

Giving a new impetus to citizenship education

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There is a strong need to support citizens in developing their critical and creative thinking, and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have a role to play in citizenship education. The second Interest Group on Lifelong Learning meeting took place in Brussels on 22nd of September 2015.



The current refugee crisis was the backbone of the meeting, which concentrated on 'The potential role of education and lifelong learning in safeguarding EU fundamental values'.

MEP **Sirpa Pietikäinen** (EPP, FI), Chair of the [Interest Group](#) kicked off the meeting by reminding the audience that "a civilised society functions on three equally important pillars: democracy, education, economic stability and welfare." Education can help refugees learn the local language and culture, but also plays a role in facilitating local's understanding of who the refugees are, what their status means, what it means for the society to welcome new inhabitants.

Education can counter the currently fast spreading hatred rhetoric. "We need to counter the narrative used by populists: education has a role to play there," stressed MEP **Roberta Metsola** (EPP, MT).

Citizenship learning should happen through life

"We need to demonstrate that education and in particular developing people's critical thinking is an essential part of the answer to the crisis," said MEP **Julie Ward** (S&D, UK), Vice-Chair of the Interest Group.

We should aim at a long-term transformational strategy. We cannot support active citizenship and democratic adherence if educational institutions themselves do not become democratic and inclusive and if we do not implement more collaborative learning methods. Participants discussed that this type of learning ought to take place in early years at school but also in later life. Gina Ebner, Secretary General of EAEA, underlined that "there are opportunities at a later stage in life to change around, to learn."

CSOs as key players in fostering civic competences

The key challenge for civil society is to really contribute to changing mentalities and turning our educational institutions into community learning places.

"Civil society organisations (CSOs) should push together for a participatory governance of educational institutions and reinforce the capacity of educators to teach and assess social and civic competences. Policy support actions in Erasmus+ should be strengthened to support this shift," said **Audrey Frith**, Director of the [Lifelong Learning Platform](#).

Participants stressed the need not to reinvent the wheel as civil society organisations are already very active in the field of citizenship education. "Partnerships with civil society are the best way to achieve this; the practice is already out there and has been for a very long time," confirmed Ms. Ward.

EAEA and the Lifelong Learning Platform have initiated an Interest Group on Lifelong Learning together with six Members of the European Parliament. The group brings together civil society representatives and MEPs to discuss various key issues connected to lifelong learning. It aims to fight inequalities and discrimination in education in order to reach the Europe 2020 and Education and Training 2020 headline targets.