

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN EUROPE

Abstract

In the midst of evolving societal dynamics and cultural diversity, the concept of European identity undergoes renewed scrutiny. This article delves into the interconnected notions of shared values, active citizenship, and European identity within the realm of education. Drawing upon contemporary research and European initiatives, particularly highlighting the Erasmus+ Programme, the article underscores education's pivotal role in nurturing active citizenship and cultivating a resilient European identity. By presenting notable empirical studies on active citizenship in both comprehensive and higher education, including the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) and the CATCH-EyoU project, the article emphasizes the importance of equipping young individuals with social, civic, and intercultural competencies while engaging them with pressing EU issues. Furthermore, it discusses challenges and disparities in implementing citizenship education policies across European Member States, emphasizing the need for coherent and meaningful integration of policies into educational systems. The article concludes with a call for continued collaboration and assessment to advance the EU's goal of fostering socially responsible and actively engaged European citizens.

Keywords: *Active Citizenship Education. European Identity. Civic Engagement. Education Policy. Youth Participation*

1. Introduction

“In the beginning was the deed.” ((Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust)

What makes us a society? What brings us together? What gives us a share of mutuality as members of a society?

The amount of work done to address these questions is abundant, yet there is an increasing need to raise awareness of the notion of communion and shared “forms of life.”

Europe seems to be going through an identity crisis. “The European Union seems to be losing its reference points, as the principles that upheld its creation are being increasingly questioned around the world and within itself”(Altomonte & Villafranca, 2019). From the Second World War onwards, Europe experienced a new social condition with citizens from diverse cultural backgrounds, forming a multicultural society that required new citizenship skills for citizens of Europe to coexist (Missira, 2019). This new concept of citizenship poses a critical question: What does it mean to be a citizen of Europe today, and what does it take for its citizens to keep their European identity and feel European?

To address these questions, we shall briefly look at the definition of “European identity” and break it down into two components: European and identity (Velički & Slovaček, 2020). Lepsius refers to “identity” as an ambiguous term that can be formed by self-descriptions and the descriptions given by others, which individuals, groups, and social structures allow to apply to themselves(Lepsius,2006). According to

Lepsius, collective identity emerges when individuals not only identify with the same symbols or values but also recognize their shared membership in a group.

This highlights the significance of being aware of shared values and interconnectedness to feel part of a group, and on a larger scale, to feel European, which brings us back to the very first question: what brings us together as members of a society? What connects us?

To address these questions, we shall look to the words of Putnam and the concept of citizenship, or rather, active citizenship to be precise, and social capital. Putnam defines “social capital” as “connections among individuals - social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.” (Putnam, 2002). An element that plays a strong role in building social capital is civic engagement, which is strongly related to active citizenship (Morrow & Scorgie-Porter, 2017). The concept of citizenship is of great significance if we intend to unravel the nature of being a citizen in a society or a union. According to Brannan et al. (2006), “the concept of active citizenship holds that citizenship is not solely comprised of passive membership of a political entity, but that being active is an essential part of being a citizen”. They argue that “involvement must speak of public-mindedness and have a purpose beyond that of a small group of people” (Brannan et al., 2006).

This is only of greater importance when considering a group of people as large and multidimensional as Europe. The EU takes active citizenship and related topics very seriously (Missira, 2019). According to the European Union (2012), “Active citizenship is the glue that keeps society together” (European Union, 2012).

In the European context, the shared definition of active citizenship was proposed by Hoskin (2006), which defines it as “participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterized by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy” (Hoskins et al., 2006). Hoskin also specifies that “active citizenship is understood in the very broadest sense of the word participation and does not focus solely on political aspects. It ranges from cultural and political to environmental activities, on local, regional, national, European, and international levels” (Guagnano & Santini, 2020).

In an attempt to clarify the aspect of the concept of “Active Citizenship” that we are dealing with in this book, we shall define it as follows: “active citizenship is the ability for political and societal participation: the knowledge, skills, and self-confidence to participate in one's environment and society and to influence the organization of society.”

We aim to stress the importance of strengthening the European identity and active citizenship and its associated skills, and how education and the school system can contribute to these fundamental concepts, as, to use the words of Arendt, “education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it”.

2. Active Citizenship in Education

In this section, we will discuss the crucial role that education plays in promoting the imperative of active participation and agency to cultivate responsible citizens in Europe. Furthermore, we will explore how education contributes to both the strengthening and sustainability of European identity.

We will examine the efforts made in Comprehensive Education and briefly touch upon Higher Education in European countries within the contexts of active citizenship, civic education, democracy, inclusion, and diversity.

On citizen education, the Education and Training Monitor report explicitly stresses the cruciality of individuals being equipped to spark societal, economic, and environmental advances in Europe to prepare for challenges in the new era (Commission & Directorate-General for Education Sport and Culture, 2023). The European strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020 framework) proposed promoting active citizenship as one of the EU objectives alongside improving equity and social cohesion (European Education Area, 2020). These recommendations still apply in the 2030 Strategic Framework for Education and Training 2030. (European Education Area, 2021) To provide scientific advice in the implementation of the ET 2020 framework, the ET 2020 working groups (WGs) were created. In the context of citizen education, the ET 2020 working group on promoting common values and inclusive education is particularly highlighted, stressing the need for special attention. The main focus of this working group includes:

- Promoting common values and intercultural competencies, including citizenship education and digital citizenship;
- Supporting inclusive education for all learners;
- Fostering a European dimension of education and training;
- Supporting education staff in encouraging diversity and creating an open learning environment.

The final meeting of the working group in November 2020 gathered around 45 representatives from organizations across Europe to follow up on the proposal for achieving a European education by 2025, published in September 2020, beginning by stating that “education is the foundation for personal fulfillment, employability, and active and responsible citizenship,” with a reference to the role of Erasmus+ programme and the supporting role of other EU policies and instruments, such as the Horizon 2020 Programme (and the consecutive Horizon Europe Programme) and their embedded promotion of citizenship (Veugelers & Zygierewicz, 2021). The Erasmus+ Programme acknowledges the limited participation in democratic processes of European citizens and their lack of knowledge about the European Union and strives to promote civic participation and help them overcome the difficulties in being actively engaged in their communities and the Union's political and social life. Strengthening citizens' understanding of the European Union from an early age through formal and informal learning is another priority of the Erasmus+ Programme to enhance the citizens' understanding of the European Union and foster a sense of belonging. The programme supports active citizenship and civic engagement in lifelong learning, it fosters the development of social and intercultural competencies, critical thinking, and media literacy. The focus is on

raising awareness of and understanding the European Union context, notably regarding the common EU values, the principles of unity and diversity, as well as their social, cultural, and historical heritage (Erasmus+, 2023).

Horizon 2020 was and the consecutive Horizon Europe is the financial arm of the Innovation Union, a flagship initiative of the European Commission aimed at enhancing Europe's global competitiveness. Backed by Europe's leaders and the European Parliament, it emphasizes research as an investment for the future, integral to the EU's strategy for smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth and job creation. By promoting excellence in science, and industrial leadership, and addressing societal challenges, the Horizon Programmes seek to propel economic growth and job creation. With their streamlined structure and inclusive approach, the programme accelerates project initiation and fosters collaboration, driving innovation across Europe. Moreover, they complement broader initiatives to advance the European Research Area, breaking down barriers and creating a unified market for knowledge, research, and innovation (Research and Innovation, 2024).

Additionally, the European skills agenda, published by the Commission, points out that “open democratic societies depend on active citizens who can discern information from various sources, identify disinformation, make informed decisions, are resilient, and act responsibly” (European Commission, 2020)

Translating these guidelines to the domain of education, beyond traditional subjects such as mathematics, science, and literature, lies the fundamental domain of civic and citizenship education. This is not merely an academic pursuit but a profound acknowledgment of education's role in shaping responsible global citizens (Schulz et al., 2023) and therefore shaping the future of Europe.

Striving to strengthen and rejuvenate the European identity for the formation of a united society emphasizes the crucial role of education and learning. Wenger underscores this importance by arguing that “learning transforms who we are and what we can do; it is an experience of identity. It is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming – to become a certain person or, conversely, to avoid becoming a certain person” (Wenger, 1989). In essence, education serves as a guiding force, enabling individuals to navigate their journey toward active European citizenship while fostering a robust and cohesive European identity.

Before delving into studies conducted in comprehensive education, we will briefly explore three pertinent studies within the realm of higher education. The imperative to fortify European higher education and enhance quality, equity, inclusion, and success for all in education and training have been proposed as strategic priorities within the framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European education area and beyond (2021-2030) (The Council of The European Union, 2021).

2.1 Active Citizenship in Higher Education

Recognizing the significance of constructing identity in educational settings, Mili and Towers conducted qualitative research with a group of postgraduates at a university in the UK in 2021 (Mili & Towers, 2022). The study aimed to explore how postgraduate students negotiate and renegotiate their learner identities and

sense of belonging within a multicultural educational environment. In the light of the growing multiculturalism in Europe today, this research holds great significance.

They examined students' identity formation through the perspective of agency, conceptualized as a person's capacity to act independently and make their own free choices (Jääskelä et al., 2017), which enables them to fulfill their potential - a concept closely related to and intertwined with active citizenship. Although students in higher education settings are usually seen as agential characters and sovereign agents who exercise intentional choice and control over themselves to meet academic expectations, Mili and Towers followed Krause's approach to the concept of distributed agency (Krause, 2015) which posits that an agent's impact on their social work is highly dependent on the 'social uptake' provided by other people. Therefore, a student's agency and efficacy are dependent on how teachers and fellow students interpret and respond to their participation in discussions within educational environments. They suggest that understanding this social dynamic in the context of higher educational settings provides insight into the relationship between material conditions and students' identity and agency in a multicultural educational learning environment.

This research focused on the Faustian notion of becoming rather than being, using critical thinking as an example. Much of the discussion centered on how students made sense of their own identities to themselves and others in the context of postgraduate study. The students were asked to share their experiences and feelings throughout the process of 'becoming' a postgraduate student and a critical thinker. Their initial feelings upon arrival in their MA course and making sense of themselves in their new context, as well as navigating their learning journey through the course, were discussed and explored. The findings suggested that using the example of critical thinking, students who were more practiced in performing critical thinking were better positioned to exercise their agency. Mili and Towers argue that this 'privilege' is due to the fact that their ways of being are recognized within the university's norm, while on the other hand, underprivileged students, who were relatively newcomers to the host country, were seen as passive taken from being silent and not contributing to discussions. This powerful and rather disturbing discourse enables and enforces the 'othering' of students. They suggest that the understated and often non-deliberate social dynamic can undermine agency in the context of teaching and learning. The study suggests, that this problematic obstacle necessitates a complex job for both teachers and students to overcome, which can be facilitated by encouraging students and providing sufficient opportunity for students to actively participate in their learning identity development throughout their postgraduate studies. This way, the postgraduate learning space could become a more inclusive and richer space for dialogues, exchange of ideas, and mutual understanding.

Another study contributing to raising awareness on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in higher education in European countries is a collaboration between seven European countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Portugal, Switzerland, and the UK), which focuses on DEI in engineering education (Direito et al., 2021). The researchers propose that the ambiguity and variety in interpretations of the definitions of diversity and inclusion pose difficulty in how progress is measured and eventually lead to different interpretations of outcomes. They underscored the need for more precise definitions of DEI and proposed the following:

- Diversity is the presence of differences within a given setting and in the educational sphere. It encompasses variations in race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, and socioeconomic class.
- Equity is the process of ensuring that processes and programmes are impartial and fair, and provide equal possible outcomes for every individual, going beyond mere 'equality.' It includes needs-based support to level out relative disadvantages.
- Inclusion is the practice of ensuring that people feel a sense of belonging in a given community and feel comfortable and supported by the organization. Inclusion requires “awareness about different aspects of diversity.”

According to this study, in the context of inclusion in engineering education in Europe, the primary concern in European institutions has been gender imbalance and the widening of participation of women through STEM programmes (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). This narrow definition is inadequate to represent the different aspects that form essential aspects of people’s identities and can lead them to experience exclusion, stereotyping, and microaggression. On the significance of inclusion, Leever stresses the need for workforce diversity, as it improves innovation, creativity, productivity, resilience, and market insights (The Engineer, 2022).

To explore how diversity, equity, and inclusion are communicated, this study investigated and analyzed university websites. Eight host institutions of the paper’s authors were examined, and the findings show that almost all have an institution-wide DEI organization, while departmental or faculty-wide policies in engineering are prevalent in most cases. Gender balance is the area prioritized in most institutions, followed by disability, while socioeconomic background and other areas are also mentioned. In engineering faculties, gender seems to monopolize the discourse on DEI, and initiatives to address diversity are centered around the recruitment of students and staff, which, they suggest, is only the first step toward addressing balance in engineering. The next practical step could be appointing a DEI officer or team to ensure integration with institution-wide policies. The study also found some indications of regional variation in institutions that demonstrate high awareness of a variety of DEI issues in the literature of mainly Northwestern Europe, suggesting further investigation of trends in a wider range of institutions, covering more European countries, especially in the East and South. Following the initial phase of data harvesting, the researchers plan to continue developing more precise definitions of DEI.

Focusing on the concept of active citizenship and civic growth, Golubeva, Gomez Parra, and Mohedano analyzed the understanding of active citizenship among Erasmus students to explore their perceptions, values, beliefs, and attitudes on the issue (Golubeva et al., 2018). They observed that despite civic growth being a primary goal of the Erasmus Programme, no specific information was collected on civic growth resulting from participation in Erasmus mobility. The analysis employed data from the Erasmus Student Network Survey (ESNSurvey) and European Commission reports. The findings revealed a notable emphasis on enhancing professional, cultural, and linguistic skills, with limited attention given to the reporting of academic and civic growth.

This observation led them to assert the need for a change in understanding the role of participation in the Erasmus+ Programme given that at the European level, it is explicitly emphasized that one of the major aims of the Erasmus+ Programme is to “reinforce the spirit of European identity” (EU (European Union), 1987) and to educate “truly European citizens” (Figel, 2007). Additionally, the Erasmus+ Programme acknowledges enhancing young people’s active citizenship as a challenge, listing the promotion of active citizenship among its specific objectives (Erasmus+, 2023).

In their research, Golubeva, Gomez Parra, and Mohedano surveyed 174 Erasmus students from 23 nationalities in September 2014, while the students were on mobility in Hungary or Spain. The results indicate that students’ understanding of ‘active citizenship’ involves indicators such as social skills and second language proficiency. Building on the concept of active citizenship, proposed by Hoskins (2006), as participation in the life of society, based on values of mutual respect, non-violence, human rights, and democracy, the study participants added values, skills, and attitudes such as freedom, equality, tolerance, appreciation of cultural diversity, critical reflection, intercultural competence, openness to change, and collaborativeness (Hoskins, 2006).

Although the majority of students believed that participation in an Erasmus mobility positively changes one’s attitude towards the EU, they perceived civic growth as the least important gain of the Erasmus mobility experience. The researchers suggest that this attitude needs to be changed, which could serve as an indicator for further research.

Inspired by the teachings of the 16th century philosopher and humanist Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, our exploration now delves deeper into the initiatives aimed at fostering active citizenship within comprehensive education. As Erasmus himself emphasized, education is the ‘well-spring of all moral goodness’ and our ‘special task’ bestowed by nature. The sooner we devote our attention to this task, the more fruitful it becomes (Erasmus, *De Pueris Instituendis*, p. 301).

2.2 Active Citizenship in Comprehensive Education

Defined and urged by the Paris Declaration as a common objective for Member States, the EU is instructed and encouraged to ensure the sharing of ideas and good practices while ensuring that children and young people acquire social, civic, and intercultural competencies by promoting democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion, and non-discrimination, as well as active citizenship (Council of the European Union, 2015a). Acknowledging the Paris Declaration, the Education, Youth, Culture, and Sport Council configuration meeting adopted a declaration that demanded education play its part in preventing radicalization by promoting citizenship and fostering social inclusion, and common European values such as tolerance and mutual respect (Council of the European Union, 2015b).

According to the description provided by Eurydice in its 2017 report, ‘Citizen Education at School in Europe -2017’, citizenship education supports pupils in becoming active, informed, and responsible citizens, who are willing and able to take responsibility for themselves and their communities at the national,

European, and international level. It further states that citizen competencies help young people interact effectively, think critically, and act in a socially responsible and democratic manner (Eurydice, 2018).

In recognizing the significant role that education plays in promoting citizenship and civic participation, the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) investigates how young people are prepared to undertake their roles as citizens in a world where contexts of democracy and civic participation continue to change (ICCS, 2024). The study was first implemented in 2009 with a follow-up cycle in 2016 and one in progress for 2022, reporting on pupils knowledge and understanding of concepts and issues related to civics and citizenship, as well as their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors concerning this domain. In addition, ICCS collects rich contextual data on the organization and content of civic and citizenship education in the curriculum, teacher qualifications and experiences, teaching practices, school environment and climate, and home and community support.

Since its first cycle in 2009, the ICCS, conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Education Achievement (IEA), has examined how education prepares young people to become citizens. The ICCS 2009 European regional module was administered to pupils in 21 European countries, focusing on pupils' knowledge about EU laws and policies, and European-related issues. Findings showed widespread knowledge of the basic facts about the EU, while great variations across countries about the knowledge of EU laws and policies. Additionally, the majority of pupils held a strong sense of European identity.

The ICCS 2016 mainly focused on affective and behavioral domains including pupils' sense of European identity. The findings revealed that the pupils' sense of European identity had increased between ICCS 2009 and 2016.

Similarly, the ICCS 2022 was mainly concerned with collecting data related to pupils' attitudes and engagement, examining pupils' attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors on European-specific civic and citizenship issues, and presenting the European results from eighteen countries and two benchmarking participants (the German states of North Rhine-Westphalia and Schleswig-Holstein). Among the themes, pupils' sense of European identity and pupils' reports on opportunities for learning about Europe at school were addressed and examined. The report also included findings relevant to the European regional context which contributes to the understanding of the context for civic and citizenship education at the school level across the different participating countries. Related to the mentioned focus points, the result showed that European lower-secondary pupils reported a strong sense of European identity, where the highest national average scale scores for pupils' sense of their European identity (more than three score points above the European ICCS 2022 average) were found in Croatia and Spain, while Cyprus, Latvia, and Poland recorded scale scores that were more than three points below average. Most of the pupils expressed having had opportunities to learn about Europe at school where about 75 percent of the pupils, on average, reported having the opportunity to learn about the EU, with five countries (Cyprus, France, Malta, the Netherlands, and Spain) and one benchmarking participant (North Rhine-Westphalia) showing percentages more than 10 points below the European ICCS 2022 average. Percentages of more than 10 points above the European ICCS 2022 average were observed in Italy, Lithuania, and Slovenia. Furthermore, on average, less than half of the teachers in European participating countries reported having attended professional development

courses on the European Union, and more than 70 percent of teachers in European participating countries felt quite well or very well prepared to teach about the EU.

Another finding of the results derived from the ICCS 2022 study was that in all European participating countries there was a positive and significant association between pupils' sense of European identity and their trust in civic institutions. Those pupils who expressed trust at or above the country average showed a higher sense of European identity. (Schulz et al., 2022).

Relevant to this finding, in response to the decline in trust among young people in civic institutions following the 2008/09 financial crisis, the CATCH-EyoU project, funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 Programme, was conducted. CATCH-EyoU (Constructing AcTive CitizensHip with European Youth: Policies, Practices, Challenges, and Solutions) aimed to investigate how European youth perceive Europe. Elvira Cicognani, the project coordinator, expressed the goal as understanding 'how EU and national institutions can be supported to cultivate a generation of informed, competent, and critically aware young people as a means to help revitalize the European project' (CORDIS, 2015)

The findings predominantly emphasized one particular aspect: "Education, education, education" (CORDIS, 2019). The project team discovered that schools play a crucial role in shaping young people's concepts of Europe and promoting active citizenship. According to the results of the study, actively involved youths held diverse perceptions of 'Europe' and its significance. For many young Europeans, Europe represents a positive notion, offering educational, employment, and personal opportunities across borders. The research also revealed that participation in cross-border mobility initiatives like the Erasmus Programme positively influences young Europeans' identification with European identity and enhances their overall perception of the European Union.

Based on results from the Horizon 2020 CATCH-EyoU project, Frosso Motti-Stefanidia, and Elvira Cicognani, examined whether and how European youth identify with the EU, trust EU institutions, and engage in EU issues, and which societal and proximal-level contexts and/or individual-level attributes promote or hinder young people's active citizenship in European context (Motti-Stefanidi & Cicognani, 2018).

The papers in this special issue aim to understand youth active citizenship in Europe. Scientists from various disciplines across eight European countries (Sweden, Estonia, the U.K., Germany, Czech Republic, Greece, Portugal, and Italy) investigate how European youth perceive Europe, trust EU institutions, and engage in EU issues. They analyze societal, proximal-level, and individual-level contexts influencing youth citizenship. Two age groups, 15-18 and 20-26-year-olds, are considered, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The special issue includes six empirical papers, addressing different dimensions of active citizenship and different processes and contexts that are deemed relevant to explain the construction of youth active citizenship.

The first paper, by Banaji et al., critically investigates and discusses how the concept of youth active citizenship, as well as that of civic and political participation, has been addressed by the scientific and academic communities. The authors suggest that the findings point to the need to adopt a more inclusionary approach to the definition and understanding of young people's engagement in the EU. The second paper,

by Landberg et al., focuses on the concept of (political) identity as a key indicator of psychological citizenship, and according to the authors, the finding indicates that focusing on identification per se may be insufficient to understand the psychological dimension of citizenship. They also highlight the need to better investigate the interplay between national and EU identification. The third paper, by Dahl et al., examines political passivity among adolescents, focusing on apathy and alienation, confirming that apathy is more common among politically passive youth.

The fourth paper by Serek and Jugert utilizes data from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study collected from 22 EU countries. The authors employ multilevel models to explore the influence of trust and participatory practices on youth active citizenship. They consider individual, interaction-level, and societal-level factors, such as interest in public affairs, school characteristics, and country-level living conditions. Findings reveal that while European citizenship differs from general active citizenship primarily in participatory dimensions, socioeconomic resources significantly impact participation at the European level. Moreover, socioeconomic background and exposure to European education influence participation more at the European level than at the national level. Country-level disparities in active citizenship components highlight the role of economic challenges and social inequalities in shaping youth trust in institutions and participation in cross-border activities. The fifth paper by Mazzoni et al. examines the impact of cross-border mobility on psychological citizenship dimensions (identification and positive attitudes towards the EU), EU-level participation, and voting intention among adolescents and young adults. Drawing from data across all consortium member countries, the study confirms the positive role of both short-term and long-term mobility in enhancing youth bonds and engagement with the EU. It underscores the importance of European mobility programmes in aiding youth in achieving their objectives. The sixth paper, by Macek et al., explores factors influencing young people's trust in media and its relation to attitudes towards the EU, finding that trust in alternative media correlates with negative attitudes towards the EU.

Together, these papers advance a nuanced understanding of youth active citizenship in the EU, emphasizing the importance of multi-level analyses and addressing current challenges. They contribute valuable insights to inform policies aimed at enhancing youth participation and engagement with the European project. (Motti-Stefanidi & Cicognani, 2018)

3. Conclusion

According to the briefing provided by the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) on Citizenship education in national curricula, citizenship education has emerged as a priority within EU education policies, aiming to empower young individuals to cultivate self-awareness and active participation within their communities (Think Tank | European Parliament, 2023). While EU Member States have increasingly emphasized the teaching of democratic values and tolerance, the integration of these principles into educational practice remains uneven. School curricula serve as indicators of governmental priorities, with the prominence of citizenship education signaling its importance within national agendas.

Examining EU programmes and national curricula across Member States reveals a multifaceted approach to citizenship education, encompassing EU institutions, values, and global challenges. Educational methods

emphasize the development of knowledge, competencies, and skills from an early age, supported by EU initiatives promoting lifelong learning through formal and informal channels. Despite progress, challenges persist in implementing coherent and meaningful citizenship education policies across the EU. Discrepancies arise in the emphasis placed on national versus European dimensions of citizenship, as well as variations in policy implementation speed. It is imperative to monitor and evaluate Member States' efforts in promoting citizenship education to ensure its effective integration into educational systems (EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service, 2023).

Moving forward, the European Commission's commitment to incorporating transversal skills, including citizenship education, in future editions of the Education and Training Monitor signals a continued focus on fostering active citizenship and civic engagement among European youth. Through ongoing assessment and collaboration, the EU can further advance its goal of nurturing informed, responsible, and engaged citizens capable of contributing to a vibrant democratic society.

Aptly suggested by Liz Moorse, the chief executive of ACT (Association for Citizenship Teaching): 'The best Citizenship education empowers children and enables them to truly understand and experience what it means to be an active citizen who is prepared to speak out, challenge inequality, and make a positive difference in their communities and the wider world' (Association for Citizenship Teaching, 2024). This profound responsibility of schools resonates with the timeless wisdom of Maria Montessori:

'The greatest gift we can give our children are the roots of responsibility and the wings of independence.'

With these foundational principles guiding us, let us persist in our shared mission to nurture a forthcoming generation of enlightened, socially responsible, and actively involved citizens, ready to lead and enact positive change within Europe and beyond.

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