

Summary The Netherlands

The Active Citizenship Compass project has the following aims, implementation strategies and predictive results:

Objectives

The aim of this project is to promote Active Citizenship (AC) in secondary schools and prepare students to be active citizens in Europe. To achieve this goal, the consortium (institutions from Belgium, Czech Republic, Greece, The Netherlands, Spain and Turkey) will work on raising students' and teachers' awareness on AC in Education (ACE), create an Active Citizenship Compass (ACC), design and implement learning activities on AC, and develop Active Citizenship school policies as an excellent practice for secondary schools.

Implementation strategies

The activities that will contribute to achieve the objectives of the project are as follows: the investigation of the current situation on ACE in partner countries, the creation of ACC - a digital tool that will assess students' skills and knowledge level on AC -, teachers' training on how to design and implement learning activities and tools on AC and their students' training accordingly. Finally, partners will develop and follow-up the school policies on AC.

Results

It is expected that after the implementation of the project, the students will have developed competences and attitudes in terms of becoming active citizens in Europe. Teachers and HEIs staff will be aware of the concept of AC, having skills required to train and guide their students on Active Citizenship, both now and in the future. Finally, schools will be able to adapt a dynamic policy on Active Citizenship that will be revised and evaluated on a regular basis.

The project consortium understands Active Citizenship as follows:

Active Citizenship is the ability to participate in politics and society, characterized by the knowledge, skill, and confidence to engage effectively in one's environment and society.

The content of the activities in this work package can be divided into 3 categories:

- research
- meetings and working processes
- outreach and dissemination activities

The majority of the activities focus on research on the current situation regarding ACE in Europe and in the specific partner countries. The research will be conducted using a mixed method approach, with a. o . literature and source analysis, questionnaires/surveys and/or interviews/focus groups, comparative analysis ...

The collection of real practices and thus, the involvement of local teachers and pupils during the research (focus groups, interviews) should be highlighted here. The final writing, editing and publishing activities within this work package belong to the HEI staff's daily core activities and an effective working process can be guaranteed. The transnational project meetings will take place as a blend of virtual, hybrid and in-person activities. The work package kick-off will be online, prepared by the WP leading institution and organized through MS Teams as interactive session. One in-person meeting with the project partners is planned to work on the concrete deliverables and share, learn and co-create transnationally. To facilitate participation and input from other colleagues at the partner institutions, hybrid sessions will be included. Other online meetings will be held whenever needed and applicable. For outreach and

dissemination, activities such as peer review, sharing and reflection sessions and dissemination will take place throughout the research process. Important is the specific sharing and reflection session within each secondary school partner institution, where input and reflections from an extended teacher and pupil panel will be collected. The ACC consortium wants to highlight again the unique cooperation between secondary schools and HEI in each partner country and the involvement of teachers, pupils, parents and other stakeholders throughout different activities.

The results of the activities can be categorized according to the typology of the activities as mentioned above. The research activities will build the evidence and knowledge foundation for the other work packages and contribute to the applied scientific education domain. The meetings and working process activities will contribute to the overall alignment within the work package (and beyond) and result in a higher quality of the outputs and to the wellbeing of the staff members. The dissemination and outreach activities result in a bigger awareness on the topic of ACE. This will create leverage for the implementation and further distribution of the project results, the developed materials and the ACC tool. In that way, the activities also contribute to the realisation of the envisaged impact.

The book publication “Active Citizenship Education for a better tomorrow. History, challenges, and perspectives across Europe”, published by the publisher house Waxmann (Germany), is the result of 6 country studies regarding active citizenship education across Europe. Beside these 6 country studies, an introduction about the European situation (including recommendation and papers from the European institutions) and a comparative analysis about this topic are integrated. This comparative analysis is based on a questionnaire filled out by 4,187 pupils and 776 teachers in the above mentioned countries.

In response to a decline in democratic principles and values among Dutch secondary school pupils, Active Citizenship Education (ACE) has been established as a required component of secondary school programmes in The Netherlands to educate pupils on active citizenship (AC) knowledge and competences. Following the implementation of two sector laws in 2006 and 2021, schools are currently mandated to more precisely define and actively promote knowledge of and respect for the fundamental values of a democratic rule of law. To provide clarity and coherence among schools, *Stichting Leerplan Ontwikkeling* (SLO) identifies six core objectives of ACE for a unified language and approach to design a learning environment where pupils experiences, learn and practice participating in a diverse society. Schools, however, retain autonomy to hold on to their ideological beliefs and pedagogical foundations and may adapt the framework based on pupil demographics, school identity and local context. Although the installment of a national curriculum is an important step forward, differences between and within schools remain. Moreover, segregated educational tracks threat the successful integration of AC by perpetuating social inequalities. Ongoing monitoring and collaboration is required to ensure all pupils’ right to ACE and spark an intrinsic motivation to participate and critically engage with society.

The results of the comparative analysis across European countries seem in line with a worrying trend that attitudes of secondary school pupils in the Netherlands are lower towards democratic values than those of their international peers. The results indicate that democratic values – such as an interest in cultural, political and parliamentary issues or the perceived responsibility felt towards planetary health issues – among Dutch, Belgian and Czech pupils are lower than pupils in Spain, Greece and Turkey. This is illustrated in the results by a lower willingness to demonstrate or to participate in charity events compared to other European countries. This can be explained, at least in part, by the multi-interpretable and apolitical nature of active citizenship education in the Netherlands (De Groot et al., 2022) and a general Dutch tradition of ‘negotiating harmony’ rather than taking a critical or activist stance (van der Ploeg, 2019).

However, in comparison with the sample used in most other countries (except from Turkey), the Dutch sample includes a high share of the age cohort 12-14 (77%). Due to this overrepresentation, it might be

that the Dutch pupils in this study are not yet aware or familiar of how to exercise their political voice and actively participate in local, regional or national decision-making bodies compared to the proportionately older pupils in most other countries used in this comparison. At the same time, it is generally assumed that active citizenship competences are less malleable as pupils transition from lower secondary school to higher secondary school. Hence, pupils between the age of 12-14 should be susceptible to active citizenship education.

It further needs to be noted that the comprehensive school where the study in the Netherlands was conducted is located in the northern part of the Netherlands. This area can be characterised as a more peripheral and less urbanised area. Additionally, 48% of the pupils come from a rural area, where pupils from Spain and Turkey mostly originate from larger cities. Compared to other Dutch regions, migration and diversity are not an omnipresent phenomenon in the Northern Netherlands. In fact, the area is traditionally home to a fairly homogenous white population. Non-experiences with inequalities or injustices due to a lack of diversity might partly explain the lower interest of Dutch pupils in political activism compared to their peers in the compared countries. Considering most are aged between 12 and 14, it might also explain why Dutch pupils in this study have relatively less interest in global issues and seem to be less able to empathise with others. Pupils, and in particular girls, show more active participation, which may be explained through the central role of social and community life in rural areas in the Northern Netherlands.

More than half (52%) of the teachers in Dutch secondary schools states they incorporate active citizenship in their teaching. This is in part related to a perceived government obligation (59%) and because there is perceived state support (23%) to aid in these activities. Although state support is more comprehensive in the eyes of Dutch secondary school teachers, it does not necessarily translate into active citizenship being included in curricula. In fact, only 29% of the respondents indicate that active citizenship is part of the school curriculum. This seems to suggest active citizenship is an important topic in the development of courses and lessons rather than the school curriculum. This supports the claim that active citizenship education remains a fragmented and that its implementation largely relies on teachers and school directors (De Groot et al., 2022). Moreover, the results also indicate that teachers active citizenship competences are relatively underdeveloped compared to their peers, for example when it comes to supporting demonstrations, being informed about politics and charity activities.