

CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Empowering people and communities through adult learning and education

The aim of this expert paper is to provide an overview of the discussion on the topic of “Citizenship Education” (CE) from the perspective of adult learning and education (ALE) and specifically the perspective of DVV International. CE is particularly important in the context of current global policy processes such as the 7th UNESCO World Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VII) and the 5th Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE 5). Diverse global and regional debates indicate that, in view of the ecological, social, economic and digital challenges before us a new positioning of ALE is needed, which focuses on enabling active citizenship. The UNESCO report “Reimagining our futures together – a new social contract for education” or the “New European Adult Education Agenda” are examples of this debate.

For DVV International as a professional organisation in the field of ALE and development cooperation, CE traditionally plays an important role; the same can be said of many of our international partners and the German Adult Education Centres (vhs), for whom civic, holistic education is an inseparable part of their mandate.

Concepts and terms

There is no universally accepted definition of Citizenship Education. For the purposes of ALE, it seems useful to use the description of “Active Citizenship Education” used by UNESCO in the report “Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education” (RALE):

“It empowers people to actively engage with social issues such as poverty, gender, intergenerational solidarity, social mobility, justice, equity, exclusion, violence, unemployment, environmental protection and climate change. It also helps people to lead a decent life, in terms of health and well-being, culture, spirituality and in all other ways that contribute to personal development and dignity.”

This definition emphasises the relationship of Active Citizenship Education and Citizenship Education to both societal and individual learning and assigns a key role to the empowerment of people to recognise and act. DVV International shares this view, and equates the two terms. CE is about empowering individuals and communities through ALE.

In the international debate, there are a number of concepts that overlap with CE to a greater or lesser extent. The concepts of Global Citizenship Education (GCED) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) are certainly at the forefront. While there are no generally accepted, precise definitions for these two concepts, it can be said that GCED focuses primarily on the role of people as global citizens. Based on a humanistic approach, GCED aims to strengthen the normative understanding of learners as global citizens and to empower them to exercise their rights and responsibilities. A similar focus, combined with an additional emphasis on environmental aspects and a strong emphasis on action-oriented skills, is found in the roadmap and concept of ESD used by UNESCO:

“Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) empowers learners with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to take informed decisions and make responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, empowering people of all genders, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity.”

Relevant references also draw on current debates on transformative or “change-oriented” ALE. The classical concept of “transformative education” according to Mezirow must be distinguished from CE, as the former only refers to biographical and individual learning. The model of “change-oriented” ALE offers important starting points, especially for the social dimension of CE. Change-oriented ALE aims to empower people to shape change. This explicitly takes the societal aspect into account by enabling learners to build a democratic, just and ethical world together, even against resistance.

Finally, it is worth noting the danger of generalising Western concepts of democracy or societal construction globally, especially when defining the objective of CE. CE starts from the universality of human rights. It must be emphasised that, from our experience, the possibilities of implementing CE offers depend strongly on the political and cultural system. In this context, it is not always permissible to assume a Western understanding of democracy that focuses strongly on political aspects, favours representative forms and places individualistic concepts at the centre.

Our approach: cross-cutting, regional, needs-oriented

Citizenship Education is a core concern of DWV International. DWV International works worldwide to overcome disadvantage, improve sustainable livelihoods and promote the human right to education. CE is a central concept for achieving these goals. The terms “empowerment, development and dignity”, which are attributed to Citizenship Education in the RALE report by UNESCO, are core attributes of the holistic, broad-based approach to adult education that DWV International pursues. Our understanding goes far beyond the acquisition of skills and knowledge. Rather, education enables people to develop an understanding of themselves and their own social and political environment and to empower themselves to act effectively.

More than other educational sectors, ALE is oriented towards the specific needs of people, a basic prerequisite for the success of Citizenship Education. ALE makes it possible to respond to the individual circumstances of each learner. This includes regional, political and cultural conditions as well as individual learning and educational levels. Unlike school, vocational or academic education, ALE is able to be flexible in its form and can be designed as a formal, non-formal or even informal learning process, depending on the framework conditions and learning needs.

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DWV International understands Citizenship Education not only as a concrete curricular component, but rather as a central cross-cutting issue. This cross-cutting nature of CE is closely linked to the basic idea of our intersectoral approach, which we pursue in our work. In our projects, we link different concepts and learning contents with each other, depending on the framework conditions on the ground. For example, we link literacy projects with contents of democracy education, and we link income-generating measures with gender issues. There is probably no DWV International project in which the basic ideas of Citizenship Education cannot be found. At the same time, the specific perspective on CE can be very different in the more than 30 countries where we work in cooperation.

DWV International in practice

Numerous DWV International projects illustrate the effective intersectoral linkage of Citizenship Education as a cross-cutting theme in adult education. A look at various projects in Asia and Africa shows the different regional and local perspectives and framework conditions.

Mali – integrated literacy strengthens participation

The inhabitants of rural communities in Mali often do not have any official documents, neither birth certificates nor information about their family status. The main reason for this, apart from poor local administration, is the high illiteracy rate (64 percent) in the African country. The consequences of this situation are manifold and range from lack of access to schools and to health and social services to inheritance issues and denial of the right to vote. The consequences of a lack of documents are thus both personal and political.

These difficulties prompted a group of about 30 citizens from five villages in the Markala area to act. The issue was raised during REFLECT courses run by our partner organisation CERDEPE. REFLECT is a method of adult literacy that encourages participants to analyse and deal with their everyday problems. Political issues often come up in the process. In this case, the participants became aware of the disadvantages of not having valid papers. They then secured the support of the local administration and started an information campaign in five villages with the help of CERDEPE. A local radio station was won over to draw attention to the activities. It broadcast information on the awarding of official marriage certificates to couples who were already traditionally married. In the end, through the activities of the villagers, several hundred children received birth certificates and several dozen couples got their status legalised. Voter turnout in the affected villages increased measurably. The civic education provided here had a direct impact on people's living conditions.

DVV International's role in the project was not limited to supporting the REFLECT circles. It also included the provision of teaching and learning materials, the training of trainers and monitoring. In addition, the technical and management capacities of our partner CERDEPE were strengthened.

Building resilience in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

More than 30 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is still disputed in over 70 places. The EU project "Peaceful villages evolution" is implemented in six villages directly crossed by the unclear international border. While the governments of the two countries have been trying for years to find ways to clearly demarcate the border, everyday conflicts continue to arise between the inhabitants, which often result in violence. In the course of these conflicts and their communication via social media, reservations and stereotypes are reinforced on both sides. This is aggravated by the widespread idea that they cannot make a difference or decide anything.

DVV International's project seeks to strengthen residents' resilience to hostile nationalist or religious rhetoric by strengthening their cognitive, psychological, rhetorical and social skills. This is done in various ways: In the youth programme, multiplier trainings on the basics of global citizenship are offered. A peace academy for influential women accompanies the implementation of cross-border women's initiatives, and various video

clips such as "Men Represent Gender Equality and Peace" accompany these initiatives. A handbook produced in the project includes modules on civic engagement, global citizenship, digital skills, leadership, self-awareness, critical thinking, diversity and tolerance. At the halfway point of the project in December 2021, more than 4,300 participants had been reached. In the "Community Safety Dialogue", cross-generational discussions are held, addressing topics such as history, identity, family culture values and positive social norms in different formats. They include intergenerational discussions in the local tea house, schools or other public places.

Learning to live together – raising awareness of migration in Tunisia

Lack of language skills is a barrier to successful integration and participation. According to estimates by DVV International, around a quarter of the approximately 53,000 migrants in Tunisia come from countries in sub-Saharan Africa. A digitally supported survey of affected people by DVV International in cooperation with the African



Leadership and Development Association (ALDA) revealed that among the 63 per cent male and 37 per cent female respondents, they cited lack of language skills as the main problem regarding integration into Tunisian society.

There is a lack of sufficient knowledge of Arabic and knowledge of the Tunisian dialect of Arabic. In addition, there is a lack of knowledge on the part of the responsible authorities about this specific group with countries of origin south of the Sahara. Our project "Learning to live together – Inclusion of the sub-Saharan African community in Tunisia" contributes to the integration of migrants from sub-Saharan countries and thus indirectly to peaceful coexistence in Tunisia. The target groups included both people with a migration background and community representatives.



Citizenship Education in Central Asia / DWV International

More than one hundred senior staff and elected councillors from the municipalities of Soukra and Bardo took part in a course in migration management as part of the project, 67 percent of whom were female participants.

The central link to Citizenship Education was learning how to live together peacefully, which is essential for dynamically building dialogue and participation in society. In the trainings, participants were sensitised to issues of migration and learned how to integrate migrants into their local activities and programmes to ensure their socio-economic inclusion. Other topics included issues related to national legislation and access to rights and services and capacity building in administrations, as well as language courses for migrants with a focus on everyday language, which is necessary for integration in the labour market. All measures were inherent in the core values of the project, which was committed to respect for human dignity, pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between men and women.

Summary and outlook

Citizenship Education is an important component of ALE and encompasses both civic education and individual learning. It enables people to reflect and to act in a self-determined way. The concrete framework conditions thereby shape the implementation of CE. ALE is particularly suited to deliver Citizenship Education, as ALE offers flexible and needs-based provision that can be adapted and scaled regionally and locally to people, communities and regions. The core attributes of empowerment,

development and dignity are the basic prerequisites for an active, peaceful coexistence of societies and for a sustainable improvement of living conditions. Thus, the achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda also requires the global use of Citizenship Education in adult education.

In the future, the international community and international civil society actors will be called upon to define Citizenship Education as a central task and to explain the key role of adult education. The central question is how the political, legal and individual preconditions and needs of people are brought to bear in Citizenship Education. DWV International, the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association, recommends the use of Citizenship Education, particularly as a global cross-sectional task and as a key topic of any adult education – for sustainable global development.

FURTHER READINGS

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