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Civic education as a pathway to inclusive societies: Exploring the role of education in fostering civic and social engagement

Hannah Borhan

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Civic Education as a Pathway to Inclusive Societies

Exploring the role of education in fostering civic and social engagement

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Abstract

Civic engagement is fundamental to an equitable and inclusive society, with active participation in democratic processes serving as a cornerstone for social cohesion. However, recent trends across OECD countries show a decline in civic participation, marked by diminishing electoral engagement, rising socio-economic disparities in political involvement, and increasing distrust in public institutions. This paper investigates the vital role of civic education in addressing these challenges, exploring how civic education practices can influence citizens' participation, trust in government, and the representation of diverse groups. Despite the growing prioritisation of civic education across OECD systems, this paper identifies significant gaps in its implementation, including inconsistent regulation, lack of inclusion, and limited research on its effectiveness. Addressing these gaps is essential for ensuring that all students are equipped to participate meaningfully in a democratic society.

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1. Introduction

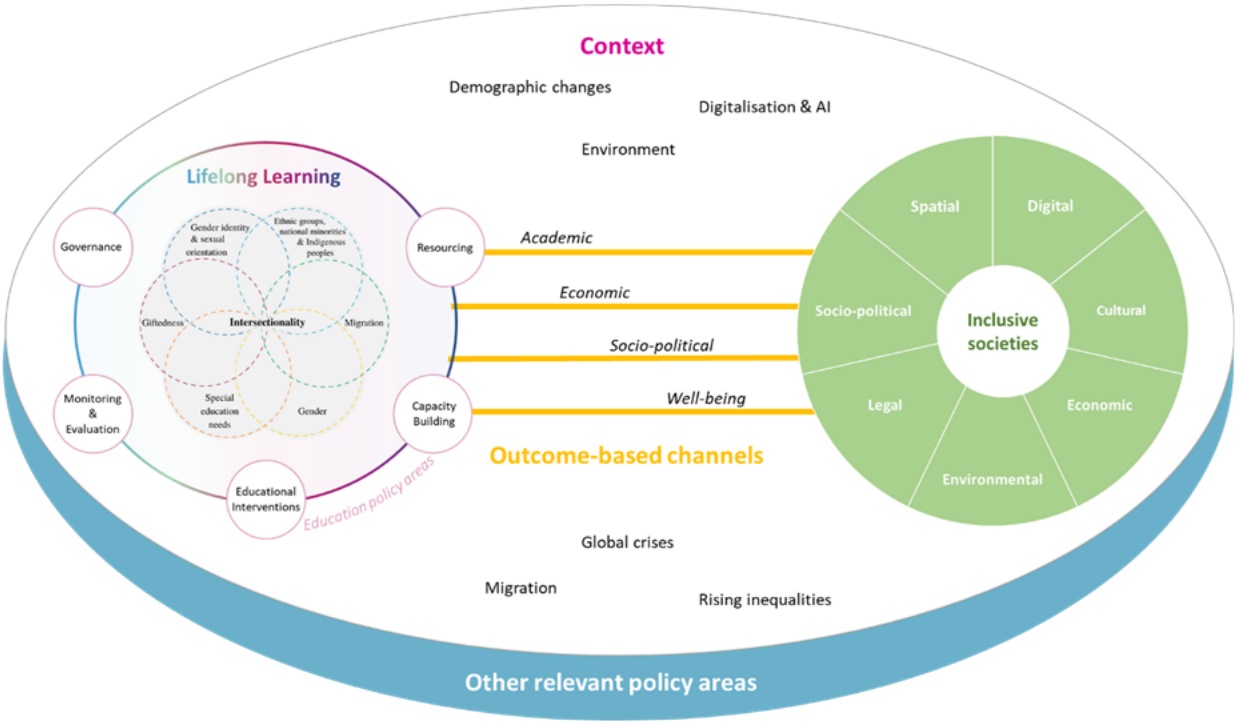
The participation and engagement of a diverse range of citizens in the democratic process, from voting in elections to participating in community initiatives, form the bedrock of an equitable and inclusive society (Prats and Meunier, 2021[1]; German Marshall Fund, 2019[2]). Over recent years, however, many OECD countries have observed a notable decline and change in civic engagement, coupled with a rise in inequality between participants and a diminishing trust in public institutions (OECD, 2018[3]; OECD, 2022[4]; OECD, 2023[5]). This trend is exemplified by issues such as the declining electoral participation of younger generations, an escalating socio-economic divide in political involvement and a rise in populism (Rodríguez-Pose, Terrero-Dávila and Lee, 2023[6]; OECD, 2023[5]). Acknowledging and addressing the decline and inequalities in civic participation are imperative for the creation of an inclusive society, ensuring an environment where all individuals have a chance to contribute and thrive.

What it takes to be an active and engaged citizen in the 21st century is constantly being shaped by multiple contextual factors such as the climate crisis, the proliferation of fake news, the rise of violent conflicts, changing migration patterns and the rise in use of digital technologies such as artificial intelligence (Isac, 2024[7]). Education policy serves as a crucial tool in addressing these challenges, as it can equip individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to actively participate in civic and social spheres, fostering a more informed and engaged citizenry (OECD Education Policy Committee, 2022[8]; Cerna et al., 2021[9]; OECD, 2010[10]). This impact can manifest both *indirectly*, where individuals acquire the general knowledge and skills needed for participation throughout the educational process, and *directly,* through specialised programmes such as civic education, which will be the primary focus of this paper. For an inclusive society, the right to education should not only be equally distributed but should be used to prepare all individuals to be actively engaged in the way in which that society is managed, ordered and represented (DESA, 2009[11]).

Civic education, often also referred to as ‘global citizenship education’, ‘citizenship education’ or ‘democracy education’, can be understood as education which aims to develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes required to be an active, democratic, responsible and critical citizen (AEGEE Europe, 2016[12]). Its ultimate goal is to educate the population on democratic citizenship and make them aware of their rights and responsibilities. Over recent years, many education systems across the OECD have increasingly prioritised civic education to promote democratic citizenship in response to falling political participation rates.

The *Education for Inclusive Societies* project in the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills has developed an analytical framework which explores the channels through which inclusive education policies can impact and form inclusive societies and vice-versa (Education for Inclusive Societies Framework, *forthcoming*). Please refer to infographic 1.1 below. This working paper will focus on the socio-political outcome-based channel.

Infographic 1.1. Analytical framework for equity and inclusion in and through education



Source: OECD (Forthcoming[13]) Education for Inclusive Societies Design and Implementation Plan

The socio-political outcome-based channel highlights the central role of education in influencing i) citizens' participation in society and politics, ii) trust in government and iii) and the presence of diverse groups in positions of leadership and decision making. Socio-political outcomes, measured by indicators such as voting and political interest, include the concept of civic and social engagement (CSE), which refers to citizens' participation in community life to improve conditions or shape the future (Godonoga and Sarrico, 2019[14]). CSE can be influenced by education in several ways, particularly through civic education, which will be explored in this working paper.

This working paper finds that despite the increasing emphasis on civic education across OECD education systems, evidence shows that civic education practices are often not regulated or evaluated, are often not inclusive of all student groups, are often not standardised across education systems, and there is limited research on civic education practices and results across the OECD. Addressing these gaps is crucial for fostering civic and social engagement, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to participate meaningfully in an inclusive society.

2. Rationale

This section outlines the rationale for the paper, examining the definition and dimensions of civic and social engagement (CSE) and its vital role in fostering inclusive societies. Drawing on data from various international sources, it analyses the evolving nature of CSE, including trends in voting, social media use, and trust in government. Finally, it highlights the critical role of education in developing the skills and competencies necessary for meaningful democratic participation. The rationale underscores the urgent need for education systems to prioritise civic education in their policies and practices.

2.1. Defining civic and social engagement (CSE)

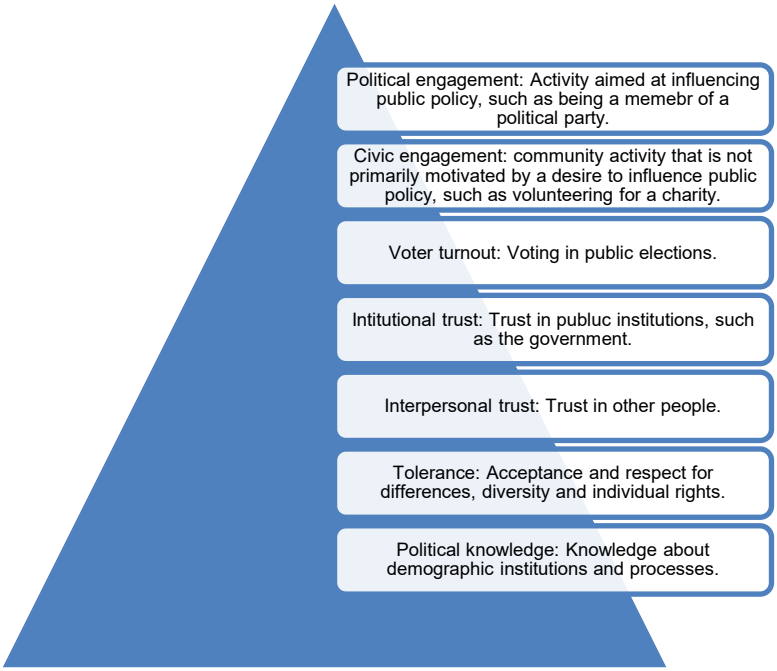
The term "civic" can be understood as the domain in which people participate in activities related to their community or society as a whole (Lauglo and Øia, 2007[15]). Civic Engagement is about whether citizens can and do take part in important civic activities that enable them to shape the society they live in (OECD, 2020[16]). However, there is little consensus about the term "civic engagement" among researchers (Ekman and Amnå, 2012[17]). Although some authors separate civic engagement from political engagement (Ekman and Amnå, 2012[17]), it is accepted by others that the term "civic engagement" encompasses a broad range of activities related to political participation such as voting and political activism, as well as broader community-orientated outcomes such as volunteering and community service, and non-participative outcomes such as political knowledge (Keeter et al., 2002[18]; Adler and Goggin, 2005[19]). The paper applies the latter definition, in line with previous work from the OECD (OECD, 2010[10]). However, the lack of consensus surrounding the definition of this concept may be a hinderance in the research, analysis and policy comparisons of civic education practices.

Social engagement can be understood as one's degree of participation within a community or society. Nath (2012[20]) describes social engagement as behaviours such as "acting as a member of, volunteering for, and donating various types of resources to an individual, group, association, or organisation, as well as acts of care for neighbours that do not occur through an organisation or as a result of friendship" and political engagement as "behaviours that influence legislative, electoral or judicial processes and public decision-making" (in Jones (2016, p. 1[21])).

Regardless of how the terms are defined, it is important to note that they support a sense of public responsibility (Jones, 2016[21]) and are interdependent (Council of Europe, 2011[22]). Authors such as Campbell (2006[23]), Borgonovi (2010[10]) and Jones (2016[21]) combine the two concepts into a general term, *Civic and Social Engagement* (CSE), which will be used for the purposes of this working paper.

Campbell (2006[23]) categorised CSE into seven dimensions, as demonstrated in infographic 2.1. Factors such as political knowledge, tolerance, and trust (both institutional and interpersonal) are positioned towards the base of the pyramid, reflecting their essential influence on civic and social life. While significant, their impact is indirect compared to the metrics situated at the top of the pyramid, namely voter turnout, civic engagement, and political engagement. These top-level indicators represent more immediate and visible aspects of civic involvement, as depicted in the hierarchical structure of the graph.

Infographic 2.1. Dimensions of CSE



Source: Adapted from Campbell (2006[23]) *What is education's impact on civic and social engagement?,* https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6h84705f (accessed on 30 November 2023)

As will be further explored in this working paper, each of these dimensions of engagement are strongly associated with an individual's education level. For instance, educational attainment is strongly correlated with voter turnout (OECD, 2020[24]), trust (OECD, 2022[4]), political knowledge (ICCS, 2023[25]), political engagement (OECD, 2023[5]) and tolerance (UNESCO, 2013[26]). The interplay between educational attainment and various dimensions of civic and social engagement underscores the pivotal role of education in shaping individuals' active participation in democratic processes and fostering a more informed, tolerant and inclusive society.

2.2. The importance of CSE for an inclusive society

Among the many elements that create an inclusive society, CSE is indispensable. An inclusive society is one in which all citizens are able to participate in the decision-making processes that impact their lives and ultimately shape their future (Hassan, Khreich and Osman, 2022[27]; UNESCO, 2021[28]). It is a society for all in which every individual has an active role to play (United Nations, 1995[29]). An inclusive society is equipped with mechanisms that accommodate diversity and equality of opportunities regardless of the personal backgrounds of its citizens, such as ethnicity, immigrant background, gender, sexual orientation and others.

Citizens play a critical role in advocating and helping to make public institutions more transparent, accountable and effective (World Bank, 2023[30]). Growing evidence suggests that, under the right conditions, meaningful forms of citizen engagement and social accountability can result in better governance, citizen empowerment, more positive and constructive citizen-state relations, strengthened public service delivery, and, ultimately, enhanced development effectiveness and well-being (ibid.)

Inclusive participation assumes that all citizens have legitimate opportunities to influence decisions concerning the identification, leveraging and mobilisation of community resources. Indeed, a thriving

democracy relies on the inclusion and active involvement of individuals from a wide range of backgrounds, demographics and perspectives in activities, and initiatives that contribute to the well-being and functioning of society (von Heimburg, Ness and Storch, 2021[31]). This can be understood as diverse participation, where all groups are included and ensured equitable participation. Diverse participation ensures a balance between individual rights and responsibilities for the collective good.

Active political participation, such as voting and advocacy, strengthens democracy and can foster trust between citizens and institutions (Callahan, 2007[32]). Trust in public institutions is vital for fostering social cohesion, promoting equality and ensuring effective governance in a society, creating an environment where individuals from diverse backgrounds feel included and valued (Algan, 2018[33]). When people feel that their voices are heard and that they have a role in decision-making processes, they are more likely to trust and support governmental and non-governmental institutions (Kumagai and Iorio, 2020[34]; van Ingen and Bekkers, 2013[35]; Harding et al., 2015[36]).

Furthermore, CSE can help lead to social cohesion (Schiefer and van der Noll, 2016[37]), which is characterised differently by authors (Fonseca, Lukosch and Brazier, 2018[38]). The Council of Europe defines social cohesion as "*the capacity of a society to ensure the well-being of all its members, minimizing disparities and avoiding marginalisation*" (Council of Europe, 2010, p. 2[39]). The OECD Global Development Report (2012, p. 17[40]) describes it as "*[a] cohesive society [that] works towards the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility*". They look at social cohesion through three different lenses:

- Social inclusion: measured by such aspects of social exclusion as poverty, inequality and social polarisation.
- Social capital: combines measures of trust (interpersonal and societal) with various forms of civic engagement.
- Social mobility: measures the degree to which people can or believe they can change their position in society.

Trust also plays a pivotal role in fostering social cohesion and promoting civic participation and engagement within societies (Cerna, 2014[41]). Trust is an indicator of how people perceive the quality of, and how they associate with, government institutions and democratic societies (OECD, 2022[4]). Strong interpersonal trust among individuals and institutions cultivates a sense of belonging and solidarity, laying the foundation for collaborative efforts to address common challenges and achieve shared goals (Stiglitz, Fitoussi and Durand, 2018[42]). Societies characterised by high levels of trust tend to exhibit greater resilience and inclusivity, as trust facilitates co-operation, reciprocity, and mutual support among diverse community members (ibid.). Moreover, trust in public institutions and political processes is essential for effective governance and democratic participation, as it enhances citizens' confidence in the legitimacy and responsiveness of decision-making bodies. Building and maintaining trust, therefore, represent essential pillars for fostering cohesive and vibrant societies that prioritise the active involvement of citizens in shaping their collective future. Democracy, civic engagement and social cohesion are interdependent (Council of Europe, 2011[22]). In a democratic framework, individuals actively participate in the decision-making processes of their community and nation, fostering civic engagement. This engagement, in turn, contributes to the strengthening of social cohesion, as it encourages a sense of shared responsibility and common purpose among citizens.

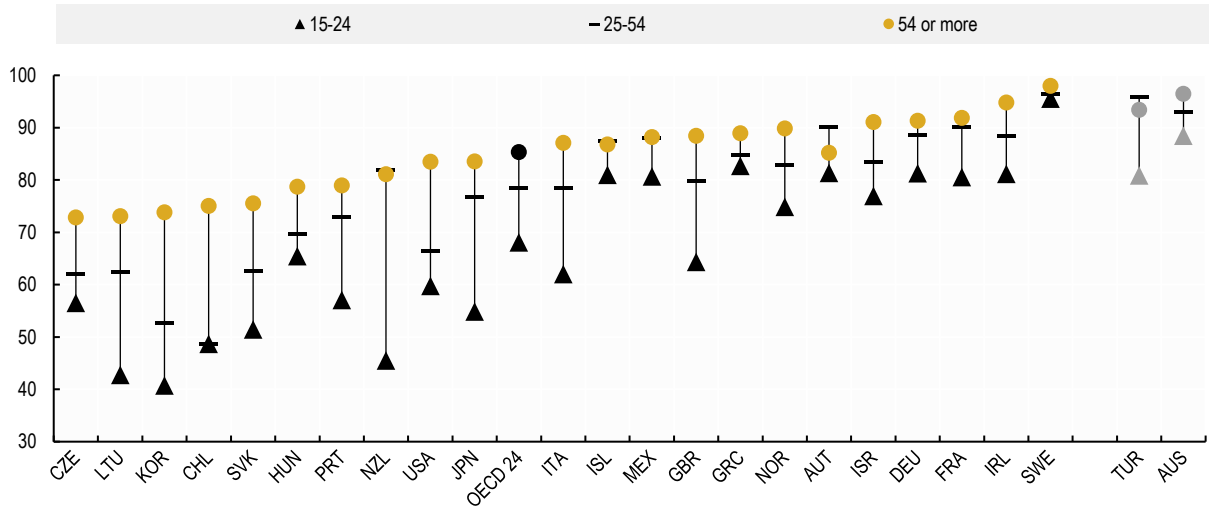
2.3. The changing landscape of CSE

Over recent years, increasing emphasis has been placed in global research and policy on how to improve citizen engagement and public accountability practices (World Bank, 2023[30]). Pressing global problems, such as climate change, growing inequalities, population ageing, conflict and health emergencies have prompted institutions and citizens to rethink how to foster more impactful decision-making and collective action, with increased attention being placed onto understanding and addressing the obstacles to effective citizen engagement. Societal changes are particularly felt by younger cohorts of the population, for whom the transition to autonomous life has become more difficult compared to previous generations. Young people aged 15-24 are 2.5 times more likely to be unemployed than people aged 25-64, have less disposable income than previous young generations, find it more challenging to afford housing and are more likely to work in insecure jobs (OECD, 2020[43]).

In relation to this, it is frequently argued that there is a "crisis" in young people's civic and social engagement (European Parliament, 2021[44]). This is partly because young people who are eligible to vote in national elections tend to do so less frequently than older generations, and also tend to trust the national government less compared to older generations (OECD, 2024[45]). Figure 2.1 shows that in every country studied, people aged 15 – 24 are significantly less likely to vote than older age groups. In most countries, people aged 54 or above were more likely to vote than all other age groups. Furthermore, Figure 2.2. People over 50 find the government more trustworthyshows that people over 50 are more likely to trust the government than younger cohorts.

Figure 2.1. Young people vote less than their older peers

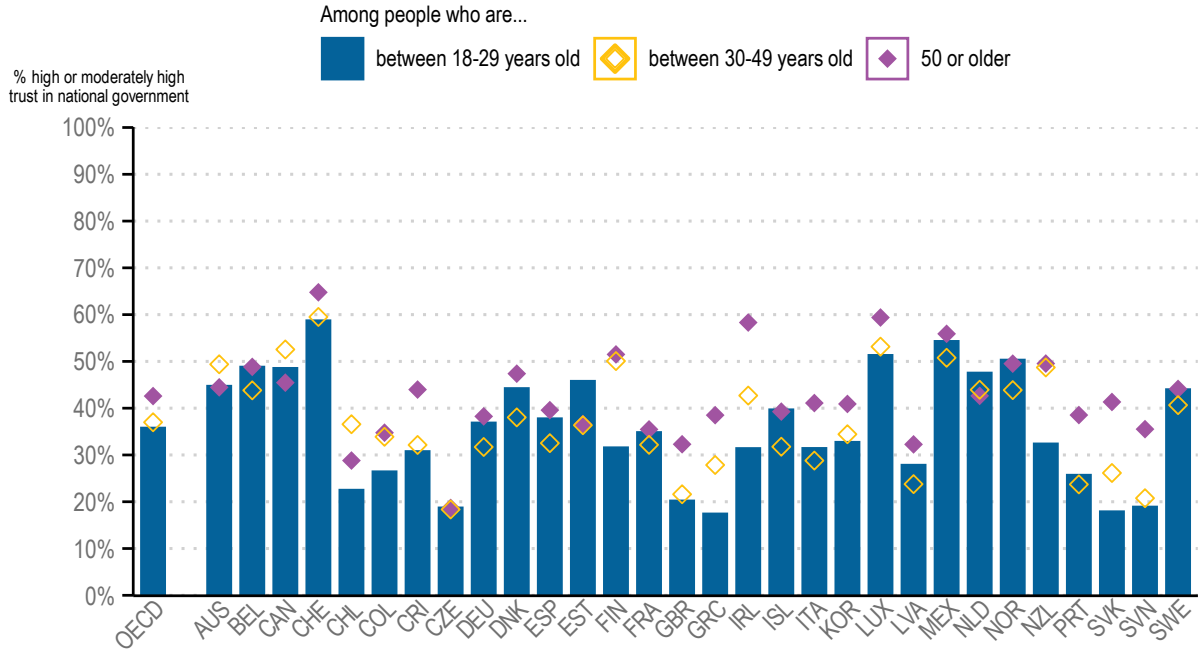
Self-reported voter turnout by age, 2012-19, percent



Note: Australia and Türkiye (shown in grey) enforce compulsory voting.
Source: CSES (2020[46]), *Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (database)*, https://cses.org/ (accessed on 23 November 2023), in OECD (2020[24]), *How's Life? 2020: Measuring Well-being*, https://doi.org/10.1787/9870c393-en.

Figure 2.2. People over 50 find the government more trustworthy

Share of population with high or moderately high trust in the national government by age, 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust the national government?" by respondents' age. Shown here is the proportion of respondents that have "high or moderately high trust" based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale, grouped by three age groups: 1) 18-29;. 2) 30-49; 3) 50 and above. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries.
Source: OECD (2024[45]), *OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 Results: Building Trust in a Complex Policy Environment*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9a20554b-en

Adding concern to the low political engagement of young people, more than 25% of young people aged 15-29 across OECD countries say they are "not at all interested in politics" – a number that is higher than in the overall population, where 20% say the same (OECD, 2018[47]). In a similar vein, the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2022, containing 15 OECD countries (Colombia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden) found that only one-third of surveyed students reported being quite or very interested in political and social issues (ICCS, 2023[25]).

Furthermore, the representation and participation of youth in state institutions also remains limited with an average representation gap of 12 percentage points between the share of members in lower houses of parliament under the age of 40 (22%) and the share of people aged 20-39 in the population over 20 years of age (34%). Only 26% of staff surveyed in OECD ministries in charge of youth affairs are under 34 (OECD, 2020[24]).

However, while the voter turnout of young people has been declining in OECD countries over recent years, many young people are instead turning to alternative forms of political and civic engagement and participation facilitated by developments in digital technologies, such as signing petitions, and participating in awareness campaigns (Calenda and Meijer, 2009[48]; Matthes, 2022[49]; Sloam and Henn, 2017[50]). Omotayo (2020[51]) and Storsul (2014[52]), for instance, both found that social media is a key platform for young people's political activities, including advocacy, campaigns, and discussions. Hassan et al. (2016[53]) and Zhu (2019[54]) further support these findings, with Hassan (2016[53]) highlighting the role of social media

in political knowledge and participation, and Zhu (2019[54]) emphasising the positive impact of creative social media use on political participation. Box 2.1 further explores the evolving role of digital technologies and CSE.

Box 2.1. Digital technologies and CSE

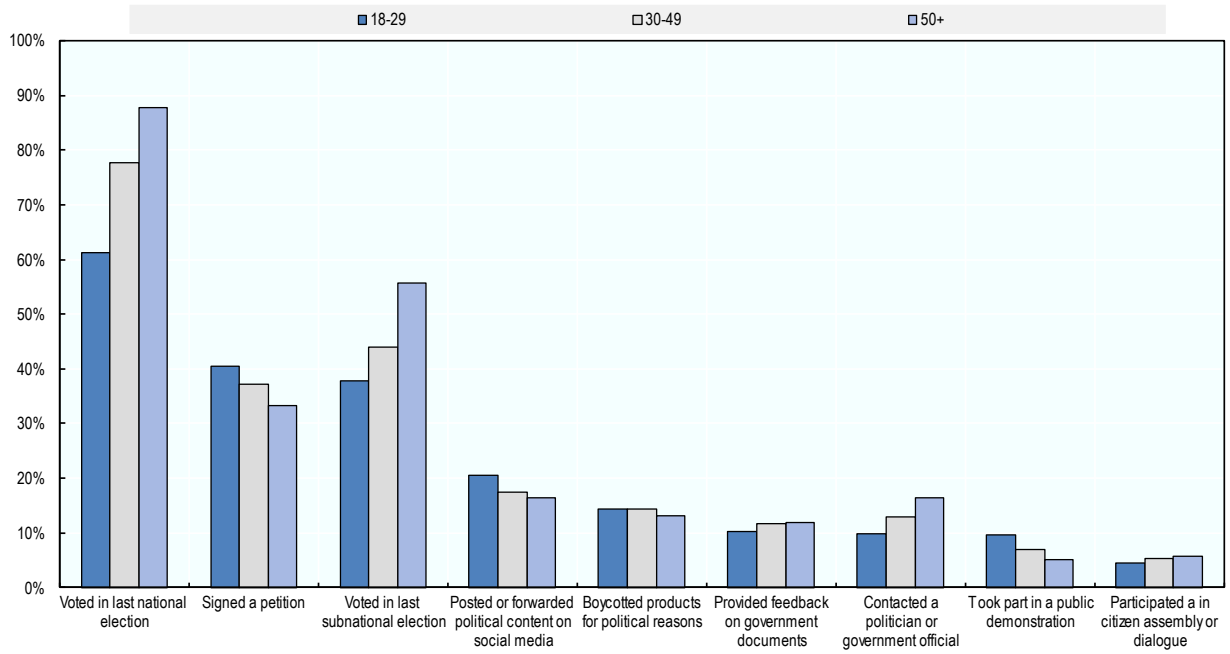
Digital technologies play a central role in people's lives today. Online networks, social media and interactive technologies are giving rise to new types of learning, where people of all ages exercise greater control over what and how they learn (Burns and Gottschalk, 2019[55]). In addition, social media and digital networks are increasingly being used for sharing news, social movements, activism and participatory politics (Cammaerts, 2015[56]).

Over recent years, there has been a steep rise social media campaigns based around societal issues which have provoked widespread political discussions and protests (Sloam and Henn, 2017[50]; Saeed, 2020[57]). Black Lives Matter (BLM), for instance, is a social justice movement that emerged in response to systemic racism and police brutality disproportionately affecting Black individuals. Originating in the United States, the movement has gained global recognition and support. At its core, it seeks to address and dismantle institutionalised racism, advocating for justice, equality, and an end to racial violence. A video capturing the tragic and fatal arrest of George Floyd on 25 May 2020, played a pivotal role in sparking a global outcry and mobilising the movement. It was shared widely on social media, serving as a powerful and indisputable piece of evidence, leading to widespread public outrage and demands for justice. It prompted protests and demonstrations not only in the United States but around the world. According to research by the Pew Research Center (2023[58]), the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag has been used 44 million times on Twitter (now *X*) since 2013. From October 2020 to March 2023, it averaged at 236 000 tweets per month.

However, while social media platforms represent a significant portion of media consumption, they are particularly vulnerable to the spread of misinformation (Pennycook and Rand, 2019[59]). The algorithms on which social media operate are designed to channel similar posts and like-minded people together. This can create an "echo-chamber" effect, which can reinforce thoughts and opinions, and can fuel a confirmation bias (Cota et al., 2019[60]). Furthermore, many experts are concerned about the effect of recent developments in generative artificial intelligence (AI) on the spread of fake news and misinformation (Sandrini and Somogyi, 2023[61]; Raman et al., 2024[62]; Barman, Guo and Conlan, 2024[63]), including generating fake images (Park, 2024[64]). Other authors argue however that it can also be used as a tool to detect misinformation (Altaher et al., 2024[65]). The power of social media in amplifying voices, sharing information, and mobilising communities needs to be recognised in education and government policy.

As demonstrated in Figure 2.3, OECD data show that people aged 18-29 are more likely to sign a petition, post or forward political content on social media, and take part in public demonstrations than older age groups, on average across OECD countries. Nonetheless, only small numbers of the population participate in such activities (less than 30%).

Figure 2.3. Participation in political activities by age group, OECD average, 2021



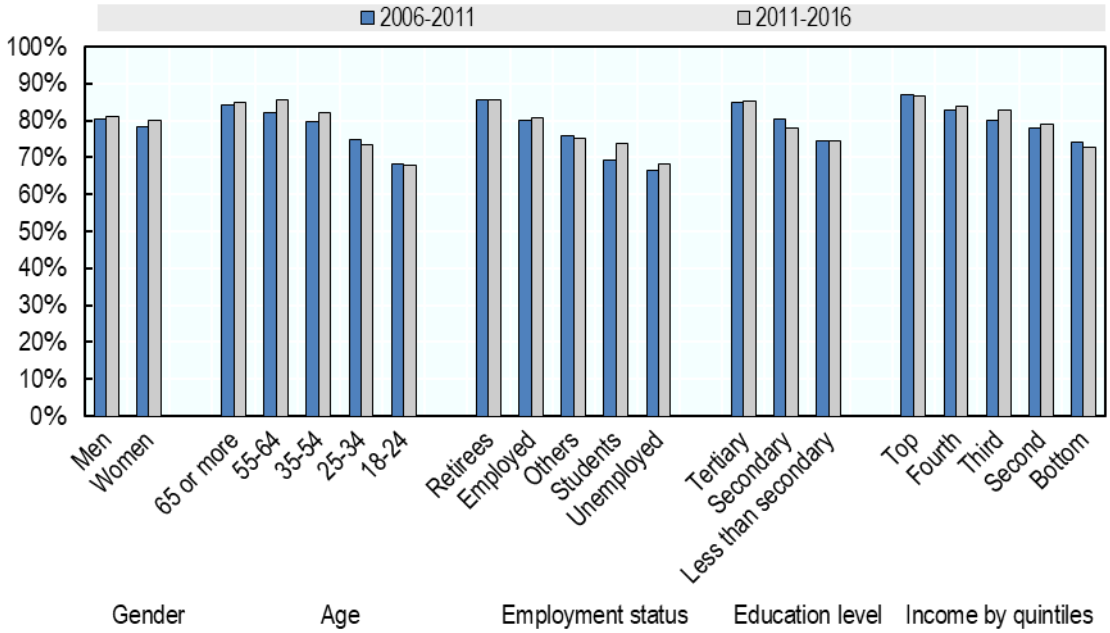
Source: OECD (2023[5]) *Government at a Glance 2023*, , https://doi.org/10.1787/3d5c5d31-en.

Low levels of political engagement may lead to governments being less informed about young people's needs. Data from the OECD Youth Governance Surveys show that when youth organisations have been used in the policy cycle to a greater extent, young people report a higher satisfaction with the government's performance across several public service areas, including transportation, health, housing and employment (OECD, 2020[43]). When youth organisations were asked what are the challenges youth face in participating in elections, "political party programmes not focussing enough on young people's concerns" was the second most reported challenge, following "lack of confidence among young people that their vote will lead to positive change" (OECD, 2020[43]). According to the ICCS 2022, only a little over half of student internationally agreed that their elected representatives represent the interests of people in their country well. Moreover, overall, in more than half of OECD countries for which data are available, young people are less likely than older people to feel they have a say in what the government does. Furthermore, limited political efficacy may feed into support for "populist movements" (OECD, 2020[43]), which can lead to a less inclusive society overall. Research from European countries found that populist parties draw their support disproportionately from younger voters (Foa and Mounk, 2019[66]). To the extent that they amplify grievances towards institutions, the appeal of populist parties among youth could contribute to the deterioration of liberal democratic institutions in the long run (OECD, 2020[43]).

Differences in voter turnout are not just affected by age, however. Differences in turnout must also be considered in relation to individuals' level of education, gender, parental education and income, ethnicity and more (OECD, 2020[43]). Social, political, economic, environmental, cultural, geographic and other factors, such as gender dynamics, shape the opportunities and scope for effective citizen engagement (World Bank, 2023[30]). As illustrated in Figure 2.4 , across the OECD, electoral participation is unequally distributed depending on variables such as employment status, educational attainment level and income level.

Figure 2.4. People who are less educated, younger and with lower income are less likely to vote

OECD average self-reported voter turnout, as a percentage of the population, by demographic and socio-economic characteristics



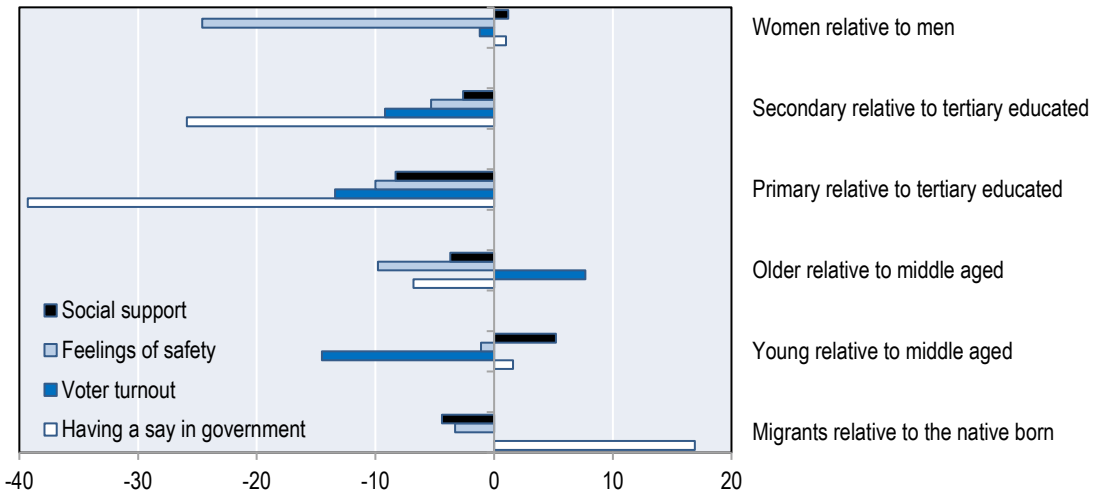
Note: Data are sorted by decreasing values of the 2006-2011 period. The OECD average is the simple average based on data available for 25 countries, and excludes Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Chile, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Spain. Data on national elections refers to elections that attract the largest number of voters that, unless specified otherwise, are lower house parliamentary elections. Data for the United States, Mexico and France refers to presidential elections. Data for Australia is an average of upper and lower house elections. Based on data availability, data for Japan corresponds to upper house elections.
Source: CSES (2020[46]) Comparative Study of Electoral Systems modules 2, 3 and 4, http://www.cses.org/ (accessed on 22 January 2024) in OECD (2017[67]) *How's Life? 2017: Measuring Well-being*, , https://doi.org/10.1787/how_life-2017-en.

While the gap between men and women's voting patterns has been closed, other inequalities remain. The likelihood of voting increased with educational attainment and higher socio-economic status. Students and the unemployed were also less likely to vote than employed and retired individuals. Further inequalities between groups are highlighted in findings from the European Parliament's Youth Survey (European Parliament, 2021[68]), which found that young women (aged 15–29) are more likely than young men to vote and sign a petition, however less likely to contact politicians. Furthermore, minorities exhibited lower voter turnout compared to the dominant population. Overall, young men from less affluent backgrounds participate the least, followed by young women from similar backgrounds. On the opposite end, older affluent young women (24–29) are the most active, followed by men of the same age (DEŽELAN, Tomaž, 2023[69]). These disparities in voting participation highlight the importance of addressing barriers to civic engagement and promoting inclusive electoral processes to ensure that diverse voices are heard in the democratic decision-making process.

In addition, data show many OECD communities are divided in terms of social support, feelings of safety, and civic engagement, in terms of gender, age, socio-economic background and migrant status relative to native born (see Figure 2.5) (OECD, 2018[3]).

Figure 2.5. Divided communities in terms of social support, feelings of safety, civic engagement

OECD countries, by gender, education, age and migrant status



Note: The figure shows the percentage difference between groups, relative to the reference group indicated. Social support and feelings of safety are captured on a simple yes/no scale; voter turnout concerns the percentage of votes cast among the population registered to vote in the most recent national elections, while having a say in government refers to the share of people who disagree or strongly disagree with the statement: "people like me don't have any say in what the government does".
Source: OECD (2017[67]), *How's Life? 2017: Measuring Well-being*, , https://doi.org/10.1787/how_life-2017-en.

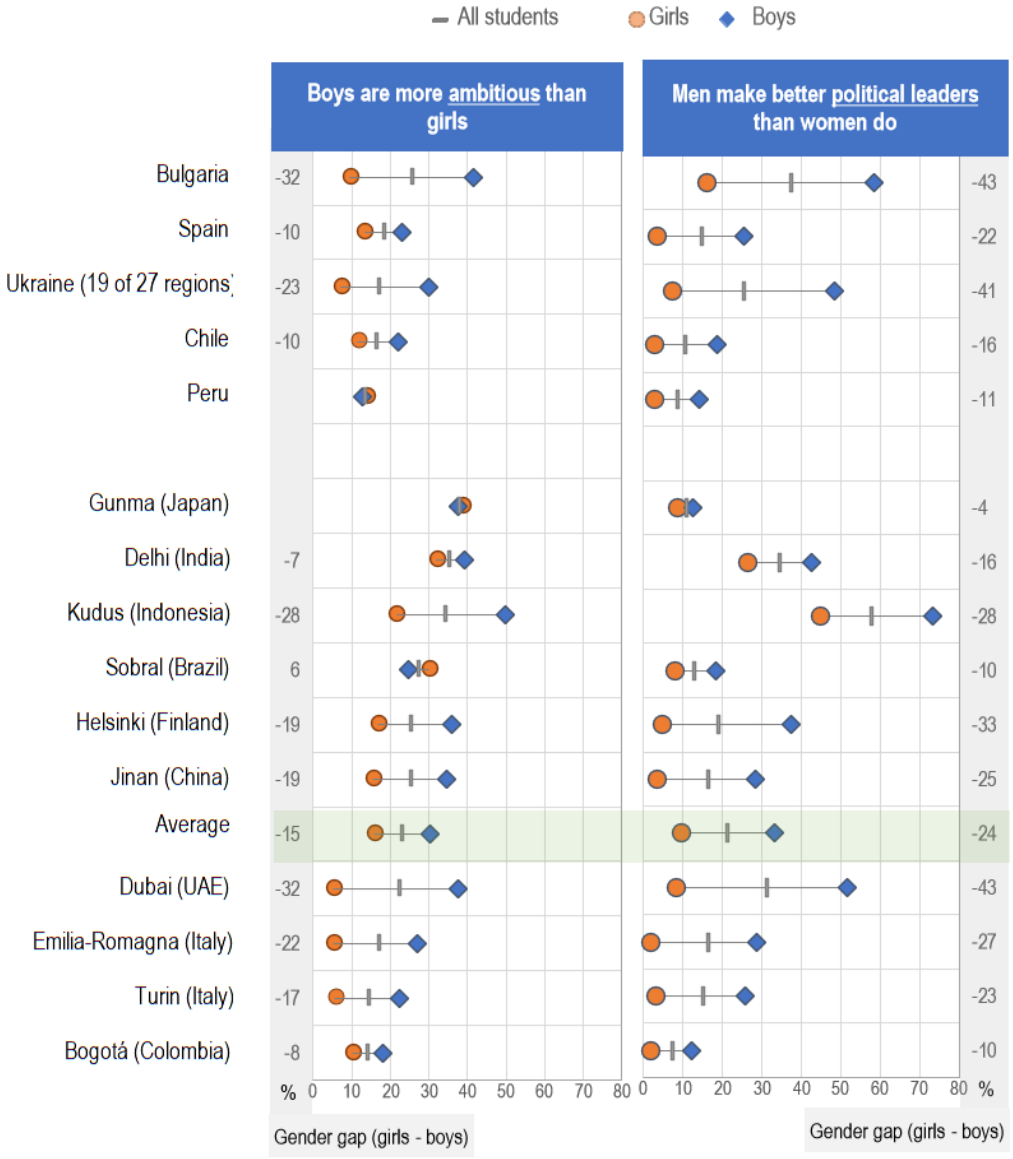
The results in Figure 2.5 showed that education level played a significant role in determining the level of social support, feeling of safety, voter turnout and perceived voice in government, with those with higher education levels scoring higher in each of those variables. Women reported significant lower feelings of safety compared to men. Furthermore, on average across OECD countries, migrants feel less like they have a say in government than the native-born population.

Differences in values and attitudes related to civic and social engagement

The latest OECD survey on social and emotional skills (OECD, 2024[70]) found notable gender differences in attitudes toward political leadership: 33% of boys surveyed expressed that men make better political leaders than women, while only 10% of girls agreed with this (see Figure 2.6). The survey also found that girls tend to have higher levels of tolerance, empathy, and responsibility, while boys have higher levels of trust and emotional regulation skills, on average. There were also significant gender differences between beliefs that attributes or achievements are more important for men or women. For example, "having a position of power" and "being in charge" were more frequently reported as being more important for men than women. Boys are more likely to hold stereotypical beliefs than girls, with a particular gender divide on views on women's' access to leadership and economic resources.

Figure 2.6. Students' agreement with gender stereotypes about ambition and leadership, by sites

Percentage of 15-year-old students agreeing or strongly agreeing with each statement, by gender



Note: Only differences that are statistically significant with a threshold of $p < 0.05$ are noted by site names. Sites are listed in descending order of the percentages of students agreeing or strongly agreeing that boys are more ambitious than girls.
Source: OECD (2024[71]) *SSES 2023 Database Tables A4.2 and A4.4.* https://www.oecd.org/en/data/datasets/SSES-Round-2-Database.html#data (accessed on 27 April 2024)

Furthermore, while the ICCS 2022 found widespread support for gender equality, it varied by the level of civic knowledge. Support for gender equality was higher when students had a high level of civic knowledge compared to low civic knowledge. Furthermore, a significant difference in support for gender equality was found between males and females in every country. Young people also widely endorsed equal rights for immigrants and for all ethnic groups in society (ICCS, 2023[25]).

Data from other surveys measuring attitudes and values also find differences between various population groups. Data from the World Values Survey (2017 – 2022), for example, reveal that 13.5% of the

lowest-educated group surveyed reported that they would object to having a neighbour of a different race, compared to only 6.7% of the highest educated population. When asked if they would be bothered by having homosexuals as neighbours, 25.8% of the lower educated group said they would be bothered, compared to 12.9% of the higher educated group (World Values Survey, 2024[72]).

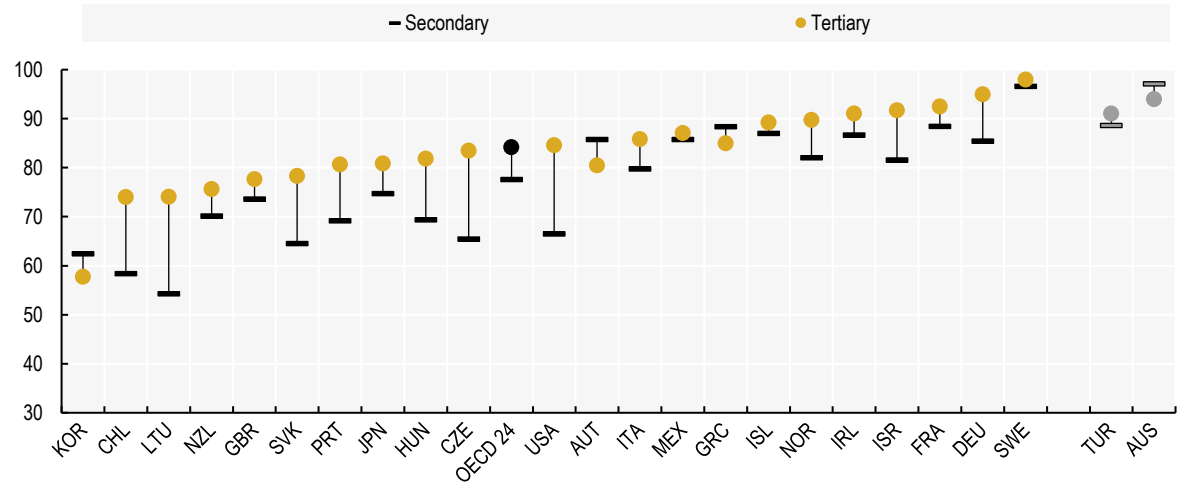
Thus, many inequalities lie within the CSE landscape across OECD countries. An individuals' education level, age, socio-economic background, gender and migrant status can affect their CSE habits and feelings of belonging in society. There is, therefore, a need to examine how policy can help increase and make CSE more inclusive. By addressing and reducing these inequalities, policymakers can foster more inclusive societies where everyone can engage meaningfully in decision-making and social progress. Education policy plays a crucial role in this effort, offering the potential to enhance civic and social engagement skills and reduce disparities.

2.4. Why education?

Investments in education are widely recognised as a key and cost-effective factor influencing various facets of civic engagement and, consequently, the sustenance of a stable and effective democracy (Dee, 2010[73]; Prats and Meunier, 2021[1]). Increases in educational attainment are believed to foster civic engagement by instilling in students a sense of civic responsibility, as well as equipping students with the requisite knowledge and skills to enable them to make well-informed decisions. Exemplifying this, educational attainment level is strongly correlated with voter turnout internationally. Figure 2.7, for example, shows that those who have obtained tertiary level education, on average across the OECD, are more likely to vote than those with just secondary level education.

Figure 2.7. More educated people are more likely to vote

Self-reported voter turnout by level of education attainment, 2012-18, percent



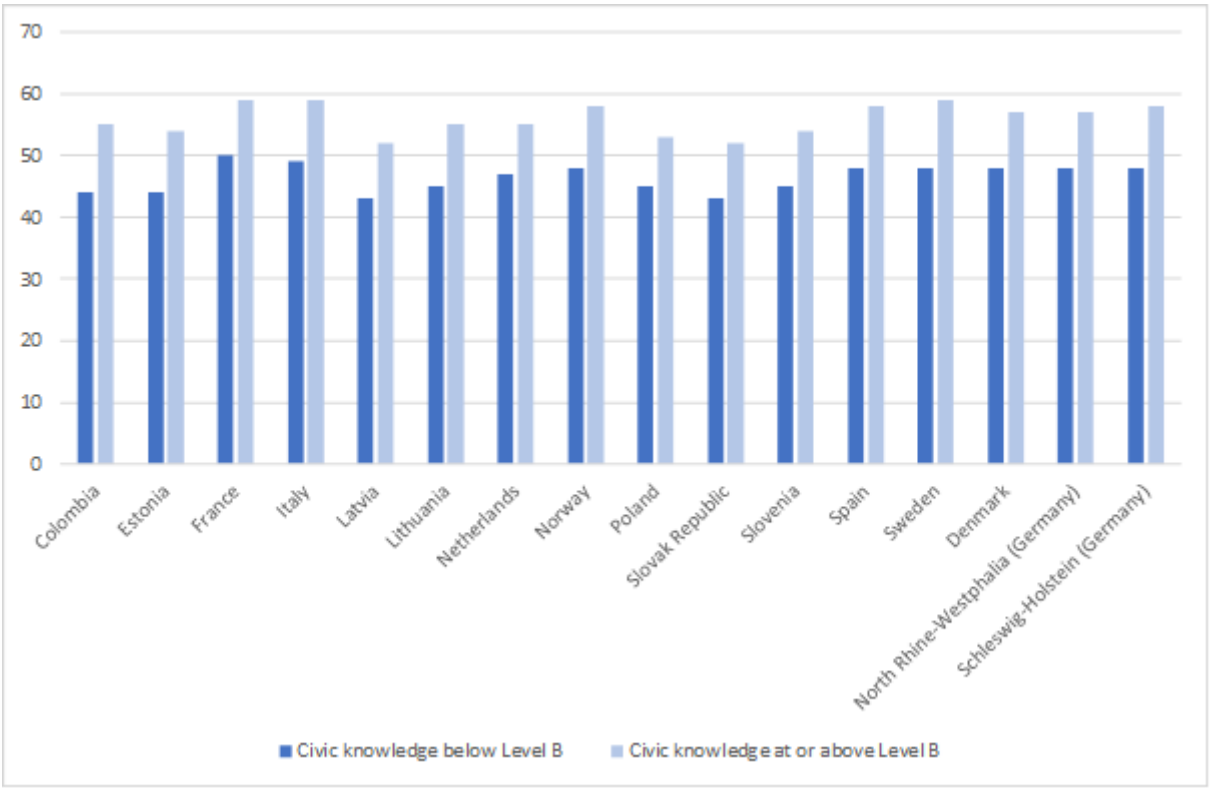
Note: Australia and Türkiye (shown in grey) enforce compulsory voting
Source: OECD calculations, based on the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (database) (2020[46]): https://cses.org (accessed on 23 November 2023), in OECD (2020[24]), *How's Life? 2020: Measuring Well-being*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9870c393-en.

Strengthening these data, research consistently shows a strong correlation between educational attainment and voter turnout at an international level (Kim, 2023[74]; Burden et al., 2020[75]). Furthermore, researchers such as Dee (2004[76]) and Milligan et al. (2003[77]) found that schooling increases the quality of civic participation in both the United States and United Kingdom as measured by awareness of public affairs and support for free speech.

The ICCS 2022 study revealed that students with higher levels of civic knowledge and understanding tend to be more supportive of gender equality, and more strongly endorse equal rights for immigrants and all ethnic groups. Figure 2.8. National average scale scores indicating students' endorsement of gender equality, by civic knowledge illustrates that students' civic knowledge is related to their endorsement of gender equality, per country. In every country, students with high civic knowledge scores score significantly higher in endorsing gender equality. This indicates that civic education can influence the social values of students.

Figure 2.8. National average scale scores indicating students' endorsement of gender equality, by civic knowledge

A higher number on the scale indicates higher endorsement of gender equality.



Note: Denmark did not meet the sample participation requirements.
Source: ICCS (2023[25]) *IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2022 International Report, Table 5.10,* https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-65603-3

Education has the potential to influence civic and social engagement outcomes through both indirect means, such as the development of essential skills like literacy, enabling individuals to register to vote, comprehend information, and verify its accuracy, and direct methods, such as dedicated civic education

programmes. The many potential mechanisms through which education might affect levels of CSE are categorised in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1. Direct and indirect educational factors affecting civic and social engagement

Factor	Summary
Bureaucratic competence	Education indirectly enhances engagement through the development of competencies such as reading, writing and information-seeking, which help students understand bureaucratic governmental procedures such as registering to vote.
Social Emotional Skills	Schools are an important place to learn socio-emotional skills needed for civic life such as communication, debating, decision-making and organisation.
Cognitive capacity	Formal education enhances important cognitive practices and skills such as problem solving and critical thinking, which in turn has an impact on all dimensions of engagement.
Curriculum	Learning about CSE can come directly from the curriculum, such as in civics classes where students learn about topics such as politics, history and how to vote.
Pedagogical method	Pedagogical methods, such as that of an open classroom climate which allows for classroom discussions about difficult topics, can promote CSE.
Student parliament	For those who participate, evidence shows it has a positive effect on political engagement.
Extra-curricular activities	Extra-curricular involvement in upper secondary is linked to associational involvement and volunteering in adulthood.
Community volunteerism/service learning	Service learning appears to be most effective when it is accompanied by reflection in the classroom on the service that students have performed.
Norms and values	Much civic and social engagement is the product of social norms and values encouraging collective action. Schools are an important institution where such norms are inculcated.
Digital and media literacy	Recently, education systems have started to focus on the skills needed to effectively navigate the digital world, as well as how to understand and use digital media.
Global competencies	Global competencies refer to students' ability to interact and engage with people from diverse backgrounds, critically examine information, and act responsibly towards global and local issues.

Source: Adapted from Campbell (2006[23]), *What's education's impact on civic and social engagement?*

As Table 2.1 outlines, education can both directly and indirectly influence the skills and competencies needed to be an engaged citizen through a variety of channels. Developing bureaucratic competencies, for instance, underscores the role of education in indirectly fostering CSE through the development of fundamental competencies such literacy and information-seeking abilities, which are pivotal in understanding bureaucratic governmental procedures such as voter registration (Campbell, 2006[23]). For developing civic skills, schools serve as key environments for encouraging the development of skills such as debating and decision-making, as well as imparting social emotional skills such as collaboration, tolerance and empathy, vital for active citizenship (OECD, 2024[78]). Additionally, formal education's impact on cognitive capacity underscores its broader influence on all dimensions of engagement.

The table further shows that the curriculum itself can play a direct role in shaping CSE, particularly through dedicated civics classes, where students learn topics such as the voting process, governmental structures and party manifestos (Maiello, Oser and Biedermann, 2003[79]; Bachner, 2010[80]). In addition, pedagogical methods, exemplified by open classroom climate, are noted for their potential in promoting CSE by facilitating dialogue on challenging societal topics (further explored in 4.1). Participation in student parliament emerges as another avenue with a documented positive effect on political engagement (further explored in section 4.3). Extra-curricular activities, particularly in upper secondary education, correspond

with increased associational involvement and volunteering in adulthood (Greenfield and Moorman, 2017[81]). The table also acknowledges the role of norms and values, with schools serving as crucial institutions for instilling social norms that encourage collective action and civic engagement among students (Treviño et al., 2021[82]). The table also highlights digital and media literacy, which has recently been added to school curricula across the OECD in response to the growing wave of fake news and access to online information, as well as the ease of ability to create online media (OECD, 2020[83]). Media literacy is the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, create and act using all forms of communication (OECD, 2019[84]). Cultivating students' media literacy can help them to capitalise on digital spaces, better understand the world they live in and responsibly express their voice online (Hill, 2022[85]).

The combination of each of these factors can be understood as "civic education". As will be explored further in section 4, there are a variety of names and goals for civic education across the OECD. The European Students' Forum defines civic education as education that aims to develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes required to be an active, democratic, responsible and critical citizen (AEGEE Europe, 2016[12]). Its goal is to educate the population on democratic citizenship and make them aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Thus, there are a variety of elements in the education system which both directly and indirectly influence students' civic and social skills. Importantly, education has the potential to reduce and compensate for inequalities in civic participation, particularly among disadvantaged students (Lindgren, Oskarsson and Persson, 2018[86]; Hoskins, Huang and Arensmeier, 2021[87]), although this area of research is under-represented (Hoskins, Janmaat and Melis, 2017[88]). Weinberg (2021[89]) found that civic education practices can act as an antidote to inequalities in political participation, while Hoskins et al. (2021[87]) identified that in-school civic participation can compensate for a disadvantaged background for developing future electoral participation and civic knowledge. Furthermore, research by Neundorf et al. (2016[90]) demonstrated that civics training in schools compensates for inequalities in family socialisation with respect to political engagement. However, researchers such as (Fitzgerald et al., 2021[91]) have illustrated that, while there has been progress, civic education has not yet gone far enough to effectively increase participation and reduce the CSE inequalities. In addition, there are few research studies which report statistically significant effects of particular educational programmes on political participation outcomes (Lindgren, Oskarsson and Persson, 2018[86]). More research is needed to understand how education can be used to compensate for the inequalities in civic and social engagement. Authors such as Hustinx (2009[92]) highlight that despite the close association between education and civic participation, the connection between learning and participation remains a 'black box'.

3. Civic education across the OECD

This section will explore the terms, definitions and contents of civic education across the OECD, before exploring how civic education is integrated across OECD education systems and analysing the available data on the gaps in civic education access between groups of students. Despite some existing research, there is a lack of research on civic education practices across the OECD, and a need for more research on the gaps in civic education opportunities between groups of students.

3.1. Defining civic education in the OECD

Defining and analysing civic education is challenging due to the array of interchangeable terms used across education systems (Muleya, 2017[93]), and sometimes even within countries and education systems (Council of Europe, 2017[94]). To date, no study of civic education terms across the OECD has been conducted. Studying European civic education practices, a report by the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2017[94]) identified a large variety of names for civic education used across countries:

- Names that focus on **civics**: civics or civic education (Austria, Czechia, France, Greece, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Slovak Republic), civic culture (Liechtenstein, Slovenia), citizenship education (Belgium, the Netherlands, Ukraine, England (United Kingdom)), Education for Citizenship (Portugal).
- Names that focus on **political education**: civic, social and political education (Ireland), civic, legal and social education (France), democracy and human rights (Türkiye), education for human rights and democratic citizenship (Croatia), political education (Germany), principles of civic society (Lithuania).
- Names that focus on **social studies**: social studies (Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland), social sciences (Denmark, Latvia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia), social subjects (Norway), science of society (Slovak Republic), life skills (Iceland), living together (France), social, personal and health education (Ireland), personal and social development (Scotland [United Kingdom]), knowledge about society (Poland), social education (Estonia).
- Names that imply various disciplinary **combinations**: history and civic education (Austria, Denmark, Hungary, Italy), history, civic education and economics (Italy), history and social studies (Finland, Poland), anthropology and social studies (Hungary), religious and moral education (Scotland [United Kingdom]), Poland), study of man and ethics (Hungary), civic education and ethics (Slovenia), ethics, social sciences, geography and history (Spain).

The goals and contents of civic education also vary greatly across education systems, and again, no such comparative study has been conducted across the OECD. Modern conceptualisations of being a citizen tend to include both the political domain and the social and cultural (Veugelers, 2021[95]). As a result, one of the goals of civic education in most contemporary democratic societies is to help students develop a broad set of so-called citizenship competences, often referred to as knowledge, skills and attitudes related to democratic conduct, socially responsible behaviour and the ability to deal with differences and conflicts (Coopmans, van der Veen and Daas, 2024[96]). The Democratic Schools for All project of the Council of

Europe, for example, aims to advise education systems, school leaders and practitioners on education policies and practices that enhance democratic competencies and culture. The project has six overall project themes with the goal of forming an active and modern citizen:

- addressing controversial issues;
- dealing with misinformation and fake news;
- improving well-being at school;
- making children's and students' voices heard;
- preventing violence and bullying;
- tackling discrimination (Council of Europe, 2018[97]).

One of the characteristics distinct to civic education outcomes compared to other educational competences such as reading, writing or mathematics, is the relevance of building attitudes and values besides knowledge and skills (Coopmans, van der Veen and Daas, 2024[96]). According to Veugelers (2017, p. 57[98]) "*In citizenship education, knowledge and skills are important, but attitudes are most relevant. They determine, to a large extent, the opinions and behaviours of citizens*". As schools, workplaces and communities become more ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse, it has become more important than ever to emphasise the inter-relatedness of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values (OECD, 2019[84]). Present-day individuals must not only acquire the skills to engage in a more interconnected world but also recognise and leverage the advantages of cultural differences (OECD, 2018[99]).).

Along these lines, the PISA 2018 Global Competence assessment (OECD, 2020[100]) was designed to measure students' capacity to examine local, global and intercultural issues, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development (see Figure 3.1).These capacities are linked closely to modern conceptions of citizenship and the competencies needed to be an active citizen in the 21st century.

Figure 3.1. Global competencies needed for CSE



Source: OECD (2020[100]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume VI): Are Students Ready to Thrive in an Interconnected World?*, 10.1787/d5f68679-en

Similarly, the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competencies for Democratic Culture specified 20 citizenship (civic) competencies that can be promoted through education, split into five overarching categories: Attitudes, Values, Skills, Knowledge and Critical understanding. However, assessing civic competence is challenging. This is explored in Box 3.1.

Box 3.1. The challenge of assessing civic competencies

The assessment of civic competencies in education is a critical aspect of fostering active, informed, and engaged citizens. However, insight into what young people learn about citizenship at school and into the differences between schools and students is lacking (ten Dam et al., 2011[101]). For many education systems, assessing young people's civic competencies is a challenge (Daas, 2019[102]; Hoskins, Villalba and Nijlen, 2008[103]). This is partly due to the fluidity of the concepts used regarding citizenship, civic and social engagement, values, as well as the normative and social aspects of being a citizen (ibid.).

In the United States, for example, helping young people to become active and prepared citizens in a democracy is an essential role of schools. Yet, civic learning has been reduced to a small part of the curriculum in the United States over recent years. The Centre for Educational Equity (Rebell, 2023[104]) identified that one of the obstacles to obtaining meaningful progress in improving civic education is the lack of civic assessment across states. They identify that, currently, U.S. education policy lacks valid and reliable methods for assessing students' development of civic competencies necessary to ensure students are prepared for responsible civic participation.

While there is little literature available about the assessment of civic skills across OECD countries, several large-scale surveys assessing civic competencies have been conducted, such as the Civic Education Study (CIVED) in the United States, the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), and the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (CELS) in England. Such approaches assess civic competencies on a wide range of items, and are grouped into scales that measure both knowledge about citizenship and attitudes towards it. This approach ensures that different areas of citizenship are covered and considers the various social and political contexts where citizenship can develop. They assess a wide range of items, including students' knowledge of democratic institutions, human rights, justice, and their ability to think critically about political and social issues. The surveys also explore students' attitudes towards democracy, diversity, social responsibility, and their intention to participate in civic life. However, these studies have limitations, such as being representative of only one age group and not capturing all the dimensions of civic competency and activity (Hoskins, Villalba and Nijlen, 2008[103]).

3.2. Integration of civic education across the OECD

Civic education has become increasingly visible and significant in education policies across the world over recent years. In the European Union (EU) for example, a focus on civic education has become stronger since the informal meeting of 17 March 2015 in Paris, where the EU education members adopted the Paris Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination in education (European Education and Culture Executive Agency: Eurydice, 2016[105]). Globally, several international organisations have established frameworks, projects and surveys related to civic education over recent years, some of them are highlighted in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. International initiatives and projects related to civic education

Organisation	Initiatives/Projects	Objective
Council of Europe (CoE)	"Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education" (EDC/HRE) project	Promotes democratic governance, social cohesion, and respect for human rights through education in the form of expert meetings, webinars, reports and guidelines for policymakers and schools.
The Commonwealth	Youth engagement and education programs	Promotes democratic values, human rights, and social justice through citizenship education and participation in youth parliaments.
Erasmus+	Erasmus+ Teacher Academies	Teacher Academies are specifically aimed at supporting the quality of teacher education across Europe. Civic education (called citizenship education by Erasmus+) is one of the key themes of this project, an initiative which is further explored in Box 4.2. Erasmus + Teacher Academies.
Eurydice	Various reports on civic education including "Citizenship Education at School in Europe"	Focuses on civic engagement and the development of key competences, including social and civic skills.
IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement)	International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS)	ICCS investigates the ways in which young people are prepared to undertake their roles as citizens in a world where contexts of democracy and civic participation continue to change.
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)	Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Global Competencies	Assesses and promotes educational strategies that include components of civic and citizenship education (such as Global Competencies).
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)	Various initiatives focusing on child rights and youth empowerment	Educates young people about their rights and responsibilities as global citizens.
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)	Global Citizenship and Peace Education (GCED)	Instills values, knowledge, and skills necessary for responsible global citizenship, fostering respect for diversity.

The most recent Eurydice report of citizenship (civic) education showed that civic education is a part of the curricula in all EU countries, as either a cross-curricular subject, part of another subject or a separate subject (Sigalas, 2018[106]). The report found that France had the highest number of civic education course hours, followed by Finland, Estonia and Greece. In those four countries, the subject is compulsory and is taught separately at each level of general education (primary, lower secondary and upper secondary).

The most common way across education systems examined by the ICCS 2022 study was through *dispersed* civic education, i.e., developing civic and social engagement skills throughout the curriculum in different subjects, rather than creating one single civics subject. PISA 2018 asked school principals questions about their education practices and found that every OECD country surveyed answered yes to "*civic education is part of the formal curriculum*" for both lower secondary and upper secondary education (PISA, 2018[107]). They also unanimously voted "yes" that their schools include all of the elements of civic education listed below:

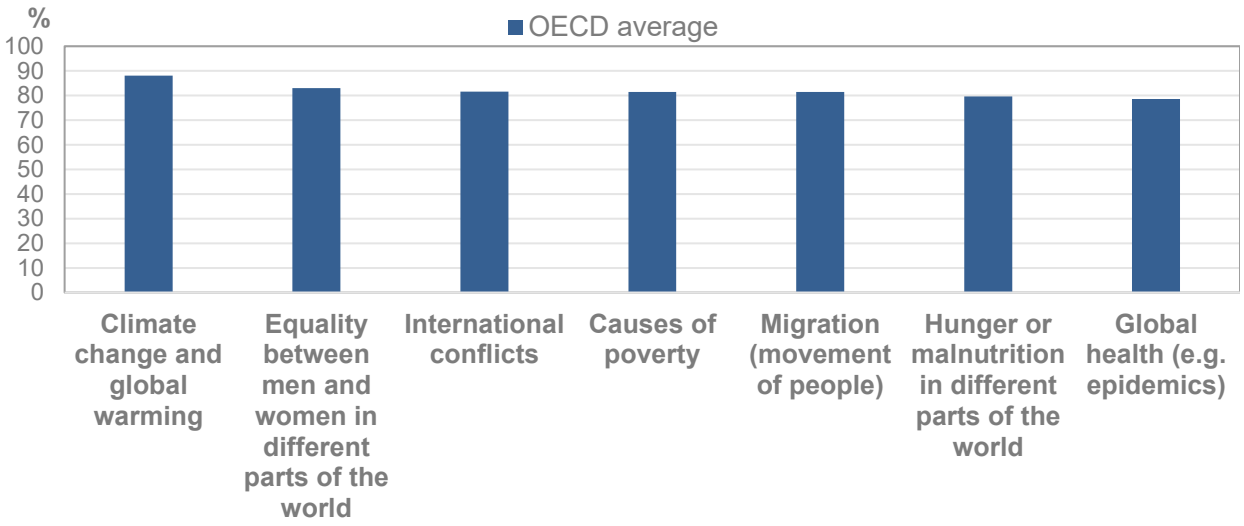
- Knowing basic civic and citizenship facts (e.g. about political institutions and processes)
- Understanding key civic and citizenship concepts (e.g. democracy, rights and responsibilities)
- Understanding key civic and citizenship values and attitudes (e.g. fairness, responsibility, engagement)
- Communicating through discussion and debate
- Understanding decision making and active participation
- Becoming involved in decision making in school

- Participating in community-based activities
- Developing a sense of national identity and allegiance
- Developing positive attitudes towards participation and engagement in civic and civil society
- Understanding how to resolve conflicts in society
- Understanding principles of voting and elections.

PISA 2018 (OECD, 2020[100]) also studied what global and intercultural topics are covered in the curriculum, which are related to civic education goals and civic and social engagement competencies overall. A large percentage of principals across the OECD reported that their school teaches a formal curriculum on the following topics related to CSE: Climate change and global warming, equality between men and women in different parts of the world, international conflicts, causes of poverty, migration, hunger or malnutrition in different parts of the world, and global health (e.g. epidemics). See Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2. Global issues covered in the curriculum

The proportion of students in schools whose principals reported that there is a formal curriculum for the following topics. Based on principals' reports, OECD average.



Note: Issues are ranked in descending order of the proportion of students in schools whose principal reported that the topic is covered in the curriculum.
Source: OECD (2018[108]), *PISA 2018 Database, Table VI.B1.7.14.*, https://www.oecd.org/en/data/datasets/pisa-2018-database.html (accessed 30 June 2024)

However, the study also found that there are discrepancies between different student groups in their exposure to global and intercultural learning opportunities. For instance, boys were more likely than girls to give and discuss their views, while girls were more likely than boys to report participating in activities related to intercultural understanding and communication (ibid). The ICCS 2022 results showed that while 78% of students reported "voting for class representative or school parliament/council", only 47% reported "becoming a candidate for class representative or school parliament/council" and 40% "taking part in

decision-making about how the school is run" (ICCS, 2023[25]), suggesting that civic education opportunities are not being universally dispersed.

Furthermore, despite the fact that many education systems have put national education goals in place regarding civic education, in some cases there is no evaluation of these goals, weak curriculum regulations and strong emphasis on assessing basic skills means subjects such as civic education are left to the side. Box 3.2. A need for stronger monitoring and evaluation practices for civic education explores this issue further. Recent studies in Austria, Canada, England (United Kingdom), France and the United States, for example, have found that many schools do not place high importance on civic education and are implementing reforms:

- Although **Austria** has integrated political education into its curriculum, Linda Exenberger, the Chief Operating Officer of Youth Empowerment and Participation (YEP) Austria, noted that these courses are often less valued than others and focus more narrowly on how political systems function (Salzburg Global Center for Education Transformation, 2024[109]).
- A 2024 report of civic education in **Canada** (CIVIX, 2023[110]) found that while civic education is a priority on paper, being well-represented in curricula across the nation states, there is systematic failures when it comes to teacher training on matters related to civic education, it ranks low on the list of school priorities, and there is a lack of integration of the subject across school subjects.
- A report in **England** (United Kingdom) found that far less than half (42%) of teachers say their school provides civic education lessons (IPPR, 2023[111]).
- An evaluation of civic education in **France** found that schools have limited time to conduct civics and moral classes, limited time for media and information studies, that there is a lack of teacher training on civic education, and that there are limited extra-curricular civic participation options for students (Cour des comptes, 2021[112]).
- In the **United States**, the 2018 Brown Center Report on American Education examined civic education and identified that while reading and maths scores have improved in recent years, there has not been a comparable increase in eighth grade civics knowledge (Hensen et al., 2018[113]).

Box 3.2. A need for stronger monitoring and evaluation practices for civic education

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of civic education, high-quality evaluations of its impact remain scarce (Ahmed and Mohammed, 2021[114]). National evaluations of civic education policies and practices are particularly limited, with few countries undertaking comprehensive evaluations (Goodier, Field and Goodman, 2018[115]). A recent report published by PrEval Expertise (Isac, 2024[7]) about approaches to monitoring civic education in Europe, found that even where monitoring frameworks exist, they often lack a cohesive strategy. The report highlights the need for a continuous discourse on improving both the monitoring process and its utilisation, emphasising that interpretations of monitoring results should be inclusive of all stakeholders. It also approves an expansion of the monitoring scope so that non-formal and informal education are also included, ensuring a holistic approach to lifelong learning.

To address the sparse data on monitoring practices, it calls for comprehensive academic research, highlighting the necessity of shared standards, evaluation criteria, and benchmarks across Europe. Stronger national monitoring practices, supported by shared standards and indicators, can enhance European monitoring, ultimately improving the quality and comparability of data used by the European Union and the Council of Europe.

Source: Isac (2024[7]), *Approaches to Monitoring Citizenship Education in Europe*

In 2022, the resolution on the implementation of citizenship education across the European Union (EU) (European Parliament, 2022[116]) was established by the European Parliament in concern about the limited focus on European and global aspects of citizenship education in national curricula. It noted the lack of a uniform approach in defining citizenship education across the EU, the lack of a common definition of citizenship education, and highlighted large differences between Member States regarding teaching methodologies, dedicated hours and teacher training. Citizenship education since has become an education policy priority at EU level (European Parliament, 2023[117]). Moreover, it noted that reliable knowledge on how civic education is being taught was missing and that the pedagogical tools used for delivering this education were inadequate.

3.3. Access to civic education opportunities

Many research studies have identified that civic learning opportunities are disproportionately accessible and often not inclusive (Bartlett and Schugurensky, 2023[118]). One of the primary takeaways of the ICCS 2022 study is the large disparity of civic education opportunities and knowledge *within* countries rather than between, suggesting that civic education opportunities are not equally extended to students. Within each country, the middle 90 percent of students (excluding the highest and lowest 5 percent) show a wide diversity in civic knowledge levels, with the range of scores spanning more than three levels on the civic knowledge scale. In contrast, the overall differences in average civic knowledge *between* countries are comparatively modest. The difference between the highest and lowest average civic knowledge scale scores across all countries studied is less than the span of 1.5 levels on the civic knowledge scale. This suggests that there is a need for focused attention on enhancing civic education opportunities and outcomes within each country to promote equitable access and engagement (ICCS, 2023[25]).

Levinson (2010[119]) argues for more robust civic education aimed at reducing what she terms the “civic empowerment gap”, referring to the gaps in knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for civic engagement that exists between groups. In the context of the United States, she argues that while all schools need improved civics education, civic education reform efforts in deprived schools provide an important avenue for mitigating this gap.

The OECD Education for Inclusive Societies project established six key dimensions of diversity related to education: migration-induced diversity; ethnic groups, national minorities and Indigenous peoples; gender; gender identity and sexual orientation; special education needs; and giftedness (OECD, 2023[120]). These dimensions encompass a broad range of individuals, and many of these groups have historically faced exclusion from mainstream education because they were considered either incapable or unworthy of conforming to the educational standards identified by education institutions. Or because their heritage and community were excluded from formal learning covered in mainstream education systems. The intensity and severity of exclusion of these groups varies greatly between groups and across countries (ibid.). While, as explored, the participation in society of these groups varies, there are also visible patterns of exclusion mirrored in the provision and quality received of civic education.

Socio-economic gap

Socio-economic background is one of the primary predictors of CSE, with lower income and education levels associated with lower levels of engagement (Brown-Iannuzzi, Lundberg and McKee, 2017[121];

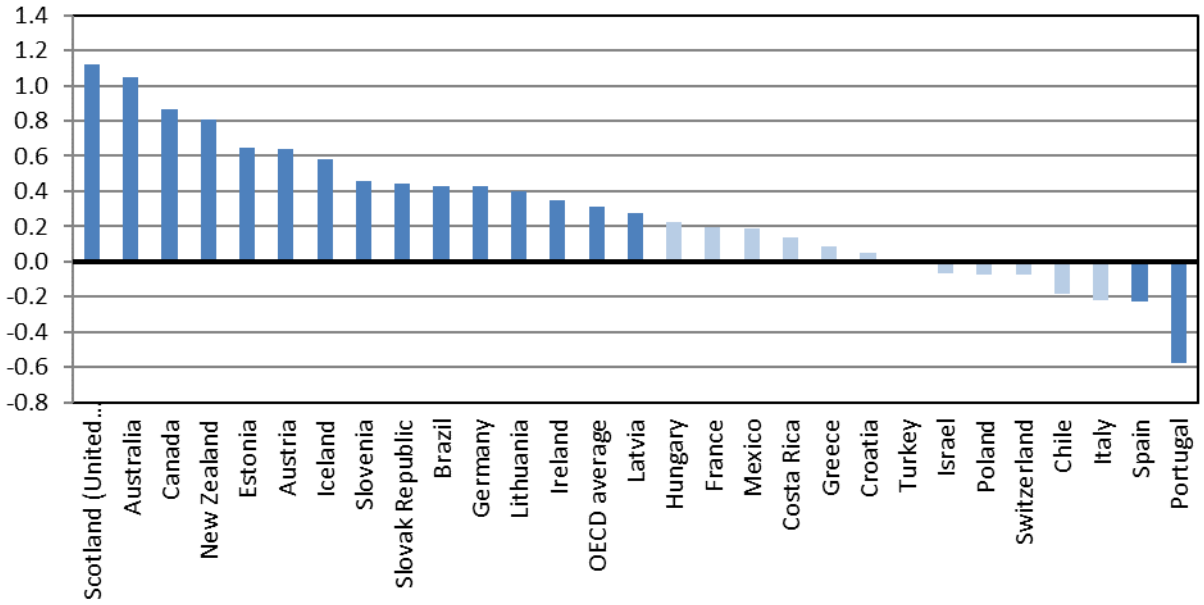
Laurison, 2016[122]; Henn and Foard, 2013[123]). Linked to this, early socialisation experiences within the home are said to influence children's choices in education and political engagement (Lauglo, 2016[124]; Healy and Malhotra, 2013[125]; Persson, 2013[126]). Early socialisation provides the opportunity for parents to transfer their attitudes and values to children, which may include an appreciation of education, political engagement and a sense of duty (Kam and Palmer, 2008[127]). Despite the inequalities in civic participation concerning socio-economic background as explored, little research considered the relation between civic education and social inequalities in students' democratic outcomes (Mennes et al., 2023[128]).

The ICCS 2022 study found that in the majority of countries, the socio-economic background of students, measured by parental occupation, parental education and number of books in the home, was significantly associated with civic knowledge in all participating countries (ICCS, 2023[25]). The difference in average civic knowledge scores between students whose parents had high levels of education (International Standard Classification of Education (ISED) Level 6 and above: tertiary) and those whose parents had lower levels of education (below ISCED Level 6: postsecondary non-tertiary and below) was 47 scale points across all countries. This gap ranged from 24 points in Colombia to 65 points in Bulgaria and the Slovak Republic. Across all countries, the difference in average civic knowledge scores between students who reported having 26 or more books at home and those with fewer than 26 books was 65 scale points. This gap ranged from 38 points in Croatia to 90 points in the Slovak Republic. Furthermore, the difference between the average civic knowledge scores of students in the high and low parental occupation groups was 53 scale points.

Similarly, results from the PISA 2018 Global Competencies study, which incorporates many elements related to civic education, show that advantaged students (those in the top quarter of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status) have access to more global and intercultural learning opportunities than disadvantaged students. This finding holds true in 33 of 65 participating countries and economies, with the largest differences observed in Australia, Canada, Hong Kong (China), Korea, Macao (China), New Zealand, Scotland (United Kingdom) and Chinese Taipei (Mostafa, 2020[129]) (see Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3. Number of learning opportunities related to global competence, by socio-economic status

Difference in access to number of learning opportunities (advantaged – disadvantaged)



Note: Statistically significant values are shown in darker tones. The global competence sample from Israel does not include students in ultra-Orthodox schools and, thus, is not nationally representative. Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the difference between advantaged and disadvantaged students.
Source: Source: OECD (2018[108]), *PISA 2018 Database, Table VI.B1.8.2.,* https://www.oecd.org/en/data/datasets/pisa-2018-database.html (accessed 30 June 2024)

Moreover, recent research by Mennes et al. (2023[128]) found a gap in participation in democratic activities offered by schools between students with advantaged social backgrounds and other groups of students.

Gaps for students in vocational education and training

A large body of literature shows concern for gaps in civic knowledge and understanding for students in vocational education and training (VET), compared to those in more academic tracks. This concerns socio-economic inequalities, as VET students make up a higher percentage of socio-economically disadvantaged students than other kinds of education (OECD, 2024[130]). AEGEE (2016[12]) identifies that students in VET are not receiving the same quality of civic education compared to students on academic paths. In both curricula and pedagogical practice, VET often strongly prioritises development of practical skills associated with the focal vocation, while democratic education is often associated with concepts and theory, as if there were two distinct orientations of knowledge (Wheelahan, 2017[131]; Rosvall and Nylund, 2022[132]).

In the United Kingdom, recent studies have found there is a marked difference between political engagement between those pursuing academic pathways after age 16, and students pursuing VET. Taking into account family background, A-level students (academic track) have significantly higher levels of voting (Janmaat, Mostafa and Hoskins, 2014[133]) and participation in demonstrations (Hoskins and Janmaat, 2016[134]) than students in VET. Despite this, the Government's white paper (Department for Education, 2021[135]) on upper secondary technical and vocational education and training focuses exclusively on advanced technical skills and does not cover any courses to do with citizenship education. However, in other countries which offer VET for students over 16, such as France, students can take courses related to civic education such as '*enseignement moral et civique [civic and moral education]'*, as well as history and geography (Janmaat and Mons, 2022[136]).

Research by the Nuffield Foundation (Janmaat, Hoskins and Pensiero, 2022[137]) discovered that the division of post-16 education into academic and vocational tracks exacerbated inequality in socio-political outcomes. Specifically, it revealed that students pursuing A-levels (academic track) not only exhibited higher political interest at age 16 but also experienced a more significant increase in political engagement compared to those pursuing a VET qualification after the age of 16. The report couldn't determine whether this disparity was due to a lack of citizenship education in VET. However, considering VET students often come from disadvantaged backgrounds and initially show lower political engagement, it is plausible that the absence of citizenship education in VET curricula is contributing to the amplification of existing inequalities in political engagement.

Similarly in their study of VET in Sweden, Rosvall et al. (2022[132]) find that those in academic tracks receive higher quality civic education than those in VET. The research project, along with several other studies, demonstrates how societal structures such as class, gender, and ethnicity permeate vocational programmes, hindering education's potential to reduce power and influence inequalities. Students in VET receive fewer opportunities to practice skills such as critical thinking, compared to those in academic tracks. In particular, the VET tracks were found to have less opportunities for debating (Rosvall and Nylund, 2022[132]).

Gender gap

Gender inclusivity in civic education is essential for fostering equitable political participation and representation. Research indicates that women often face barriers to civic and political engagement, resulting in lower participation rates compared to men. This disparity is influenced by socio-economic factors, cultural norms and structural biases within political systems (UN Women, 2018[138]; IDEA, 2013[139]). For instance, women's political participation is often limited by fewer opportunities for leadership roles and a lack of supportive networks compared to their male counterparts (IDEA, 2013[139]). In 2021, women held only 36% of ministerial positions on average in OECD countries (OECD, 2023[140]). The share of women in senior positions grew in most countries between 2011 and 2021 from 33% on average in OECD-EU countries to 41% in 2021, yet still below gender parity (ibid.).

Despite this, the ICCS (2023[25]) study found a significant gender difference in civic knowledge between males and females in 18 of 20 countries surveyed, as well as on average across countries, with females having higher civic knowledge scores than males. Civic knowledge scores of female students were also higher in nearly all countries of the previous cycles. The difference was not statistically significant in Colombia, the Netherlands and the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany).

In their analysis of PISA 2018 results, Mostafa (2020[129]) identified that boys were more likely than girls to participate in activities in which they are expected to give and discuss their views, while girls were more likely than boys to report participating in activities related to intercultural understanding and communication. More boys than girls (about 5 percentage points more) reported that they learn about the interconnectedness of countries and economies, on average across OECD countries. Boys were also more likely than girls to be invited by their teachers to give their personal opinion about international news (a difference of 4 percentage points). In contrast, girls were more likely than boys to report that they learn how to solve conflicts with their peers in the classroom (a difference of 4 percentage points), and learn about different cultures (again, a difference of 4 percentage points) (Mostafa, 2020[129]).

Additionally, the study found that women with vocational qualifications were the only demographic that saw a decline in political interest between ages 16 and 30. This indicates that customised forms of civic education could be particularly effective in fostering political engagement in vocational pathways for women.

Gaps for students with special education needs

For students with special education needs (SEN), civic education can serve as a tool for promoting self-advocacy, empowering them to participate meaningfully in societal decisions, and enhancing their overall social and emotional development. Moreover, an inclusive civic education programme has the potential to benefit all members of society by breaking down barriers and stereotypes, fostering a more tolerant and accepting society (Bartlett and Schugurensky, 2023[118]). In addressing the gaps in civic education for students with SEN, we move toward a more equitable and inclusive educational system that prepares all students for active participation in civic life (Bartlett and Schugurensky, 2023[118]).

However, studies reveal that students with SEN often face challenges in receiving comprehensive civic education, and this gap can have significant implications for their overall development and integration into society (Garwood, 2020[141]). Traditional approaches to civic education may not always account for the varied cognitive, emotional and physical abilities of students with special education needs (Bueso, 2022[142]). For example, students with learning disabilities, autism or other complications may struggle with conventional classroom settings and standard instructional materials. The lack of accommodation and accessibility measures can limit their engagement with civic content, hindering their understanding of essential concepts related to governance, rights, and societal responsibilities (ibid.).

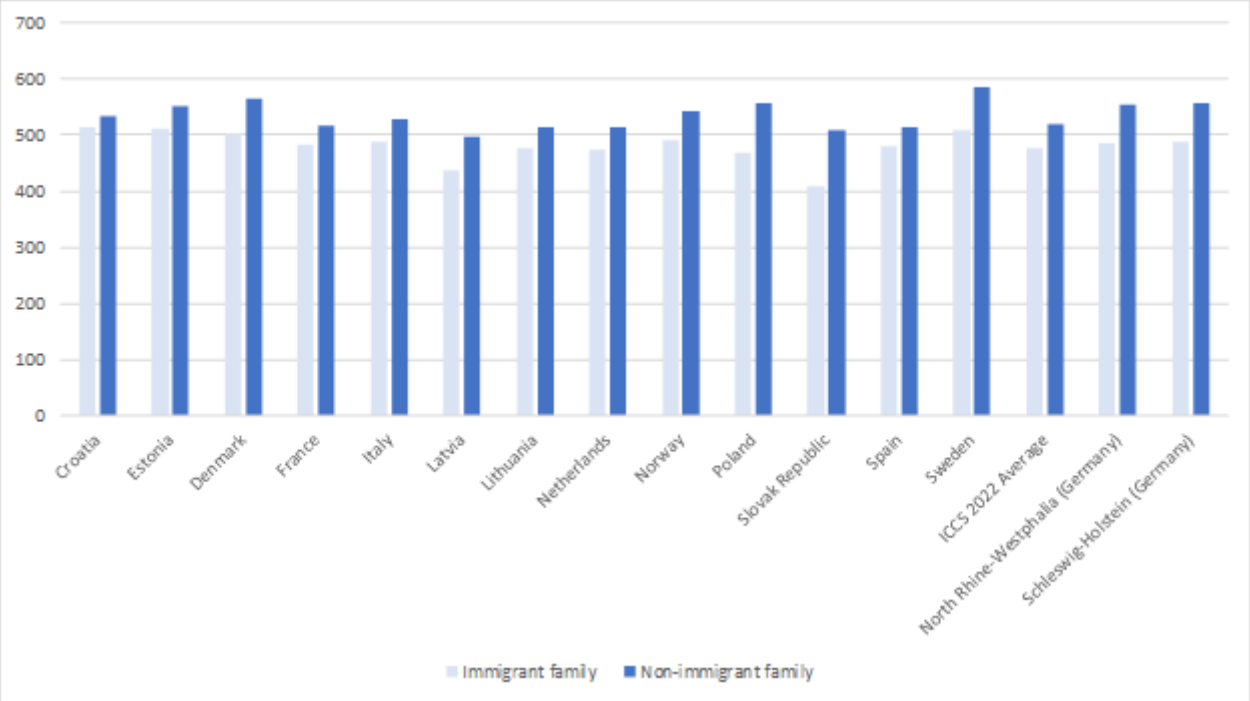
The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2022) civics exam in the United States revealed that only 8% of students with SEN, compared to 24% of those without, scored a proficient level in civics (NAEP, 2022[143]). Moreover, another recent study from the United States found that schools systemically (even if unintentionally) exclude students with disabilities from civics lessons: "*Qualitative interviews revealed a trend in which students missed social studies because they were scheduled to be pulled out for interventions during social studies instruction.*" (Tichnor-Wagner, Kawashima-Ginsberg and Hayat, 2020[144]). The study found that the students most often miss civics instruction because they lack equal access due to needing to leave regular classroom lessons on regular occasions.

Gaps for migration-induced diversity and ethnic groups

The ICCS 2022 study found a gap in civic knowledge for students with an immigrant and language background (ICCS, 2023[25]). The study highlighted that students from immigrant backgrounds and those who spoke a different language at home tended to have lower levels of civic knowledge compared to their peers who were native-born and spoke the country's primary language at home. This gap is consistent with findings from previous cycles of the ICCS study and points to the ongoing challenges in ensuring equitable civic education for all students, regardless of their background. An illustration of the gap in civic knowledge scores between students with an immigrant background and students without is highlighted in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4. ICCS 2022 Civic Knowledge Scores by Immigrant Background

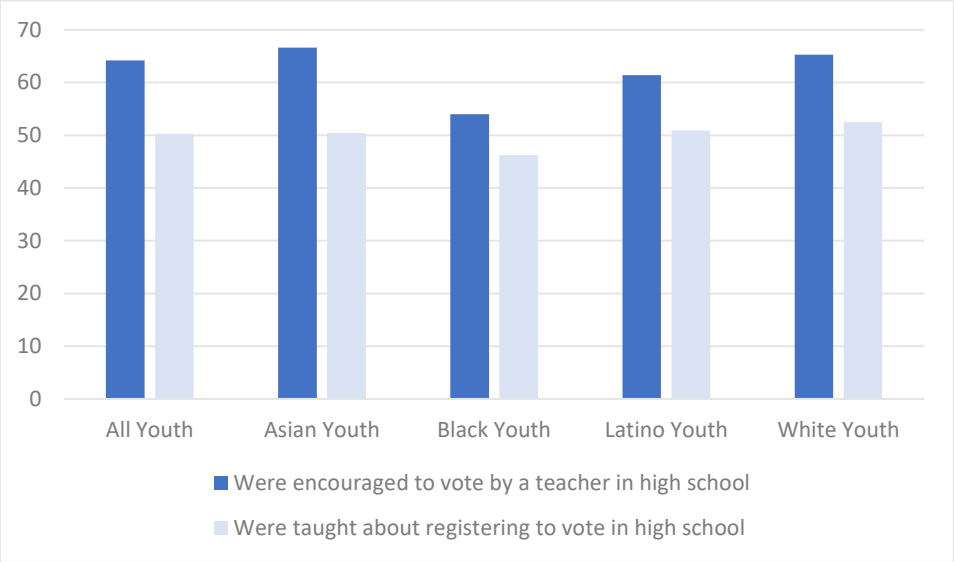
Mean civic knowledge score of students with an immigrant background versus non-immigrant background.



Note: Denmark did not meet the ICCS's sample participation requirements. In every country but Croatia, the difference in civic knowledge between students with an immigrant background and non-immigrant background was statistically significant.
Source: ICCS (2023[25]) *IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2022 International Report, Table 3.17,* https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-65603-3

A study by the Center for Information Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) in the United States found disparities between ethnic groups and the voter education they received (2020[145]). For example, while almost two in three students overall report having been encouraged to vote in high school (64%), this was true for just over half of Black students (54%). This is further illustrated in Figure 3.5.

Figure 3.5. High school students' experiences of electoral education varies by ethnicity in the United States



Source: CIRCLE polling data (2020[145]), https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/youth-who-learned-about-voting-high-school-more-likely-become-informed-and-engaged#ftn1 (accessed on 15 May 2024)

Providing civic education for people with immigrant backgrounds is also relevant in adult education. This is because countries that receive immigrants are interested in the quick and smooth adaptation of new members of their civil communities (EENCE, 2023[146]). For adult refugees and immigrants, education can be a valuable tool for enhancing their language skills, employability, and overall integration and inclusion into their host country (Cerna, 2019[147]).

The roles of adult education and learning are manifold, combining ideas about preparation for the labour market with active citizenship and personal development (Fejes, 2019[148]). As depicted in the EU Council Resolution on a New European Agenda for Adult Learning (Council of the European Union, 2021[149]), there is a notable emphasis on the significance of adult education for adaptation, specifically in assisting citizens in adjusting to a quickly evolving society. These concepts align with those found in national-level policy formulations, such as in Sweden, where formal adult education at the municipal level is delineated with three primary functions: serving the labour market, compensating for educational gaps or insufficient support in prior education leading to incomplete degrees, and fostering democratic engagement (SFS (Svensk författningssamling [Swedish Code of Statutes]), 2010[150])

Even though adult learning and education addresses "all" citizens, the focus has often been directed towards those who are deemed to be at risk of exclusion, such as social security dependants single mothers or immigrants (Fejes, 2006[151]; Sandberg et al., 2015[152]). Recently, policy initiatives across the OECD have been geared towards addressing the needs of immigrants, driven by the historically high number of refugees. Indeed, how can newly-arrived migrants be effectively integrated as citizens in host societies remains a policy challenge (Fejes, 2019[148]).

4. Civic education policies and practices for an inclusive society

This section will examine various policies and practices which have shown promise in the ability to enhance students' CSE competencies. Considering the goal of establishing an inclusive society, it will focus particularly on policies and practices in civic education which have the potential to reduce the participation gap or are targeted at minority student groups.

Policies and practices which have been shown to have a significant effect on political engagement and that will be examined in this paper are an open classroom climate (Manganelli, Lucidi and Alivernini, 2015[153]; Campbell, 2008[154]; Orit, 2003[155]; Quintelier and Hooghe, 2013[156]; Knowles and McCafferty-Wright, 2015[157]), continuing professional learning and initial teacher education, civic knowledge and participatory learning (Whiteley, 2012[158]; Martens and Gainous, 2012[159]), civic education interventions targeted at specific groups, developing civic attitudes, values and social and emotional skills (OECD, 2024[78]), media literacy (Karaduman, 2015[160]; OECD, 2024[161]), and a whole-school approach to civic education. Each of these areas of education show promise in boosting the CSE habits of children and young people in the short and long-term and have shown particular benefits for various minority groups who may be under-represented or excluded from CSE and/or civic education. To achieve the most inclusive civic education, a combination of all activities is essential to ensure that every student has the opportunity to engage meaningfully and develop the skills necessary for active participation in democratic life.

4.1. Open classroom climate

An "open classroom climate" (OCC) is frequently cited as one of the most effective ways to develop the civic competencies, knowledge and skills of students (Campbell, 2008[154]; ICCS, 2023[25]; Knowles and McCafferty-Wright, 2015[157]). An open classroom climate refers to the overall atmosphere and environment within a classroom that encourages openness, inclusivity, and positive interaction among students and between students and teachers. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) (2022[162]) describes an OCC as "a space that allows students to discuss social and political issues and express their opinions openly", and identifies the positive relationship between an OCC and student civic knowledge as one of the most stable findings of IEA studies on civic and citizenship education (ICCS, 2023[25]).

Elements of an OCC include debates and discussions, student-centred learning and active participation in classroom decisions. In this spirit, Hess et al. (2008[163]) characterise an open classroom climate as having a "democratic ethos" where students feel comfortable engaging in deliberation. Research has indicated that the open classroom climate consistently contributes to positive civic outcomes (Huang and Biseth, 2016[164]) and the development of political self-efficacy (Levy, 2011[165]) in (Hu and Huang, 2019[166]).

Debating controversial societal issues in an open classroom environment, for instance, helps in the development of critical skills for effective CSE such as critical thinking, problem-solving and empathy skills,

as well as the ability to consider multiple perspectives (Kraatz et al., 2022[167]). In studying two empirical cases, (Parker, 2010[168]) found that ambitious classroom discussion can develop more complex understandings of issues by allowing students to build on experiences of their peers. Furthermore, Hess (2009[169]) in (Knowles and McCafferty-Wright, 2015[157]), in their research of high school students, linked discussion of controversial issues with promoting democratic values, such as tolerance, equality and diversity.

In addition to building civic skills, an OCC has many other positive benefits for students, including influencing their academic achievement, heightening their engagement in school, strengthening their relationships with their peers and teachers and improving their overall well-being (OECD, 2019[170]; Wang et al., 2020[171]). Findings from the ICCS 2009 study revealed a connection between students' favourable views of their interactions with teachers and their perception of the openness of classroom discussions (Maurissen, Claes and Barber, 2018[172]). Similarly, data from the ICCS 2016 study indicated a correlation between positive student-teacher relationships and students' civic knowledge (Schulz et al., 2018[173]).

Mitigating the socio-economic gap through OCC

Research has consistently shown that OCC can particularly help mitigate socio-economic differences in political knowledge (Campbell, 2008[154]; Castillo et al., 2014[174]; Persson, 2014[175]; Knowles and McCafferty-Wright, 2015[157]; Weinberg, 2021[89]). This environment fosters political engagement, intention to be an informed voter, and expected electoral participation, particularly among disadvantaged students (Campbell, 2008[154]; Castillo et al., 2014[174]). It also increases civic knowledge and political efficacy, which are positively correlated with civic and social engagement activities such as joining advocacy groups and showing solidarity with disadvantaged groups (Knowles and McCafferty-Wright, 2015[157]). These findings underscore the importance of creating an open and inclusive classroom environment to promote political knowledge and engagement, especially among disadvantaged students.

Hoskins (2017[88]) analyses how school systems can tackle inequalities in political socialisation. Looking at an open classroom climate, the author analyses how access and mitigating effects can shape the political learning experiences of students, particularly in relation to their family background. This is illustrated in Table 4.1. Students are likely to benefit from an OCC if they are encouraged to bring up issues for discussion, make up their own minds, freely express opinions and disagree with the teacher. Teachers who present several sides of an issue and respect students' opinions contribute to this accessible learning environment. While advantaged students may gain more from the experience of an OCC because of their familiarity with the processes, an OCC has the potential to allow their disadvantaged peers to catch-up (Hoskins, Janmaat and Melis, 2017[88]).

Table 4.1. How access and mitigating effects can influence young people's political learning at school as a result of their family background

Open classroom climate	Access	Potential for mitigating effects
• Bring up issues for discussion • Encouraged to make up own minds • Feel free to express opinions • Feel free to disagree with the teacher • Teachers present several sides of an issue • Teachers respect students' opinions	• Self-reported student experience dependent on student-teacher relationship • Students from high socio-economic status (SES) families often have an 'open home environment' and know the rules of the game' so are better able to access this type of exercise • Teachers' skills are necessary to enable and allow all students to experience it	• High SES gain more because of their familiarity with this experience • Gives children from low SES background opportunity to catch-up

Source: Adapted from Hoskins et al. (2017[88]) *Tackling inequalities in political socialisation: A systematic analysis of access to and mitigation effects of learning citizenship at school,* 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2017.09.001

Special attention should therefore be given to ensure that schools, teachers and students in socio-economically disadvantaged areas have the support and competencies required to establish an OCC.

Supporting teachers to encourage an OCC

Teachers play a pivotal role in creating an OCC. However, there are disparities in teachers' ability, knowledge and support for establishing an OCC. For example, according to PISA 2018 results, 67% of students across OECD countries agreed or strongly agreed that their language-of-instruction teachers listened to their view on how to do things, an essential component of an OCC. However, there was wide variation across OECD countries from less than one in two students in Japan, to almost 77% of students in Colombia, Korea and Portugal (OECD, 2020[176]).

Furthermore, research suggests that teachers in socio-economically deprived areas may encounter significant challenges in establishing an open classroom climate (Bondy and Ross, 2008[177]). These challenges can stem from various factors such as limited resources, high student needs, behavioural issues and external pressures (ibid). Additionally, teachers in these areas may face greater demands on their time and resources, which can make it difficult to devote sufficient attention to fostering an open and supportive classroom environment. Hornstra et al. (2015[178]) identify that teachers often feel that strategies relating to an open classroom climate, such as trusting students with autonomy and constructive learning are not suitable in classrooms, and that authoritarian approaches are more suitable. However, providing the right amount of structure, adapted to students' levels of independence and competence, ensures the effectiveness of autonomy support (ibid).

In recognition of the challenges teachers face, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) has created guidelines for teachers on how to encourage an OCC for the development of students' civic knowledge (IEA, 2022[162]). This includes advice on encouraging students to express their opinions, allowing students to make up their own minds, encouraging students to discuss issues with people who have different opinions and presenting several sides of the issues discussed in the classroom. Other frameworks have been developed by authors such as Pace (2021[179]), and have been integrated into education policy, as explored in Box 4.1. A framework for teaching controversial issues

Box 4.1. A framework for teaching controversial issues

Open discussions of current events and social issues can be an extremely rewarding experience for both teachers and students, developing critical thinking skills and democratic commitments (Fournier-Sylvester, 2013[180]). However, it is crucial for teachers to approach these discussions with care and empathy, particularly when discussing controversial issues which are sensitive in nature (Forrest, 2020[181]). This is especially important when addressing topics in which students may struggle to express their arguments and identities, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual (LGBTQI+) rights (Beck, 2013[182]), or when discussion questions, subjects or topics create a vast difference of opinion.

Pace (2021[179]) developed a framework for teaching controversial issues in an open classroom climate, which introduces eight essential elements for creating powerful curricula which encourages expression

and reflection. The eight elements are as follows:

1. Cultivate a supportive environment through community building, norms, openness to dissent and individual affirmation.
2. Prepare thoroughly with attention to student identity and development, teaching contexts, subject matter, purposes and methods.
3. Think through teacher stance including pedagogical roles, positions on issues, and pros and cons of disclosing teacher views.
4. Communicate proactively with students, parents, colleagues and administrators about what issues will be studied.
5. Select authentic issues and frame questions to promote student engagement and inquiry, progressing from less controversial to more controversial topics.
6. Choose resources and pedagogies that challenge assumptions and include diverse perspectives and foster participation.
7. Guide discussion with tools for analysing sources, exchanging ideas, moving from small groups to whole groups, and attending to equality.
8. Address emotions by creating space for processing them, using de-escalation moves and developing self-awareness.

Controversial Issues in Schools policy, Australia

The Controversial Issues in Schools policy in Australia (New South Wales Government Education, 2023[183]) outlines that teaching approaches to controversial issues needs to be sensitive, objective and balanced. Teachers should ensure that a range of opinions on a subject are taken into account in designing suitable learning programmes and must ensure that in situations where they need to give their own views in order to assist a discussion, they should ensure that they are balanced and presented as one opinion among others. When including controversial issues in the curriculum, educational staff members must consult with the school leader, inform parents of the proposed content (including materials to be used), and provide parents the opportunity to either consent or to withdraw their child from the presentation, event, programme or activity. In cases when communicating with parents or carers who do not understand English well, the use of translated documents or interpreters is encouraged.

4.2. Continuing professional learning and initial teacher education

A teacher's participation in continuing professional learning is a lifelong process and is an indicator of teacher quality (OECD, 2017[184]). While there is much literature on the influence of teachers' continued professional development, little work has been conducted in regard to civic education (Hu and Huang, 2019[166]). A study by Eurydice found that nearly half of EU countries have no regulations or recommendations on the development of teachers' citizenship education competencies through initial teacher training (European Parliament, 2023[117]). Furthermore, the effectiveness of civic knowledge education often relies on the political knowledge of the teacher. Studying teachers' challenges in teaching civics, Burton (2015[185]) quotes a secondary-school teacher:

> *"One of the difficulties is that the more political aspects require specific knowledge ….I happen to be interested in politics and world affairs…I am well informed but other people aren't as well informed so that is a problem" (p. 85[185]).*

Hu and Huang (2019[166]) examine the influence of teacher's continued professional learning on their sense of preparedness and teaching practices in civic education, and on how students experience the classroom climate, in Norway, Sweden, Chinese Taipei, and Korea. The study found that teachers who feel prepared use more student-centred teaching methods such as role-playing, student research, student discussion in the classroom, and asking students to propose lesson topics, which have been proven to be most effective in developing students' CSE. In contrast, teachers who felt under prepared were not confident to engage in these techniques, impacting the civic learning of students.

The EU recognises this problem at the level of teacher training and has developed policy goals and teacher academies to enhance their civic learning, as illustrated in Box 4.2.

Box 4.2. Erasmus + Teacher Academies

At the EU level, despite progress over recent years, half of the Member States have no regulations or recommendations on the development of teachers' citizenship competencies through initial teacher education (European Parliament, 2023[117]). An Erasmus+ project, Teacher Academies, aims to promote excellence in teacher education in Europe, with the goal of establishing at least 25 teacher academies by 2025. Part of the project, "Towards a European Syllabus in Teacher Education", advocates for the inclusion of global and societal topics in teacher education, such as sustainability, democratic education and active citizenship, gender sensitivity, multilingualism, diversity, and digitalisation of learning spaces. Another part of the project, European civic Teacher Academy, aims to enhance mobility, European civic awareness, multilingualism, and cultural diversity awareness among teachers, aligning with EU policies supporting European teacher development. This project takes crucial steps towards the overarching goal of improving teacher training for civic education in Europe.

Source: European Commission (2023[186]) *Erasmus+ Teacher Academies to promote excellence in teacher education in Europe,* https://education.ec.europa.eu/fr/news/16-new-erasmus-teacher-academies-to-promote-excellence-in-teacher-education-in-europe#21st (accessed on 15 May 2024)

Findings from ICCS 2022 reveal that training for civic and citizenship education tends to be compulsory for teachers in the humanities and social sciences, and in the majority of education systems, for teachers of language arts, religion/ethics, and other subjects. However, it is less commonly mandated for teachers of mathematics and sciences, as well as specialist teachers. In most education systems, there is an expectation that teachers in the humanities and social sciences undergo continuous training in this area.

Regarding the contents of the training received on average across participating countries, the highest percentages were recorded for responsible internet use (66%), conflict resolution (65%), diversity and inclusiveness (59%), critical and independent thinking (57%), human rights (54%), citizens' rights and responsibilities (53%), and the environment and environmental sustainability (51%). Interestingly, across countries, only 37 percent of teachers on average reported that they had attended teacher training courses on voting and elections (ICCS, 2023[25]).

One country where a number of different approaches to teacher training for civic education training have been piloted is England, United Kingdom. In England, citizenship (civic) education became part of the National Curriculum in secondary schools (11 to 16 year-olds) in 2002. Since, the Department for Education and Skills has organised a range of training-related initiatives in civic education, including a national professional development team, a secondary-school self-evaluation tool (Department for Education, 2015[187]), training videos from primary and secondary schools, a full-time one-year postgraduate training course (UCL, n.d.[188]), and a professional association (Association for Citizenship Teaching (ACT), n.d.[189]). An evaluation of the training showed positive outcomes, with teachers reporting

that they enjoyed the training, and found it enhanced their understanding of the concept of citizenship and strategies of how to teach and encourage it in the classroom (ACT Project, 2019[190]). Several teachers reported that it shifted their idea of teacher training into one which places a greater emphasis on active citizenship and practice-based learning. Students who were taught by these teachers reported that they both enjoyed themselves and gained further skills. However, the review also found that teachers found it difficult to create enough time for civic education-based lessons due to factors such as school leaders not making enough time available on the timetable, staffing changes, and illness.

Another example stems from the Austrian Centre for Citizenship Education in Schools (polis) which supports teachers in implementing citizenship education through knowledge transfer, awareness raising, and sensitisation on politics, democracy, and human rights (Polis, n.d.[191]). Operating under the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, its key activities include maintaining an educational portal, publishing teaching materials, providing in-service teacher training, organising workshops and events like Austrian Citizenship Days, and coordinating international co-operation projects. These efforts aim to enhance civic education and engagement among students.

4.3. Building civic competence through participatory learning

Traditional classroom-based civic education, or knowledge-based civic education, including lecture and textbook approaches, has been found to be effective in increasing political knowledge (Owen, Chalif and Soule, 2011[192]; Galston, 2001[193]). Examples of the desired outcomes of knowledge-based civic education include understanding how to register to vote, knowing how to research candidates and policy issues, navigating different information sources and identifying potential biases, knowledge of the functions of the local and national political system, desire to participate in community improvement projects and discussing civil and legal rights (Garwood et al., 2020[194]).

A survey by the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) (2020[145]) in the United States found that high school efforts to educate children on the electoral system lead to adults who are more likely to be informed and engaged voters. Young individuals who received encouragement or guidance on voting and voter registration during their high school years are more inclined to participate in voting and other civic engagements. They exhibit greater awareness of the voting procedures and demonstrate higher levels of interest and attention towards significant events like the 2020 election compared to their peers who did not receive such guidance. For example, compared to their counterparts, these individuals were more knowledgeable about whether their states offered online voter registration. They were also at least 10 percentage points more likely to have encountered information about voting by mail and expressed confidence in knowing where to find relevant information if their state's election transitioned to exclusively mail-in ballots. Students who hadn't received encouragement from their high school teachers to vote were over twice as likely to believe that "Voting is a waste of time" compared to those who had been encouraged: 26% versus 12% (CIRCLE, 2020[145]).

However, many education systems are calling for more learning-by-doing approaches to civic education, where students have the chance to practice democratic principles in classroom and real-life settings (OECD, 2023[195]). Such practices recognise children as active agents with valuable perspectives, experiences, and contributions. Encompassing practices where students have the right to voice their opinions, from a child-rights perspective as well as for developing civic skills and competencies, is becoming of increasing interest for education systems across the OECD (Gottschalk and Borhan, 2023[196]).

Participatory activities in schools such as debates, elections, student councils and service learning have been found to be associated with higher levels of political engagement later in life (OECD, 2023[195]). The Council of Europe (2012[197]) outlines several benefits of participatory activities at school, including:

- Involving students in school decision-making processes can cultivate a sense of citizenship among young learners, while also nurturing essential civic competencies such as co-operation, communication, self-efficacy and an awareness of societal issues.
- Receiving invitations to make meaningful contributions to both the school and the broader community can instill a sense of belonging among young learners. Additionally, this engagement aids in the development of their self-esteem and the cultivation of respectful relationships. This, in turn, has the potential to positively impact the school environment by mitigating issues such as drop-outs, radicalisation, and bullying.
- Employing participatory practices in the classroom has demonstrated positive effects, enhancing both the classroom atmosphere and the educational achievements of students.

Student councils

Student councils, for example, are a common participation method adopted by schools and are typically the first experience children and young people have of the democratic process (Mcfarland and Starmanns, 2009[198]). They can provide a meaningful way for students to have their opinions heard, considered and acted upon in the decisions which affect them (Department for Education UK, n.d.[199]). Children who participate in councils are likely to develop self-esteem, confidence and often see an improvement in their academic performance and engagement (Lyle, Hendley and Newcomb, 2010[200]) as well as behavioural improvements (Committee for Education, 2012[201]). Furthermore, taking students' opinions into account through school councils can make school reforms more successful and improve the overall climate of the school (Lyle, Hendley and Newcomb, 2010[200]).

Differences in factors such as age, gender, special education needs, ethnic background and socio-economic status can affect a student's ability to participate in, and be represented by, a student council (Committee for Education, 2012[201]) (Lyle, Hendley and Newcomb, 2010[200]). Students who participate actively in their student council (i.e., post-holders) benefit the most in terms of personal effects (confidence, developing democratic skills etc.) and in terms of improvements in peer relationships and student-adult relationships, compared to their peers who do not have active roles (Griebler and Nowak, 2012[202]). Lyle et al. (2010[200]) identify in their study of Welsh schools that teachers should actively encourage the involvement of all students in consultation, and avoid amplifying the voices of only the "articulate elite" (p. 3[200]). Similarly the Committee for Education in Northern Ireland (Committee for Education, 2012[201]) stresses that schools must make an effort to avoid 'popular pupil only syndrome', where only the most popular students are elected in post-holder positions, when establishing student councils. This can be done through methods such as rotating leadership positions on a schedule.

Another factor that can undermine equity and inclusion is differences in funding, and how that can impact, whether positively or negatively, the effectiveness of school councils. McFarland et al. (2009[198]) found, in their US study, that public schools with more financial resources could afford to give school councils more authority and low-faculty oversight than less advantaged schools. They also found that schools in low-income areas tended to not have school councils or to have councils that only performed social functions. Furthermore, they identified that private religious schools had the most active school councils involved in a wide range of topics, but that they had the most faculty oversight in contrast (Mcfarland and Starmanns, 2009[198]).

The ICCS 2022 study found that 78% of schools analysed participated in "voting for class representative or school parliament/council", 67% of students reported "becoming a candidate for class representative or school parliament/council" and 40% took part in "decision-making about how school is run" (ICCS, 2023[25]). The Children's Worlds Survey highlighted wide variation across participating OECD countries in the proportion of 10- year-olds who reported having opportunities to make decisions at school ranging from 19% in Germany to 58% in Spain (Rees-Jones, Shorrer and Tergiman, 2023[203]). Furthermore,

participatory activities such as school councils are often not mandatory for schools to undertake, which means that access could be an issue. In addition, within each school these activities may not be mandatory for students to participate in, suggesting that there could be a self-selection effect for partaking in these activities. The choice to participate could also be influenced by the students' peers or by their teachers (Hoskins, Janmaat and Melis, 2017[88]). Supporting teachers to encourage students from less advantaged backgrounds to stand for positions in school councils could play an important role in reducing inequalities (ibid.). Box 4.3 provides an example of how to include a diverse range of voices in decision-making practices.

Box 4.3. Inclusive student council structure

An example of good practice in student councils was highlighted by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) in England (United Kingdom) in a 2015 review of student participation strategies across the country (Education and Training Inspectorate, 2015[204]). In an example school, formal student participation structures began at age eight, with each class having its own individual class council that contributed to the overall Student Council. This was organised as follows:

- Every six weeks, all children in the class vote for three peers to be chairperson, vice chairperson and secretary. The teacher must help the students in ensuring that representation is balanced in terms of demographic characteristics of the students.
- For the youngest group of students in the council (year four), the teacher models the roles and responsibilities in order to develop the children's understanding of participatory processes.
- The class councils meet every week to discuss no more than four items of business. Agendas and minutes are then taken forward to the Student Council meeting later in the week. The role of the teacher in these meetings is to facilitate the meeting by helping children manage their time effectively and keep interactions pertinent.
- Following the Student Council meetings, the class council representatives report outcomes and decisions to the rest of the class.
- Ideas are also presented to the Parents' Council and the Board of Governors, and have according to ETI, successfully impacted change.

Furthermore, children in year six are given the responsibility of operating the school's Eco Committee using the same structures and practices which they learn during the Student and Class Councils. Only children who are not post-holders in the Student Council are able to be post-holders in the Eco Committee, extending the opportunity for student participation further. Children are placed in charge of various responsibilities, such as monitoring and reducing the use of electricity, recycling and organising the school's fruit shop. The school has been awarded the Eco-Schools Green Flag accreditation (Eco-schools, n.d.[205]) on three separate occasions, each time represented and defended to the jury by the children themselves.

Source: Example in Gottschalk and Borhan (2023[196]), *Child participation in decision making: Implications for education and beyond*, https://doi.org/10.1787/a37eba6c-en

Participating in real-life political issues

Examples from Austria and Scotland (United Kingdom), as exemplified in Box 4.4, found that targeted education programmes and information campaigns regarding voting, in combination with lowering the voting age, lead to heightened voter turnout both in the present and long-term, which resulted in augmented engagement particularly in minority groups.

Box 4.4. Lowering the voting age in combination with educational programmes: Examples from Austria and Scotland (United Kingdom)

A promising way to heighten young people's electoral participation, particularly for minority groups, is through lowering the voting age, in combination with targeted educational reform. Many studies advocate for lowering the voting age from 18 to 16 years, while the majority of young people still attend school and live with their parents, which provides a context that is supportive of their electoral participation (Imagine Canada, 2010[206]). It has the potential to generate greater interest in politics among the young population, promote their participation, and therefore contribute to a more diverse and representative electoral population. While concerns about insufficient political maturity, political interest, and knowledge may give rise to worries about an uninformed electorate, the topic of lowering the voting age is currently under debate not only in the United States but also in European countries like Denmark, Norway, and the United Kingdom (Eichhorn and Bergh, 2021[207]).

Austria was the first European country to lower the voting age to 16, with the inclusion of 16-year-olds in the federal electoral reform in 2007. This was accompanied by measures such as awareness raising campaigns in combination with reforming civic and citizenship education in schools (Imagine Canada, 2010[206]). A study of the effectiveness of these policies on boosting young people's voting turnout found that the electoral turnout for first-time 16 and 17 year old voters was significantly higher than turnout of older first-time voters (18-20 year-olds) (Elections and Democracy, 2018[208])

Scottish youth aged 16 and 17 were invited to vote in the 2014 referendum of independence, and since 2015, in all Scottish and local elections. A recent study (Eichhorn and Hübner, 2023[209]) of the outcomes of this found that the young people who participated in elections aged 16 or 17 were more likely to turn out to vote in the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections than young people who were first eligible to vote aged 18, suggesting a lasting positive effect of lowering the voting age on voter turnout.

Benefits for minority groups

The study (Eichhorn and Hübner, 2023[209]) also examined the effect of lowering the voter age on addressing socio-economic inequalities in political engagement. It found that young people from all socio-economic backgrounds were equally likely to be engaged with politics immediately after the initial lowering of the voting age. Following the 2014 independence referendum, 16- and 17-year-olds in Scotland showed lower levels of inequality in political participation regarding the social class of their families than peers elsewhere in the UK. A study in 2015 found that there were no major differences in voting, non-electoral participation or information source usage between 16- and 18-year-olds of different social classes in Scotland. For the same age group elsewhere in the UK, usual patterns of inequality were still observed. Unfortunately this effect didn't last into later life. In the 2021 elections, those with families of higher social classes were more likely to turn out to vote than their less well-off peers. For 16- and 17-year-olds however, there was an equal possibility of turning out to vote dependent on social class.

The report (Eichhorn and Hübner, 2023[209]) advocates for lowering the voting age to 16 for all UK elections to give more young people the opportunity to benefit. It also recommends the strengthening of political literacy education across Scotland, for the nationwide provision of opportunities to discuss political issues in the transition into early adulthood (including work places and further education), and for improving the data base for research into the experience of voting at 16 through a longitudinal collection of evidence of the impacts and outcomes of voting age reform.

Volunteering and service learning

Another key way of encouraging students to participate in the community and gain civic skills and competencies is through Service Learning (Gottschalk and Borhan, 2023[196]). This is also known as community involvement programmes or community service. Experiential learning programmes such as these are commonly praised for allowing students to become active participants in the learning process, rather than solely the recipients of knowledge. Community involvement programmes aim to positively influence students by offering them opportunities for authentic learning in settings outside of the classroom, opportunities to discover new passions, to strengthen the relationship between schools and their communities, and to foster interpersonal skills, which are essential for active and engaged citizens (Furco, 2010[210]).

Studies focused on civic education outcomes found that participating in service-learning/community-based education can enhance students' political knowledge (Hamilton and Fenzel, 1988[211]), their political engagement (Morgan and Streb, 2001[212]), and their motivation to volunteer in the future (ibid). As recognised by the OECD Recommendation on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People, meaningful volunteer service can strengthen young people's trust in government and their relationships with public institutions (OECD, 2021[213]).

In a longitudinal investigation, Hart et al. (2016[214]) discovered that both voluntary and mandated community service engagements during secondary education significantly predicted voting and volunteering behaviors in adulthood. However, the study also emphasised the importance of the quality of the volunteering experience in nurturing enduring civic skills and engagement. Additionally, participation in extra-curricular pursuits emerged as a predictor of future voting and volunteering tendencies. Hart et al. (2016[214]) identified several factors contributing to the effectiveness of service learning initiatives:

- Referencing Youniss and Yates (1997[215]), they noted that engaging in service allows students to forge personal connections with political and community issues, moving beyond abstract contemplation.
- Crystal and DeBell (2002[216]) underscored that involvement in community activities enables students to establish networks for discussing civic matters.
- Moreover, the role of community service is acknowledged for exposing students to social issues previously unfamiliar to them (Eyler and Jr, 1999[217]).
- Lastly, they emphasised that participating in the community fosters the development of essential civic skills such as active listening, teamwork, and self-organisation, potentially enhancing students' perceptions of themselves as capable future volunteers and citizens.

In several OECD education systems, such as that of Ontario (Canada) (as outlined in Box 4.5), service-learning programmes are a mandatory part of the curriculum. This can help foster the inclusion of all students in participatory civic education opportunities. Across OECD members, at least 16 countries and the European Union have put in place a national youth volunteering or civic service programme to foster young people's civic participation and support them in gaining skills to enter the labour market (Gagliardi and Robinson, forthcoming[218]).

Box 4.5. Community involvement activities in Ontario, Canada

In the province of Ontario, Canada, students aged 14 to 18 are mandated to complete 40 hours of unpaid community involvement activities as a requirement for their high school diploma. Introduced by the Ontario Ministry of Education in 1999, the initiative aims to foster civic responsibility and community support awareness among students. The programme has influenced other Canadian provinces like British Columbia and Newfoundland to adopt similar service-learning curricula. Approved activities, such as fundraising, volunteer work and involvement in community events, must benefit the local community. Students need permission for activities outside the approved list, and the school board oversees administrative procedures. Students can fulfil the requirement through one or multiple activities over four years, with the school principal determining compliance.

According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (1990[219]), one of the objectives of the programme is to enhance civic values. Data comparing volunteer patterns in Ontario to the rest of Canada reveal that Ontario youth exhibit higher volunteering rates and greater participation in cultural and community-related activities than the overall population (Imagine Canada, 2010[206]). The 2018 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating (GSS-GVP) reported that 62% of Ontario youth aged 15 to 24 volunteered at least once in the past year, with 72% making charitable donations (Tara Hahmann, 2021[220]). In terms of youth voter turnout for federal elections, there was a nationwide increase between 2011 and 2015, with Ontario experiencing a rise from 32.8% to 56.2% (Elections Canada, 2015[221]).

The mandated nature of Ontario's community involvement programme, requiring all students between the ages of 14 and 18 to participate, fosters a culture of inclusivity by ensuring that the benefits of civic engagement are extended to the entire student population, rather than a select few. This approach promotes equal access to opportunities for personal growth, community awareness and the development of civic values, contributing to a more inclusive society where diverse perspectives and contributions are valued and acknowledged.

Source: OECD (2023[195]), *Engaging young citizens: Civic education practices in the classroom and beyond*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 10.1787/2166378c-en

4.4. Civic education interventions targeting specific groups

Gender

Civic learning opportunities in schools can be tailored towards disadvantaged groups. For example, as explored in the previous section of this working paper, women and girls are under-represented in positions of power, including in politics. One effective educational practice to combat these disparities is incorporating gender-sensitive cuticula in civic education. This involves integrating discussions on gender equality, highlighting women's contributions to society, and encouraging both girls and boys to engage in political processes. A practical example is the use of role-playing activities where students simulate political decision-making processes, ensuring that female students take on leadership roles. This approach not only boosts confidence among girls but also normalises female leadership for all students (Páez-Bernal and Kittilson, 2022[222]). An example of a global initiative, The Girls Leading Our World (GLOW), is highlighted in the Box 4.6 below.

Box 4.6. The Girls Leading Our World (GLOW) Programme: Empowering Young Female Leaders

The GLOW (Girls Leading Our World) programme is an initiative that was originally developed in 1995 by Peace Corps volunteers in Romania, with the aim of empowering young girls through leadership development, self-confidence building, and civic engagement. The programme has since expanded to numerous countries where it has been integrated into broader educational and community programmes focused on gender equality and civic participation.

Key objectives and impact:

GLOW aims to address gender disparities in leadership and civic participation by equipping young girls with the skills and confidence needed to become active and informed citizens. The programme typically includes a series of workshops, camps, and community service projects that focus on leadership development, self-esteem enhancement, health education, and the importance of civic responsibility. By engaging in these activities, girls are encouraged to explore their potential as leaders and advocates within their communities, challenging traditional gender norms and fostering a sense of agency.

Programme structure and activities:

At the core of the GLOW programme are its camps and workshops, which provide girls with a safe and supportive environment to learn and practice leadership skills. These sessions often include activities such as public speaking, teamwork, conflict resolution, and community organising, all facilitated by female mentors who serve as role models. Additionally, the curriculum addresses global issues, human rights, and the role of civic engagement, linking personal leadership growth with broader societal contributions.

Outcomes and evaluation:

The GLOW programme has demonstrated positive outcomes, with participants showing increased self-confidence, leadership abilities, and civic engagement. For example, evaluations have indicated that girls who participate in GLOW are more likely to assume leadership roles in their schools and communities, and to engage actively in civic and social activities. These outcomes support the broader educational goals of many OECD countries, where promoting gender equality in leadership and civic participation remains a priority.

Source: Global Girls Leading Our World (GLOW) Programme, (n.d.[223]), *Global Girls Glow*, https://globalgirlsglow.org/ (accessed 21 January 2025)

Students in vocational education and training

As uncovered in the previous section of this paper, in many education systems, VET students do not receive the same quality of civic education compared to their peers in academic tracks. Recognising this, countries such as the Netherlands have launched new VET programmes aimed at developing students' civic and social skills further. This is explored in the Box 4.7 below.

Box 4.7. Diversity and inclusion in VET in the Netherlands

The Netherlands launched their project, *Getting started with diversity and inclusion*, in January 2020. Financed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, it aims to deliver a set of innovative interventions to support diversity and inclusion in VET. Agreed between a variety of actors, including the students themselves, the Netherlands adopts a participative approach to learning tolerant and democratic attitudes as opposed to traditional classroom settings. This approach has been found to be one of the most effective in creating informed and engaged citizens (OECD, 2023[195]). VET schools now offer practice-orientated settings that encourage learning-by-doing teaching approaches. VET school representatives have agreed on the following learning priorities:

- Clarifying the concepts of diversity and inclusion
- Designing interschool interventions and defining working methods to test them
- Providing pedagogical teacher training in diversity and inclusion issues
- Aligning schools' policies and implementation initiatives and raising the commitment of their teaching staff.

Some of the activities proposed by the programme include one-day or multi-day challenges around Community Service Learning/Social internships, assignments where they show a classmate their town/village as a guide for a day, and teachers temporarily teaching at another school. These initiatives not only broaden students' perspectives by engaging them in real-world experiences but also foster a sense of community, empathy, and collaboration among students.

Source: CEDEFOP (2020[224]) *Netherlands: shaping diversity and inclusion in VET through action,* https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/netherlands-shaping-diversity-and-inclusion-vet-through-action (accessed 30 November 2024)

Migrants and refugees

Many countries have put in place civic education initiatives for refugees. In Poland, for example, various non-governmental organisations, including *Grupa Zagranica* (Grupa Zagranica, n.d.[225]), a civil society platform involved in development co-operation, democracy support, humanitarian aid and global education, actively engage in supporting refugees. *Grupa Zagranica* implements integration programmes aimed at fostering values of solidarity and tolerance. In the United Kingdom, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), n.d.[226]) has initiated a series of projects dedicated to assisting refugees and immigrants in honing their skills to meet the demands of the labor market. Meanwhile, in Austria, the city of Vienna, in conjunction with Viennese adult education centers (*Volkshochschulen*), has introduced welcome workshops specifically tailored for refugees. These workshops offer information modules covering various topics, including health, accommodation and education, with the aim of facilitating a smooth integration process for refugees in the community. An example from Sweden, Swedish from Day One, is illustrated in Box 4.8.

Box 4.8. Swedish from Day One

Municipal adult education plays a pivotal role in Sweden, serving almost as many students as the regular upper secondary school system for young people (Fejes, 2019[148]). In response to the 2015 migration influx, the Swedish government allocated funds for study associations to set up study circles for asylum seekers. Between 2015 and 2017, over 120 000 participants (representing more than half of all asylum seekers during that period) engaged in these activities.

One of the notable activities for asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants is a programme called "Swedish from Day One". This initiative, funded by study associations, focuses on providing asylum seekers with initial Swedish language skills and an introduction to Swedish society. Civic education is integrated into language learning, with project managers emphasising the intertwining of these knowledge areas. Field trips and information sessions cover various aspects of society, including health, the labour market and other topics.

Source: Fejes (2019[148]), *Adult education and the fostering of asylum seekers as "full" citizens,* International Review of Education, 10.1007/s11159-019-09769-2.

4.5. Developing civic attitudes, values and social and emotional skills

Embedding civic values in the curriculum

Schools play a crucial role in helping students to develop the attitudes, values, knowledge and competencies needed to thrive and be an active citizen in the 21st century. The OECD Learning Compass 2030 (OECD, 2019[84]) defines attitudes and values as the principles and beliefs that influence one's choices, judgements, behaviours and actions on the path towards individual, societal and environmental well-being. Values are defined as the guiding principles that influence what people believe to be important when making decisions in all areas of private and public life. Attitudes are underpinned by values and beliefs and have an influence on behaviour. Values are classified into four categories: personal (values associated with who one is as a person), social (values related to how one behaves towards others, including how one manages interactions such as conflicts), societal (shared values which define the priorities of cultures and societies), and human (similar to social, but seen as transcending nations and cultures, considering the well-being of humanity) (OECD, 2019[84]).

As schools, workplaces and communities become more ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse, it will be more important than ever to emphasise the inter-relatedness of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values (OECD, 2019[84]). As such, the importance of developing attitudes and values through education is increasingly discussed in international forums. Table 4.2 shows the values articulated by various international bodies and instruments.

Table 4.2. Values articulated by international bodies and instruments

International body/framework	Values
OECD Global Competency Framework	Includes values ("valuing human dignity" and "valuing cultural diversity") as guiding principles for attitudes such as "openness towards people from other cultures", "respect for cultural otherness", "global-mindedness", and "responsibility"
Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 on Education	Focuses on Global Citizenship Education and Education for Sustainable Development; knowledge of global issues and universal values, such as "justice", "equality", "dignity" and "respect", as well as aptitudes for "networking and interacting with people of different backgrounds, origins, cultures and perspectives", and behavioural capacities to "act collaboratively and responsibly to find global solutions for global challenges", and to "strive for the collective good"
Council of Europe Competence Framework for Democratic Culture	Includes values (i.e. valuing "human dignity and human rights", "cultural diversity", "democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law") and attitudes (i.e. "openness to cultural otherness and other beliefs", "world views and practices", "respect", "civic-mindedness", "responsibility", "self-efficacy", and "tolerance of ambiguity")
G7 Summit Leaders' Declaration 2016	Recognises the importance of common values and principles for all humanity (e.g. "freedom", "democracy and respect for privacy", "human rights", "human dignity") at a time of violent extremism, terrorist attacks and other challenges
United Nations instruments	Values articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Charter and the UN Millennium Declaration include "equality", "freedom", "justice", "dignity", "solidarity", "tolerance", "peace and security", and "sustainable development"

Source: OECD (2019[84]), 2030 Learning Compass, https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/learning-compass-2030/OECD_Learning_Compass_2030_concept_note.pdf (accessed 30 November 2023)

Although the terminologies used to articulate the values above are not identical, a common thread emerges on the importance given to certain values, such as human dignity, respect, equality, justice, responsibility, global-mindedness, cultural diversity, freedom, tolerance and democracy. These values would help shape a shared future built on the well-being of individuals, communities and the planet. For example, values such as respect includes a wider scope, including respect for self, others including cultural diversity and the environment. Studies show that self-respect improves academic outcomes (Zhao et al., 2021[227]). Respect also improves societal relations as valuing others is essential for forming close relationships.

Conceptions of attitudes and values appear both in international documents and in curriculum frameworks around the world. Many countries acknowledge that education is inherently imbued with values, shaping their curriculum around a mutually accepted set of principles. An example from Singapore is highlighted in Box 4.9 below. In their responses to the Policy Questionnaire on Curriculum Redesign, countries most frequently mentioned values such as respect (for self, others, country, diversity, and the environment), empathy, integrity, and resilience (OECD, 2019[84]).

Box 4.9. Values embedded in the curriculum in Singapore

The curriculum in Singapore underscores the importance of acquiring competencies alongside core values – care, integrity, respect, resilience, responsibility and harmony – positioned at the core of the learning framework. Singapore's Ministry of Education asserts that 21st-century competencies are best cultivated within specific contexts rather than in isolation. The expectation is for these values to be seamlessly integrated into every subject. Simultaneously, a distinct subject titled "character and citizenship education" is incorporated into the syllabus, complete with guiding principles, content

examples, pedagogies, and assessments.

Singapore's 21st-Century Competencies Framework places significant emphasis on the values of respect, responsibility, resilience, integrity, care, and harmony. The belief is that these values play a pivotal role in shaping a young person's social and emotional competencies, including self- and social awareness, relationship management, self-management, and responsible decision-making. Moreover, these values are integral to developing 21st-century competencies such as civic literacy, global awareness, cross-cultural skills, critical and inventive thinking, as well as communication, collaboration, and information skills. These competencies are deemed essential for addressing challenges posed by globalization, shifting demographics, technological advancements, and other contemporary trends. Collectively, they aim to nurture individuals who are confident, self-directed learners, responsible citizens, and active contributors.

Source: OECD (2019[228]) *Attitudes and Values for 2030*

Social and emotional skills for civic and social engagement

Socio-emotional skills are integral to civic education, fostering effective communication and collaboration skills essential for engaging in diverse communities (Miyamoto, Huerta and Kubacka, 2015[229]; OECD, 2021[230]). These skills, including empathy and respect, contribute to the development of responsible citizens who understand and appreciate differing perspectives (OECD, 2021[230]). In navigating conflicts inherent to civic participation, socio-emotional skills play a key role in promoting constructive dialogue and resolution. By emphasising these skills, civic education nurtures individuals capable of contributing positively to democratic societies through inclusive and co-operative citizenship.

Tolerance can be understood as a key socio-emotional skill for cultivating an inclusive society, and is a cornerstone of democracy (Stoeckel and Ceka, 2022[231]). Tolerance refers to the acceptance and respect for diversity, differing opinions, and various cultural or social backgrounds. In an educational context, fostering tolerance involves teaching individuals to recognise, appreciate and embrace the differences that exist among people. It goes beyond mere awareness to cultivate an open-minded and non-judgmental approach toward individuals or groups with distinct beliefs, values, and perspectives (Sakallı et al., 2021[232]; Orlenius, 2008[233]). A policy example from England (United Kingdom) is highlighted in Box 4.10.

Box 4.10. Policy example on building tolerance in schools from England (United Kingdom)

Social mixing, skills and knowledge, and access

The Department for Education in England (United Kingdom) states that schools should promote community cohesion and shared values such as respect and tolerance for those of other faiths and beliefs (p.9). They aim to do so through three key policy areas/issues: social mixing (providing opportunities to interact and build positive relations with those from different backgrounds, within and beyond educational settings and local communities), skills and knowledge (equipping children and young people with the skills and knowledge to become active citizens in wider society), and access (supporting positive interactions between different kinds of people, by breaking down barriers to access and promoting positive treatment within educational institutions). Aimed at building skills related to tolerance and social cohesion, several key policies and practices which have been undertaken in a large number of schools in England and have been evaluated, are highlighted in their research report, Social Integration in Schools and Colleges.

An example: Schools Linking

Schools Linking is an established intervention designed for pupils aged 4-18 in primary and secondary schools, as well as colleges. Facilitated by The Linking Network, it aims to promote sustained, classroom-based contact between students from diverse backgrounds. The evidence for Schools Linking is generally positive, impacting measures of social integration, though further robust evaluation on the programme's long-term effects is needed. The Linking process involves sustained involvement, structured meetings between schools, and is likely to be more impactful with increased interactions.

The intervention is versatile, addressing diversity broadly, including factors such as age, socio-economic status, faith/belief, and residential location. It is not limited to linking between schools; intra-school linking is also an option. The programme's broad aims encompass developing knowledge and understanding of identity, diversity, equality and community, along with fostering skills like critical thinking, empathy and respect. Schools Linking seeks to achieve these goals through visits involving various activities that facilitate contact, teamwork, and learning about different cultures and religions.

In practice, the programme entails a year-long series of activities. In primary schools, entire year groups participate, forming links with classes in other schools. Secondary and special schools often involve one class of pupils in the programme. The Linking Network, based in Bradford, collaborates with Local Authorities and non-governmental organisations, providing a structured model, resources, support, and training for implementing the programme locally.

The philosophy guiding Linking work emphasises the importance of dialogue across boundaries. The programme is designed around four key questions: Who am I? Who are we? Where do we live? How do we all live together? These questions guide preparatory work, exchanges between classes, and various activities throughout the academic year.

While costs associated with the intervention are relatively low, schools are responsible for transport costs and supply cover for teacher training sessions. The programme has been widely adopted across England, involving over 30 000 children in more than 1 000 classes in 729 schools. Resources and support provided by The Linking Network include training for Local Authority Advisers, teacher training, and access to a resource library.

The programme draws on psychological research and contact theory, aiming to reduce prejudice and improve relations between different groups. Evaluation studies have shown positive impacts on pupils' skills, attitudes, and behaviours, with sustained involvement enhancing these effects. However, challenges include potential reinforcement of negative attitudes and the need for further research to address these issues. The programme's contribution to wider integration extends to the pupil, school, teacher, and Local Authority levels, with a primary focus on fostering integration at the pupil level.

Source: Hewstone (2023[234]) *Social integration in schools and colleges,* Social Integration in Schools and Colleges Research Report (accessed on 30 November 2023)

Similarly, the Danish Adult Education Association (DAEA) is highlighted as an exemplary association that focuses on various lifelong educational projects aimed at adults and refugees (Monika Kil and Henkes, 2013[235]). The primary objectives of DAEA include promoting intercultural dialogue, fostering tolerance and ensuring the integration of immigrant communities within Danish society. The programme goes beyond traditional education by inviting refugees not only as learners but also as contributors, such as instructors and teachers. DAEA seeks to inform the Danish population about the refugee situation, providing insights into who the refugees are, their origins and the reasons behind their migration. The ultimate goal is to encourage and enhance tolerance within the Danish community.

4.6. Developing inclusive media literacy education

Another important element of civic education in the 21st century is media literacy, which can be defined as the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, create and act using all forms of communication (OECD, 2019[84]). Cultivating students' media literacy can help them to capitalise on digital spaces, better understand the world they live in and responsibly express their voice online (Hill, 2022[85]). In response to the growing wave of fake news and access to online information, as well as the ease of ability to create online media, there is growing demand for schools to develop media literacy policies (OECD, 2020[83]). According to the OECD Policy Questionnaire on Curriculum Redesign (PQC) in 2020, media literacy is not commonly embedded in curricula across all countries and jurisdictions. However, in some countries, such as Czechia, Denmark, Quebec (Canada), and Northern Ireland (United Kingdom), they have integrated media education as a cross-curricular theme. Northern Ireland has gone further by introducing it as a standalone subject. Australia has included "Media Arts" as one of the subjects in its curriculum for The Arts (OECD, 2020[83]). The PISA 2029 innovative domain will be on media and AI literacy, highlighting its heightened importance in international education policy.

Considering the representation of under-represented groups

Mass media, social media and other mediated communication forms today serve as a significant source for understanding and interpreting the world, and providing an essential framework for mediating and fostering dialogue and exchange among cultures. Authors such as Neag et al. (2022[236]) argue that for encouraging an inclusive society, media literacy should consider how media contributes to the reproduction of existing inequalities, stereotypes, forms of discrimination, racism, sexism, heteronormativity among other issues. Similarly, Kellner et al. (2007[237]) argue that media education should question the workings of representation, and that media literacy should challenge the representation of gender, ethnicity and class. Several studies on media representations of refugees, for example, demonstrate how immigrants, refugees and minorities are often under-represented in media or portrayed as threats, criminals, or powerless victims in mass media and social media (Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017[238]; Van Gorp, 2005[239]; Neag, Bozdağ and Leurs, 2022[236]).

In addition, minority groups are often the victims of hate speech in the media (Geneva International Centre for Justice, 2021[240]). Through images, dialogue and representation, mass media and digital media environments can serve as amplifiers of violence, polarisation, discrimination, nationalism and racism. Educating everyone in society about how to avoid and identify hate speech can lead to a more socially cohesive society.

Along these lines, UNESCO calls media and information literacy (MIL) "an essential tool to facilitate intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding and a cultural understanding of people" (UNESCO, 2021[241]). In a report issued by the European Commission, "intercultural dialogue" is foregrounded as a principal means of "challenging radicalisation and hate speech" (Chapman, 2016[242]). For this reason, it is included in the list of five main skills related to media literacy (with media use, critical thinking, creativity and participation and interaction) (UNESCO, 2021[241]).

In recent years, numerous policies and practices have been initiated with a focus on developing media literacy education to tackle hate speech and discrimination online. These projects address everyone involved in media, from media professionals to the target audiences of these representations. They aim to raise critical awareness about how media outlets construct stereotypical depictions of marginalised groups. An example from Canada is outlined in Box 4.11.

Box 4.11. MediaSmarts, Canada

One example of inclusive media literacy education is *MediaSmarts*, a Canadian initiative, which provides information and resources for media professionals, organisations and teachers. They focus on topical media issues such as body image, gender representations and diversity, as well as digital issues such as online hate, cyberbullying and online ethics. They have a "diversity" information section which focusses on specific examples of media representations which are relevant in the Canadian context, for example representations of Aboriginal people, portrayals of visible minorities, people with disabilities and queer people. Teachers can access these materials and leverage them in order to create a more inclusive society, both online and off.

Source: MediaSmarts (2023[243]) *MediaSmarts Canada website,* https://mediasmarts.ca/ (accessed on 22 January 2024)

Furthermore, some minority groups, such as refugees, may need media literacy education more than others to ensure they are not excluded from the digital space. Neag et al. (2022[236]) identifies that there are not enough policies or projects orientated specifically towards the media literacy skills of immigrants, refugees and minorities and other marginalised groups. An EU initiative which aims to tackle this challenge is highlighted in Box 4.12.

Box 4.12. Speak Up! Media for Inclusion

Speak Up! Media for Inclusion is a cross-European project which has been adopted by France, Greece, Hungary, Italy and the Netherlands. The project's objective is to provide media and information literacy training to recently arrived migrant and refugee children, emphasising media production skills, particularly in radio and film-making. The goal is to develop a sense of belonging in the host country for refugee children through the creation of media. Examples of activities include media training workshops, which are organised for young migrants as a way to help them tell their stories and share information for their community and broader public.

Following the success of Speak Up!, Team Up! is a cross-European, Erasmus+ project founded by four non-profit organisations in France, Greece, Italy and Portugal aimed at fostering adults' digital and media information literacy. The project offers a range of materials such as toolkits, training workshops and specialised events for adults in the roles of teachers, educators and librarians.

Team Up! collaborated with ERIM (Equal Rights and Independent Medias), an association, to create training courses for trainers in media information and literacy in 2022 with focus on the themes of gender in the media, hate speech and migration vis practical content production in the form of films, photography, podcasts and so on. ERIM is a non-profit group founded in Lyon, France in 2004, which aims to promote the defence of human rights, particularly with regard to women's rights, minorities and the fight against discrimination against LGBTQI+ people. It strives to strengthen independent media and empower citizens to critically analyse information. The association works with local communities and supports them in strengthening their media literacy capacities.

Source: Association des Bibliothécaires de France (2022[244]) *Media for Inclusion (EU) website* https://mediaforinclusion.eu/ (accessed on 23 November 2024)

Neag et al. (2022[236]) identify that there is a need for a more inclusive and intersectional approach to media literacy education, which should not focus on only maginalised groups, but society as a whole. This approach transcends a singular focus on marginalised groups, advocating instead for a broader

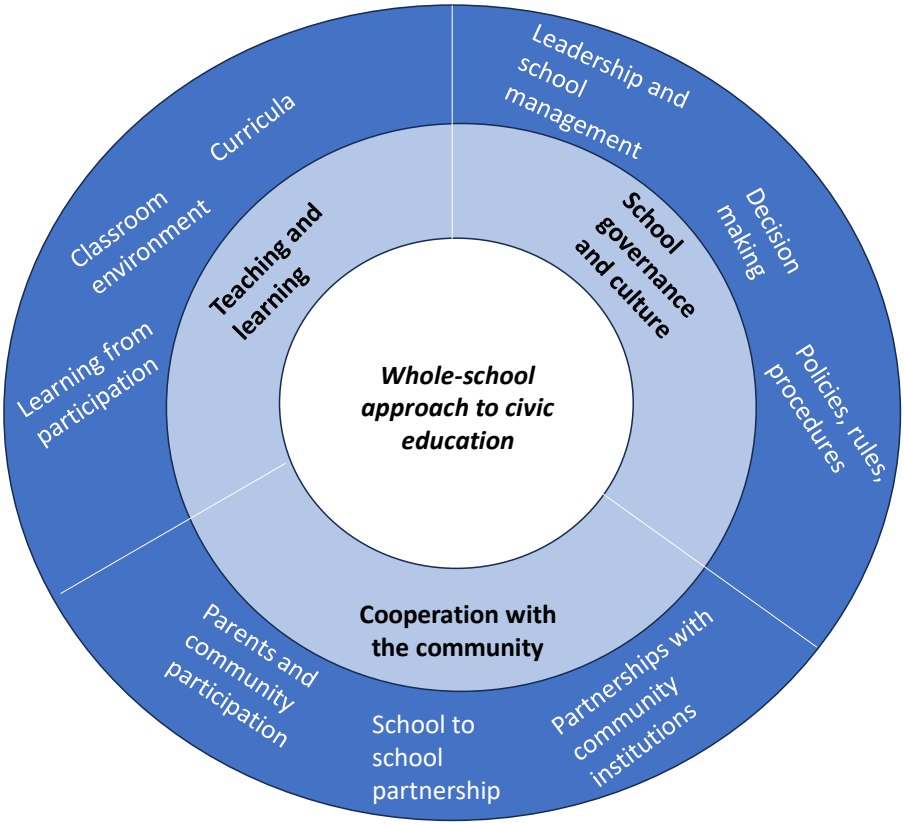
engagement that encompasses society as a whole. By adopting this inclusive perspective, media literacy education can better address the diverse and evolving landscape of media consumption, fostering a more informed and critically aware citizenry.

4.7. A whole-school approach to civic education

A whole-school approach to civic education ensures that every aspect of school life – curricula, teaching methods and resources, leadership and decision-making structures and processes, policies and codes of behaviour, staff and staff-student relationships extra-curricular activities and links with the community – reflect democratic and human rights principles relating to civic and social engagement (Council of Europe, 2018[245]). Rather than confining civic education to a single subject or a set of isolated lessons, this approach embeds civic principles in the daily routines, interactions, and policies of the school, ensuring that students experience and practice civic and social engagement in a holistic, immersive way.

The Council of Europe breaks down a whole-school approach to civic education into three components: teaching and learning, school governance and culture, and co-operation with the community. This is illustrated in infographic 4.1.

Infographic 4.1. A whole-school approach to civic education



Source: Adapted from Council of Europe (2018[245]) *CDC and the Whole-School Approach*, https://rm.coe.int/guidance-document-5-cdc-and-the-whole-school-approach-reference-framew/1680993a71#:~:text=A%20whole%2Dschool%20approach%20to%20CDC%20ensures%20that%20all%20aspects,links%20with%20the%20community%20%E2%80%93%20reflect (accessed on 24 November 2024)

Under **teaching and learning**, several elements of the formal school programme such as curriculum and lesson planning, teaching and learning methodology, and extra-curricular activities are integrated. By incorporating these elements into teaching and learning methodologies, education systems can potentially have a great impact on the development of competences related to democratic culture and civic and social engagement (Council of Europe, 2018[245]). The organisational culture of a school, referred to in the infographic as **school governance and culture**, plays a role in the development of students' CSE skills through its approach to leadership, decision-making processes and involving students in those processes, and creating a culture of openness and trust in the school to improve relations between its members. This involves practices such as giving students a voice in decision-making processes that affect their school life, from classroom rules to broader school policies. Student councils, for instance, provide a platform for students to practice deliberation, leadership, and collective problem solving.

Moreover, **co-operation with the community** is a critical pillar of the whole-school approach. Schools that embrace civic education holistically often create strong partnerships with local organisations, policymakers, and civil society. These partnerships offer students real-world contexts for applying their civic skills and values. Activities like volunteering, local government shadowing, or involvement in environmental or social justice initiatives provide hands-on experiences where students can contribute to their communities while learning about the complexities of governance and societal issues. This connection between school and community helps students understand their roles as active citizens beyond the confines of the classroom.

Equally important is the role of educators in modelling civic values. In a whole-school approach, teachers, staff, and school leaders are encouraged to integrate civic themes into their subject areas and to model democratic behaviour in their interactions with students. This can be modelled through an OCC as previously explored. Furthermore, **Professional development** for teachers becomes a key aspect of this approach, equipping educators with the skills to teach civic competencies, engage in critical discussions on contemporary issues, and create inclusive, respectful classroom environments. For instance, history or social studies classes may emphasize civic ideals such as justice, equality, and participation, while science or literature classes can engage students in discussions about ethical decision-making, environmental stewardship, and media literacy.

Lastly, a whole-school approach promotes inclusivity by ensuring that all students—regardless of their background—have equal opportunities to participate in civic learning. This means addressing barriers to participation, whether they stem from socio-economic disparities, language challenges, or other forms of marginalisation. By fostering an environment where diverse perspectives are valued and all students are encouraged to engage, schools help cultivate a generation of citizens who are not only informed but also committed to promoting equity, inclusion, and justice in their communities.

An example of a framework that countries can follow is exemplified in Box 4.13.

Box 4.13. Becoming a democratic school with the CITIZED Toolkit

The Council of Europe believes that schools should set examples of inclusive and transparent decision-making by systematically using democratic principles in their work and operations, and improving their models by comparing them with other relevant actors. The CITIZED Toolkit for Whole School Approaches to Civic Education is designed to provide practical guidance for schools and educators to foster active citizenship and democratic engagement among students.

At its core, the CITIZED Toolkit supports schools in embedding civic education into their curriculum, teaching practices, and school culture. It offers a variety of resources, including lesson plans, activities, and frameworks for teaching civic competencies. The toolkit encourages educators to take a holistic

view of citizenship education, addressing not only knowledge of civic institutions but also critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills necessary for democratic participation.

One key aspect of the CITIZED Toolkit is its focus on inclusivity and diversity, ensuring that all students, regardless of background, are equipped to engage in civic life. It promotes student voice and agency by encouraging schools to involve students in decision-making processes and fostering collaboration between students, staff, and the wider community. The toolkit also provides guidance on assessing civic competencies, ensuring that schools can track the progress and impact of their civic education efforts effectively.

Source: European Commission (2023[246]) *CITIZED: Guidelines and toolbox for a whole-school approach in citizenship education | European School Education Platform,* https://school-education.ec.europa.eu/en/teach/teaching-materials/citized-guidelines-and-toolbox (accessed 25 January 2024)

Over recent years, Portugal has taken significant steps to address diversity in education at both the societal level and among its students (OECD, 2022[247]). One key initiative is the **National Strategy for Citizenship Education** (ENEC), launched in 2017 (ibid.; (Ministry of Education Portugal, 2017[248])), which adapts a whole-school approach (see Box 4.14).

Box 4.14. Portugal's whole-school approach to civic education

In 2017 Portugal launched its National Strategy for Citizenship Education (ENEC) (Ministry of Education Portugal, 2017[248]). The ENEC aims to enhance the values and skills needed for active and informed citizenship, promoting a safer, fairer, more sustainable, and inclusive society. It encourages students to develop a wide range of active citizenship skills that are considered essential for young people before they turn 18. Since its adoption in 2017, all public and private schools in Portugal have incorporated civic education into their curricula.

As illustrated in Table 4.3, Portugal's civic education strategy comprises 17 domains, encompassing a whole-school approach to civic education. Among the compulsory courses for all schools, each grade has course objectives, which are highly relevant for diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as civic and social engagement, including: Sustainable Development, Human Rights, Gender Equality, Interculturality, Environmental Education and Sexuality. Schools have the freedom to manage up to 25% of the curriculum.

Table 4.3. Civic education in Portuguese school curricula

Mandatory courses for all levels of education	Courses taught at two levels of primary and lower secondary education	Optional courses (any school grade level)
• Human Rights • Gender • Equality • Interculturality • Sustainable Development • Environmental Education • Health	• Sexuality • Media • Institutions and democratic participation • Financial Literacy and Consumer Education • Road Safety	• Entrepreneurship • Labour World • Security, Defence and Peace • Animal well-being • Volunteering • Other

	• Risk	

Source: OECD (2022[247]) *Review of Inclusive Education in Portugal,* 10.1787/a9c95902-en.

5. Conclusion

Civic and Social Engagement (CSE) is a cornerstone of an inclusive society. Not only does it empower individuals to actively shape their futures and influence their communities, but it also plays a pivotal role in advocating for transparent, accountable public institutions. The evolving landscape of CSE, characterised by falling engagement levels and rising inequality, show the urgency of addressing the ways in which policy makers can mitigate these challenges to bridge participation gaps. Education policy emerges as a crucial instrument.

Education not only informs young citizens about their rights but also develops their political agency, social and citizenship skills. As analysed, the level of education an individual has attained significantly influences their understanding of political issues, voter turnout, trust and overall engagement in civic life. However, other factors such as socio-economic status, gender, and immigrant background continue to influence an individual's CSE. Civic education can help to mitigate these factors by equipping all individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills to actively participate in diverse aspects of civic life. In contrast, limited access to education or lower educational attainment can result in reduced political literacy and awareness, potentially discouraging individuals from exercising their right to vote and participate in society. Inclusive education ensures that all individuals have equitable access to civic education opportunities.

As explored in this working paper, various direct and indirect educational factors impact civic and social engagement, including open classroom climates, participative learning activities, and building democratic schools. These factors contribute to the development of competencies, civic skills and critical thinking necessary for informed and inclusive civic participation. Importantly, civic education has the potential to reduce and compensate for inequalities in civic participation, especially among disadvantaged students. However, while research highlights the positive impact of civic education in compensating for background inequalities, challenges remain in fully addressing participation disparities.

Furthermore, modern conceptions of civic education must transcend beyond building knowledge and skills, and into developing the values and attitudes needed for an inclusive society. This holistic approach ensures that individuals not only learn the necessary skills to be active citizens, but develop attitudes, values and global competencies needed to be a 21st century citizen in diverse and interconnected communities.

However, obstacles persist in the pursuit of a comprehensive and holistic civic education. This paper has highlighted that the reception of civic education practices varies among under-represented groups, and there is an evident underrepresentation of research and practical efforts specifically tailored for these diverse groups. The scarcity of rigorous studies examining the enduring impacts of education on civic and social engagement further complicates the identification of genuinely effective practices. This dearth of long-term research hinders the ability to discern which educational strategies truly contribute to lasting positive outcomes in civic and social education.

5.1. Key takeaways

A number of policy suggestions emerge from the analysis in this paper.

Conduct more rigorous national evaluations of civic education programmes

To enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of civic education across the education system, it is essential to implement more rigorous national evaluations of civic education programmes. These evaluations should assess the quality, accessibility, and impact of these programmes on diverse student populations. By establishing clear metrics and standards, policymakers can identify best practices, address existing gaps, and ensure that civic education effectively prepares all students for active participation in society. Regular evaluations will also foster accountability and promote continuous improvement, ultimately contributing to a more engaged and informed citizenry.

Minding the gap in access to civic learning opportunities for under-represented students and adopting civic education policies accordingly

Several groups of students, such as individuals with SEN, refugees and immigrants, and students in VET do not receive the same amount of quality of civic education as other students. Efforts to address this gap are essential for promoting equitable educational outcomes and ensuring that all students, regardless of their abilities, are prepared to actively participate in civic life. Policy makers should pay attention to the implementation of inclusive civic education practices in schools, specifically targeting students in groups who are routinely missed out of civic education practices or civic and social engagement later in life.

Improving civic education training for teachers

Teachers play a crucial role in fostering civic knowledge and skills among students, yet many face challenges, including a lack of specific political knowledge and preparedness. In addition, there is a gap in research on what effective teacher training for civics education is, and a lack of a uniform approach between counties. Governments could consider mandating continuous professional learning in civic education for all teachers, regardless of their subject area. Teacher training programmes could include coursework or modules specifically focused on political knowledge and its application in civic education. This could help ensure that teachers have the necessary background knowledge to effectively teach about political concepts and processes, thereby enhancing students' understanding of civics.

Ensuring that civic education policies are culturally sensitive

Recognising the diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and values within communities, policymakers and educators could prioritise the integration of culturally responsive pedagogy into civic education programmes. This is particularly important when encouraging debates surrounding current topics, as explored in section *Open classroom climate*. Strategies to achieve this include:

- Developing and implementing a curriculum that reflects the cultural diversity of students' backgrounds and experiences. This includes incorporating diverse historical narratives, cultural traditions, and perspectives into civic education materials to make them more relevant and engaging for all learners.
- Fostering partnerships with local community organisations, cultural institutions, and diverse community leaders to enrich civic education experiences. Involving families and community members in the learning process, inviting them to share their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives with students.
- Providing continuing professional learning opportunities for educators on cultural competence and culturally responsive teaching practices.

- Encouraging critical reflection and open dialogue about issues of culture, identity, and power within the civic education curriculum. Creating opportunities for students to explore and discuss topics such as social justice, equity, and human rights from diverse cultural perspectives.

By making civic education practices culturally sensitive, policymakers and educators can promote a more inclusive and equitable learning environment where all students feel empowered to engage meaningfully in civic life, regardless of their cultural background or heritage.

Developing more research focused on fostering inclusivity in civic and social engagement through education

Research on civic education practices, as highlighted by Campbell (2019[249]) and Schugurensky and Myers (2008[250]), is notably limited, especially regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion, as underlined by Hoskins et al. (2017[88]). Addressing this research gap is crucial for developing effective strategies to ensure equitable civic learning opportunities for all students, irrespective of their backgrounds. Understanding the intersections of socio-demographic factors and systemic inequalities with civic education is essential for fostering engaged and informed citizens in diverse societies. Without such insights, efforts to promote democratic values and civic participation risk reinforcing existing disparities, undermining the very goals of civic education. Bridging this gap in research is vital for creating inclusive civic education programmes that empower students from diverse backgrounds to actively participate in civic life, thereby contributing to the construction of a more fair and democratic society.

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