

Active Citizen Compass: A Digital Assessment Tool of Active Citizenship in Schools

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Abstract

This work presents the development of the “Active Citizen Compass (ACC)”, a digital assessment tool designed to evaluate active citizenship among secondary education students. The tool has been developed within the framework of the Erasmus+ project “Active Citizen Compass”, which aims to promote active citizenship among students across six partner countries: Belgium, Czechia, Greece, Spain, the Netherlands, and Turkey. Before the tool’s development, a cross-national study was conducted to explore students’ knowledge, skills and attitudes related to active citizenship. The findings from this research informed the design of the ACC, which will be piloted in partner schools to assess students’ active citizenship competencies before and after participating in related learning activities. Upon completion, the tool will be freely accessible to all schools, supporting them in promoting and assessing active citizenship competencies in diverse educational contexts.

Keywords: active citizenship, active citizen compass (ACC), assessment tool, students

Introduction

Global developments in recent years, including social inequality, migration, economic and political instability, and environmental sustainability issues, have brought attention to the importance of preparing young people to actively and responsibly participate in their own and broader environments. To address these challenges, active citizenship—the ability to participate in political, social, and community activities with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to have a significant impact—has become a crucial competency (Bacian & Huemer, 2023). This idea promotes not only the rights of individuals but also their responsibilities within the community, encouraging participation, solidarity, volunteerism, and civic engagement (Birdwell et al., 2013).

In the context of European education, policies have long recognised the importance of preparing students to become active citizens who respect diversity, support human rights, and contribute to the common good (European Commission, 2025). Contemporary curricula across Europe aim to equip young people with the necessary competencies to navigate a rapidly changing society and actively participate in local, national, and European contexts (Aragón et al., 2025 · Bacian & Huemer, 2023 · Chiou, 2025a · Chiou, 2025b · Chiou & Holz, 2025a · Eurydice, 2012 · Huizinga, 2025 · Paesen et al., 2025 · Saleminezhad et al., 2025).

In line with these policies, the Active Citizen Compass (ACC) project (2023-2026), funded by the Erasmus+ Programme, represents a significant effort to promote active citizenship in secondary schools across six countries: Belgium (Flanders), Czechia, Greece, Spain, the Netherlands, and Turkey. The project aims to support the development of school policies on active citizenship and provide schools with tools and materials to prepare students for being active citizens. One of the core components of this project is the creation of a digital assessment tool to evaluate students' knowledge, skills and related active citizenship attitudes.

In particular, the ACC project consists of five work packages (WPs):

- *WP1: Project Management.* WP1 focuses on ensuring effective coordination, quality assurance, and progress throughout the project.
- *WP2: Active Citizenship across Europe: A Comparative Analysis.* WP2 aims to provide other WPs with evidence-based data through an analysis of active citizenship education across the six partner countries.
- *WP3: Active Citizen Compass.* Central to the ACC project is the design of a digital self-assessment tool, the *Active Citizen Compass*, which enables students to evaluate their progress in developing active citizenship-related competencies and guides them toward becoming actively engaged citizens.
- *WP4: The implementation of the Active Citizen Compass (ACC) in the classroom.* WP3 aims to pilot test and integrate the ACC tool into teaching practice along with the implementation of related learning activities.
- *WP5: Policy Guidelines and Recommendations.* WP5 focuses on the development of school policies on active citizenship education.

The development of the Active Citizen Compass (ACC)

The *Active Citizen Compass* (ACC) is a digital, interactive assessment tool designed to evaluate secondary school students' competencies related to active citizenship. Functioning as a metaphorical compass, the ACC tool will guide both students and teachers through a series of questions and interactive elements aimed at improving the active citizenship skills.

The development of the ACC tool was based on the ACC questionnaire designed for the cross-national research in schools within the framework of the *Active Citizen Compass* project (Chiou & Holz, 2025b · Paesen et al., 2025). Additionally, the overview of the partners' national curricula with respect to the promotion of active citizenship as well as research findings on students' and teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to active citizenship (Holz et al., 2025) informed the structure and the content of the ACC tool.

Structure and content of ACC

The ACC is structured around three core sections, each assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5):

1. **Participating in the own environment:** This section contains 27 items that assess students' skills and attitudes related to active engagement and responsibility within their own environment, such as school, family, and local community.
2. **Participating in society:** This section includes 21 items focusing on students' skills and dispositions to engage and act responsibly in broader societal contexts.
3. **Influencing Society:** This section includes 10 items that evaluate students' competencies in influencing society and societal outcomes, such as involvement in advocacy, activism, voluntarism, or democratic processes.

In addition to these three sections, there is a fourth section that includes 7 dichotomous (true/false) knowledge-based questions.

To enhance student engagement and motivation, the ACC incorporates gamification elements, making the assessment process more interactive and enjoyable. To ensure accessibility and inclusivity, the ACC tool will be available in English and ACC partners' national languages.

Pilot - testing

The ACC tool will be pilot-tested with the participation of 20 students per partner country.

Assessment perspectives of the ACC

Based on students' responses, their results will be categorised into one of the following competency levels.

Table 1. Active Citizen Compass - Competency Levels and Descriptions

Competency level	Score range	Description
Highly Competent	4.5 - 5.0	Consistently demonstrates strong active citizenship behaviours.
Competent	3.5 - 4.49	Regularly engages in responsible and respectful citizenship.
Emerging Competence	2.5 - 3.49	Shows developing awareness and participation in civic behaviour.
Needs Improvement	1.5 - 2.49	Requires more consistent effort and understanding.
Critically Low Competence	1.0 - 1.49	Lacks a fundamental understanding or behaviour of active citizenship.

Assessment results will be reported per section. The students will be able to download their individual results. Follow-up assignments will be provided for each section to enhance students' competencies in areas where improvement is needed.

Discussion

The *Active Citizen Compass* (ACC) is an innovative digital assessment tool designed to evaluate students' active citizenship-related competencies. Its development is based on evidence derived from comparative cross-national research across six European countries. Moreover, the ACC's structure and content allow for the assessment of students' active citizenship-related competencies from a multidimensional perspective focusing on students' participation in their own environment and in society, as well as their influence on society.

The integration of gamification into the ACC is expected to increase students' interest, motivation and engagement, transforming assessment into an interactive and enjoyable learning experience. The multilingual availability of the ACC enhances its accessibility and inclusivity at the European level. It is worth noting that the ACC does not function solely as a diagnostic tool but supports students' learning by directing them to targeted learning activities based on the assessment scores.

The success of the ACC largely depends on how it is implemented in schools. Teachers must be adequately trained to use the ACC tool effectively. A targeted training guide is

expected to be published within the framework of the ACC project, and subsequent teacher training sessions will take place at the start of the school year 2025-2026. Furthermore, the pilot testing of the ACC in partner schools will provide valuable insights about its usability, clarity, friendliness, and effectiveness. The results of the pilot testing will be crucial for refining the tool.

In conclusion, the ACC tool represents an innovative digital tool for promoting and assessing active citizenship in secondary schools. As education systems continue to evolve in response to global and local challenges, assessment tools like the ACC can play a significant role in supporting the promotion of active citizenship in schools.

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