



GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP & YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN EUROPE



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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.
Project Number: 2014-1-UK01-KA200-001841



GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION BRIEFING FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

The launch of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in September 2015 has provided a new impetus for encouraging an approach to education around the world that recognises the importance of equipping young people with the skills, knowledge and values base to be global citizens. The Goals aims that by 2030, all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including 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.

Civil society organisations with a focus on human development across Europe, are key to making progress on these goals. Many of them come from a strong rights based perspective and wish to see a more just and egalitarian world. They have access to communities around the world who can provide learners with different voices and perspectives to that which they may be getting from policy-makers or the media. They also are playing an important role in mobilising people to be more effectively engaged in tackling the issues posed in the Sustainable Development Goals.

A term increasingly used across Europe to mobilise people on global concerns is global citizenship. This term has become used by many civil society organisations as a way to describe how they wish to involve people in securing social change.

The term global citizenship has also become part of educational practice in a number of European countries over the past decade. In some countries it has become the 'global' aspect of citizenship or civics education whilst in others it is becoming more closely aligned with existing practices around global and development education. Within the differing interpretations of these concepts around Europe, there is a consensus that themes such as diversity, human rights, social justice, sustainability, conflict resolution and peace need to be part of the learning of young people. There is also a recognition that if civil society organisations wish to encourage young people to be active global citizens, they need not only understand the issues that affect them, but have the skills and values base to play an active role in securing a more just and sustainable world.

Using the term global citizenship can also be a way that civil society organisations can influence policy-makers who are seeking greater youth engagement in society. Many young people across Europe are concerned about global issues but the tendency by policy-makers has been to focus on encouraging young people's involvement through existing political structures. Using the term global citizenship can help to encourage policy-makers to see a connection between young people's interests and forms of social and political engagement through looking at the issues that concern them, rather than just focusing on political institutions.

Many organisations across Europe are engaged with projects that aim to equip young people to play an active role in securing a more just and sustainable world. However, what is often missing from these projects is the importance of a distinctive youth voice where young people are not the passive recipients of

information but the active constructors of social action that is based upon acquired knowledge, developing the appropriate skills and having a values base rooted in social justice.

Issues such as refugees and asylum seekers, climate change, global poverty and terrorism are ever present in our daily lives in Europe. Young people are often at the forefront of concern about these issues. They use forms of communication, networking and campaigning that are linked to their daily lives through social media. They want to take action but on their terms.

Across Europe over the past decade there have been a wealth of initiatives encouraging greater youth participation in society but all too many of these programmes have given minimal consideration to the ways in which young people engage in society. For many young people social and political action is linked to lifestyle, consumer culture and forms of engagement that are outside of traditional political structures.

Civil society organisations can play a central role in acting as supporters and facilitators for youth engagement through providing the appropriate knowledge and skills that can ensure young people's involvement is grounded in an understanding of the key global issues that concern them.

Key to ensuring this effective youth participation, is the engagement of educational bodies, particularly schools. Many civil society organisations work with schools and teachers through running professional development programmes and producing good quality resources. These organisations could play an important role in ensuring effective youth engagement on global issues in schools by providing teachers with the appropriate skills to support the development of participatory skills for young people.

Distinct spaces and forms of activity for young people that are youth led need to be encouraged and supported by civil society organisations. This may be challenging within a structured classroom environment but out of class activities such as after school clubs can play a role in facilitating greater youth engagement.

For active global citizenship to be realised, as suggested in the Sustainable Development Goals, young people need to be valued, supported and encouraged by civil society organisations.

About this Briefing:

This directive is part of a major European Commission funded project called Schools for Future Youth involving organisations in Cyprus, Italy, Poland and the UK and is based on a longer paper, Global Citizenship and Youth Participation available at <http://www.sfyouth.eu/index.php/en/mm-about-en/reports/needanalysis>.

The aim of Schools for Future Youth is to increase educational engagement and active civic participation through the application of Youth Participation for Global

Citizenship in formal and informal education. It will be reached through the achievement of three main objectives which are to:

- Develop innovative support for European teachers to use Youth Participation for Global Citizenship effectively through their core teaching;
- Develop innovative support for European youth to use Youth Participation for Global Citizenship to promote social actions through formal and informal education;
- Influence school systems across Europe to increase opportunities for teachers and young people to carry out Youth Participation for Global Citizenship.

Further information about the Project can be found at: <http://www.sfyouth.eu>.