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

Report¹

Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media

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1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 15917](#), Reference 4799 on 15 April 2024.



A. Draft resolution²

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, 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 school environment, it can also present complexity 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 about others, 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, lack of human resources, a lack of voice in education governance, inadequate pay and recognition for their work. These factors lead to heavy workloads, large class sizes, poor working conditions and 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 practicing 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 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 curriculum 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 Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024-2030 based on three pillars: 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 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;

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 1 December 2025.

- 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-centered and interactive pedagogies and co-operative learning in small groups, acknowledging cultural differences and multiple identities among learners 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 to 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, as developed by the Council of Europe ([DCE Planner](#)); connect physical, social, and digital learning spaces, 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, learners 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 so as 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.

B. Draft recommendation³

1. In response to a global democratic decline and referring to its Resolution... (2026) “Socialising at schools: for an inclusive and participatory education fostering democratic values”, the Parliamentary Assembly underlines that learning and practicing democracy should be a core political and educational priority in Europe today to help young people engage in democratic citizenship.

2. In this context, the Assembly upholds the decision of the Council of Europe Ministers of Education to set new priorities and actions to implement the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy by endorsing the Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024-2030. The strategy focuses on three pillars: 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.

3. Moreover, the initiative of the Secretary General to launch a New Democratic Pact for Europe to engage and support member States in strengthening democratic resilience in Europe is timely. The Assembly considers that building more resilient and responsive education systems should be a key component of this process. The political commitment of member States will be crucial in placing education as a priority, allocating resources and developing policies that enable schools to respond to multiple societal and democratic challenges, and become places where democratic, inclusive and participatory principles can be learned and practiced.

4. Teachers and school leaders are central to this process, which is grounded in a democratic whole-school culture, and which needs to be widely developed and used within the European Space for Citizenship Education. The Council of Europe provides valuable guidance and practical tools for educators such as the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture and experiences from past projects such as “Democratic and Inclusive School Culture in Operation” and “Free to Speak – Safe to Learn. Democratic Schools for All”. Moreover, the 2025 European Year of Digital Citizenship Education offers a useful platform to exchange experiences and access resources and innovative practices in digital citizenship education.

5. In this context, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers provide support and assistance to member States to undertake a strategic policy review, in line with the Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024-2030 and in particular:

5.1. promote a learner-centred and human rights-based approach to education, ensuring that all learners – including vulnerable groups such as migrant children and children with special education needs – benefit from an inclusive approach that values students’ needs, talents, abilities and interests, and does not reduce them to perceived limitations;

5.2. strengthen the democratic mission of education systems by ensuring full alignment with the European Space for Citizenship Education; facilitate the implementation and widespread use of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture; and favour the provision of age-appropriate education for democratic citizenship as a distinct compulsory subject complemented by the transversal integration of competences for democratic culture in other relevant subjects during all stages of formal education;

5.3. provide guidance to integrate the Council of Europe curriculum framework for digital citizenship education fully in education systems;

5.4. provide targeted and practical guidance to include the competences for democratic culture and digital citizenship education in teacher education, vocational training, and early childhood and care;

5.5. continue, and where appropriate, enhance co-operation with the European Union, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to provide coherent and complementary guidance to uphold the democratic role of education and advance the concept of a democratic whole-school culture to be widely used and implemented in schools.

3. Draft recommendation adopted unanimously by the committee on 1 December 2025.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Luz Martínez Seijo, rapporteur⁴

1. Introduction

1. The Reykjavík Summit⁵ underlined the importance of education in providing children and young people with the necessary references to grow up embracing democratic values in culturally diverse societies. In this context, the Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024-2030,⁶ launched at the 26th Standing Conference of Ministers of Education⁷ in September 2023, focuses on three pillars: renewing the democratic and civic mission of education; enhancing the social responsibility and responsiveness of education; advancing education through a human rights-based digital transformation.

2. The motion for resolution⁸ that I tabled with several other members in January 2024, underlines that “[w]hile competences for democratic culture, civic engagement, learning methodologies, and responsiveness and innovation in and through education are essential concerns, these aims cannot be achieved in isolation. Care for the learners’ holistic development, mental health and well-being in a safe environment are pillars of quality education.”

3. Moreover, we emphasised that “Violence, bullying, discrimination, racism are unfortunately still present in school settings. Learning to live together in diversity, respecting and tolerating different attitudes that arise from coexistence are part of the socialisation process and a key element to implement learning strategies, such as co-operative learning and project-based learning, with special attention to vulnerable learners.”

4. Among the previous work of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media to promote inclusive education and the special needs of vulnerable learners, we can refer to the report of Mr Pavlo Sushko entitled “Quality education for children with special educational needs: challenges of the pandemic, war and digitalisation”⁹ which advocates adopting a human rights-based approach to education that ensures accessibility, participation and equity in various learning environments.

5. In my report I therefore aim to provide examples of innovative policies, methodologies and tools to encourage Council of Europe member States to promote the socialisation process through quality education in the digital age, with a view to improving learners’ safety, mental health, and well-being, fostering democratic values and strengthening tolerance and inclusion within schools. The Parliamentary Assembly could recommend the development of Council of Europe guidelines to assist member States in this process.

6. I wish to thank all experts that we have interviewed during the hearings in Trondheim in Norway and online in Strasbourg, for sharing information, their insights and thoughts on required action in the future, which we consider in the subsequent chapters of the explanatory memorandum. I also wish to thank Dr Carlos Mas Ruiz, University of Alcalá in Spain, for assisting me in preparing this report with substantive research.

2. Socialising at schools: issues at stake

7. Let me begin with the definition of educational socialisation which constitutes the process through which the individual integrates into society by assimilating norms, values, and roles. Its theoretical foundations go back to Émile Durkheim (1975), who defined it as a “methodical socialisation of the young generation”; in other words: the intentional transmission of culture by adults to ensure the reproduction of social order. From this perspective, educational work is conceived as a sphere of social modelling that, beyond academic instruction, shapes consciences, standardises behaviours, and establishes a shared framework of beliefs and values. It is not merely about acquiring knowledge, but about internalising patterns of conduct that sustain the cohesion of the social structure.¹⁰

8. Education is a fundamental pillar of democracy and a key mechanism for fostering socialisation, inclusion, and well-being. Schools are not merely spaces for academic instruction; students develop social skills, engage in co-operative learning, and experience democratic participation. However, modern schools face increasing challenges in fulfilling this role. Societal divisions, economic inequalities, digital

4. The explanatory memorandum is drawn up under the responsibility of the rapporteur.

5. [4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe – Committee of Ministers](#).

6. [“Learners First” – a new Council of Europe Strategy 2030 for the Education sector](#).

7. [26th session of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education](#).

8. [Doc. 15917 – Motion for a resolution](#).

9. [Doc. 15984 – Report](#).

10. Professor Marta Talavera, University of Valencia, Spain, 2025

transformations, and institutional shortcomings have contributed to growing isolation, anxiety, and disengagement among students. The Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024-2030 underscores the importance of integrating socialisation into education policies to create safe, inclusive, and democratic learning environments. Schools must go beyond academic instruction to actively foster students' mental health, emotional intelligence, and democratic engagement. Policies that neglect these aspects risk failing in their broader mission of preparing students for life in diverse societies. The Assembly has consistently urged member States to strengthen the social role of schools in response to challenges such as social media influence, migration-driven diversity, and rising mental health concerns.¹¹

9. Schools today reflect the broader transformations of society. Growing cultural and ethnic diversity, rising economic disparities, and the persistence of social divisions have complicated the process of socialisation among students. While diversity enriches school environments, it also presents complexities in building shared values and mutual understanding. Discrimination, racism, and socio-economic exclusion remain common in many school settings, making it difficult for students from different backgrounds to form meaningful connections. Research conducted by UNICEF (2020) has highlighted that students from minority or migrant backgrounds often face language barriers, prejudice, and lower levels of participation in school life, which directly affect their sense of belonging.

10. Economic disparities further exacerbate the division between privileged and vulnerable students. This gap in resources creates inequalities in socialisation opportunities, as students from disadvantaged backgrounds may experience isolation and reduced self-esteem due to limited access to social and recreational activities, as well as limited opportunities

11. The rapid expansion of social media and online communication has profoundly altered how young people interact. While digital platforms can facilitate socialisation, they also contribute to new forms of isolation, anxiety, and cyberbullying. Studies indicate that excessive screen time has led to a decline in in-person interactions, weakening students' ability to develop social skills, emotional intelligence, and conflict-resolution abilities.¹² Children and adolescents increasingly spend less time playing outdoors or engaging in face-to-face social activities, opting instead for digital interactions that lack emotional depth.

12. The Council of Europe's research on youth mental health has shown that excessive social media exposure can lead to anxiety, stress, and reduced self-confidence, particularly among adolescents who struggle with online validation and peer pressure. Moreover, digitalisation has introduced new forms of violence, including cyberbullying and online harassment. The lack of effective digital education policies in schools leaves many students unprepared to navigate the risks of online interactions, making them vulnerable to manipulation, misinformation, and online discrimination.¹³

13. Despite these challenges, schools remain the most effective setting for promoting socialisation and inclusion. When family or societal structures fail, the school environment becomes the only place where students can develop the social and emotional skills necessary for social integration. Schools play a vital role in fostering social responsibility, co-operation, and participatory citizenship, ensuring that students experience democratic values in action. The development of co-operative learning strategies, conflict mediation programmes, and peer support initiatives has been recognised as an effective approach in improving socialisation in schools.¹⁴ Schools that implement participatory governance models, such as student councils, peer mediation programmes, and school-wide discussions on inclusion, tend to have higher levels of student engagement and reduced incidents of discrimination.

14. Programmes focusing on mental health, emotional education, and conflict resolution also help create a school climate that encourages positive interactions and well-being. The Council of Europe's "Democratic Schools for All" initiative (2017-2022) demonstrated that schools that prioritise student participation in decision-making and school governance tend to report higher levels of satisfaction, social cohesion, and respect.

11. [Competences for democratic culture – Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies – Executive summary.](#)

12. [Council Recommendation on Common values, Inclusive Education and the European Dimension of Teaching – European Education Area.](#)

13. [Anti-Bullying Alliance.](#)

14. [Competences for democratic culture – Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies – Executive summary.](#)

15. Many education systems lack structured policies to reinforce the social function of schools. Studies from the UK Anti-Bullying Alliance indicate that bullying, discrimination, and violence remain persistent problems in European schools, leading to psychological distress, disengagement, and higher school dropout rates. Teacher training is often insufficient, leaving educators unprepared to handle social conflicts and foster co-operative learning. The absence of co-ordinated guidelines on digital education also limits schools' ability to teach responsible social media use, exposing students to higher risks of cyberbullying and online manipulation.

16. Education systems should accordingly develop comprehensive policies, ensuring that schools integrate socialisation as a core objective, alongside academic achievement. Strengthening teacher training, funding for mental health initiatives, and structured specific programmes will be essential in addressing these challenges.

3. Priorities: living together, well-being, inclusion and democratic values in schools

17. Europe must adapt to the social, technological, and scientific changes that characterise the 21st century. This adaptation requires policies that enable schools to be flexible, not only in terms of curriculum but also in modelling democratic, inclusive, and participatory values.

3.1. Harmonious living together and well-being

18. To create a good framework for harmonious living together in schools there must be a robust process of socialisation, building in collaboration and participation, so that students learn to relate to each other in a healthy way, and to interact in a manner that promotes mutual respect and empathy. Improving school coexistence implies different aspects such as the democratic development of classroom rules, participatory conflict resolution, prevention of violence and bullying, and student well-being.¹⁵

19. Well-being and mental health at schools can only be achieved sustainably through a whole-system, whole-school approach to well-being and mental health.¹⁶ The Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission has recently published “Guidelines for education policymakers”¹⁷ with proposals for stimulating a positive school climate, integrating social and emotional education into the curriculum, fostering collaborative partnerships, creating safe schools to prevent and address any form of violence, and promoting well-being in the digital age. They also recommends integrating well-being principles into initial teacher education, strengthening the capacity of school leaders to address well-being at school, providing continuous professional development and support to educators, and guaranteeing access to support services for learners with mental health needs.

20. UNESCO’s Happy Schools Initiative advocates for transformative education reform and a paradigm shift to prioritise happiness in education policy and practice. Activities cannot be effectively implemented at scale without being integrated into education policies and plans. Therefore, it is recommended to foster a holistic, values-driven, and community-focused approach, supported by education policy and planning to ensure systemic changes.¹⁸

3.2. Inclusion and valuing diversity

21. School segregation is still a significant issue in Europe today. It disproportionately affects children with disabilities, children from migrant backgrounds, Roma children, and others facing specific social or personal challenges. The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights addressed this problem in the report “[Fighting School Segregation in Europe through Inclusive Education](#)”. The report offers recommendations for education systems to promote inclusive education and better understand student needs.

22. To assess the inclusivity of schools and the entire education system, authorities can use tools such as the “Index for Inclusion”. This well-known resource helps schools evaluate and enhance their inclusivity, focusing on the participation and achievement of all students, particularly those with disabilities and other marginalised groups.¹⁹

15. Integrated model for coexistence improvement. IMECA. UAH.

<https://convivenciayaprendizajecooperativo.web.uah.es/wp/biblioteca-videos-articulos-prensa-etc/publicaciones/>.

16. Simões, C., Caravita, S., & Cefai, C. (2021). “A Systemic, Whole-School Approach to Mental Health and Well-Being in Schools in the EU”, analytical report, European Union.

17. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/901169>.

18. UNESCO’s global Happy Schools Initiative, [//www.unesco.org/en/education-policies/happy-schools](http://www.unesco.org/en/education-policies/happy-schools).

23. Inclusive education is a journey that embraces the diverse needs of all learners through several key approaches. For example, co-operative learning²⁰ in a class transforms the environment. Here, students are organised into heterogeneous groups, each member playing a specific role. These activities foster positive interdependence and utilise co-operative techniques, allowing tasks to be tailored to different levels, including special needs, all culminating in a final group product.

24. Another well-known method is Universal Design for Learning, a framework that shapes educational environments to meet the various needs of every student, by providing multiple means of engagement, motivating students through different strategies. In collaborative teaching or co-teaching, teachers join forces to plan and deliver lessons. This approach often involves acting together within the classroom, creating a dynamic and inclusive learning experience.

25. Each of these approaches plays a vital role in making education more inclusive. They ensure that all students, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities, can fully participate and thrive in the learning environment. Through such methods, inclusive education becomes a reality, fostering a sense of belonging and success for every learner.

3.3. Democratic values

26. Democracy must be learned. Human values underpin democratic rights, which must be developed through practice. Schools must teach democratic values such as respect, pluralism, peace, justice, solidarity, truth, and responsibility through both reflection and action. These values translate into citizens' rights: the right to education, security, freedom of thought, equal opportunity, physical and mental health, accurate information, and participation in school and society. These rights are lived out in schools through inclusive, participatory methodologies and non-aggressive communication.

27. To apply these principles to educational policies, State educational authorities and international organisations should provide guidelines to assist schools. Over the years, the Council of Europe has developed numerous policy recommendations to integrate human rights and democratic values into society, and in particular in education, ensuring that students not only learn about these principles but also live them.

28. To support this vision, the Council of Europe developed the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture. This framework outlines essential competences across four areas: values, attitudes, skills, knowledge, and critical understanding.²¹ It serves as a comprehensive model illustrating what it means to be a democratic citizen and provides recommendations for implementing education for democratic citizenship in practice.

29. In 2023, the Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education adopted a resolution to renew the civic mission of education and encouraged educational institutions to adopt a whole-institution approach, ensuring that democratic values permeate every aspect of school life.²² The European Space for Citizenship Education is a pillar for this mission. It seeks to provide a shared set of principles for good practice in developing quality education for democratic citizenship, to provide a platform for sharing innovation and good practices, and opportunities for national and international collaboration among relevant stakeholders and partners. The goal is to prepare active and responsible citizens who participate in democratic life. The celebration of the European Year of Digital Citizenship Education in 2025 extends these aims to the digital world, addressing challenges related to human rights and democratic values.

30. The Education Policy Advisors Network encourages the integration of the Reference Framework into education systems, sharing experiences and practices, and improving co-operation. This aligns with target 4.7 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, which focuses on education for sustainable development and global citizenship.

19. Booth, T. & Ainscow, M. (2019). "Index for Inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools" (3rd ed.). Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education (CSIE).

20. Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2018). "Cooperative learning: The foundation for active learning". *Active learning—Beyond the future*, 59-71.

21. www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture.

22. <https://rm.coe.int/resolutions-26th-session-council-of-europe-standing-conference-of-mini/1680abee7f>.

31. Member States should aim to develop comprehensive curricula that include human rights and democratic values at all educational levels; build in practical experiences in schools to allow students to practice these values in daily life; promote digital citizenship education to address challenges in the digital environment; strengthen teacher education to equip educators with the necessary skills and knowledge; and adopt a whole institution approach to embed a culture of democracy in educational settings.

4. Methodologies and tools

32. To give life to a policy of socialisation in classrooms, it is essential to develop appropriate methodologies and draw on useful resources. Schools need tools that promote harmonious living together and teach democratic competences (values, attitudes, knowledge and critical understanding), enabling students to participate actively, manage their emotions and well-being, resolve conflicts, co-operate in learning, and navigate the digital environment.

4.1. Education in human rights and democratic values

33. Implementing human rights education (HRE) and education for democratic citizenship in schools is a journey that blends theory with practice. The model is a classroom where the foundation is laid through theoretical teaching. Here, students deal with subjects such as citizenship education, where they learn about human values and human rights. This foundational knowledge is crucial, helping them understand the principles of democracy and the importance of human rights.

34. But learning doesn't stop at theory. The practical application of these values is where the real process happens, that is, a school where teachers, school leaders, students, and families are all actively involved in the educational community. They participate in the school's representative bodies and associations, making decisions together and fostering a democratic culture. This active involvement helps students see democracy in action, teaching them the importance of participation and respect for others.

35. By embedding these teachings in the curriculum and promoting active participation, schools ensure that students not only learn about their rights and responsibilities but also understand the importance of respecting and upholding these values in their daily lives. This holistic approach prepares students to be informed, active citizens who contribute positively to society.

36. Citizenship education has become part of educational policies and curricula in many member States, which are increasingly aware that citizenship education and its European dimension have a role to play in strengthening European identity. There is no single model for fostering citizenship education, but there are numerous inspiring examples of best practices. Examples of curricula dedicated to citizenship and ethical values in some European States include²³:

- France: Citizenship education – more specifically civic and moral education – is part of the French national education mandatory curricula throughout both primary and secondary education cycles;
- Germany: Education on democratic citizenship and human rights is a core task and objective of formal education at all levels as well as non-formal education. As such, it is incorporated into the history, social sciences, and politics/citizenship educational programmes;
- Croatia: Citizenship education is a mandatory cross-curricular subject in primary and secondary schools, meaning it does not exist as a separate subject but as part of other subjects;
- Spain: There is a general education curriculum explicitly aimed at preparing students for the active exercise of citizenship. Recently, a royal decree incorporated “citizen competences” into the eight key competences that make up a student’s profile at the end of their basic education path. All primary education students must receive education in civic and ethical values during any of the courses of the third cycle, and then during their secondary education;
- Greece: Citizenship education is part of the primary-level course (ages 6-12) on social and political education.

37. These are just a few examples. It would doubtless be of great benefit for member States to co-ordinate such curricula into a common core.

23. “Citizenship education in national curricula”, European Parliamentary Research Service (2023).

38. Beside citizenship education, history teaching is particularly important in the curriculum of secondary education, since the use and analysis of historical sources can play a key role in fostering respect for different opinions, pluralism, and diversity, and in assessing the reliability and validity of information. Reflecting on sensitive periods in history at appropriate ages is necessary for young people to understand the origins of the current situation and hopefully avoid repetition of past mistakes.²⁴ German curricula, for example, include specific sections on the history of democracy, and introduce the concept “Erinnerungskultur” or “culture of memory.” In the school context, this involves teaching students about historical events, cultural traditions, and the importance of memory for identity and the future. These contents aim to help students understand the importance of a resilient democracy and the historical challenges Germany has faced on its path to democratic consolidation.

39. The Council of Europe has developed several initiatives for schools: “Democratic and Inclusive School Culture in Operation (DISCO)”, which ended in 2021, and “Free to Speak – Safe to Learn. Democratic Schools for All”, which ended in 2022. Within the European Space for Citizenship Education and the Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024-2030, a label or distinctive mark for schools could be created that would reflect the legacy of these initiatives, highlighting the proposed socialising approach and offering an attractive and agile digital framework for “schools for learning to live”. Networking between schools would be key to develop a training and supporting system for the goals described in this report: student participation, school conflict analysis, assertive communication skills, socio-emotional learning, conflict mediation programmes, peer support and bullying prevention, co-operative learning, and classroom rules and climate.

4.2. Participation as a means for students’ active socialisation

40. The best way to promote active socialisation in school is to offer students ample opportunities to participate in the life and decisions of the school. Such involvement creates a strong sense of belonging, making the school feel as their own space where they can share learning, experiences, and emotions, resolve conflicts independently, and learn to live together. There are many ways to engage students: distributing various roles of responsibility in the classroom, co-creating rules, implementing co-operative learning, forming support teams, organising extra-curricular activities and clubs, engaging in project work, and hosting thematic debates. These activities help involve all students in school life. Specific inclusive and integrative spaces can be created and designed for this purpose. The Learner Participation in Inclusive Education model identifies four forms of participation: physical (including accessibility), socio-emotional, decision-making, and engaged participation.²⁵

41. Two decades ago, a transformative programme was developed within the research and educational framework of the University of Alcalá in Spain. The project provides training, advice, and support to the school communities, emphasising student participation.²⁶ The training covers several key areas, including fostering a positive outlook on others, understanding and analysing school conflicts, assertive communication in conflicts, social skills, emotional education, school conflict resolution methods, and creating a positive school climate with democratic rules. Specific training is also provided for different programmes, including conflict mediation by students, peer support, restorative circles, inclusion and co-operative learning, classroom representatives (covering areas such as support, health, sport, equality, recycling, and courtyard activities) learning service, and digital citizenship. During the training, teams including students, teachers, and families are formed, which creates strong relationships and prepares them to work on new projects or future improvements. Hundreds of secondary and primary schools in Spain have adopted and are actively developing this project. The project consistently yields positive results for the school climate, becoming an integral part of the school culture. As a result, these schools form a network of good practices.

24. “Multiperspectivity in remembrance and history education for democratic citizenship”, report | Doc. 16090 | 8 January 2025. Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media. Rapporteur: Ms Luz Martínez Seijo.

25. European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2025. “Learner Participation in Inclusive Education: Background Paper”, (K. Todorova and M. Bilgeri, eds.), Odense, Denmark.

26. The Integrated Model for School Coexistence Improvement, www.grao.com/libros/modelo-integrado-de-mejora-de-la-convivencia-1573, <https://convivenciayaprendizajecooperativo.web.uah.es/wp/biblioteca-videos-articulos-prensa-etc/publicaciones/>, IMECA Research and Innovation Group. University of Alcalá, <https://convivenciayaprendizajecooperativo.web.uah.es/wp/>.

4.3. Social and emotional education

42. Social and emotional learning is the process of acquiring the competencies to recognise and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions and handle challenging situations effectively. Such learning programmes cover developing self-awareness, social awareness and relationship skills, therefore helping students to understand better their own emotions and interact positively with diverse people and groups.²⁷

43. For example, a non-profit organisation MOT (Courage), founded in 1997 in Norway, offers schools preventative value-based programmes to help young people build resilience and integrate. As a “whole school approach”, these programmes are offered to students, teachers and parents. They promote life skills such as building capacity of young people to trust in themselves, to become robust (develop awareness and courage) and to cope in various life situations. Programmes are offered for primary (grades 1–4), lower secondary (grades 8–10), and upper secondary (grades 11–13) education. The Robust Youth Programme for secondary school covers many themes and involves individual and classwork to build inclusive environments, to discuss and practice fundamental values, democracy and citizenship, learn about public health issues, and develop life-skills and critical thinking. Coaches include teachers, school nurses, counsellors, or youth workers. They receive comprehensive training in methodologies and close follow-up afterwards. Well-known personalities are engaged as ambassadors to reach youth more effectively and create a greater impact. Values and tools include: *courage to care* (show respect and kindness towards those who are excluded); *courage to live* (be yourself and accept who you are); *courage to say no* (stand up for your values, dare to voice your opinion, prioritise what is right and important for you).

44. Another remarkable project supporting emotional education in schools is the Emocrea project,²⁸ developed by the Emocrea research group from the University of La Laguna in Spain. This project provides training support to schools, and researches, promotes, and disseminates the potential of emotional and creative learning approaches as elements of educational innovation. Based on a school subject in the Canary Islands, the concept of “emocreativity” was invented, referring to all activities that can be carried out in social and emotional education in an artistic and creative way. The project covers assessment, methodologies, resilience, teacher skills, and development in the community, thereby fostering a supportive and innovative learning environment for both students and teachers.

45. There are other resources that collectively enhance emotional education by providing practical tools and frameworks to support students' well-being and development. The SEMH Handbook²⁹ assists schools in developing responses for students with Social-Emotional-Mental Health needs or those at risk. SEE-KS (Social Emotional Engagement – Knowledge and Skills)³⁰ fosters social emotional engagement within a universal design for learning framework, creating inclusive environments. The SHLS (Safe Healing and Learning Space) Toolkit³¹ provides guidelines for creating secure environments that promote both emotional healing and academic growth, ensuring students feel protected and encouraged to express themselves.

4.4. Conflict solving

46. Conflict resolution is a crucial aspect of socialisation, essential for building relationships with peers, teachers, and family. It involves understanding, preventing, and managing conflicts, including those in virtual relationships on social media. A participatory approach encourages students to resolve their own conflicts using non-violent strategies such as conflict mediation, peer support, restorative practices, and assertive communication skills. These programmes, developed in several European countries, have shown positive results in improving school climate and coexistence, and they hold significant educational value for students' future lives.³²

27. European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, “Social and emotional learning and academic achievement in schools”, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023.

28. <https://emocrea-ull.com/proyectos>.

29. Barking and Dagenham School Improvement Partnership, <https://bdsip.co.uk/resources/semh-handbook/>.

30. www.see-ks.com/.

31. [Safe Healing and Learning Space Toolkit](#).

32. European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, “What can schools do about bullying?”, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, .

47. Several European anti-bullying projects continue the mission of combating bullying through education, community involvement, and innovative methodologies. They include: SAFER,³³ which targets school violence and bullying prevention for students aged 8-14, and EIRENE³⁴, an Erasmus+ project enhancing schools' ability to respond to bullying for students aged 13-16. The Stop Bullying Project equips youth workers with skills to prevent and intervene in bullying situations.

48. Other resources include "KiVa" (Finland),³⁵ which provides tools for schools to tackle bullying, and the "No Blame" Approach (UK),³⁶ which focuses on collective solutions without assigning blame. "Brave Club: Zero Violence from Age Zero"³⁷ trains students in peer-led mediation, while "NoTrap!" (Italy)³⁸ addresses bullying and cyberbullying with a peer-led approach. The project "Mediator at school" (France)³⁹ trains students to mediate peer conflicts, promoting peace and understanding. The Integrated Model for Coexistence Improvement in Spain also includes a strong conflict mediation programme.

4.5. Collaborative learning processes

49. Collaborative learning processes are essential for socialisation, as they involve working together, sharing ideas, facing challenges, solving problems, and building projects. Traditional lecture-based teaching does not offer these experiences. It is crucial for classrooms to be spaces where students can work together and learn from one another.⁴⁰ For co-operative learning to be effective, it must meet certain conditions, such as creating positive interdependence, enabling individual accountability, encouraging face-to-face engagement, developing social skills and group roles, and creating tasks that involve skilled information processing within the group. Teachers should organise the class into carefully balanced groups to ensure heterogeneity and develop co-operative teaching units with differentiated tasks at various levels, allowing for the success of all students, including those with disabilities, and their contribution to a common result.

50. Valuable resources are developed and used in several countries: The Global Inclusive Teaching Initiative (GITI),⁴¹ the Index for Inclusion,⁴² the Jigsaw Classroom,⁴³ the Tool to Upgrade Teacher Education Practices for Inclusive Education, designed by the European Commission and the Council of Europe,⁴⁴ the Collaborative-Cooperative Learning Course by the European Commission,⁴⁵ the Team-Based Learning Collaborative⁴⁶ and the KoaLa⁴⁷ project.

4.6. Digital responsibility

51. The digital environment and technologies provide unprecedented means for people to express themselves in various forms, discover, learn, create, communicate, and socialise. At the same time, challenges such as disinformation, cyberbullying, online hate speech, and the misuse of personal data have become more prominent. The socialisation of young people today is increasingly taking place through digital media; it is therefore important that schools educate their students about the responsible use of the digital world.⁴⁸ Digital responsibility can be promoted through legislation and restrictions on device use at school. However, it is also essential to improve educational programmes dedicated to various digital topics and skills.

33. www.safer-erasmus.eu/.

34. <https://eireneproject.eu>.

35. KiVa, Anti-bullying Program. www.kivaprogram.net/.

36. <https://tacklebullying.ie/restorative-approach-to-bullying-for-educators/>.

37. Brave's Club: "Zero Violence from age zero".

38. No Trap! Liberi del bullismo, www.notrap.it/.

39. Projet Médiateur à l'école, France médiation, www.francemediation.fr/projet-mediateur-a-l-ecole.

40. Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2018). Cooperative learning: The foundation for active learning. *Active Learning Beyond the future*, 59-71.

41. International Forums of Inclusion Practitioners (IFIP), www.ifip.group/.

42. Booth, T., & Ainscow, M. (2019). Index for Inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools (3rd ed.). Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education (CSIE).

43. The Jigsaw Classroom, www.jigsaw.org/.

44. Hollenweger, J. et al. (2015). *Tool to Upgrade Teacher Education Practices for Inclusive Education*. European Commission-Council of Europe.

45. *Collaborative-Cooperative Learning Course*, European Commission.

46. Team-Based Learning Collaborative, www.teambasedlearning.org/.

47. KoaLa project, www.dipf.de/en/research/projects/koala-cognitively-activating-and-collaborative-learning-opportunities.

48. O'Neill, B., 2023, Research for the Committee on Culture and Education – The influence of social media on the development of children and young people, European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, Brussels.

These include awareness of the dangers of the internet (such as addiction, viral dangerous challenges, paedophilia and grooming, and toxic groups) and the risks of artificial intelligence applications. Additionally, programmes should focus on the prevention of cyberbullying, self-limitation and information filtering skills, critical thinking and analysis of information, detection of hoaxes, and responsible content posting. This is probably one of the most important challenges of our time and a task that only education can effectively address.

52. Digital citizenship education is a priority for the Council of Europe. The Digital Citizenship Education Forum⁴⁹ held in May 2025 addressed themes such as understanding digital citizenship, ethical behaviour online, safety and security, combating disinformation, digital literacy and critical thinking, digital footprint and reputation, cyberbullying and online harassment, inclusive and accessible digital communities, digital rights and responsibilities, and digital participation and democracy. To support these initiatives, various resources have been developed, including a digital citizenship education handbook, leaflets, lesson plans, a report for parents, and the *Diginauts* animation series for young children. These resources aim to help teachers, students, and parents navigate the digital world. Additionally, the Council of Europe is focusing on artificial intelligence (AI) literacy, covering technical skills, human aspects, learning with AI, and using AI to learn about learning. Other significant resources include the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027), and the European Wergeland Centre in Norway, which collaborated with the Council of Europe on digital citizenship education.

5. Key stakeholders for democratic and participative schools

53. While competences for democratic culture, civic engagement, learning methodologies, and responsiveness and innovation in and through education are essential concerns, these aims cannot be achieved in isolation. To nurture democratic values, schools must be an inclusive space of socialisation where everyone can feel recognised and respected, and where learners enjoy being with others.

54. The educational systems of the member States do recognise and address these socialisation aspects. However, the Assembly should urge the Council of Europe member States to step up and build on their commitment to further promote the socialisation aspects of quality education in the digital age, to improve learners' safety, mental health and well-being, grounding democratic values, and strengthening inclusion and participation in a sustainable digital society. The various existing initiatives would benefit from the co-ordination of key stakeholders to create a common frame that schools can identify and work with.

55. Teachers play a crucial role in the development of students, modelling norms, values, and social skills. They help to shape students' identity and self-esteem through their own academic and personal characteristics and expectations. As socialisation agents, teachers should act – like parents – as role models, displaying ethical and moral behaviour that students can learn from. For example, they can introduce discussions about ethical dilemmas adapted to the age of learners and demonstrate appropriate ways to handle conflicts. Furthermore, it is up to teachers to apply active or collaborative methodologies, and to teach subjects related to citizenship education, democratic values and related competences, and the use of digital resources in school. Any action to improve the socialisation of students must thus prioritise the initial and ongoing training of teachers.

56. Socialising work requires the participation of everyone. Schools and teachers are the core, but only a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach among key stakeholders will achieve optimal results. Each party plays a very important role. Educational authorities in member States could co-ordinate a common citizenship education curriculum and practice, with the support of the European Space for Citizenship Education and use of resources such as the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture. They should implement policies in the areas of harmonious living together, well-being, inclusion, and democratic values and practices. Strengthening initial and ongoing teacher training in socialisation, inclusion, values and emotional education, participation, conflict prevention/resolution, and co-operative learning is essential. Additionally, the Assembly could recommend creating a European seal, label, or other distinctive marker and an attractive and agile digital framework for “schools for learning to live”, thus creating a network permanently linked through social media with specific training and support system.

57. School directors and management teams should aim to create democratic and participative schools, that support the identity of the local community, and where students and families have specific channels for participation. They should value each of the school's teachers, facilitating time for ongoing training, the exchange of ideas, and mutual support and co-operation. It is crucial to promote harmonious well-being in

49. www.coe.int/en/web/education/dce-for-educators;
www.coe.int/en/web/education/european-year-of-digital-citizenship-education-2025.

school through an integrated model, which includes adopting common rules in a participatory and democratic way and implementing programmes for the prevention and participatory resolution of conflicts – such as mediation, peer support, and restorative justice. Developing co-operative learning programmes that promote collaboration, not competition, and offering students a wide range of complementary activities and clubs (artistic, sportive, environmental, social service, etc.) that encourage socialisation around their interests are also important steps.

58. Teachers should be encouraged to be proud that they are the core of the school's socialising work and value the importance of this task. They should be supported in their commitment to the educational community, through regular and career-long training to update knowledge and techniques on the topics and programs mentioned in this report. Exchange of ideas and good practices among teachers at State and European levels should be stimulated and funded.

59. Students and families need to be encouraged to actively engage in the school community through parent and student associations. They can contribute to the learning environment by participating in interactive groups, and family-oriented training activities. Collaboration around citizenship education is vital, fostering a family life grounded in respect, positive emotional skills, and well-being. Violence prevention and promoting digital responsibility should be central concerns. Any signs of distress, harassment, or isolation should be rapidly detected and acted upon to ensure well-being and a safe and supportive environment for everyone.

60. Support stakeholders, including counsellors, psychologists, and educators, can offer valuable assistance and forge partnerships with external associations and specialists. Universities can play a crucial role in assisting school communities by developing research programmes, and monitoring and evaluating the initiatives.

6. Conclusion

61. In a global context marked by ongoing wars and other major crises, it may seem that enhancing the socialising role of schools is not an immediate priority. Yet we must recognise that today's schools shape tomorrow's society. Given that the children and young people in classrooms today will soon be the ones leading the world, no time should be lost in preparing them to face the future.

62. Wars and conflicts continue to claim lives, while ordinary people feel powerless to influence these events. We have witnessed democracies erode into authoritarian regimes – some now governing vast populations – and others drifting into uncertainty. Even in Europe, where democracy has long been a cornerstone, we are seeing a troubling rise in far-right ideologies and growing mistrust in democratic institutions. Many young people, having never experienced the absence of democracy, may not fully grasp and appreciate its value.

63. In this climate, the influence of social media and the spread of disinformation among youth is undeniable. Young people are learning to navigate a world where truth is often distorted, and where technology can displace critical thinking and civic engagement. Schools must serve as a counterbalance – a space where democracy is not only taught but lived. Democracy and living together are not innate; they must be learned and practiced every day. School is the ideal setting for this learning.

64. The activities mentioned in this report aim to strengthen socialisation and democratic engagement. They promote participation, shared responsibility, collaboration, dialogue, peaceful conflict resolution, emotional education, respect for diversity, and mutual support. These experiences foster confidence, critical thinking, and a sense of responsibility therefore laying the foundation for inclusive and resilient communities. The time to act is now. Every teacher, every school, every family that educates young people to respect and embrace democratic life is helping to build a better world.

65. We hope that this report may inspire new initiatives and raise awareness of the vital role schools play in socialising among students, especially in these challenging times. It is both important and urgent that educational authorities intensify their efforts. Schools must be empowered to fulfil their role in preparing children and youth not only for a working life, but for a shared life protecting and participating in a democratic society.