

Resolution 2640 (2026)¹

Socialising at schools: for an inclusive and participatory education fostering democratic values

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly is of the firm view that education is a fundamental pillar of democracy. Schools bring together people of different ages, backgrounds and disciplines to a degree that is only found in a few other community spaces. They are not just places for academic instruction, but also spaces where children and young people can participate as community members, engage in co-operative learning, develop social skills and attitudes such as critical thinking and empathy, learn about democratic values and respect and value diversity.

2. As a mirror of society, schools are however confronted with increasing challenges in fulfilling this democratic role. While diversity enriches the school environment, it can also present challenges in building shared values and mutual understanding. Discrimination, racism, bullying and exclusion remain common in many school settings, making it difficult for students from different backgrounds to form meaningful connections. Excessive social media exposure reduces face-to-face interaction, can present young people with disinformation fuelling harmful biases and stereotypes, can deepen a sense of isolation and anxiety and undermine self-confidence, particularly among adolescents who struggle with online validation and peer pressure.

3. Moreover, the Assembly expresses real concern for the situation and well-being of teachers across Europe. They are severely affected by budgetary cuts in the education system, a lack of human resources, a lack of voice in education governance and inadequate pay and recognition for their work. These factors lead to heavy workloads, large class sizes, poor working conditions and a lack of resources for creative and innovative work with students. Many teachers also lack appropriate professional and psychological support. These cumulative constraints bear a heavy toll on the well-being of teachers and consequently on the quality of teaching.

4. In many educational contexts, there is a significant gap between the democratic values and respect for diversity which are explicitly promoted in curricula and the actual experiences students live within traditional school cultures, often marked by authoritarian, hierarchical or even xenophobic dynamics. The deepest and most lasting learning does not occur solely through declared content, but above all through everyday experiences within the school community. The Assembly therefore emphasises that educational environments should reflect the values they aim to transmit so that students not only study democracy but also experience it through real practices of participation, deliberation, shared responsibility and social justice. Processes of transformation in school culture should be promoted to prioritise coherence between educational goals and the means used to achieve them, ensuring that every space, relationship and decision within the school becomes an opportunity to live democratic principles in action.

5. Given the alarming context of a global democratic decline, the Assembly emphasises that learning and practising democracy should be a core political priority in the education system, with the aim of helping young people to gain trust in democracy and engage in democratic citizenship. Referring to the Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024-2030 and the initiative of the Secretary General to launch a New Democratic Pact for

1. *Assembly debate* on 28 January 2026 (6th sitting) (see [Doc. 16314](#), report of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, rapporteur: Ms Luz Martinez Seijo). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 28 January 2026 (6th sitting). See also [Recommendation 2303 \(2026\)](#).



Europe, the Assembly urges member States to prioritise education and make the necessary investments. Policies are required to ensure that schools have the necessary flexibility to respond to today's challenges, not only in terms of adapting curricula and methodologies but also in modelling democratic, inclusive and participatory values and practices within schools.

6. The Assembly therefore recommends that member States of the Council of Europe:

6.1. concerning education policies:

6.1.1. consider education a political priority aiming to strengthen democratic resilience in society and undertake a strategic policy review, in line with the three pillars of the Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024-2030: renewing the democratic and civic mission of education; enhancing the social responsibility and responsiveness of education; and advancing education through a human rights-based digital transformation;

6.1.2. develop comprehensive policies to ensure that schools can integrate socialisation, inclusion and well-being as core objectives, alongside academic achievement; introduce a flexible curriculum as a key factor to promote inclusive education, allowing teachers to adapt content and respond to different needs; and provide opportunities for active and meaningful participation of students within school governance and in their communities;

6.1.3. where appropriate, adopt legislation to promote harmonious living together in schools and prevent bullying; and consider regulating the use of smartphones at school and introducing an age limit for access to social media;

6.1.4. adopt a learner-centred and human rights-based approach to education, with special attention to vulnerable learners, including migrant children and children with special education needs, by broadening the concept of inclusive education to focus on students' needs, talents, abilities and interests, rather than on their perceived limitations;

6.1.5. integrate age-appropriate education for democratic citizenship as a distinct compulsory subject and incorporate competences for democratic culture in other relevant subjects during all stages of formal education;

6.2. concerning methodologies:

6.2.1. promote student-centred and interactive pedagogies and co-operative learning in small groups, acknowledging cultural differences and multiple identities among students in a class and making use of the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture;

6.2.2. introduce socio-emotional education to promote students' well-being, prevent mental health problems, increase social cohesion and provide support for students' personal and societal development;

6.2.3. aiming at zero tolerance towards bullying, develop school programmes for the prevention and participatory resolution of conflicts through mediation, ways to disagree respectfully, peer support and restorative justice;

6.2.4. offer students a wide range of complementary activities and clubs (artistic, sportive, environmental, etc.) that encourage socialisation around their interests; and create opportunities for democratic participation in schools and their communities (student councils, debate clubs, community-based projects);

6.2.5. advance digital responsibility and media and information literacy, using a curriculum framework for digital citizenship education (DCE Planner), as developed by the Council of Europe; connect physical, social and digital learning spaces, by sharing a common vision of inclusion, democratic citizenship, respect for diversity, well-being and learning;

6.2.6. foster active participation and participatory governance in schools by involving educators, students and parents in developing a whole-school democratic culture which is based on a holistic, values-driven and community-focused approach, building trust and participation in communities through education; partnerships with external associations and specialists may provide added value;

6.3. concerning measures to create a supportive and enabling environment for teachers:

6.3.1. strengthen initial and ongoing teacher training on the topics of socialisation, inclusion, socio-emotional education, active participation, conflict prevention and resolution, and co-operative learning;

6.3.2. include the competences for democratic culture as described in the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture in teacher education and vocational training;

6.3.3. expand teachers' opportunities for professional exchange and development and provide a range of teaching resources and guidance; guarantee free access to virtual learning environments and to open educational resources;

6.3.4. promote shared processes of inquiry and collective reflection on one own's practice to break the continuity between teachers' past experiences as students and the critical construction of their professional identity, and to reinforce a culture of teaching practice aligned with democratic values, social justice and collaborative learning.

7. Furthermore, the Assembly calls for strengthened international co-operation to uphold the democratic role of education and invites the European Union, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to co-operate closely with the Council of Europe to provide coherent and complementary guidance to member States.