

Executive summary

This report presents the main findings from the first review of the implementation of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC). The review process took place between March and December 2023.

The main aim of this study was to understand the extent to which the RFCDC has been used in formal education systems of member states since 2016, including its influence on policies and practices. Moreover, this review was intended as an opportunity for policy learning among member states. The results have supported the preparation of the Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024-2030 and were fed into the 26th session of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education of the Council of Europe on 28 and 29 September 2023.

Chapter 1 of the report offers an overview of the conceptual definitions guiding the study and the research design used. Chapter 2 analyses the main findings in the implementation of the RFCDC in the following areas: 1) education policy development; 2) education systems; 3) school; 4) addressing current and emerging issues such as: violence in schools, violent extremism and radicalisation; climate change; media and informational literacy; ethical implications of artificial intelligence (AI); and education in times of crisis; 5) main opportunities and challenges related to the integration of the RFCDC in education systems. The concluding chapter (Chapter 3) presents policy pointers for improvement with regard to the implementation of the RFCDC in key areas of action, and how to support further member states in undertaking this task.

The findings presented below were drawn from the analysis of evidence collected through:

- ▶ a literature and document review conducted in English and French;
- ▶ two online surveys: one for the Education Policy Advisors Network (EPAN) members (25 responses received), and one for education stakeholders across levels and sectors of education (42 responses received);
- ▶ peer learning workshops with EPAN held in May 2023;
- ▶ online focus groups (15 participants in five online focus groups);
- ▶ individual interviews with EPAN members (five).

Key findings

I. Progression in education policy development

There is a positive trend in legislation and education policy development with regard to integrating the RFCDC. Many countries have adopted, or are in the process of adopting, policies aligned with the Framework. The main findings in educational policies and practices of participating countries in the survey are summarised in various categories as follows.

- 1. Education reforms and legislation.** There is notable progress in integrating the RFCDC into education policies and legislation, although challenges remain. Government and governmental agencies are key in formulating and developing policies that incorporate the RFCDC. Policy makers are engaged in adapting the Framework to national and regional contexts, ensuring its alignment with existing education policies.
- 2. Integration of RFCDC into education systems.** There is substantial integration of the RFCDC within education systems, impacting policies, curricula, educational resources, and training and professional development. However, there is a need to dedicate more attention to integrating the RFCDC into early childhood education, vocational education and training, higher education and adult education. There is an effort to translate the RFCDC materials to provide guidance and facilitate the implementation of the Framework in formal education.
- 3. Institutional autonomy and integration.** There is a significant level of RFCDC integration in education institutions, particularly in countries where they have a greater degree of autonomy. Education institutions are fundamental in integrating the RFCDC into their curricula and teaching practices. There is a high level of activity in developing teaching resources, such as handbooks and guidelines, to aid integration. There is an effort to develop contextualised educational resources related to competences for democratic culture (CDC) in the languages of schooling, as a means to integrate CDC into the curriculum. The commitment of education institutions and education professionals is central to the practical implementation of the RFCDC in classroom and institutional settings. Their involvement includes adapting advanced teaching and learning methodologies and developing educational materials and resources to incorporate CDC.

II. Enhancing education stakeholders' engagement and co-operation

Some key aspects of the involvement of diverse education stakeholders are as follows.

- 1. Involvement of the education community.** The education community, including parents and local authorities, is recognised as an important stakeholder group in the implementation of the RFCDC. Engaging a broader education community helps to create a more supportive environment for implementing a democratic culture and democratic practices in education.
- 2. Collaboration between formal and non-formal education.** There is active collaboration between formal and non-formal education sectors, highlighting the importance of multisectoral approaches.
- 3. Role of non-governmental organisations.** Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are significantly involved in the promotion and implementation of the RFCDC, particularly in non-formal education settings. Partnerships between NGOs, educational institutions (of all levels of education) and government bodies play a pivotal role in advancing the Framework and its principles. NGOs act as crucial partners in providing capacity-building opportunities for educators and in reaching out to vulnerable groups.
- 4. International and regional co-operation.** Co-operation among member states and international organisations helps in sharing best practices, resources and experiences in implementing the RFCDC. Such co-operation facilitates a more co-ordinated response and effective adoption of the Framework across different countries.

III. Challenges in implementing the RFCDC

The report identifies significant challenges in implementing the RFCDC, especially in assessment of CDC in learners, in vocational education and training, and in higher education. These areas require further attention in terms of effective integration of the Framework. Some of the challenges in assessment, vocational education and training, and higher education as identified in the implementation of the RFCDC are as follows.

- 1. Difficulties in assessing learners' competences for democratic culture (CDC).** There is a lack of knowledge and clarity about how the RFCDC is being used for assessing CDC in learners. The assessment of CDC is not widespread or at least is underdeveloped, indicating a gap in assessing these competences effectively within educational systems. A significant challenge lies in the assessment of recognising values and attitudes, which are key components of CDC. Questions remain about whether and how attitudes can be effectively assessed and if values can be really assessed at all. The complexity of assessing competences as outcomes, as opposed to assessing subject knowledge, requires new approaches and methods to assess CDC.
- 2. Further implementation of the RFCDC into vocational education and training and in higher education.** The integration of the RFCDC into vocational education and training (VET) and in higher education needs further attention. Integrating the RFCDC into existing VET and higher education curricula presents challenges (even resistance), especially in integrating the CDC to fit VET diplomas and academic disciplines in higher education. Teachers, trainers and professors lack the training, support and resources to effectively integrate the RFCDC. There is a need for professional development programmes and research schemes that specifically target CDC.

Key recommendations

The following recommendations are prioritised to address the immediate needs in diverse areas of implementation of the RFCDC, aiming to enhance the integration and effectiveness of CDC in education systems.

- 1. Implementing the RFCDC into education to confront challenges.** Policy makers and education professionals should adapt the RFCDC to a variety of contexts, including VET and higher education, and use the RFCDC to address current and emerging issues in education.
- 2. Evaluating the implementation and development of the RFCDC in Europe.** Governments and institutions should establish mechanisms to track the progress and impact of policies related to the RFCDC. This includes having timely information about effective strategies and areas that require improvement.
- 3. Fostering opportunities to learn and practise CDC among education professionals and the education community.** There is a need for the provision of opportunities for the development of CDC among education professionals and the education community. These opportunities should cover initial teacher education, continuing professional development and strategies to support the learning and practice of CDC in learners and their families. Especial attention should also be given to vulnerable groups, such as out-of-school children and young people.
- 4. Enhancing participation and co-operation among education stakeholders.** Creating platforms for dialogue and participation of all education stakeholders is essential to foster a better understanding of the importance of CDC. The Council of Europe's new legal instrument for a European Space for Citizenship Education will be a significant opportunity to facilitate co-operation among member states.