



# DOCUMENTO-CHAVE

## THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE REFERENCE FRAMEWORK OF COMPETENCES FOR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE: LEARNING AND PRACTICING DEMOCRACY THROUGH EDUCATION

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### 1. What is the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture? Introducing the Framework: main concepts and structure

The Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) is the latest Council of Europe policies in the area of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education (EDC/HRE). It was developed as a reference or a tool for educators and policymakers in various educational contexts, aimed at the development and support of a democratic culture in Europe through and in education.

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The RFCDC outlines 20 competences to be developed in young people in order to play an active role as citizens in democratic and multicultural societies. The competences are divided in 4 groups: values, skills, knowledge and attitudes<sup>3</sup>.

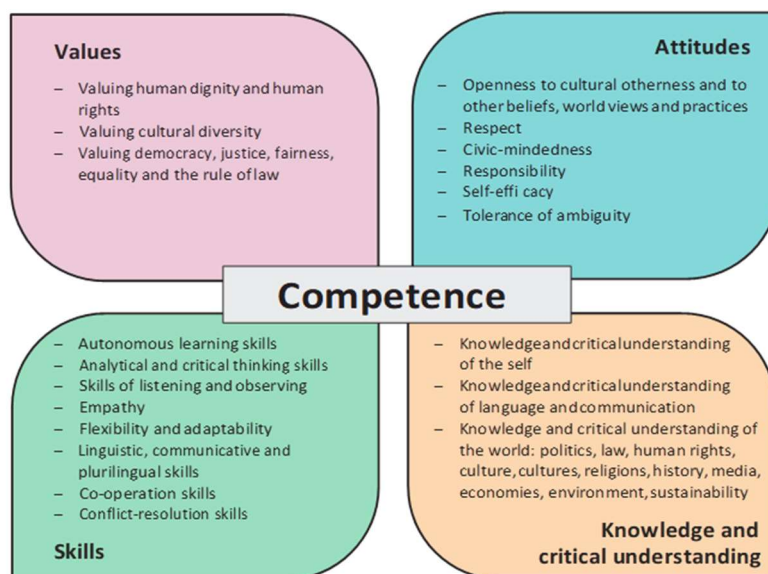


Figure 1 - Competences for Democratic Culture of Council of Europe

As the authors of RFCDC indicate, “*competence is the ability to ... mobilise and deploy relevant values, attitudes, skills and knowledge and/or critical understanding in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities that are presented by a given type of context*”<sup>4</sup>.

Democratic situations can be seen as one type of these contexts. Democratic culture is supported by democratic institutions, but also by the commitment of citizens to participate efficiently in public affairs. Thus, a competence for democratic culture is the ability of individuals to mobilize and deploy necessary resources for reacting efficiently to challenges and opportunities. RFCDC demonstrates a complex of values, knowledge, attitudes and skills that are necessary “*to participate effectively in a culture of democracy and live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse democratic societies*”<sup>5</sup>.

Since December 2013, a multidisciplinary and multinational expert group has worked on the elaboration of the Framework that educational stakeholders could apply and adapt to their national contexts. Consequently, the Framework development involved a wide range of stakeholders’ consultations, surveys and pilot projects. In April 2016, the use of the RFCDC was unanimously approved by the European Ministers of Education at their

<sup>3</sup> Council of Europe (2017). Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture. Volume 1: Context, concept and model (p. 38). Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg. Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/prems-008318-gbr-2508-reference-framework-of-competences-vol-1-8573-co/16807bc66c>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 32

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.11

standing conference in Brussels. Furthermore, in May 2018 RFCDC was recommended by the EU Council as a tool for the promotion of democratic citizenship education in EU member states<sup>6</sup>.

RFCDC consists of three volumes:

- Volume 1 clarifies the concepts at the foundation of the framework and offers a model of 20 competences – so called democratic competences.
- Volume 2 contains learning targets and outcomes for each competence. These descriptors are intended to help educators design learning situations that enable them to observe learners' behaviour in relation to a given competence. The descriptors were tested by volunteer schools and teachers in 16 member states.
- Volume 3 offers guidelines on how the model of competences and the related descriptors can be applied to 6 educational areas – curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, teacher education, the whole-school approach<sup>7</sup> and building resilience to radicalization. Together, these volumes present a toolbox for all educational settings, all learning levels and all educators, who are willing to design, put into action and evaluate educational interventions in formal and non-formal settings.

## 2. Why was RFCDC created? Background for the Framework: RFCDC momentum

The development of the RFCDC reflects the CoE approach to education, as well as other international developments. There are two trends we believe are highly relevant for the development and use of the RFCDC – the rise of citizenship and human rights education on the international agenda and the orientation towards a more competence-approach in education across Europe and internationally.

### ***Citizenship and human rights education in the international agenda***

As many international organizations emphasise, education plays a fundamental role in forming the future of humanity and demonstrates the kind of world we want to create for future generations. Citizenship and human rights education are essential for constructing an inclusive, peaceful and democratic world. However, until 2015, access to education has been the key education-related target within the international development agenda<sup>8</sup>. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) changed this course and highlighted the quality and inclusiveness of education as one of the key aims of international development by 2030. SDG 4.7 refers to

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<sup>6</sup> Council of the European Union (2018). Council recommendation 2018/C 189/01 of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning.

Retrieved from [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legalcontent/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legalcontent/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)&from=EN)

<sup>7</sup> A whole-school approach implies the active engagement of all actors in 3 areas of school life - teaching and learning, school governance and culture, co-operation with the community. More details in Council of Europe (2018). Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture. Volume 3: Guidance for implementation (p. 89). Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg. Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/prems-008518-qbr-2508-reference-framework-of-competences-vol-3-8575-co/16807bc66e>

<sup>8</sup> Millennium Development Goals on the site of the United Nations Development Programme: [https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sdgooverview/mdg\\_goals.html](https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sdgooverview/mdg_goals.html)

and defines citizenship and human rights education as a necessary means: “by 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development”.

“Learning to live together” became a basic motto of international educational frameworks, including the CoE<sup>9</sup>. According to its mandate, all CoE activities are aimed at strengthening European values, such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The organization considers that education is essential for the promotion of these values and, thus, gives particular attention to the implementation of EDC/HRE in 47 member states. CoE defines the purposes of education as preparation for the labour market, personal development, the development of a broad, advanced knowledge base (lifelong learning) and *preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies*.

In 2010, the Committee of Ministers adopted the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, which defined EDC/HRE as one of the CoE priorities in education. Through the Charter, the Committee recommended CoE member states to integrate the principles of EDC/HRE in their national policies. However, the Charter did not offer any concrete models for implementation. The framework offers such a model or tool for EDC/ HRE implementation in member states.

### **Competence-based approach in education**

International experts from various spheres of specialization chose a competence-based approach for developing an EDC/HRE model for practical implementation. Educational competences (or competencies, depending on the organization) are increasingly present both on the international and national policy level. Among the organizations that emphasise the relevance of competency-based approach for the 21st century are such as the United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)<sup>10</sup>, as well as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)<sup>11</sup>. International stakeholders emphasise that the fast developing, even disruptive 21st century and the Industry 4.0 requires that “learners interactively mobilise and ethically use information, data, knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and technology to engage effectively and act across diverse 21st century contexts to attain individual, collective, and global good”<sup>12</sup>. In fact, the focus in education shifts from what students learn to how they can apply what they learn in the situation of unpredictability. Asking young people about their opinion, they underline the importance to focus stronger on

<sup>9</sup> For example, Council of Europe (2017). Learning to live together. Council of Europe Report on the state of citizenship and human rights education in Europe. Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg. Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/the-state-of-citizenship-in-europe-e-publication/168072b3cd>. UNESCO (2015). Global Citizenship Education: Topics and Learning Objectives. UNESCO, Paris. Retrieved from <https://gcedclearinghouse.org/sites/default/files/resources/150020eng.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> UNESCO (2015). Level-setting and recognition of learning outcomes. The use of level descriptors in the twenty-first century. UNESCO, Paris. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000242887>

<sup>11</sup> OECD (2018). The Future of Education and Skills: Education 2030. The Future We Want. OECD, Paris. Retrieved from [https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/about/documents/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20\(05.04.2018\).pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/about/documents/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20(05.04.2018).pdf)

<sup>12</sup> International Bureau of Education (2018). Future Competences and the Future of Curriculum Global Reference for Curricula Transformation. IBE, Paris. Retrieved from [http://www.ibe.unesco.org/sites/default/files/resources/future\\_competences\\_and\\_the\\_future\\_of\\_curriculum.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/sites/default/files/resources/future_competences_and_the_future_of_curriculum.pdf)

competences. According to the Eurobarometer survey conducted in 2017, 49% of the European youth strongly supported the promotion of such competences as critical thinking and media literacy<sup>13</sup>.

As for Europe today, we can witness many countries including CoE member states, which have been working or are in the process of reforming their curriculum, moving from a traditional knowledge-based approach towards a more competence-based approach<sup>14</sup>. By elaborating a framework which describes the main competences citizens require in order to participate effectively in a democratic and diverse society the Council of Europe wishes to increase the focus on these competences in educational systems and in educational practice.

### **3. RFCDC in practice – insights into the work of the European Wergeland Centre (EWC)**

The European Wergeland Centre (EWC) is a resource centre on education for intercultural understanding, human rights and democratic citizenship. EWC's main aim is to strengthen the capacity of individuals, educational institutions and educational systems to build and sustain a culture of democracy and human rights.

The RFCDC is currently used in many countries for the development of educational materials, teaching in various contexts and on different levels, training of teachers, research etc. As for today, RFCDC is available in over 20 languages. Below we present two examples of how the reference framework is currently implemented in educational practice.

#### ***Supporting competence-based curriculum reform in Ukraine***

Since 2017, the Ukrainian authorities with the participation of various educational stakeholders launched a competence-based curriculum reform – the New Ukrainian School. The new curriculum for primary school and the draft curriculum for basic school education are aimed at the development of 11 key competences, including civic and social competences. EWC, along with other international experts, assisted the authorities in the curriculum formation and piloting.

The new curriculum is based on the main principles of the RFCDC. The definition of cross-curricular civic competencies includes 3 clusters of RFCDC – values, attitudes and skills. The learning outcomes, related to the development of civic competences, were elaborated on the basis of RFCDC descriptors. The Ministry of Education of Ukraine considers democratic competences to be essential for young Ukrainians.

Schools in the country face the difficulties of integrating children of over 1,4 million internally displaced people, as well as the challenge of developing media literacy to counter populism and propaganda, of implementing inclusive education, of fighting wide-spread bullying and other forms of discrimination, while also introducing more participatory ways of governance to embrace the school autonomy provided by the comprehensive decentralization reform.

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<sup>13</sup> European Commission (2015). Flash Eurobarometer 408. European Youth Report. Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/flash/fl\\_408\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/flash/fl_408_en.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> OECD (2018). Education Policy Outlook. OECD, Paris. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/9789264301528-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/9789264301528-en>

The changes concern not only the content of education but also the overall school environment and all the school stakeholders, including parents. In addition to the curriculum reform, new quality standards for school education have been developed and adopted in 2019. According to the new standards that will guide internal and external school assessment the educational environment is to be democratic, safe, inclusive and human-rights - oriented. To achieve this principle, active participation of students, a wider teacher autonomy, as well as partnerships with the community and parents is essential. It is defined that it is a whole school's responsibility to develop social and civic competences of the students. Consequently, democratic and inclusive environment at school, the prevention of bullying, shared decision-making, democratic leadership, among other RFDC-related principles, are reflected in the new quality standards.

To support schools in the implementation of these changes and assessment of civic competences, a comprehensive teacher retraining programme has been launched and supported by international donors. Also, different teaching and learning resources were developed and disseminated. The EWC has been supporting the implementation of the reform since 2017 by providing an institutional development program for schools based on the democratic school development tool<sup>15</sup>, a blended learning course for school-based teacher competence development, and developing teaching and learning resources for teachers to build their capacity of implementing the new curriculum. For example, a manual for teachers “Civic Responsibility: 80 exercises for the development of civic competences at 12 school subjects”<sup>16</sup> contains examples of tools and classroom activities for students from grades 5 to 9. Most importantly, the publication demonstrates to teachers how civic competences can be developed in a cross-curricular way and how principles of democratic education can be integrated into all school subjects, including, in particular, natural sciences, physical training and mathematics.

Grade	Topic	Expected result. A student:	Components of civic competences that can be developed by using the suggested exercise
5	Natural numbers. Comparison of natural numbers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Knows</b> what the family budget is made up of;</li> <li>• <b>Understands</b> the essence of the concept of «the right to a decent standard of living»;</li> <li>• <b>Solves</b> real life problems with real data on the family budget, calculates the possibility of large-scale purchases;</li> <li>• <b>Is aware</b> of the need to plan a family budget.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ability to analyze own economic situation and calculate family budget using mathematical methods;</li> <li>• ability to stand for one's own opinion;</li> <li>• economical habits and frugality.</li> </ul>

Figure 2 - Civic competences developed in Mathematics through the “Family budget” classroom activity

<sup>15</sup> European Wergeland Centre (2019) Tool for planning, monitoring and self-evaluation of Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education at schools [online publication]. Retrieved from <http://www.theewc.org/Content/Library/Teacher-Training/Training-Tools/Tool-for-Democratic-School-Development>

<sup>16</sup> European Wergeland Centre (2017). Civic Responsibility: 80 Exercises for Development of Civic Competences at 12 School Subjects. Manual for Teachers. European Wergeland Centre, Kiev. Retrieved from <http://www.theewc.org/Content/Bibliotek/Teacher-Training/Training-Tools/Schools-for-Democracy-Civic-Responsibility-Manual-for-Teachers>

The publication has been recommended by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine for use in schools. Several online courses for teachers and school heads are developed in order to scale up the capacity building efforts to all teachers in the country.

Consequently, democratic and inclusive environment at school, the prevention of bullying, shared decision-making, democratic leadership, among other RFCDC-related principles, are reflected in the new quality standards. To support schools in the implementation of these changes and assessment of civic competences, different teaching and learning resources were developed and disseminated.

### ***Fostering inclusive and democratic schools in the Baltic region***

Another area of RFCDC implementation is the whole-school approach (WSA). The whole school approach integrates democratic values and human rights principles into teaching and learning, governance and the overall atmosphere of the school and contributes significantly to young learners' experience of, development of and practice of democratic competences.

For democracy and human rights to become a reality in daily life in a society they should become a reality in daily life in schools. Schools are where young people often get their first opportunity outside the family to develop and practice the democratic competences that they need for active engagement and living together in diverse societies. When students feel engaged in the life of the school community and have a good relationship with their teachers and parents, their achievements at school can improve.

The Baltic Summer Academy is one of the EWC training programmes promoting a WSA to citizenship and human rights education. It is a training programme dedicated to building a democratic and inclusive culture in schools in Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia through strengthening the competences of education professionals and community actors and through encouraging joint actions and partnerships. The Academy provides an opportunity for school-community teams including school leaders, teachers, students, civil society organizations and local authorities to learn practical tools and strategies on how to create a more inclusive environment for all children.

The three Baltic countries face similar challenges in education. The countries' curricula are aimed at fostering students' ability to make decisions and the development of students' civil maturity. However, schools often encounter difficulties in implementing these principles in practice. School leadership often does not have an experience of involving students in the decision-making process. Many teachers feel unprepared to work in linguistically, culturally diverse classrooms or to equip students with media literacy competences necessary for counteracting propaganda, hate speech and *fake news*. Furthermore, teachers hesitate to touch upon controversial issues, such as sexual education, migration or different views on history, particularly in schools or regions with a larger proportion of Russian - speaking students.

After the training, school teams implement EDC/HRE-oriented projects in cooperation with their peers. Projects are aimed at changes in one or more areas of school life: teaching and learning, governance and culture, and partnership with the community.

Examples of projects and activities which have been conducted by school teams to foster a more democratic and inclusive culture and thus to strengthen students' democratic competences are the following:

**Teaching & learning:**

- classes on democracy, human rights, tolerance;
- trainings for the school staff;
- mock trials or elections;
- creating opportunities for students' participation in the classroom.

**Governance & culture:**

- new democratic school guidelines or setting up of new governing bodies;
- opportunities for students to express their views on matters of concern (through class discussions, student councils, surveys and suggestion boxes, debating clubs, presentations, school assemblies, etc.).

**Partnership with the community:**

- schools involve local authorities, policymakers, parents, other schools and educational institutions in local activities;
- along with local authorities, schools encourage the participation of students in formal governance structures (e.g. youth councils);
- students create projects aimed at solving community problems or challenges (for example, improvement of personal safety, elderly citizens' quality of life, prevention of youth crime etc.)

These activities usually concern the whole cluster of competences. For example, being involved in the training on controversial issues can lead to the development of critical thinking, communicative skills, openness to different beliefs, tolerance of ambiguity, etc.

WSA has proven to be beneficial for all school stakeholders. Students become more confident, responsible, motivated and accepting of the diversity. New democratic governing bodies and guidelines allow the participation of everyone involved in school life, assisting the administration in the decision-making. The more constructive and close cooperation leads to more friendly, supportive and respectful relationships between teachers, students and the administration. Members of the community take a more active part in the activities and the interest of parents in the school life increases. The schools with democratic and inclusive climate schools become more attractive for new students.

#### **4. Conclusion**

RFDCDC was created as a tool for the practical implementation of CoE EDC/HRE principles and concepts. It was a timely response to the rising importance of civic and human rights education, as well as of the competence-based approach to teaching and learning. Its applicability and usefulness in various educational contexts are proven by its wide use in CoE member states on different levels, from curriculum reform to work in



a particular classroom. The examples from the EWC practice demonstrate that the application of RFDCDC can lead to a more democratic, inclusive and human-rights oriented approach to education, beneficial for all educational stakeholders involved.

[Índice](#)