



EUCIS-LLL key messages on Education and Citizenship

Preamble

The European Year of Citizens 2013 is a timely opportunity to reflect upon European citizenship. This concept covers different realities. Some consider citizenship as the enjoyment of civic rights such as the ones created by the treaties since 1992 while others relate it to the feeling of belonging to a common project or identity. EUCIS-LLL favours a broad definition of citizenship. The key issue for us is *“How do we ensure that citizens do participate actively in the life of the EU?”*. EUCIS-LLL hopes that the European Year 2013 will create a debate before the 2014 European elections. Indeed, the results of the last elections, with a European turnout of 43.1%, taught us a lesson. Most citizens do not feel that their vote will change the way the EU functions and sometimes they do not even know what is going on in Brussels. We also observe a decreasing sense of belonging to Europe and a very low level of confidence that people have in the EU. According to a recent Eurobarometer survey, just 43% of people questioned stated that they knew about what it meant to be a European citizen and 32% considered they were well or very well informed of their rights as citizens. It is by providing proper information, by equipping citizens with basic and transversal skills, by offering proper modules in schools and continuing training to teachers, by involving civil society representatives actively in the process of decision-making and by proposing policies that correspond to citizens' needs that citizens will feel part of the political project. Education and training has a very special role to play in that respect. Because European citizenship needs to be learned and lived, community programmes should consequently have appropriate budgets allocated to them. Civil society organisations also have a significant contribution to make, as a bridge between Europe and its people but also as a privileged environment in which to foster active citizens.

Key messages

1. Equipping all citizens with basic skills is the prerequisite for removing obstacles to active participation in society
 - Make sure all EU citizens master basic skills. The Education and Training Strategic Framework 2020 rightly aims at **reducing the share of low-achieving 15-year-olds** in reading, mathematics and science to below 15%. Yet today one 15-year-old and almost one adult in five still do not know how to read and write properly. This has a negative impact on participation. Indeed, we know that on average, adults with high levels of education vote 14.8% more than their less educated counterparts (OECD's Education at a Glance, 2012).
 - Acknowledge the wider negative consequences of a lack of basic skills: the new “Rethinking Education” Communication emphasises the need to equip citizens with basic skills for employment and social inclusion. A lack of those skills does not only **hinder their chances** of finding a job or being included but also **of participating genuinely in the political life** of their own country and of the EU. This should be underlined in the new Communication since it puts at stake the model of democracy that we want.
 - Foster **inclusive education** systems by developing tailor-made learning opportunities in a lifewide and lifelong learning perspective; improved access to lifelong learning is also about strengthening our EU social model and tackling today's common challenges. Intercultural learning can contribute to a better integration of migrants, intergenerational learning to make ageing populations more active, etc. Those target groups and more generally **people at risk of being at an educational disadvantage** should be addressed as a matter of priority.
 - **Innovative learning pathways** should be developed to broaden access to learning such as **Open Educational Resources**. EU debates on access shall not be reduced to technological challenges. Member States must implement EU strategies to tackle **early school leaving** and **tertiary achievement** so that the related EU2020 headline targets are reached in time. The impulse given by the Cypriot Presidency should

not be lost on school dropout and deeper reflections must be initiated on how to involve non-traditional learners in higher education.

2. Value citizenship education as a key to engaging citizens in EU democratic life

- Make citizens aware of Europe's values, prerogatives, political history and structure by developing citizenship through **formal and non-formal education**: a genuine democratic society cannot be built if citizens are not aware of the impact that the EU institutions have on their daily life. Today, only 9% of Europeans think the EU level has an impact on their living conditions (Eurobarometer 77, Spring 2012).
- Give **social and civic competences** the role they deserve in the new "Rethinking Education" Commission Communication (November 2012) that focuses mainly on entrepreneurial skills and leaves out the other Key Competences of the 2006 Framework. This is particularly important as the 'feeling' of belonging to the EU is decreasing in Europe.
- Adopt a **holistic approach to citizenship education** by valuing transversal key competences (learning to learn, sense of initiative, cultural awareness and expression) necessary to foster tolerance, solidarity and intercultural understanding in more and more complex societies.
- A paradigm shift towards **learning outcomes** is crucial to value transversal competences and ensure that their benefit for societal engagement is recognised. Member States should implement national **validation** systems that take into account the outcomes of individuals' civic engagement.
- Make use of mobility: "the citizenship outcomes" of EU mobility programmes should be better monitored.
- As active citizenship is a shared responsibility, recognise the contribution of civil society organisations as **non-formal education providers** in developing those "citizenship skills" and empowering learners, especially in the framework of volunteering activities. Build on the European Year of Volunteering 2011 to feed the discussion for the European Year of Citizens 2013. This is the case of civil society organisations promoting debate and activities on remembrance.
- Value the fields of education and training as privileged settings in which to **reflect upon the consequences of the economic and social crisis**. Citizenship education is also about discussing why European solidarity and cohesion have decreased in the past few years, how resilient those values are and what can be done to consolidate them.

3. Make learning abroad a reality for all through the new funding programmes 2014-2020

- The EU Year of Citizens 2013 puts a particular emphasis on the right to move. 21% of EU citizens think that student exchange programmes are the most positive result of the EU (Eurobarometer 77, Spring 2012): EU **mobility schemes** are therefore strongly associated with the benefits of EU citizenship in people's minds and **proper investment** has to be made in the next funding programme, (but also the next European Social Fund, the Europe for Citizens Programme and the EU Year of Citizens) so that up to five million learners can enjoy an experience abroad.
- Along with an adequate budget, the **content of the programme** must be designed to ensure a wide access to mobility opportunities: the participation of people with special needs or fewer opportunities shall be secured; loan guarantee schemes for higher education must not replace grants in the long term and come with financial security for repayment, etc.
- The next funding programme shall not only aim at reaching a systemic impact but take into consideration the **individual impact** of mobility schemes: there is no longer a need to prove that an experience abroad is highly beneficial for the individual, in particular to develop their sense of belonging to the EU. A systemic effect for a more inclusive society can only be reached through the aggregation of engaged individuals.

4. Acknowledge and support civil society organisations for their role in bridging the gap between the EU and its citizens

- Think of the EU Year of Citizens also as the Year of EU Citizenship and **celebrate civil society** for bringing Europe to the citizens and vice-versa. Creating ownership is not about a one million-euro communication plan but about the work that non-profit organisations have done for years to voice the concerns of EU citizens on policy-making in Brussels, and multiply EU action at grassroots level. Indeed, 68.8% of respondents to a EUCIS-LLL survey (December 2011) know about the ET2020 Strategic Framework thanks to their European network.

- Provide **sustainable operating support** to European civil society organisations within the new funding programme 2014-2020. Those organisations simply cannot survive if their funding is exclusively project-based as they could no longer sustain their activities, would lose their political independence and their capacity to put crucial issues on the EU agenda. Recognise **volunteer time** as contributions in kind in project proposals.
- Set up more regular consultation mechanisms for civil society to develop a **genuine structured dialogue** in the field of education and training, starting by giving them a consultative statute in the Programme Committee that monitors its implementation.
- Launch a Green Paper on Article 11 as a whole and re-launch the process leading to the adoption of a statute of the European association. The voices of millions of European citizens, freely and voluntarily joining together in associations and NGOs, would be given proper recognition. Active citizenship is also about encouraging the emergence of a genuine European civil society. This recognition would be a great leap for a genuine implementation of **Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty** to initiate “an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society”, an article also mentioned in the legal basis of the EU Year of Citizens.
- **Make educational institutions democratic settings in themselves** where learners and educational staff can engage in the democratic life of the institution and access **mobility schemes** to develop their sense of EU belonging.