



EDUCATION POLICIES AND PRACTICES TO FOSTER TOLERANCE,
RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY AND CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY IN CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE EU

Executive summary



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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2016

ISBN 978-92-79-49069-9

doi: 10.2766/797305

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Please cite this publication as:

Van Driel, B., Darmody, M., Kerzil, J., 'Education policies and practices to foster tolerance, respect for diversity and civic responsibility in children and young people in the EU', *NESET II report*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2016. doi: 10.2766/797305

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Acknowledgements:

The authors wish to express their thanks to Hanna Siarova from the Public Policy and Management Institute (PPMI) for her considerable contribution to the report. The authors also gratefully acknowledge the advice and useful comments from Jana Huttova and Georgios Zarifis on earlier versions of this report. Thanks must also go to a number of colleagues with specific expertise who responded to numerous queries from the authors: Robert Jackson, Vanja Ljubic, Lucien Dubuisson, George Nikolaou, Nektaria Palaiologou, Doyle Stevick, and Maria Lucia Uribe.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Growing ethnic and religious diversity¹ in Europe poses both opportunities and challenges to European policy-makers and societies as a whole. It is expected that this diversity will continue to increase. At the same time, recent studies show that intolerance and social exclusion are increasing, with some migrant groups feeling alienated. This is leading to incidences of social tensions and unrest. **Education** has a key role to play in preparing societies for dealing with these phenomena. It also plays a vital role in the political socialisation of European citizens from cradle to grave.

This independent report reviews the most relevant European and international research on these issues in order to summarise existing knowledge and to distil policy lessons based on **evidence**. It addresses questions that include:

- What main opportunities and challenges do European education systems face in terms of educating for tolerance, respect for diversity and active citizenship?
- For each of these, what policy insights can we draw from existing European and international research and evidence?
- Which specific education policies and practices appear to work best and under which specific circumstances?

Main conclusions:

1. *Respect for others can be taught.* From an early age there is a need to correct misconceptions and provide opportunities for genuine intercultural experiences.
2. *School policies that encourage ethnic mixing create conditions for inter-ethnic cooperation and fostering tolerance.* However, simply bringing young people from different backgrounds together physically is not sufficient to reduce prejudice and develop positive intercultural relations; schools need to create the conditions for all children and school staff to develop their intercultural competence.
3. *The way a school operates makes a difference.* In particular, whole school approaches and schools with strong and dynamic ties to the local community have great potential for promoting cohesion. They create a sustainable positive school atmosphere, as well as a stronger sense of belonging.
4. *New effective methods for creating inclusive classrooms have been developed in recent years.* Most European countries still tend to use traditional teaching methods, although methods such as project-based learning, cooperative learning, service learning and peer education are becoming more common. These methods have demonstrated their value in combating intolerance.

¹ This report focuses primarily on ethnic, religious and cultural diversity, while it also pays some attention to sexual diversity. The practices and strategies discussed in this report most often interplay with other dimensions and identities such as gender, disability, socio-economic status, age, etc, which are not discussed at length.

5. *Extra-curricular activities can promote tolerance and understanding.* After-school activities can help build on classroom learning and can contribute to the creation of a dynamic and inclusive school.
6. *Approaches that foster social and emotional learning matter.* Educational approaches that facilitate a child's social and emotional development have been shown to be powerful tools in promoting inter-ethnic tolerance and respect for diversity.
7. *Effective leadership and governance are essential.* The personal commitment of school leaders and other members of school management teams to an ethos of diversity is critical in developing respect for diversity among students and improving their intercultural competence. Such commitment needs to be reinforced by professional development in these areas.
8. *Teachers need diversity training.* The intercultural competence of teachers in Europe needs to be strengthened. Also, at present there is a significant lack of diversity among the ranks of teachers and principals in schools across Europe.
9. *Education is a shared responsibility between schools and other stakeholders.* Partnerships between schools, communities and parents help to connect better to local needs. They also increase mutual understanding and trust between school staff and community, as well as recognition of the assets and expertise of various stakeholders.
10. *Schools could benefit more from third-sector know-how.* Local and international NGOs with specific expertise in the field can enhance the expertise in schools, but are underutilized in both formal and informal education.
11. *School curricula need to better incorporate diversity.* Minority children often find it difficult to identify and engage with the learning process and the content of a mono-cultural curriculum. Addressing religious, ethnic and other forms of diversity is a critical aspect of education. Culturally sensitive approaches can be effective in promoting inclusion. At present, there is a widespread failure among EU nations to adequately meet this challenge.
12. *Mother tongue education has a profound impact on a person's sense of identity and well-being.* Effective forms of bilingual and multilingual education benefit both majority and minority students, yet are rarely found in Europe.
13. *New media present both a threat and an opportunity.* Cyber bullying is an increasing danger to young people in today's classrooms, as is exposure to extremist ideas and hate speech. However, new media products are also showing potential in fostering tolerance and encouraging respect for diversity.
14. *More research and data regarding what works to combat intolerance and promote respect for diversity is needed.* Though there is some evidence to show what works when combating intolerance and promoting diversity, most evidence remains anecdotal. Much more systematic and solid evidence is needed.

Key policy recommendations

For policy makers at European/national/regional level

- 1. Avoid segregation and promote diversity in schools:** Policy-makers at all levels should encourage the development of intercultural competence of teachers and students, and ensure that migrants and minorities are equitably represented across schools to avoid schools with high and low diversity. School admission policies should ensure equal access to all students, notwithstanding their ethnic, religious, socio-economic status or gender. One of the possible strategies is "controlled choice", to balance parents' wishes to choose a school for their children and the policy goal to counter segregation. The promotion of diversity should start at the pre-school level.
- 2. Develop and use culturally relevant curricula and culturally-responsive pedagogies:** Stakeholders, each at their own level, have a role to play in developing a more diverse curriculum and methods, taking into account the realities of all students. Member States should move towards the implementation of a more culturally responsive pedagogy in primary and secondary schools. Educational policy-makers at national levels should promote the use of educational materials that deal with migrant histories and that can lead to a better understanding of the experiences of migrants. Educational policy-makers should think about ways to implement culturally responsive pedagogies in all schools, starting from teachers' pre-service education and in-service training. Policy-makers should support universities in their efforts to research whether these pedagogies are being used appropriately and effectively.
- 3. Provide bilingual and multilingual education:** Countries and their Education Ministries should ensure where possible that all students have the opportunity to learn their mother tongue at school, especially through two-way bilingual immersion approaches. Education policy-makers should promote education policies that value and foster students' mother tongues and educational programmes that help students to make connections between languages. National policy-makers should re-examine the possibilities to include instruction of migrant languages in a meaningful way for all students in schools, reflecting, for example, the local diversity present in a community. Teacher preparation institutes should develop courses and programmes that educate future teachers to become bilingual and/or mother tongue teachers.
- 4. Encourage diversity in the education workforce:** Member States should adopt measures to attract more representatives from minority communities to the teaching profession and provide support to retain such teachers. National policy-makers need to carefully examine present routines to attract teachers from minority communities and make improvements where possible. The creation of networks of teachers with an immigrant background should be supported. Possibly, an affirmative action can be utilised in countries where entry to the initial teacher education is highly competitive or presents barriers for students from disadvantaged background, including immigrants.
- 5. Better prepare the education workforce for tolerance, diversity and inclusion:** Member States should ensure high quality pre-service education and in-service training for teachers at all levels of education. Initial teacher education (ITE) programmes and continuous professional development (CPD) should help all teachers develop their intercultural competence and, in turn, the necessary skills to work with a diverse body of students including ethnic, religious, linguistic and sexual minorities; as well

as students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those with special educational needs. In addition, teachers should be adequately prepared to approach sensitive issues and address bullying.

6. Promote a whole-school approach and engage with wider groups of stakeholders: Policy makers should create enabling conditions for practicing whole-school approach that would engage entire community in education process. Education policy-makers should promote policies that build sustainable bridges between schools and community. Policy-makers at the national and local levels should include experienced NGOs in the development of their policies to address the increasing diversity in society, and look for ways to collaborate with such NGOs.

7. Provide accurate information on migration flows: Studies in Europe show that schoolchildren vastly overestimate the number of migrants and other minorities residing in their countries. This can lead to increased feelings of fear and threat. National and local policy-makers should work with schools to guarantee that schoolchildren receive accurate information with respect to the number of migrants and minorities in the country and that their misperceptions are corrected. Students need to be actively involved in the process of collecting information.

8. Support the collection of empirical evidence for policy-making across Member States: Although there is some evidence to show what works well and less well to combat intolerance and promote diversity in educational settings in Europe, more empirical evidence is needed from various EU Member states as most current research is from North America, Australia and the United Kingdom. The European Commission and policy-makers at all levels should support and enable empirical research and evaluations aiming to show what works, why, how and under what conditions. These efforts could be reinforced at the European level through the establishment of an institute to assess the effectiveness of education practices in Europe (akin to the 'What Works Clearing House' in the US).

9. Acknowledge and reward good practice: At the moment, it is unclear what good practices are in place in schools with respect to promoting tolerance, helping students develop intercultural competences and respecting classroom diversity. The European Commission should work with NGOs and other key stakeholders to identify and reward schools and projects that are successful in promoting tolerance and respect for diversity. Bestowing awards for best practice is recommended as an incentive for educational institutions.

For educational institutions

10. Ensure effective school leadership: National and local authorities should encourage and provide help and means for school leaders to implement evidence-based programmes that foster tolerance and understanding. This help could take the form of providing opportunities for professional development of staff, organizing and facilitating meetings with the school team and the community (including NGOs and parents). It is crucial to promote the development of a learning culture in schools and school districts and implement self-reflection and self-evaluation approaches that could serve as the basis for future action.

11. Adjust the content of teaching according to the local needs: Schools and teachers can better balance what is taught in the curriculum by including books, films, websites, etc. that better represent the diversity of the classroom. This action should be undertaken in consultation with the representatives of the diverse communities that constitute the student body.

12. Provide a safe environment for discussing controversial issues: Activities relating to controversial issues can develop qualities such as empathy, multi-perspectivity, as well as the ability to understand the beliefs, interests and viewpoints of others. Educational policy-makers should encourage and provide help and means for teachers to teach about controversial issues in the classroom. This help could take the form of appropriate training courses and the provision of relevant educational materials.

13. Provide "education about religion and beliefs" in a balanced and human rights framework: The religion and belief dimension is a critical aspect of a child's social-emotional development. It also has the potential to promote respect for diversity. Yet at present it is insufficiently addressed in European school systems. Member States should develop strategies to implement education about religion, belief and value systems that are inclusive and at the same time will not be seen as a threat to secularism.

14. Recognise the importance of empathy and social-emotional learning: Social and emotional learning, as well as a feeling of empathy toward others, are powerful tools to foster tolerance and promote diversity. Schools with the support of policy-makers should develop sustainable educative programmes that aim to improve empathy among children. Since experience can strongly influence attitudes, such programmes may include experience-based activities such as tutoring others, intervening to help others, as well as learning and applying conflict resolution skills. Such measures should be closely monitored and evaluated.

15. Use interactive participatory teaching methods: Project-based learning, cooperative learning, service learning and peer education are all active and engaging teaching approaches that have demonstrated their effectiveness in fostering tolerance, respect for diversity, and civic responsibility in students from diverse backgrounds. School leaders and teachers need to take further steps to develop and support more active, participatory pedagogies in schools.

16. Use new technologies with responsibility: New technologies have the potential to spread extremist ideas and hate speech as well as to promote diversity. Member States should continue to reinforce the measures they have to prevent, monitor and report incidences of bullying, cyber bullying and hate speech that occurs through use of the internet and social media. Collaboration with NGOs should take place to develop online learning tools and for instance Apps aimed at fostering a greater openness to diversity among children. It is important that schools with the support of national and local authorities work with the many reputable NGOs presently developing new technology materials and closely monitor and evaluate this process.

17. Promote intergroup contact: Simply bringing young people from different backgrounds together is not sufficient to reduce prejudice and encourage intercultural relations. Schools need to create conditions and equal opportunities for all participating children for inter-ethnic contact and cooperative learning. Education policy-makers should ensure that present and future teachers are aware of the conditions that can promote positive interactions between individuals from diverse backgrounds and that they are trained to put these conditions in place. School leaders and teachers should promote activities that allow students to engage in/observe pro-social behaviour, like tutoring other students, learning and applying conflict resolutions skills, role playing.

18. Promote home-school partnerships: Home-school partnerships create a positive school atmosphere, a stronger sense of belonging among all students, and build closer ties to the community as well as trust between the diverse communities. Schools should be encouraged to engage students more actively in the school and build meaningful and sustainable links with parents. More than is the case to-

day, schools should be encouraged and supported in developing engaging after-school activities for students involving parents, NGOs and other community actors where possible.

19. Involve NGOs and youth organization in education: In many countries local and international NGOs have gained extensive experience in training and educating teachers, students and other stakeholders about issues related to tolerance and diversity but not enough use is made of this expertise. Organisations can be involved in education process via various activities: e.g., providing training and support for students, teachers and other school personnel; developing resource materials; helping to organise campaigns in schools (such as anti-bullying campaigns); organising field trips to and after-school and summer activities for students.

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