

COMPETENCE **FRAMEWORK** **for European** **Citizenship** **Educators**

Why a competence framework?

Competence frameworks started to be developed in the 1970s as a way of going beyond the more traditional frameworks working with *skills* and *knowledge*, to integrate the essential dimensions of *attitudes*, *motivations* and *inclinations* which are decisive in both the process of learning and in the ways learning is mobilized and used. In the context of democratic or citizenship education, these dimensions are crucial since the learning that is required to take place is holistic and potentially pertinent and transformative of every dimension of a person's life and identity, or, in a more traditional vocabulary, formative of their *character*.

A competence framework can be useful both for educators in designing processes and formats which are targeted to developing and reinforcing aspects of learning that are of importance for learning which is practically applied to life situations, and can be useful for educators and learners in assessing their own learning. This competence framework is designed in a way that it can be used and adapted by formal, non-formal and informal educators, and is intended as an inspiration for further development.

Shortcomings of a competence framework

A risk present in democracy education in general, and in competencies as a way of approaching practical action, is to reinforce the idea amongst learners that success or failure is a matter of individual responsibility. Particularly when it comes to dimensions of life like citizenship, politics and social change, individual skills, knowledge, competences and capacities only go so far: both the possibility of actually taking meaningful action as a citizen, and the chance that such action has a meaningful impact, depend on factors which are largely out of the individual citizen's control. These factors include living in a society in which there are freedoms of expression and assembly, in which there are meaningful democratic procedures and rule of law, with a relatively stable climate which is hospitable to human flourishing, and in which the norms and values of active citizenship are sufficiently widely shared in the population. An important part of democratic education is precisely about learners understanding the importance of these systemic conditions in which democracy and human autonomy is possible, the importance of upholding these conditions, and that upholding such conditions usually requires collective action.

A simple way of counteracting the individualizing tendencies of contemporary educational structures and talk of competences, is to work with learners to apply the competence framework to collectives such as the school as a whole, the city, the country... evaluating to what extent these competences are shared and widespread.

Going beyond literacy to critical consciousness

Recent years have seen the proliferation of 'literacy' frameworks for learning: political

literacy, media literacy, digital literacy, futures literacy, sustainability literacy and so on. The trend itself suggests that the number of domains in which literacy is important is likely to multiply. Developing the competences to understand these areas of life is of course important, but this competence framework starts from the conviction that developing a broader ‘critical consciousness’, as first formulated by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire in the 1970s, is more fundamental because it seeks to enable learners to critically engage with any area of collective life they might encounter, by promoting a critical approach which integrates a political awareness of power dynamics and injustice, and is also deeply committed to agency and transformation. The risk of literacy frameworks is to enable learners to understand a phenomenon, for example how they are being manipulated by fake news, but not to intervene to change or transform that phenomenon: for example, by taking action to address the reasons fake news spread (which range from the vested interests of media and social media companies, to geopolitical interference, to personal ambitions, wealth generation, power-grabs, scape-goating or the insecurities of individuals).

How this competence framework is structured

This competence framework for European citizenship education is structured by knowledge, skills and dispositions. For each category, several levels are developed, starting from a basic level to a more advanced level. For this experimental and draft competence framework, these are not yet associated with ages or benchmarked to other learning frameworks (such as national curricula), which would require much more testing in different contexts.

For adults reading today the competence framework, it may seem that some elements of knowledge taken to be quite fundamental at basic level are somewhat esoteric in some parts of Europe, for example knowing the dates of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus or the Yugoslav wars, the longer planetary history of our earth, or even the basics of the European institutions themselves. This is as it should be: a European citizenship education which is dignified of the name should go well beyond what older generations have learnt in national educational systems, it should both have a wider geographical and historical scope, and integrate elements of the history of sciences and earth sciences amongst other innovations.

The elements of attitudes may also seem to people brought up under previous educational paradigms to be quite advanced or difficult, but experiences of teaching shows that young people in particular can quickly develop competences of teamwork and dealing with ambiguity and uncertainty which can surprise older people. To prepare learners to face contemporary social, political and ecological issues requires acknowledging this complexity, difficulty, uncertainty and degrees of volatility, which previous educational models have often tried to eradicate. Anything less will rightly seem to learners as inauthentic.

Types of problems	Simple Like baking a cake	Complicated Like making a rocket	Complex Like raising a child
	Easy to do. Re-creating the proven. Low risk of failure. Can do it myself.	Difficult to do. Improving what works. Risks are many & managed. The right team can do it.	Iterative, ambiguous risk not easily managed. The village is needed. Relationships are key.
	Known Easy. I can do this.	Knownable Difficult but doable	Unknowable No “right” answer

Adapted from Glouberman & Zimmer (2022)

What do we mean by citizenship education?

Education for democracy can look different across Europe, depending on each country’s traditions. It is mainly based on ideas from civic education and citizenship education. These two areas are closely related but not exactly the same. This section gives some background to help teachers understand the approach and purpose behind this competence framework.

Civic Education

Civic education is a planned and organized effort to give students the skills and knowledge they need to take an active part in society. It is essential for a healthy democracy because it helps citizens understand complex social issues and take action to solve them.

Civic education is a broad subject that connects with many areas of the school curriculum. It does not only happen in schools—it also occurs outside the classroom, through non-formal and informal learning

Civic education typically includes knowledge, skills, and attitudes that help people participate responsibly in society.

- ▶ **Civic knowledge** is understanding key ideas and knowing how to apply them in different situations.
- ▶ **Civic skills** involve both thinking and participation abilities.
- ▶ **Civic dispositions** are the values and behaviors—like respect, fairness, and active listening—that support equality and good communication (Muleya, 2018).

Citizenship Education

Citizenship education is based on the idea of citizenship, though this concept can be controversial. At its core, citizenship describes the relationship between individuals and

a political community—usually this has been the nation-state. The goal of citizenship education is to help people understand their role as citizens, encourage them to take these roles seriously, and reflect critically on their rights and responsibilities. Citizenship education often promotes shared civic values that help people live together in society. There are different ways to approach citizenship education. A narrow approach focuses mainly on political literacy—teaching facts about citizenship, political ideas, institutions, and issues. However, many scholars argue for a broader approach that also develops moral and social responsibility and encourages community participation, and this is the approach adopted for this competence framework. From this wider perspective, citizenship education should help students build values, skills, attitudes, and commitments, not just knowledge. More recently, some educators have called for citizenship education to extend beyond the nation-state and include a global dimension, preparing students to think and act as global citizens. This competence framework seeks to prepare learners to be responsible planetary actors with European citizenship.

Democratic culture

Democracy has been described as a form of life in which citizens collectively inquire into shared problems. From this perspective, a fundamental assumption is that democracy cannot thrive unless it is rooted in a culture that not only embraces democracy but also actively supports it. Although democracy requires democratic institutions and laws, these cannot function effectively unless they are rooted in a culture of democracy, encompassing in the broadest sense democratic dispositions, attitudes, and practices. Thus, rather than referring to “democracy”, numerous voices have started placing the emphasis on the need to cultivate a “culture of democracy”. (see Council of Europe, 2016; 2018).

The work of the Council of Europe in this area has been groundbreaking. In the Council’s publication *Competences for Democratic Culture: Living Together as Equals in Culturally Diverse Democratic Societies*, it is stated “The aim is not to teach students what to think, but rather how to think, in order to navigate a world where not everyone holds their views, but we each have a duty to uphold the democratic principles which allow all cultures to co-exist.” (Council of Europe, 2016, p. 7).

This approach directly impacts how democracy and democratic citizenship are addressed within the framework of compulsory education. In this line, the *Reference framework* on competences for democratic culture identifies a set of competences that need to be acquired by learners if they are to become effective engaged citizens and live peacefully together with others as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies.

The Framework points at:

- 1. values** (valuing human dignity and human rights, valuing cultural diversity, valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law);
- 2. attitudes** (openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and

- practices, respect, civic-mindedness, responsibility, self-efficacy, tolerance of ambiguity);
- 3. skills** (autonomous learning skills, analytical and critical thinking skills, skills of listening and observing, empathy, flexibility and adaptability, linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills, co-operation skills, conflict-resolution skills); and
- 4. knowledge and critical understanding** (knowledge and critical understanding of the self, knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication, knowledge and critical understanding of the world: politics, law, human rights, culture, cultures, religions, history, media, economies, environment, sustainability) as key areas to foster in order to preparing learners for life as democratically and interculturally competent citizens (Council of Europe, 2018).

Whilst the Council of Europe competency framework is a landmark work that has many uses, the competence framework developed here is at once more specific and more ambitious than the Council of Europe framework. It is more specific in targeting European Union citizenship, and it is more ambitious in its potentialities for large scale political and social change of planetary dimensions, and in more thoroughly integrating the dimension of the social imagination as the level on which profound political and social transformation takes place (following Castoriadis amongst others).

Another important difference is that the dimension of ‘values’, introduced by the Council of Europe into its competence framework (as something of an innovation) is not prioritised here. The Council of Europe framework argues that educating values is essential because otherwise the competences would not be democratic, but generally political and compatible with authoritarian regimes. Avoiding talk of values in this competence framework is motivated by two counter arguments: firstly that the articulation of values in an abstract way can be counterproductive from an educational perspective, and rather learners should be accompanied in drawing out their own value judgement based on historical, geographical and experiential learnings that are part of democratic education; and secondly that the democratic attitudes, practices and dispositions that are part of this competence framework are simply not compatible with authoritarianism attitudes either at micro or macro levels.

Competence Framework

Knowledge (critical understanding of the world)

1. of history of country in relation to other countries

- ↪ understanding that you live in one country amongst others
- ↪ understanding that countries have different perspectives and histories
 - ↪ understanding specificities of how different countries may view differently the same historical event, the same political issue and the reasons for this
 - ↪ being able to explain how these different understandings influence contemporary politics

2. of changing borders and statuses

- ↪ knowing that borders and shapes of countries change over time, that some countries did not even exist in the recent past
- ↪ knowing that wars have been fought over border issues and being able to name some wars and how the territorial dispute was involved
- ↪ knowing examples of border conflicts that have been frozen, or have been resolved in other ways

3. Of history of colonialism and empire

- ↪ being aware that Europe has had several empires, both inside of Europe and in the rest of the world
- ↪ being able to name specific empires and give indications on a map of which places and countries were part of which empires
- ↪ awareness of the slave trade and histories of racism
 - ↪ knowledge of societies that were impacted by European colonialism, and what some of those impacts were (both positive and negative)
 - ↪ knowledge of how empires ended and why, and knowledge of how the effects of imperialism and colonialism continue to shape societies, economies, identities and geopolitics

4. of 20th century wars, totalitarianism

- ↪ knowledge of the years and names of the world wars, the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, of the fall of the Berlin wall, of 1992 breakup of the Soviet Union, and years and names of the Yugoslav wars
- ↪ knowledge of the crimes of Fascism, Nazism and Stalinism, and its impacts on the general population and on specific minority groups (including Jewish people, disabled, racialized people, LGBTQI+ and political dissidents)
- ↪ knowledge of historical conditions, decisions and events that led to the emergence of

Fascism, Nazism and Stalinism, and totalitarian nationalism, knowledge of resistance movements and initiatives that existed in every country

- ↪ knowledge of the continued disputes emerging from 20th century wars and how they affect contemporary politics, and knowledge of continued presence of totalitarian attitudes and ideologies

5. of European Union history and institutions

- ↪ knowing that the European Union exists and countries that are part of it
- ↪ knowing what led to the creation of the European Union and the stages of its creation
- ↪ knowing the difference with the Council of Europe and United Nations
- ↪ knowing the different institutions of the European Union, including Parliament, Commission and Council, and being able to summarise their different roles
- ↪ knowing the stages of enlargement of the European Union, and being able to name accession countries
- ↪ knowing about the role and importance of the European budget, and understanding the debate about competences of the EU

6. of democratic tools and practices

- ↪ knowing about elections and what political positions are elected when (at local, national and EU scales)
- ↪ knowing about other democratic practices than elections, including petitions
- ↪ knowing about advantages and shortcomings of each form of democratic practice, and how they can be combined

7. of planetary scale challenges

- ↪ having a sense of the history of the planet extending well beyond human history
- ↪ understanding some of the main threats to life on the planet because of climate change and that there are some solutions and mitigation strategies, both on a personal and a collective level
- ↪ understanding how climate change and biodiversity related threats impact different people and places differently
- ↪ being able to give examples of specific measures that can be taken to address climate change

8. of the role of social movements and workers unions

- ↪ knowing what a social movement is and being able to give some examples
- ↪ knowledge of some major social advances brought by social movements or trade unions (eg. limiting working hours, paid holidays and sick leave, public recognition of reality of climate change, or resistance to authoritarianism)
- ↪ knowledge of diversity of social movements, tensions between different social movements
- ↪ knowledge of changes in composition of social movements and workers movements over time, notably in interaction with technological innovation

9. of gender-related inequalities and identities

- ↪ understanding existence of the spectrum of different gender identities
 - ↪ basic knowledge of the fundamental issues of inequality, including discrimination, health and body issues, career pay and work issues, childrearing and childcare, domestic work and sexuality related dimensions
 - ↪ knowledge of progress in addressing inequalities, the role of the feminist and LGBTQI movements and of political initiative (for example in winning the right to abortion)
 - ↪ knowledge of backsliding and threats to gender related rights
 - ↪ knowledge of contemporary debates and initiatives of the European Union to advance gender equality

10. understanding of different economic interests in society

- ↪ knowledge of different sectors of the economy (agriculture, industry, services, research and development, public sector etc)
- ↪ knowledge of different interests of business owners and stakeholders, employers, workers and consumers
 - ↪ knowledge of forms of intermediation between different economic interests, including role of trade unions and collective bargaining, role of consumer associations, employer associations
 - ↪ knowledge of how lobbying and political influence on behalf of different economic interests works
 - ↪ understanding of transparency regulations and rules

11. of geopolitics

- ↪ knowledge of existence of major world powers, and what gives them power and influence
 - ↪ understanding of different forms of power – military, economic, cultural...
 - ↪ knowledge of some contemporary geopolitical conflicts or competitions
 - ↪ understanding of position of Europe inside geopolitical conflicts and competitions

12. of role of science and technology

- ↪ understanding differences between scientific knowledge, conjectures, beliefs and conspiracy theories
- ↪ understanding that science has developed over history and is constantly being tested and improved by researchers and scientists
 - ↪ understanding that scientific knowledge and progress has come from throughout the world, and different kinds of people many times ignored or persecuted in their life-times
 - ↪ knowledge of how technological innovation and scientific knowledge has interacted and shaped human lives and the planet – in, for example, domains of medicine, organization of work and the economy, energy, social interactions, politics
 - ↪ understanding of risk and the unknowns of science and technology, and strategies of risk management
 - ↪ understanding cycles of innovation and disruption and social and economic implications

Skills

1. teamwork

- ↪ skill of collaborating on the same task
- ↪ skill of breaking down an activity into different tasks that are role of different members of team
- ↪ skills of mediating conflicts, finding common agreements, understanding of emotional and rational dynamics of disagreements and teamwork
- ↪ skills of mentoring and coaching

2. understanding of and working across differences

- ↪ skill of recognizing differences
- ↪ skill of identifying personal reaction to difference, overcoming reluctances and hesitations, 'stepping out of comfort zone'
- ↪ skill of valourising difference, asking about different points of view in a productive way
- ↪ skills of team composition and dynamics which bring full benefit of different perspectives, experiences and skill sets

3. balancing of interests, compromise

- ↪ skill of recognizing underlying interests and stakes of different parties
- ↪ skill of identifying areas of possible common interest or common ground
- ↪ skills of negotiation, of building compromise, of leadership to focus on the bigger picture or joint goal

4. democratic decision making

- ↪ skills of participating in and respecting results of majority votes
- ↪ skill of recognizing different decision making options, and evaluating which is more appropriate to the decision that needs to be taken
- ↪ skills of explaining the democratic legitimacy of a decision taken to outsiders, or people who challenge that legitimacy

5. finding information on a topic

- ↪ knowing where to look in library, or online for reliable information
- ↪ skill of extracting relevant information from source, and cross checking information against other sources
- ↪ developing an exposition, an argument or case based on information that has been extracted, ordering the information in the best way for the purpose intended

6. asking for information from a state authority

- ↪ knowing which state authority to ask for specific information (regarding policies, procedures, rights, under transparency rules...)
- ↪ formulating requests to authorities in a way that is appropriate to receive a response

- ↪ understanding the response of state authorities, and knowing when and how to ask for more information

7. getting information from lawyers and specialists

- ↪ knowing what kind of information lawyers and specialists can provide on citizenship matters and where to find contacts
- ↪ knowing how to request information from lawyers and specialists in an appropriate way; understanding what is likely to be paid-for advice and what pro bono advice means
- ↪ being able to evaluate legal advice and information, and knowing how to act upon it

8. addressing authorities and accountability

- ↪ judging when it is appropriate to challenge authorities (state, corporate, media) on their actions or statements, and on which basis to do this
- ↪ knowing how to formulate complaints, or freedom of information requests, or finding support from other political actors

9. finding economic and personnel resources and using resources responsibly

- ↪ evaluating the needs for economic or personnel resources to advance on an issue
- ↪ skill in requesting, collecting or recruiting the economic and personnel resources to advance a cause
- ↪ skills in managing resources responsibly and in an accountable way

10. generating public awareness

- ↪ skill in identify issues of wider public interest
- ↪ skill in press relations, drawing attention to a cause
- ↪ skill in working with other campaigns and causes in a coalition to build public awareness

Attitudes

1. imaginative capability

- ↪ attitude that change is possible and many things in social, political and economic life are not inevitable
- ↪ attitude of openness to ideas and alternatives, and generation of those ideas and alternatives
- ↪ motivation to seek out alternative ideas and experiments

2. futures thinking

- ↪ attitude that future is not inevitable, that many futures are possible
- ↪ disposition to keep positive futures open
- ↪ motivation to work towards positive futures

3. critical awareness

- ↪ attitude of constructive critique: asking questions, finding shortcomings, but also proposing constructive solutions
- ↪ disposition of seeking to improve on shortcomings and problems
- ↪ motivation to innovate and be enterprising

4. sense of responsibility

- ↪ attitude of feeling responsible both on the basis of individual actions and historical advantages from which one might benefit, and from being in a position to take action on an issue
- ↪ disposition to not be overwhelmed or paralysed by guilt or individual responsibility, but to keep in responsibility in perspective – ‘you can only do what you can do’
- ↪ motivation to lead others, to help others exercise their responsibility

5. agency

- ↪ can do attitude: willing to try, willing to fail if we must, succeed if we can
- ↪ disposition to seek out opportunities to act, to exercise agency
- ↪ motivation to constantly want to advance the collective conditions of agency

6. solidarity

- ↪ attitude of trying to understand other people's struggles
- ↪ disposition of wanting to constructively help other people in their struggle, to find proactive and productive ways of improving the situation
- ↪ motivation to act and take risk on behalf of others

7. persistence

- ↪ attitude of continuing to press for change or rights until they are granted, understanding it may take a long time
- ↪ disposition of completing objectives that one has set for oneself

- ↪ motivation to keep on trying, despite setbacks

8. comfort with ambiguity and uncertainty

- ↪ attitude of appreciating not everything can be known in advance of taking action or making some initiative
- ↪ disposition of being comfortable with some level of risk, of risk of making mistakes
 - ↪ motivation to take a chance and correct course if necessary, rather than not to act



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