

# **Priorities for Civic and Citizenship Education in Europe**

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## **Introduction**

The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) focused on the ways in which young people are prepared to undertake their roles as citizens. Preparing students for citizenship involves developing relevant knowledge and understanding as well as encouraging the formation of positive attitudes toward being a citizen. The conceptual background for, and the design of ICCS were described in the assessment framework (Schulz, Fraillon, Ainley, Losito, & Kerr, 2008) and the international results were reported in its international reports (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr & Losito, 2010a & 2010b).

This paper provides an overview of the results from the regional assessment of civic and citizenship education in the European region based on data from 24 European countries. The results for the European region are described in more detail in Kerr, Sturman, Schulz and Burge (2010).

## **About the European regional module of ICCS**

Regional contexts are important aspects of civic and citizenship education because they help us understand how people are differentially influenced to undertake their roles as citizens.

24 countries participated in the study's European regional module. This paper will discuss findings from the ICCS European student instrument that investigated specific European issues related to civic and citizenship education. It will also discuss relevant findings from the ICCS international student instruments that pertained to those countries.

The European module investigated students' civic knowledge in a European context as well as their attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours in relation to European civic issues, institutions and policies. More specifically, it considered European citizenship and identity, intercultural relations in Europe, free movement of citizens in Europe, European policies, institutions, and participation, and European language learning. This paper examines variations across European countries in these measures and the associations of these measures with selected student characteristics. The findings are based on data gathered from random samples of more than 75,000 students in their eighth year of schooling in more than 3,000 schools from 24 European countries. These student data were augmented, where relevant, by data from over 35,000 teachers in those schools and by further contextual data collected from school principals and the study's national research centres.

## **Civic knowledge and knowledge about civic institutions, policies, and issues in Europe**

Students' knowledge about and understanding of civics and citizenship (i.e., their civic knowledge) was measured using the 80-item ICCS test of civic knowledge (79 of these items formed the scale). In addition, a European cognitive test investigated the extent of students' civic knowledge about the European Union (EU) and its policies, institutions, practices, and processes.

In the ICCS international test, civic knowledge was measured on a scale where the international average was set to 500 scale points, with a standard deviation of 100 scale points. Students in European ICCS countries attained scores that were higher, on average (514 scale points), than the average for all participating countries (500 points). However, the

results showed considerable variation in civic knowledge among and within European countries. European country averages ranged from 453 to 576 points.

Items in the European student cognitive test on the EU did not form a measurement scale but were reported in relation to items grouped around three areas: basic facts about the European Union (EU), knowledge of EU laws and policies, and knowledge about the euro currency. Knowledge of basic facts about the EU was widespread among students across most ICCS European countries, including those countries that are not EU members. However, there was greater variation among countries in students' civic knowledge of detailed information about the EU. Students' knowledge about the euro and eurozone was also widespread across ICCS European countries, including those countries not in the eurozone.

As an example, Table 1 below contains national percentages of correct responses for two questions (Q9 and Q10) from the cognitive test, relating to EU laws and policies. There was considerable variation across these items. The first statement (Q9a) gauged students' knowledge of whether the EU determines what is taught about the EU in schools. Sixty-five percent of students overall knew that the EU does not have the power to make such decisions. The countries with the highest percentages (more than 80%) of correct student responses for this item included Liechtenstein and Switzerland, the only two participating countries that are not member countries of the EU, as well as Denmark. Test question Q9b asked students whether an aim of the EU is to promote peace, prosperity and freedom within its borders. On average, 89 percent of students responded correctly to this item. The national percentages of correct student responses ranged from 80 percent (Greece) to 95 percent (Belgium (Flemish), Finland, Lithuania, and the Slovak Republic).

*Table 1: National percentages of correct responses for European test items about European Union laws and policies (Q9 and Q10)*

Similarly high percentages of correct responses were found for test question Q9c, which asked whether it was true or false that all EU members have signed the European Convention on Human Rights. On average, 86 percent of the students knew that this was true; the national percentages ranged from 75 percent (in Latvia) to 93 percent (in Finland). Across the European ICCS countries, an average of 70 percent of students knew that the EU makes laws to reduce pollution (test question Q9d). National percentages of correct responses ranged from just over half of students in England (56%) to over 80 percent in Bulgaria (81%), Lithuania (82%), and Slovenia (80%). All of these countries had only recently become EU members.

Test question Q9e asked students whether the EU pays money to farmers in EU countries to use environmentally friendly farming methods. On average, 52 percent of the participating students correctly identified this statement as true. National percentages of correct responses ranged from 35 percent in Italy to 75 percent in Poland.

When asked what EU citizens are entitled to do by law (Q10), the students gave responses indicative of a relatively low level of knowledge. On average, only 30 percent of students knew that all citizens of the EU can, by law, study in any country of the EU without needing a special permit. We consider that the general lack of knowledge across countries can be construed as surprising, given that we might reasonably expect students to have a natural interest in matters relating to study. However, because this survey was administered to students whose average ages ranged from 13.7 to 15.0, it is possible that many of them have not yet considered future study options beyond their immediate home context. They might well become more knowledgeable once they start considering higher education studies.

In nearly all ICCS European countries, female students gained higher civic knowledge scores than male students; the average difference was 22 scale points across all the ICCS European countries. However, male students recorded higher levels of knowledge related to the EU than did females. There were also differences in the civic knowledge scores of students according to their immigrant background.

## **Interest and disposition to engage in public and political life**

The European student questionnaire investigated the extent to which students were interested in and engaged with five specific European-related civics and citizenship issues:

- European citizenship and identity;
- Intercultural relations in Europe;
- Free movement of citizens in Europe;
- European policies, institutions, and participation;
- European language learning.

Large majorities of students had a strong sense of European identity. However, this sense was generally stronger for male students than for females. In a number of countries, students from immigrant backgrounds expressed a slightly weaker sense of European identity than did students from non-immigrant backgrounds. Variation across countries was observed with regard to students' sense of identity at the European and national levels. However, the data showed a consistent association between students' national and European identities, in that students with more positive attitudes toward their country tended also to have a stronger sense of European identity.

Most students in EU countries expressed pride in the fact that their country was an EU member, but there was variation in students' sense of feeling part of the EU. Students in ICCS European countries held positive attitudes toward equal rights for other European citizens living in their country as well as for ethnic or racial groups and immigrants. Students who expressed positive attitudes toward equal rights for other European citizens living in their country were also likely to express positive attitudes to equal rights for ethnic or racial groups and immigrants. Most students supported the general right of free movement for citizens to live, work, and travel anywhere in Europe. However, a number of students expressed support for some specific restrictions on the movement of citizens in Europe. Students in some countries were more supportive than students in other countries of such restrictions. In many countries, students from immigrant backgrounds were less supportive of restrictions than those from non-immigrant backgrounds.

Majorities of students across Europe reported that they could communicate in at least one other European language, although there was considerable variation in self-reported language proficiency levels among countries. There was a consistent association between students' attitudes to learning European languages and their views on intercultural relations. Students who expressed positive attitudes toward learning other European languages were also likely to express positive views on equal rights for ethnic or racial groups and immigrants.

Majorities of students agreed with the concept of increased policy harmonization and convergence in Europe. Agreement was strongest on convergence of policies concerning the environment, education, relations with non-European countries, and the legal system but less strong on convergence of economic policy in Europe.

As an example, Table 2 gives the country average scale scores for students' attitudes toward European political unification. For all countries, the average scores sit in the lighter shaded

part of the graph, which indicates that students generally tended to disagree with the statements measuring this scale. National average scores ranged from 45 to 54. National results of at least three scale score points above the European ICCS average emerged in Bulgaria, Cyprus, and Malta. The lowest average scale scores (below 47 points) occurred in Finland and Denmark, a finding which shows that students in these countries were those least likely to support substantial political unification across the EU.

*Table 2: National averages for students' attitudes toward European political unification*

On average, over half of the participating students in the ICCS European countries reported support for EU enlargement, although levels of support varied across participating countries. Across participating countries, students' levels of trust or support for the European Commission and the European Parliament were similar to students' levels of trust in civic institutions at the national and international levels. Students reported greater interest in domestic political and social issues than in European and international politics. There was an association between students' interest in political issues at national level and their interest in European and international political issues. Students' interest in European political issues was generally higher in those countries with higher levels of students' interest in local and national political issues.

Students reported that they got information about European news from different sources, most frequently from television. Majorities of students also reported that schools provided them with opportunities to learn about other European countries. However, students' active civic participation in Europe-focused activities was relatively low, with only a minority stating that they had participated in activities and groups related to Europe.

Also noted was an association between students' reported participation in the wider community and participation in activities or groups at the European level. The more students reported active participation in the wider community, the more likely they were to report participation in activities or groups at the European level. Large majorities of students reported that they intended to vote as adults in local and national elections, but their expectation of voting in European elections was much lower.

Gender differences were apparent with regard to a number of civic issues related to European integration, in particular with regard to students' sense of European identity, students' attitudes toward equal opportunities for other European citizens, and students' attitudes toward European language learning. Differences were evident between immigrant and non-immigrant students' sense of European identity, attitudes toward equal rights for ethnic or racial groups and immigrants, freedom of movement for European citizens. Differences were also apparent between these two groups of students with respect to their attitudes toward their country of residence.

## **Aspects of schools and systems related to civic and citizenship education**

Data from the national contexts survey made clear that the countries participating in the European regional module viewed civic and citizenship education as a priority in their educational policy. In Table 3, it is clear that there was considerable variation in how countries defined and approached civic and citizenship education. These approaches included providing a specific subject, integrating relevant content into other subjects, and including content as a cross-curricular theme. Eleven countries included a specific subject concerned

with civic and citizenship education; 22 provided civic and citizenship education through integration in several subjects.

*Table 3: Approaches to civic and citizenship education in the curriculum for lower-secondary education in European ICCS countries*

According to the information collected from the ICCS national centres, curricula for civic and citizenship education covered a wide range of topics. These topics encompassed knowledge and understanding of political institutions and concepts, such as human rights, as well as social and community cohesion, diversity, the environment, communications, and global society (including regional and international institutions).

Most of the teachers, as well as the school principals, who participated in the ICCS European module regarded the development of knowledge and skills as the most important aim of civic and citizenship education. This complement of knowledge and skills included “promoting knowledge of social, political, and civic institutions”, “promoting knowledge of citizens’ rights and responsibilities”, and “promoting students’ critical and independent thinking.” Only minorities of principals and teachers in the ICCS European countries saw “preparing students for future political participation” and “supporting the development of effective strategies for the fight against racism and xenophobia” as among the most important aims of civic and citizenship education. There was greater support among teachers than among principals for “promoting respect for and safeguard of the environment” as an important aim of civic and citizenship education. However, the development of active participation was not among the objectives that teachers or school principals most frequently cited as the most important aim.

## **Possible implications of the findings**

Although a majority of students in the participating ICCS European countries demonstrated knowledge of main civic and citizenship institutions and understanding of the interconnectedness of institutions and processes, substantial minorities of students had lower levels of civic knowledge. In addition, there was considerable variation in students’ knowledge of more detailed information about the EU and EU laws and policies. These findings suggest that there is still a need to improve learning about the EU as part of civic and citizenship education.

Also evident was considerable variation in students’ attitudes to European civic issues. A majority of students expressed positive attitudes toward intercultural relations and European language learning, and stated strong support for equal rights for ethnic or racial groups and immigrants as well as the freedom of movement of citizens within Europe. However, there were substantial minorities of students that had rather negative attitudes toward equal opportunities and freedom of movement, as well as toward European language learning.

In the context of what schools can do to prepare students for “more active citizenship” and for their future roles as citizens, attention should also be drawn to the fact that, according to most teachers and principals in the ICCS European countries, the focus of civic learning should primarily be on developing students’ knowledge and skills and not necessarily on their participatory skills or strategies. This finding suggests that there is room for broadening the focus of civic and citizenship learning on citizenship issues and community participation.

It is expected that this ICCS paper will be followed by analyses that investigate in greater detail the relationships between civic knowledge and attitudes to aspects of civics and citizenship in the European context as well as the relationships between these outcomes and

approaches to civic and citizenship education and characteristics of students and their societies. Interaction between the country-level context and within-country relationships between context factors and outcome variables are of particular interest.

The implementation of additional data collection focused on region-specific aspects, in Europe, as well as in Asia and Latin America, is a feature of ICCS that will allow researchers to also exploit the ICCS database for European countries and address region-specific aspects of civic and citizenship education.

## References

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**Table 1: National percentages of correct responses for European test items about European Union laws and policies (Q9 and Q10)**

Country	Q9a: The European Union decides what is taught in your school about the European Union	Q9b: The European Union aims to promote peace, prosperity, and freedom within its borders	Q9c: All European Union countries have signed the European Convention on Human Rights	Q9d: The European Union has made laws to reduce pollution	Q9e: The European Union pays money to farmers in European Union countries to use environmentally friendly farming methods	Q10: What can all citizens of the European Union do by law?
Austria	71 (1.0) △	84 (0.9) ▽	79 (0.9) ▽	61 (1.1) ▽	51 (1.3)	30 (1.0)
Belgium (Flemish) †	76 (1.0) ▲	95 (0.5) △	91 (0.8) △	71 (0.9)	38 (1.1) ▼	27 (1.1) ▽
Bulgaria	53 (1.3) ▼	90 (0.8)	89 (0.8) △	81 (1.1) ▲	69 (0.9) ▲	31 (1.1)
Cyprus	45 (1.3) ▼	82 (0.9) ▽	84 (0.7) ▽	73 (1.1) △	60 (1.1) △	31 (1.2)
Czech Republic †	69 (0.9) △	92 (0.4) △	86 (0.7)	62 (0.9) ▽	56 (0.8) △	32 (0.9)
Denmark †	80 (0.9) ▲	93 (0.5) △	91 (0.5) △	72 (0.9) △	47 (1.3) ▽	33 (1.0) △
England ‡	57 (1.4) ▽	89 (0.9)	85 (0.8)	56 (1.0) ▼	50 (1.0)	20 (0.9) ▼
Estonia	68 (1.1) △	92 (0.7) △	89 (0.8) △	79 (1.0) △	52 (1.2)	31 (1.0)
Finland	72 (1.0) △	95 (0.4) △	93 (0.5) △	70 (0.9)	48 (1.2) ▽	42 (1.0) ▲
Greece	53 (1.2) ▼	80 (1.0) ▽	80 (1.0) ▽	67 (1.0) ▽	49 (1.1) ▽	33 (1.0) △
Ireland	68 (1.1) △	91 (0.8) △	89 (0.7) △	70 (0.9)	53 (1.0)	21 (0.8) ▽
Italy	64 (1.5)	92 (0.7) △	86 (0.9)	67 (1.5)	35 (1.4) ▼	33 (1.7)
Latvia	49 (1.3) ▼	88 (1.0)	75 (1.1) ▼	64 (1.2) ▽	54 (1.3)	33 (1.3) △
Liechtenstein	83 (2.0) ▲	85 (1.9) ▽	86 (1.7)	69 (2.8)	41 (2.4) ▼	33 (2.3)
Lithuania	59 (1.2) ▽	95 (0.5) △	81 (1.0) ▽	82 (0.8) ▲	73 (0.8) ▲	29 (0.9)
Luxembourg	65 (1.0)	84 (0.6) ▽	79 (0.7) ▽	65 (0.8) ▽	43 (0.8) ▽	33 (0.8) △
Malta	56 (1.4) ▽	82 (1.2) ▽	84 (1.0) ▽	70 (0.9)	57 (1.1) △	23 (1.1) ▽
Poland	67 (1.2) △	91 (0.6) △	88 (0.8) △	71 (0.9)	75 (1.0) ▲	30 (1.2)
Slovak Republic <sup>1</sup>	62 (1.7)	94 (0.5) △	90 (1.0) △	63 (1.6) ▽	60 (1.4) △	39 (1.5) △
Slovenia	69 (1.4) △	89 (0.7)	87 (0.8) △	80 (1.2) ▲	40 (1.3) ▼	26 (1.3) ▽
Spain	49 (1.2) ▼	83 (0.8) ▽	82 (0.9) ▽	70 (0.9)	44 (1.1) ▽	28 (0.8) ▽
Sweden	71 (1.1) △	92 (0.5) △	87 (0.6) △	72 (1.0) △	56 (1.0) △	30 (1.0)
Switzerland †	81 (1.0) ▲	91 (0.6) △	86 (0.9)	65 (1.2) ▽	39 (1.6) ▼	26 (1.4) ▽
European ICCS average	65 (0.3)	89 (0.2)	86 (0.2)	70 (0.2)	52 (0.3)	30 (0.2)
Country not meeting sampling requirements						
Netherlands	75 (1.5)	91 (1.2)	88 (1.1)	73 (1.9)	41 (2.0)	19 (1.6)

**National percentage**

▲ more than 10 percentage points above European ICCS average    △ significantly above European ICCS average  
 ▽ significantly below European ICCS average    ▼ more than 10 percentage points below European ICCS average

**Notes:**

- ( ) Standard errors appear in parentheses. Because results are rounded to the nearest whole number, some totals may appear inconsistent.
- † Met guidelines for sampling participation rates only after replacement schools were included.
- ‡ Nearly satisfied guidelines for sample participation only after replacement schools were included.
- <sup>1</sup> National Desired Population does not cover all of International Desired Population.



Table 2: National averages for students' attitudes toward European political unification

Country	Students' Attitudes Regarding Political Unification of European Countries					
	Average scale score	30	40	50	60	70
Austria	51 (0.3) △					
Belgium (Flemish) †	49 (0.3) ▽					
Bulgaria	53 (0.3) ▲					
Cyprus	54 (0.3) ▲					
Czech Republic †	48 (0.2) ▽					
Denmark †	47 (0.2) ▼					
England ‡	49 (0.3) ▽					
Estonia	47 (0.4) ▽					
Finland	45 (0.2) ▼					
Greece	51 (0.3) △					
Ireland	47 (0.3) ▽					
Italy	51 (0.2) △					
Latvia	52 (0.3) △					
Liechtenstein	49 (0.5) ▽					
Lithuania	50 (0.2)					
Luxembourg	52 (0.2) △					
Malta	53 (0.3) ▲					
Poland	50 (0.3)					
Slovak Republic <sup>1</sup>	50 (0.3)					
Slovenia	52 (0.2) △					
Spain	52 (0.3) △					
Sweden	50 (0.2)					
Switzerland †	48 (0.3) ▽					
ICCS European average	50 (0.1)					
Country not meeting sampling requirements						
Netherlands	50 (0.4)					

**National percentage**

- ▲ more than 3 score points above ICCS European average
- △ significantly above ICCS European average
- ▼ more than 3 score points below ICCS European average
- ▽ significantly below ICCS European average

■ Average score +/- confidence interval

On average, students with a score in the range indicated by this color have more than a 50% probability of responding to positive statements about European unification with:

Disagree or strongly disagree
Agree or strongly agree

**Notes:**

- ( ) Standard errors appear in parentheses. Because results are rounded to the nearest whole number, some totals may appear inconsistent.
- † Met guidelines for sampling participation rates only after replacement schools were included.
- ‡ Nearly satisfied guidelines for sample participation only after replacement schools were included.
- <sup>1</sup> National Desired Population does not cover all of International Desired Population.

*Table 3: Approaches to civic and citizenship education in the curriculum for lower-secondary education in European ICCS countries*

Country	Approaches to Civic and Citizenship Education in the Curriculum for Lower-Secondary Education						
	Specific subject (compulsory)	Specific subject (optional)	Integrated into several subjects	Cross-curricular	Assemblies and special events	Extra-curricular activities	Classroom experience/ethos
Austria			●	●			
Belgium (Flemish)			●	●	●	●	●
Bulgaria			●	●	●	●	●
Cyprus			●	●	●	●	●
Czech Republic	●		●	●			
Denmark <sup>1</sup>			●	●			●
England	●		●	●	●	●	●
Estonia	●		●	●			
Finland			●	●		●	●
Greece <sup>2,3</sup>	*		●		●		●
Ireland	●		●	●	●	●	●
Italy			●	●	●	●	●
Latvia			●	●	●	●	●
Liechtenstein			●		●	●	●
Lithuania	●		●	●	●	●	●
Luxembourg	●		●	●	●	●	●
Malta			●	*	●	●	●
Netherlands			●			●	
Poland	●				●	●	
Slovak Republic	●			*	*	*	*
Slovenia	●		●		●		●
Spain	●		●	●	●	●	●
Sweden			●	●			
Switzerland <sup>4</sup>	●		●	●			●

**Approaches**

- For all study programs and school types
- \* For some study programs

**Notes:**

- <sup>1</sup> No formal national curriculum but a series of ministry guidelines that form a "common curriculum" which includes civic and citizenship education.
- <sup>2</sup> Data relate to the ICCS target grade because there are differences in approach between grades within the lower-secondary phase.
- <sup>3</sup> Civic and citizenship education is not taught in the ICCS target grade and there is no intended integration. However, civics and citizenship topics can arise in a number of subjects.
- <sup>4</sup> There are considerable differences in approach between the Swiss cantons. In some cantons, civic and citizenship education is a curriculum subject, while in others it is integrated into several subjects.

**Source:** ICCS 2009 national contexts survey; reference year is 2008/2009.