

CHARTER ON EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP AND HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION: A DIVERSITY OF APPROACHES



Analytical review of
the findings of a survey
on the development
of competences for
democracy and human
rights in Belarus,
Georgia, Lithuania and
the Russian Federation

Funded
by the European Union
and the Council of Europe



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Executive summary

■ In 2013 a questionnaire survey was organised as part of the Council of Europe/European Commission «Human Rights and Democracy in Action» pilot projects scheme, with the main aims of:

- ▶ gathering information on the current situation regarding the development of skills/competences required for life in democratic societies, within the framework of school education (concerning children aged 14-15 years);
- ▶ promoting the development of sustainable mechanisms for fostering citizenship and human rights education in the participating States.

■ The questionnaire was filled in by pupils, teachers and heads of educational organisations in Belarus, Georgia, Lithuania and the Russian Federation.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

■ Among the factors making the issue of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education necessary and more topical in the States participating in the survey, the respondents defined the following:

- ▶ 1. the changing social, political and socio-cultural situation in the world, prompting citizens to seek answers to questions and challenges of our time (Russian Federation, Belarus, Lithuania, Georgia)
- ▶ 2. the need to teach and educate pupils of different ethnic backgrounds and faiths within a single educational environment (Russian Federation)

■ Educational programmes geared to education for democratic citizenship are incorporated in the standards of all four countries and are presented both in the context of humanities subjects at school (law, social studies, economics, history) and within the framework of extracurricular activities (optional courses, extra classes, thematic lessons). The respondents of all four countries recognised the need to involve parents in the educational environment and also the importance of timely and multi-faceted in-service training for teachers.

■ The conditions for effectively developing democratic citizenship skills and human rights education were identified by the respondents as follows:

- ▶ 1. the forging of an environment where children feel that they have an important role to play in the educational process (Belarus, Georgia and the Russian Federation)
- ▶ 2. committed teachers, a creative approach and also having enough time to carry out extracurricular activities (Lithuania, Russian Federation)
- ▶ 3. regular in-service training for teachers to give them experience in conducting extracurricular activities aimed at education for democratic citizenship (Russian Federation)

■ The most important factors seen by the respondents as hampering the successful development of citizenship skills and competences for pupils included:

- ▶ 1. insufficient involvement of parents in the educational process, as a result inter alia of them being busy at work and there being no attractive method for involving them in school life (Belarus, Lithuania and the Russian Federation),
- ▶ 2. teachers' tendency to concentrate on educational activities geared to passing on knowledge, know-how and skills in concrete areas of expertise (mathematics, languages etc) and not on creative education using technologies for developing a competent approach among pupils aimed at developing their ability to independently resolve problems in different spheres of activity on the basis of practical knowledge, know-how and skills and of social experience (Belarus, Lithuania),

- ▶ 3. the absence on a certain level of criteria for assessing the effectiveness of teaching citizenship skills in a context of limited or insignificant involvement of pupils in the social life of the town or State, and also subjectivity in assessing citizenship skills by means of awarding grades under a points system (Russian Federation),
- ▶ 4. the lack of ability among pupils to critically assess material from social networks and media sources - as a result of inadequate perception of negative information giving rise to aggressive attitudes, ideas of ethnic supremacy etc (Georgia, Russian Federation),
- ▶ 5. insufficient involvement of media to draw attention to youth-oriented social projects and the encouragement of young people to join in this activity (Russian Federation, Georgia),
- ▶ 6. a lack of openness and the bureaucratic nature of the education system in the area of democratic citizenship and human rights education (Russian Federation),
- ▶ 7. inadequate methodological assistance with regard to developing programmes for democratic citizenship and human rights education from the Council of Europe (no materials in state languages other than Russian and English).

■ **To increase the effectiveness of programme implementation it is necessary to:**

- ▶ 1. promote the involvement of parents in the educational process and school life,
- ▶ 2. provide schoolteachers with more time for extracurricular work and the devising and conducting of creative courses, seminars and other activities aimed at drawing pupils' attention to issues of democratic citizenship; provide further training,
- ▶ 3. devise clear criteria for assessing the results of educational work,
- ▶ 4. teach pupils to work with information media and critically assess their content,
- ▶ 5. involve media in the dissemination of information on youth projects and develop «intelligent» media attracting a younger audience,
- ▶ 6. make the education system more transparent and cut red tape,
- ▶ 7. introduce educational standards in line with the challenges of the present-day,
- ▶ 8. provide targeted material support to schools to help teachers and back up material and technical resources,
- ▶ 9. raise the level of methodological assistance from the Council of Europe for the preparation and implementation of programmes of education for democratic citizenship.

Introduction

■ In 2013 a questionnaire survey was organised as part of the Council of Europe/European Commission «Human Rights and Democracy in Action» pilot projects scheme, in order to gather information on the current situation regarding the development of skills/competences required for life in democratic societies, within the framework of school education (concerning children aged 14-15 years). The aim of the survey was not to present a comprehensive overview of the current situation but rather to take a snapshot of the individual perceptions of participants in the educational process active in the sphere of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education in Belarus, Georgia, Lithuania and the Russian Federation at the time of the survey.

■ Two groups of respondents were selected as focus groups. The first of these consisted of representatives of schools (head teacher and teachers), officials from ministries and departments overseeing education, as well as representatives of various non-profit organisations active in the sphere of education. The second group consisted of pupils aged 14-15 years.

■ The first group of respondents was asked to reply to 10 questions, which could be conveniently divided into three groups: 1) «How are educational programmes aimed at developing democratic citizenship and human rights implemented in your country?», 2) «How effective are these programmes within the existing education system and how could they be made more effective?», 3) «How can young peoples' citizenship skills be supported by parents, social groups and the media?». The school pupils (second group of respondents) were asked the question: «To what extent do you think that schools promote the development of skills for life in democratic society (such as skills for promoting social cohesion, valuing diversity and resolving differences and conflicts)?»

■ The present analysis has been put together on the basis of the corresponding feedback prepared by representatives of the countries participating in the survey. The bodies responsible for implementing the project to initially identify interesting educational processes in the respective countries were: in Belarus - the Academy of postgraduate education, in Georgia - the Centre for teacher training, in Lithuania - the Association for conflict prevention and in the Russian Federation - the Civic education centre. The methodological bases for conducting the survey were agreed within the framework of a coordinated meeting in Lithuania on 23-24 July 2013. A total of 155 people participated in the survey, of whom 64 were pupils aged 14-15 years.

■ The authors of the present analysis have attempted to identify and assess: 1) specific characteristics (methods and educational approaches) of the development of democratic citizenship skills/competences which are applied in the educational process of countries participating in the survey, 2) vectors of development of democratic citizenship and human rights education programmes, 3) distinguishing features and specific characteristics of educational practice in a number of States and problems encountered by the respondents (in cases where this was covered in the feedback submitted).

■ For objective reasons, the authors of the analysis had to refrain from comparing given positions in quantitative terms and, instead of figures, use generalised non-specific terms. This was dictated by the logic of the survey itself and more specifically the attempt to provide a «snapshot of individual perceptions», as well as a fairly free interpretation of the survey by the participating countries, which does not always allow a precise statistical comparison on each specific point.

Findings of the analysis

1. The education systems of the participating countries are underpinned by traditional approaches, making it possible to successfully educate pupils in citizenship and promote human rights education. The approaches that stood out in the survey were a humanist approach (as regards guidance for developing one's personality in harmony with universal culture and alignment with nature) and an axiological (value-based) approach (where education and the forming of an individual are regarded as a process of acquisition by that individual of humanist (universal and national) values of society and culture). Within the framework of these approaches educational models are implemented, geared to the teaching of skills necessary for the positive perception of diversity and equality and for the respect of differences, above all between different faith and ethnic groups.

The socio-cultural approach, determining vectors for the forging of a value-oriented concept of pupils' skills/competences, motivation to take part in socially significant activity as well as the correction not of actions and conduct but of the sense underlying those actions, promotes skills for settling disagreements and conflicts in a non-violent manner with respect for one another's rights.

Working in groups (whether during a lesson in class or in a study group within the framework of additional learning) makes it possible to provide pupils with skills in promoting social cohesion as well as the ability to listen to the opinions of members of the group.

A particularly salient feature of the questionnaire feedback was the emphasis on the need to move away from the traditional system of education formed on the basis of transmission by the teacher of ready knowledge for its further unthinking replication by pupils. At present, respondents in all four countries consider that an exclusively competence-based approach is the only right approach to take. This is geared to developing pupils' ability to independently resolve problems in different spheres and areas of activity on the basis of practically oriented knowledge, know-how and skills and social experience.

These approaches are implemented in the educational practices in the States participating in the survey through the use of different technologies and methods such as: interactive teaching and learning methods; project work (carrying out of social projects, educational research); development of pupils self-governance within the school; organisation of educative/social specialisation and pre-specialisation practices; training courses; games technology; critical reasoning techniques.

As indicated in most of the feedback, approaches like this make it possible to involve pupils more in the educational process and make them aware of their own role in that process.

Respondents believe that such methods, together with modern education techniques, make it possible to develop the skills needed by pupils for life in democratic society.

2. Respondents were unanimous on how to resolve the problem of including the development of skills/competences required for life in democratic societies in the existing educational standards of the States participating in the project. Respondents in Belarus, Georgia, Lithuania and the Russian Federation all mentioned the inclusion of these questions in the basic school syllabus for humanities subjects such as law, social sciences, economics and history.

In addition, education in democratic citizenship skills was implemented within the framework of extracurricular classes with a social education bias (optional courses, circles, extra classes).

These approaches are established as mandatory in educational standards and, consequently, written into the education programmes at the different levels. In the Russian Federation, for example, corresponding federal state educational standards have been adopted and various tolerance education programmes and mandatory use of the ethnic/regional component in the teaching of each subject in a proportion of 10% are in operation, and thematic lessons in class are devoted to the problems of intolerance in society, the tragedy of the Holocaust etc. A basic educational programme for elementary general education has been devised in accordance with those educational standards, geared to forming pupils' general culture, their spiritual/moral, social, personal and intellectual development, the creation of a basis for independent study activities and the development of creative abilities. Initiative-based work is also carried out: school groups take part in different competitions and social projects, and creative groups take part in thematic festivals. In Belarus programmes have been devised for optional extracurricular activities on civic and legal topics for secondary and upper-secondary pupils. These include: «The future is us» (an education programme geared to the teaching of moral and volitional qualities, such as determination, responsibility, independence, initiative); «Exploring humanitarian law» (an education programme aimed at instilling pupils with attitudes of non-violence, understanding, empathy and the ability to peacefully resolve conflicts within a legal framework, as well as willingness to abide by the principles and standards of international humanitarian law); «Basic gender issues» (an education programme geared to forging gender awareness among upper secondary pupils and the study of problems of contemporary society).

In Lithuania the teaching of democracy skills is dispensed through a citizenship education course in schools. The «Citizenship education» curriculum pursues the goals of providing pupils with skills in resolving problems by non-violent means and involving pupils in the life of the school and society and proposes participation in project activity aimed at identifying problems of schools and school society, together with the means of resolving them. The curriculum looks at attitudes towards others and seeks to identify the causes of discrimination on racial, ethnic or gender grounds.

Nevertheless, it is noticeable from most of the questionnaire replies that there is no clear understanding of how to organise work on the ground methodically and methodologically and how to ensure that the educational standards and curricula do not simply remain a fine document shelved in an official's office or a theoretical manual but are implemented in practice. Respondents from Georgia¹, Lithuania and the Russian Federation commented along these lines. The situation could be improved by a series of measures, including further teacher training, which is discussed below.

3. Concerning the effectiveness of the existing evaluation of pupils' skills/competences for life in democratic society, it was frequently stated that the evaluation system was effective as it was arranged in such a way that the pupils were involved in monitoring/assessment activities and acquired skills in and familiarity with self-assessment and that it is effective on the level of assessing knowledge of the school subject of social science. However, such assessments are subjective and shown in marks for subjects, which is not always correct. Many of the respondents pointed out that there was in fact no system for evaluating these skills using defined grades or criteria and that it was all down to subjective assessment by the teacher. Evaluation criteria for the democratic citizenship skills acquired may be judged from the sensible, tolerant and adaptable behaviour of pupils in concrete situations (attitudes displayed towards violence, racial or other discrimination etc), more often than not in a stressful situation.

Unfortunately, a large proportion of the respondents questioned considered that it was impossible to measure effectiveness.

4. Concerning the role of school life organisation as an instrument for guiding the process of democratic skills/competences development, the respondents pointed to the paramount importance of school governance programmes within education establishments. Taking part in the work of the school board, including voting on decisions on the work of the school and carrying out school-wide measures, including those aimed at forging a tolerant environment, are all processes enabling pupils to learn how to work out their philosophy on matters of immediate importance and, consequently, gain positive social experience and develop their capacity for critical thought. The functioning of the governance process within education establishments is an important condition for developing and practising pupils' civic, social and communication skills and competences.

In addition, the development of citizenship skills/competences is implemented within the system of teaching and educative work within the education establishment. Many teachers perform duties of class heads/tutors, carrying out individual and group educative work with the pupils.

1. For the question «How are questions of democratic citizenship and human rights education included in the educational standards in your country?», the Georgian respondents did not manage to provide an unequivocal answer.

The system of civic and legal education for pupils comprises teaching, educative nurturing, research or exploratory work by pupils, children's and youth club activities, activities geared to social causes or culture and leisure, and voluntary movements.

Civic and legal education includes the teaching of school subjects and is aimed at enlightening and informing pupils on civic, legal and moral topics.

The experience of participating States in this area shows that the system of educative work in schools helps to instil pupils with a civic viewpoint and tolerance and also contributes to the prevention of extremism. Where such work is carried out systematically, these skills are maintained at a high level. This is particularly important to point out, given the high percentage of pupils originating from socially disadvantaged strata/underprivileged families. Social groups like this typically follow a conflictual pattern of behaviour, displaying polarity and harsh judgements etc. Teachers and head teachers commented that, in such cases, the education establishment must foster the forging of the view among pupils that everything (or much) depends on them personally. Children must participate in the life of the school, exercising the right to self-governance and demonstrating continual, active mutual assistance. In their preparation to become a citizen they must learn to feel like citizens of their own schools at an earlier stage.

■ **5.** The respondents observed that tasks like this must be facilitated by an effective teacher training system. At present there is a clear need to hold seminars for teachers on topics such as the «organisational and pedagogical bases for pupil self-governance in schools» and the «organisation of the school board.» It is important to use different teaching formats, such as seminars, training sessions in psychology and round tables. The organisers of such events must take account of educational experience in other countries and be able to exchange opinions and ideas for projects on a single platform.

In a number of cases respondents mentioned the inadequacy of teacher training in terms of present-day perceptions and understanding of the changing socio-cultural map of the world. The deep-rooted nature of the education system in a number of participating countries and its inertia mean that teachers may speak about topical problems in the world on the basis of their own common perceptions of the subject. It is commonplace in teaching circles not to distinguish between the victims of the Second World War and the victims of the Holocaust, to skirt round the notion of «tolerance», mistakenly lumping it together with the concept of «permissiveness», and to interpret the concept of «civic education» as «civic-patriotic» and emphasise military history teaching accordingly. In such cases, providing in-service training for teachers and teaching them skills enabling them to apprehend a vision of socio-cultural reality in correlation to a commitment to democratic values will substantially enhance their ability to speak with the young generation of citizens about what is happening in the country and in the world.

At the same time, such in-service training courses require backing at state level. Increasing the number of hours devoted to extracurricular studies with pupils will allow more time to be devoted to the civic education of young people. In turn, trainers will be supplied with motivated teaching specialists interested in working in this sphere.

■ **6.** The basic stances of state policy on supporting pupils' skills and competences involve inter alia drawing up targeted programmes on given topics, producing various «roadmaps» and allocating funding for grants to youth initiatives. The material and technical provision is improving too: modern equipment is being purchased. In the case of the Russian Federation, examples included targeted programmes such as «7 skills of the citizen» and «Youth. Opportunity. Achievement», while in Lithuania the Institute of Civil Society is running a programme entitled «Building the State». At the same time, the respondents were united in the opinion that the promulgation of other types of programmes and projects at national level, in many cases placing emphasis on modern, innovative approaches to implementation, was running up against reluctance to implement them at local level, stemming from inadequate teacher training and the prevailing tradition of academicism in the education process, as well as reluctance to introduce extramural activities carried out in an active form. Some respondents also mentioned that, at this stage in time, there is no concrete targeted support on the part of the State.

■ **7.** Media coverage of initiatives to develop skills and competences in the area of citizenship and human rights merits a separate mention. Concerning broadsheet periodicals, products of the state and private telecommunications systems and other media not specialising in education issues, it should be pointed out that the question of developing these skills and competences in the education process is touched upon in a piecemeal manner. Nevertheless, the mass media do cover questions of respect for human rights, democracy and tolerance as global universal values. Programmes look at topical problems of life in society, education and youth policy. Practices in teaching young people democratic citizenship skills

are explained as part of that coverage. However, this does not mean that broad sectors of society are made significantly aware of the issue of interest to us here. To a certain extent, this situation is compensated for by the substantial possibilities opened up for dialogue between representatives of society (and first and foremost parents) and representatives of the education sphere by internet forums devoted to education issues. Normally, such forums present a news feed, with the possibility of commenting on events, a forum where participants can create publications on topics of interest to them and blogs by specialists - education officials and teaching practitioners. In the Russian Federation, for example, there is a forum run by the «Vektor obrazovaniya» [education vector] information agency devoted to the latest news in the education sphere and providing an opportunity for interaction on the web between interested participants in the education process.

8. Recently, a major role has been played by web-based means of communication, such as social networks like Facebook and its counterpart used in the Russian-speaking segment of the Internet and popular in the participating countries, «VKontakte» [in contact]. Social networks enable informal groups of teachers, pupils and their parents to maintain ongoing contact, exchange views and compare notes on social ideas and projects. These very tools are used within school society - special pages are created for schools and pupil groups to showcase their achievements, ideas and projects. This working method is used alongside the traditional wall newspapers and limited print-run bulletins. Nevertheless, the experts point out that social networks and other information and communication technologies are more commonly used within school society to provide or receive information on events run in the school, announce changes to pupil timetables etc. These technologies are more seldom used to create and implement projects aimed at developing skills and competences for democratic citizenship. Even so, examples of the latter are mentioned in the comments from Belarus, Georgia, Lithuania and the Russian Federation. At the same time, there was also mention of the substantial amount of negative information featured on the Internet, including information aimed at inciting inter-ethnic hatred, claims of the supremacy of certain ethnic groups over others and material showing acts of violence and other inappropriate viewing. It goes without saying that school societies prefer to work in a secure environment, where the content of a site or group is filtered by adults. But beyond the confines of that artificially created environment stands the enormous universe of the Internet, which frequently features deliberately distorted information. This engenders another pedagogical problem – that of teacher-pupil dialogue on a social network. It is very important for competent educationalists and first and foremost those providing in-service training for teachers to take up their niche in the web-based life of society, maintaining their authority through their ability to move with the trend of modern times and pass on their expertise in the modern language of technologies.

9. Efforts to develop any skills and competences among pupils in class and extramural activities will not be successful unless they are backed by understanding and support on the part of the parents. In this respect, the respondents see a clear need to work with groups of parents in order to enlighten them in the sphere of civic education and involve them in the educational environment. However, attempts to suggest that parents learn and become more civically literate are met with uneasiness and unwillingness to participate in the process on their part. Parents are made uneasy by the form in which this education is served up, and people are not willing to listen to moral preaching while sitting at a desk. The answer here seems to be to devise an attractive method for involving parents in educative processes. In particular, such methods would offer parents an opportunity to look at their child from a detached viewpoint, forget about their family ties and see them through different eyes, and have a different take on how a child defers to their parents' opinion, expresses a protest against adults or relates to their authority and care. This makes it possible to not only support citizenship skills in the parents themselves but also to give them general guidance, with the help of pedagogical devices, for dealing with their children.

In addition, the respondents pointed to the importance of getting parents to participate in general school events, which, with the involvement of parents, serve as a good example of interaction between generations, the school and the family. Nevertheless, it was stated that, more often than not, many parents are busy with work and financial and housekeeping issues linked to the material upkeep of the family and, as a result, do not devote enough time to their children's education and upbringing. This is the key factor underlying the low level of parent involvement in the educative process.

10. Systematic work geared to the development of democratic citizenship and human rights skills/competences has an impact on the respect of children's rights in the school. All school pupils have equal rights, irrespective of their belonging to a given faith or ethnic group. Obviously, if children know what rights they have, they will check that these are respected. Legal knowledge is organised within the system of ethical guidance, which is a prerequisite for the legal safety of children and childhood.

Respect for the rights of children and young people in education establishments is directly dependent on whether their civic, social and legal skills/competences have been forged and to what extent these are developed. Children and young people with civic, social and legal skills/competences respect, know and observe the law. They are equipped with a world outlook and behaviour giving them a positive perception

of the diversity and equality of peoples, cultures, religions and values. They strive for dialogue, mutual understanding and cooperation with different people (peers and adults) and for the resolution of conflicts by peaceful means, which all fosters democracy and social cohesion.

These children and young people have an active civic stance, social engagement, empathy with the problems of individuals and the socium, motivation to take part in social projects and social activism.

Concerning the outcome of training in democratic citizenship skills, on the whole the experts concurred that this activity results in a decrease in aggressive behaviour in schools and a reduction in the number of pupils demonstrating inappropriate behaviour. Nevertheless, the experience of Lithuania and the Russian Federation shows that what is technically a reduction in instances of aggressive behaviour is not necessarily down to a real wish on the part of pupils to work out its causes or discuss a problem that has arisen with the teacher. Rather more revealing is the example given from Lithuania, when pupils were told off by their teachers for mounting a protest against the attestation procedure. Here we can see not only a violation of pupils' right to express their own opinions by the school administration but also unwillingness to resolve that issue by means of dialogue.

Also noteworthy is another problem mentioned in feedback from the Russian Federation. This is linked to the issue of relations between pupils from different ethnic groups studying in the same class. The current migration situation is inevitably resulting in classes of pupils belonging to different ethnic, national and religious groups. This engenders situations of conflict driven by ethnic strife, with classes dividing themselves up into groups defined by ethnic characteristics, which then battle for the right to be the leaders in the class. This situation is particularly evident in regions where most of the inhabitants are made up of a majority mono-ethnic group and a given group of migrants. In cases where the former has the numerical advantage in a school, the classes (and society as a whole) enjoy a sufficient degree of civil rest. If the demographic situation changes, the school becomes an institutional setting where the rights of children may not be respected by their counterparts.

The experience of the contemporary system of education in the participating States shows a positive dynamic in grasping the necessity of teaching democratic citizenship skills and certain difficulties in implementing the programmes adopted for that purpose. However, it is worth considering the opinion of the end user of the system, namely the pupil. The question selected for this group of respondents was to what extent their school promotes the development of skills for life in a democratic society (such as skills for fostering social solidarity, valuing diversity and settling disagreements and conflicts). In the opinion of the pupils the school actively promotes the development of skills for life in a democratic society. History and the other humanities develop them very well. Nevertheless, pupils are unwilling to make a practical assessment because they believe that the skills acquired remain at the level of theoretical knowledge and they have little practical experience. School is one of the stages of life in a democratic society because it develops cordial relations, tolerance and respect, provides guidance in difficult circumstances, narrates historical events and sets people in the right direction. There is much discussion of this in classes, and pupils participate in pupil self-governance, social projects and trips and interact with their peers. The children show interest in acquiring new skills and knowledge, including in the sphere of citizenship; however, for the majority actual experience is given tangible form solely in discussions within local groups and youth clubs but not in real decision-making of significance for the life of the local community, town or country.

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