspectorate of Education monitors the integration of civic education in schools, ensuring alignment with national democratic values. The inspectorate determines whether education aimed at promoting citizenship:

o is targeted (are there concrete learning objectives, for knowledge, attitudes and skills?)
o is coherent (is there a logical structure?)
o recognisable (does the school put the learning objectives and coherence into practice?)

The inspectorate also determines whether schools pay attention to the promotion of basic values and the promotion of social and civic competences.

Finally, the inspectorate pays attention to whether the school climate reflects basic values:

o Do teachers teach the basic values?
o Can pupils practice putting basic values into practice?
o Do pupils and teachers feel safe and accepted?

Across Europe, democracy education is implemented through a variety of approaches, reflecting historical, cultural, and political influences.

Despite differing methodologies, all countries emphasize the importance of fostering active citizenship, critical thinking, and democratic engagement among students to ensure a well-informed and participatory society.

Teacher training and resources

Teacher training

Teaching in the field of democracy education requires specific training due to its unique challenges. The fast-evolving political landscape demands that educators stay informed about emerging issues, shifting ideologies, and the changing dynamics of democratic practices. Sensitive topics such as human rights, equality, and social justice need to be approached with care, ensuring that all students feel respected and heard in discussions. Additionally, teachers must be equipped to manage the complexities of differing political views in the classroom, fostering critical thinking while maintaining an environment of mutual respect. Specific training empowers educators to navigate these challenges effectively and create an engaging, inclusive learning environment.

Specific teacher training programs for democracy education exist in several countries, though their accessibility and mandatory status vary.

In Germany, such programs are available, but participation is typically voluntary. Teachers can access training through online portals or in-house workshops. Although citizenship education is part of pre-service training in colleges, in-service programs are not mandatory, and low participation rates sometimes lead to course cancellations. However, democracy education is an essential part of teacher training in Germany. Teachers commit to upholding democratic norms and values when they begin their careers.

In Italy, teachers have opportunities to engage in democracy education training with a focus on civic education and citizenship rights. Universities offer extensive courses on democracy, human rights, and active citizenship, with an increasing shift toward interactive and digital formats. Regional institutions also play a key role in supporting training.

In Spain, national and regional initiatives provide resources such as online teaching guides and workshops through the Centres of Pedagogical Resources in Catalonia. While in-

service training is encouraged, it is not obligatory.

Greece offers a more structured approach, including training sessions provided by the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP), universities, and NGOs. Programs run by the Hellenic Parliament aim to deepen teachers' understanding of democratic principles, though participation remains optional.

In Austria, training is integrated into specialized programs like the Jean Monnet Teacher Training at the University of Vienna, which focuses on EU studies and citizenship. However, these programs are not compulsory for all teachers.

Similarly, in the Netherlands, democracy education is an integral part of teacher development. Various educational institutions offer specific programs, providing both online and in-person training to equip teachers with the tools to integrate democratic values and principles into their classrooms.

Educational resources for democracy education

Several countries offer a variety of educational resources to support democracy education.

In Germany, a strong academic foundation exists, with numerous research projects and dedicated professorships. The Federal Agency for Civic Education (bpb) provides an extensive range of online materials, including articles, videos, and tools like the "Wahl-O-Mat," which helps students compare their political positions with those of different parties.

In Italy, the Ministry of Education promotes civic engagement and democratic values, with local schools collaborating with external

organizations such as associations for legality (Libera against the mafia) or Catholic Action. Many schools integrate Erasmus projects into their curricula.

Spain provides some resources through the website 'EducaGob', which compiles educational materials on ethics but lacks specific content for democracy education.

In Greece, textbooks provided by the Ministry of Education focus on democracy and civic responsibilities. The digital platform "Photodentro" offers interactive tools, while educational programs by the Hellenic Parliament and NGOs such as the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation further support teachers. Greece also participates in European initiatives like Erasmus+ and the Council of Europe's Education for Democratic Citizenship, offering additional resources to help integrate democracy education into classrooms.

Austria supports teachers through the [Austrian Centre for Citizenship Education in Schools (Zentrum polis)](), which provides educational materials and training. The Centre is also responsible for the coordination of the large school network ["EUrope at school"](). Forum Politische Bildung publishes a [magazine for teachers](). The [Democracy Centre Vienna]() is an independent scientific institution, active in both research and practical education.

In the Netherlands, SLO serves as the national expertise centre for curriculum development. They developed a current draft core objectives for citizenship (commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science) and provide concrete ways to get started with basic citizenship skills at https://www.slo.nl/thema/meer/basisvaardigheden/burgerschap/

The aim of the [Expertise Centre for Citizenship]() is to offer adequate support in giving substance to citizenship education. Their support focuses on the sustainable strengthening of citizenship education in primary education, secondary education, vocational education and secondary vocational education with the goal to stimulate goal-oriented, planned and recognisable citizenship education, in which the school is a safe training ground. Support is provided at all levels: for boards, school management, coordinators and teachers. Finally, the expertise centre focuses on bringing together and connecting research, policy and practice, and translates this into concrete practical support for boards, schools and educational institutions.

Initiatives strengthening democracy education

Various initiatives across different countries aim to strengthen democracy education. In Germany, the [Federal Agency for Civic Education (bpb)]() offers resources and programs promoting civic engagement. Other initiatives, such as ["Schule ohne Rassismus – Schule mit Courage"](), focus on addressing racism and promoting tolerance in schools. Programs like ["Jugend debattiert"]() encourage students to engage in discussions on political and social issues, while Model United Nations simulations provide a deeper understanding of international politics. Additionally, projects such as "Begegnung mit der Zeitgeschichte" and "Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft" focus on Holocaust education and recent German history. The European Youth Parliament further engages young people in European political debates.

In the Netherlands, government and civil society efforts focus on teaching democratic values, rights, and responsibilities through school curricula and collaborations with local organizations. The Dutch Ministry of Education supports various programs aimed at fostering civic engagement and human rights. Schools work with organizations like the Dutch Human Rights Council and the Democracy Education Foundation to promote democratic principles. Additionally, the Netherlands is actively involved in EU initiatives such as Erasmus+ and European Parliament Ambassador Schools (EPAS), offering students opportunities to engage in democracy education on both national and European levels.

In Austria there are several school networks, like the European Parliament Ambassador Schools (EPAS) or the UNESCO schools, which focus on human rights, democracy and participation.

Navigating the complexities of democracy education

Challenges

Democracy education in Europe faces multifaceted challenges, deeply intertwined with the evolving socio-political landscape. One major hurdle is addressing the rise of political polarization and extremism. Educators must foster open and respectful dialogue in classrooms where students may hold increasingly entrenched and opposing views. This challenge is further exacerbated by the spread of misinformation and disinformation, particularly online, which can erode trust in democratic institutions and processes.

The digital transformation presents both opportunities and risks for democracy education. While digital tools enhance learning and engagement, they also expose students to harmful content, cyberbullying, and misinformation. Educators must equip students with digital literacy skills to navigate online spaces responsibly and critically while fostering digital citizenship and ethical online behaviour. Addressing these challenges is crucial to preparing young people to be informed, engaged, and responsible citizens who contribute to the vitality of democratic societies.

Navigating issues of identity and diversity is another critical challenge for teachers. They must create inclusive classrooms where students from diverse ethnic, religious, linguistic, socioeconomic, and sexual orientation backgrounds feel seen, valued, and respected. This requires a nuanced understanding of different identities, an awareness of potential biases, and the ability to facilitate respectful dialogue across differences. Educators must help students engage with diverse perspectives, challenge stereotypes, and appreciate the richness that diversity brings to society. Addressing topics like prejudice, discrimination, and historical injustices must be done in a way that is both informative and fosters social cohesion. Teachers also need to manage potential conflicts or misunderstandings arising from cultural differences in a constructive and sensitive manner while being mindful of their own biases.

Considering the complexity of these challenges, it is evident that educators require structured, high-quality training to effectively teach democracy education. However, a key structural issue is the lack of a mandatory, stand-alone teacher training program for citizenship education, leaving many educators unprepared to handle controversial topics. Additionally, outdated teaching methods and a lack of interactive, student-centred

approaches make it difficult to engage students effectively.

Democracy education often lacks a coherent, in-depth approach due to its integration into multiple subjects rather than being a stand-alone subject in all schools. It competes for curriculum space, with academic performance frequently prioritized over civic engagement. Extracurricular initiatives are often underfunded, and the evaluation of democracy education programs remains inconsistent. Furthermore, limited opportunities for student participation in school governance, resistance from authoritarian and populist political groups, and minimal family involvement further challenge the effectiveness of democracy education.

Country-specific challenges add further complexity. In Spain, curricular inconsistencies between autonomous communities lead to uneven implementation. Furthermore, there is often a considerable disparity between theoretical frameworks and the realities of educational practice. While official reports and academic discourse portray an idealised vision of inclusivity and democratic values, the first-hand experiences of educators within the formal education system reveal a more complex and challenging picture. More broadly, across Europe, disparities in resources and curricula contribute to inconsistent democracy education, with some schools receiving more support and training than others. Political polarization also influences the perception and teaching of democracy. In Italy, for instance, polarization restricts teachers' ability to discuss certain topics, while democratic practices outside the classroom remain underdeveloped. In Spain, political parties across the ideological spectrum frequently invoke democracy while delegitimizing opponents as undemocratic,

leading to a semantic erosion of the concept. Spain's relatively young democracy, consolidated with the 1978 Constitution after Franco's dictatorship, continues to mature, with historical memory, political narratives, and the development of a strong democratic culture still in flux.

Controversies

Debates and controversies around democracy education are widespread across European countries, often reflecting broader societal and political tensions. These discussions revolve around several key issues, including the role of politicians in schools, the balance between ideological neutrality and democratic values in curricula, the level of student participation in decision-making, and the influence of external actors such as NGOs.

One of the most contested issues is whether politicians should visit schools.

In Germany, this has sparked significant controversy, particularly regarding visits from far-right politicians, such as the AfD. In 2018, Jörg Urban, an AfD politician, visited a school in Saxony, triggering backlash over concerns that the party was using the platform for propaganda rather than open political discussion. Critics argued that, given the AfD's nationalist and anti-immigration stances, allowing their representatives into classrooms risked exposing students to extreme ideologies. While politicians from all major parties engage in school visits, the AfD's involvement has drawn particular scrutiny due to its polarizing rhetoric, leading to broader debates about the limits of political

engagement in education. These concerns are especially pronounced in East Germany, where the region's political history and the AfD's strong presence complicate discussions about democracy.

At the same time, school visits from politicians and student visits to parliaments—including discussions with elected representatives—are common across Europe. In Italy, Greece, and the Netherlands, similar debates exist over whether such engagements enhance democratic learning or introduce political bias.

Austria tends to take a more open approach, the general attitude is that pupils should not be overwhelmed and that a balanced presentation of different opinions should be ensured. Insights into political practice and real-life encounters should supplement lessons and are desired:

"Encounters with people and institutions of the political sphere (politics, interest groups, NGOs, citizens' initiatives, media, etc.) play a special role in the implementation of civic education. The involvement of external actors or providers of civic education has an important added value, as school is not a closed area, but is always embedded in a concrete social environment." (Citizenship education teaching principle, 2015 general ordinance)

Another recurring debate centres on the content and approach of democracy education. The longest and most persistent debate about citizenship education in Austria is e.g. whether or not the subject should become a stand-alone subject in all types of schools. Academics have valid arguments in favour, while the administration sees problems in anchoring an additional subject and thus more hours in the curriculum. The debate has gained new momentum because the new government's programme of 2025 has announced a new subject, democracy education.

Some advocate for a primarily theoretical curriculum that emphasizes constitutional principles and historical developments, while others argue for a more practical approach that integrates debate, activism, and media literacy. In Italy, there are numerous debates on the subject. In particular, the discussion focuses on whether or not to encourage activism and critical thinking: for some, it is essential to strengthen democracy, while for others, it would be better to avoid it as it could politically influence younger generations. In Germany, curriculum discussions often focus on sensitive topics such as immigration, European integration, and the legacy of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The way these subjects are taught can be contentious, with some calling for a more balanced presentation of diverse perspectives, while others stress the need to reinforce democratic values. For instance, how migration is framed—whether as an opportunity or a challenge—remains a divisive issue. In Spain, this debate is further complicated by regional differences, particularly in Catalonia after the self-determination referendum not authorised by the Spanish state in 2017. triggering one of the deepest political crises in the country's recent history, as both sides accused each other of

being undemocratic. This context has influenced the debate on the educational model. Tensions between the central government and the Generalitat of Catalonia have affected key aspects of the school system, such as the linguistic immersion model, education in democratic values, and the participation of the educational community in decision-making.

In general, these debates reflect broader ideological tensions within society about how history should be taught and how contemporary political issues should be addressed in classrooms.

The level of student participation in school decision-making is another point of contention. While some education experts advocate for greater student involvement, for example, through student councils, others question whether such initiatives offer real influence or are merely symbolic. This debate strikes at the core purpose of democracy education: is it primarily about imparting knowledge, or should it actively foster participation and civic engagement? This question is particularly relevant in East Germany, where historical experiences of limited democratic participation may shape attitudes toward student involvement in governance.

The role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in democracy education also remains a debated issue, particularly regarding concerns over political neutrality. While NGOs bring valuable expertise and resources, their involvement raises questions about potential bias. For example, an NGO focusing on environmental activism might emphasize certain perspectives on climate change that some consider too advocacy-oriented for a neutral educational setting. Schools must

navigate these concerns carefully to ensure that external contributions align with educational objectives while maintaining a balanced approach.

Finally, with the increasing prevalence of misinformation and disinformation, there is a growing push for schools to strengthen media literacy as part of democracy education. This includes developing students' critical thinking skills to assess sources, recognize bias, and understand the impact of social media algorithms. However, balancing neutrality with active engagement remains a challenge. How can schools equip students to critically analyse information and participate in informed debates without promoting a specific political agenda? This question is particularly relevant in East Germany, where concerns about susceptibility to misinformation and extremist narratives persist. Similar concerns have also emerged in other countries, as highlighted in scholarly and public debates on the susceptibility of youth to authoritarian views.

Read more: Foa, R. S., & Mounk, Y. (2019). *Youth and the populist wave: Are young people really more authoritarian than their parents?* Journal of Democracy, 30(3), 5–19. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0044).

These debates illustrate the complexity of democracy education across Europe. While there is broad consensus on its importance, differences in historical contexts, political climates, and societal attitudes shape how it is implemented and the challenges it faces. Striking a balance between ideological neutrality, active participation, and the promotion of democratic values remains an ongoing challenge for educators and policymakers alike.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of democracy education in Germany, Italy, Spain, Greece, Austria, and the Netherlands highlights a shared recognition of its importance across all six countries. Despite this consensus, democracy education is rarely a standalone subject, instead being integrated across various disciplines. While this approach ensures broad exposure, it also creates significant challenges in practical implementation, including inconsistencies in depth, coherence, and prioritization within curricula.

Beyond structural challenges, democracy education in these countries also faces difficulties related to teacher preparedness, resource allocation, and the need to foster critical thinking and active participation. To address these issues, greater investment is required in teacher training programs that equip educators with the skills and confidence to navigate complex and sometimes sensitive topics. Additionally, ensuring adequate resources and adopting interactive, student-centred approaches can enhance the effectiveness of democracy education.

In an era of increasing political polarization, misinformation, and societal challenges, strengthening democracy education is more important than ever. By prioritizing systematic improvements in training, resources, and pedagogical approaches, education systems can better prepare young people to engage meaningfully in democratic processes and contribute to the resilience of democratic societies.

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