

EQAVET PLA: ‘Quality assuring education for democratic citizenship in VET (24-25 April 2024)

Around 71 participants attended the online EQAVET PLA, representing more than 26 EU countries: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom, Georgia, Albania and Kosovo.

The majority of the PLA participants work at a Ministry/national authority related to VET. There was also a significant representation of participants from VET providers and research institutions.

In brief, the first day of the EQAVET PLA started with three presentations from DG EAC, the Council of Europe, and a thematic expert with the aim of setting the scene and introducing emerging trends, current opportunities and challenges linked to democratic citizenship education in VET. Participants were then introduced to three practical examples reflecting the contexts in the Netherlands, Portugal, and an international EU-funded project. On the second day, the participants delved deeper into the topic by listening to presentations from a student union representative and national examples from Slovakia and Georgia. On both days, participants were divided into smaller group discussions and engaged in interactive activities.

Flash Report

The first day focused on understanding the topic of democratic citizenship education and gathering country-specific examples. The second day shifted the focus towards quality assurance and its role in mitigating a commonly understood implementation gap (i.e., the difference between what is set as learning objectives for democratic citizenship education and how it is implemented in on the ground).

Koen Bois d’Enghien, DG EMPL, European Commission opened the EQAVET PLA underlining that the topic of democratic citizenship education is becoming increasingly important in VET and that quality assurance is an instrumental element in ensuring that implemented initiatives lead to impact including development of citizenship competences amongst learners. In general, education for democratic citizenship education is less prominent in VET than in general education. The EQAVET reference framework and quality assurance can help to identify potential implementation gaps – and the EQAVET Network can offer a platform for Member States to share learnings and good practices of quality assuring input, output, outcomes and impact of education for democratic citizenship in VET.

Introduction to the topic

At the start of the event, participants were asked to share what education for democratic citizenship meant to them. The results were presented in a word cloud, see below:



Figure 1: results from a Slido question: With one or two words, what does education for democratic citizenship mean to you?

Daria Arlavi, DG EAC, European Commission (EC) was the first speaker at the EQAVET PLA, and she introduced an overview of the European Commission’s actions and initiatives supporting democratic citizenship education. Daria is the coordinator of the European Education Area Working Group on Equality and Values and explained how they have worked on the topic of democratic citizenship education. The Working Group issued among others a paper in which one of the conclusions was that most effective citizenship education is delivered not only as a special topic but rather as a cross-curricular theme. Furthermore, the European Commission has opened a public consultation linked to the interim evaluation of the European Education Area and invited the PLA participants to contribute to the [public consultation](#) by 27 June 2024.

Salvador Sala, Council of Europe, Andrea Laczik, Edge Foundation and Søren Kristensen, Techne presented the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) Guidance document on Vocational Education and Training. The document includes definitions of key terms and research on CDC in VET highlighting contextual aspects of VET (including curricula, assessments, quality control and teachers and in-company trainers) with a comparing perspective at European level. In conclusion, the guidance document indicates a need for an integrated approach and combine democratic citizenship education with other areas that can function as a catalyst for democratic competences (for example, the student councils). The guidance document should be regarded as a first step, however, there is a need for more research of how democratic citizenship education is implemented in VET.

Tomaž Deželan, University of Ljubljana acted as a thematic expert in the EQAVET PLA and provided a further introduction by summarising the background paper circulated ahead of the event. In his view, citizenship education in VET should receive more attention as it links to many on-going societal challenges (for example, related to changes in the labour market and socio-technological developments). There are several on-going barriers linked to implementing education for democratic citizenship education in VET, including a lack of strategic orientation (for example, policy objectives tend to focus on the provision in general education (GE) over VET), there is a shortage of capacity and competences across the VET sector (for example, many teachers and in-company trainers have not been trained on the topic) and there is a systematic lack of resources (for example, linked to development of teaching material). The EQAVET reference framework and QA in general can help to visualise current challenges and areas for improvements.

Democratic citizenship education in practice

This EQAVET PLA further included six presentations by a total of eleven speakers from the Netherlands, Portugal, the EU-funded project Euro4VET, Slovakia, OBESSU and Georgia showcasing how democratic citizenship is implemented in practice including how it is quality assured. In brief:

- **Chris Holman, ROC Noorderpoort** presented how citizenship education in secondary VET (MBO) is quality assured in the Netherlands.
- **Ângela Dionísio, Isabel Marques and Emília Lopes, ANQEP - National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training** introduced the Portuguese Strategy for Citizenship Education and showcased how it is quality assured as well as a practical example from a local school.
- **Sérgio Fernades, Elisabete Marques, Renato Guiomar, Insignare** discussed how the EU-funded project Euro4VET provides initiatives helping both VET teachers and students to develop EU-related citizenship awareness.
- **Lubica Gálová, Slovak EQAVET National Reference Point and Jana Feherpataky-Kuzmová, Institute for Active Citizenship** addressed how local initiatives related to developing citizenship skills in VET and GE are implemented and linked to the national quality assurance measurements.
- **Albert Janssens, the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU)** provided the PLA participants with his unique perspective on how education for democratic citizenship should be provided acquired from being VET student and his engagement in student councils. Albert stressed the importance of 'learning by doing' over theoretical approaches.
- **Dr. Kakhaber Eradze, LEP, National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement** presented the Georgian approach to quality assuring the provided education for democratic citizenship in VET, which is quality assured at system level using elements of EQAVET.

Discussions and conclusions

Across the two days, the PLA participants were divided into smaller group discussions to deep dive into the topic. The discussions on the first day were focused on collecting information (what is the status of democratic citizenship education in VET across Europe) by addressing the first three questions listed below. During the second day, the participants shifted their focus towards quality assurance by discussing how QA can help to mitigate the often-occurring implementation gap between learning objectives and the reality of provided education by discussing the three last questions listed below.

- How is democratic citizenship education being provided in VET?
- What are the strong areas/cases of democratic citizenship education provision in VET?
- What are the main weaknesses/barriers to adequate provision of democratic citizenship education in VET? How can these weaknesses be mitigated?
- How can the implementation gap (i.e., the difference between what is set as learning objectives for democratic citizenship education and how it is implemented in on the ground) be understood?

- How can QA help to mitigate the implementation gap (e.g., what is needed, evidence-based data, training for teachers/trainers etc.)?
- How can the EQAVET reference framework strengthen democratic citizenship education in VET?

The discussions showed that there are a several good practice examples across Europe, yet, implementation is patchy and often not tailored to VET, and there is a lack of systematic data on the inputs, outputs outcomes and impact. For instance, there is often no clear and common understanding on what constitutes quality and good practice in education for democratic citizenship in VET, and how this should be measured.

EQAVET Network members discussed that the EQAVET reference framework contains many relevant indicative descriptors and indicators for the quality assurance of democratic citizenship education and its principles could be used throughout the entire policy cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation and review. To speed up progress, it will be important to continue sharing experiences and enhance collaboration at European level.

Reflecting on their key learning from this EQAVET PLA that would be relevant for their work, participants responses included the following points:

- “Learning by doing rather than learning by talking about citizenship.”
- “The importance of updating content and adapting it to the VET context”.
- “Importance of data and monitoring of DCE in VET.”
- “Work together on European level!”

Further information

A more detailed synthesis report from the meeting will follow in a few weeks' time.

In case of questions, please contact the EQAVET Secretariat
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