DEMOCRAT News

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Democrat
EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

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# Key message

Democracy is central to the identity of the European Union (EU) but faces challenges like polarization, digitalization, and the need for sustainability. One way to strengthen Democracy is through education for democracy (EfD), which empowers citizens, especially youth, to engage in democratic processes. The DEMOCRAT project focuses on using transformative education to build democratic skills.

Key insights from the project include:

## Understanding of Democracy

- Democracy is not only a political order: it is also a social order forming part of our daily life.
- To protect democracy, we must enhance education that addresses digitalization and sustainability.

## From a competence framework to an outline of a European Curriculum

- A clear framework of citizenship competences should guide this shift to transformative education for democracy, complementing existing EU and Council of Europe frameworks.
- This framework will result in the outlining of a European Curriculum, helping to integrate EfD in the teaching practice at school and in other learning environments.
- The outline of the European Curriculum could also help national authorities integrate EfD into their education systems.

## Teaching and Learning democracy

- Schools should embed democratic practice in their organisation procedures and not only in specific classes.
- Learning democracy should be embedded in cooperation with local, global and digital environments.

- Students need to understand and act on their rights and responsibilities in relation to peers, teachers, parents, and local authorities and other relevant political actors.
- Teachers are crucial in creating environments where students can learn and practice democracy.

By virtue of these efforts, education can strengthen democratic engagement and citizenship.



# Challenges and changes

Democracy is facing increasing threats from polarization, extremism, mistrust in Science, and the spread of belief in conspiracy theories. Global issues like climate change, pandemics, and rising inequality pose additional challenges. These forces put core democratic values—liberty, equality, solidarity, and respect for fundamental rights—at risk.

## Digitalisation

Digitalisation is a major force in shaping society. People are active in the cyberspace, forming virtual communities across borders. This digital dimension must be taken into account in any approach to democracy.

## Sustainability

The growing responsibility towards the Planet is now part of the democratic agenda. Democratic citizenship must have a global reach that addresses environmental concerns adequately.

## European Model of Sustainable Democracy

Since Democracy is central to the EU identity, it should be prioritised as a solution to societal and environmental challenges. The EU model of democracy must be sustainable, and the EU model of sustainability must be democratic. One effective way to strengthen this model is through education for democracy (EfD) oriented to responsible democratic citizenship.

## Education for democracy

Though EfD is a part of citizenship education across the EU, it needs greater emphasis and a distinct role to counter rising anti-democratic trends. To achieve this, a coherent framework of democratic competences is required to help citizens address local, regional, national, and global issues. This framework can serve as a guide for national and regional EfD strategies, to empower citizens, especially youth, through transformative learning that strengthens democratic engagement and action.

Open social Innovation

The DEMOCRAT project is an open social innovation process based on social science evidence in the field of Education for Democracy (EfD) and related fields.

## What are social innovations?

An innovation can be defined as a novel response to technological, economic, and/or social challenges. For a solution to be considered an innovation, it must have been adopted beyond the social niche in which it was created. Social innovation refers to the creation of new solutions to social needs and problems.

## From Social Invention to Social Innovation

Social inventions, like new teaching methods, become social innovations when widely adopted and sustained over time. DEMOCRAT aims to create such social inventions in Education by developing a competence framework for responsible democratic citizenship, along with an EU curriculum and assessment tools.

These inventions will be tested in schools and educational settings, with the hope that successful models can be scaled up into broader social innovations.

## Social Innovation in Education for Democracy

A key element of the open social innovation project is the involvement of the education community from the start. DEMOCRAT identifies educational challenges in collaboration with stakeholders and has established Living Labs — structured platforms for defining social challenges, searching for solutions, and testing and refining them through Local Pilot Projects. To facilitate the conversion of the social invention into a social innovation, DEMOCRAT employs a scaling-up strategy development.

There are six national Living Labs (LLs) in Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Poland, and Spain, supported by a Transnational Living Lab to foster cross border cooperation.

## What are Living Labs

Living Labs is an iterative mutual learning process among different stakeholders during a certain period of time. DEMOCRAT used it for:

- Learning with practitioners and other stakeholders to resolve the problem of effective education for democracy and to enhance democratic commitment in the EU countries.
- Learning from one's own experience with novel approaches to education for democracy in education practice.
- Learning from others' experience with novel approaches of education for democracy in education practice.



## Living labs as means for co-creation

Living Labs provide collaborative platforms for education communities to engage in the co-creating and testing educational strategies that promote responsible democratic citizenship. To consolidate the LLs across the span of the Project and to expand the audience interested in EfD, a transnational Agora and six national Agoras have been created to use digital tool.

## Living Labs activities

In each participating country, Living Labs act as innovation hubs, organising workshops and other events to engage a wide range of stakeholders in an open social innovation process. More than 100 participants per Living Lab (including public authorities, teachers and experts) have taken part, sharing best practices and discussing the principles of democracy education. Discussions have covered topics such as the knowledge framework for responsible democratic citizenship, the outline of the European curriculum and assessment tools.

## Past Workshops

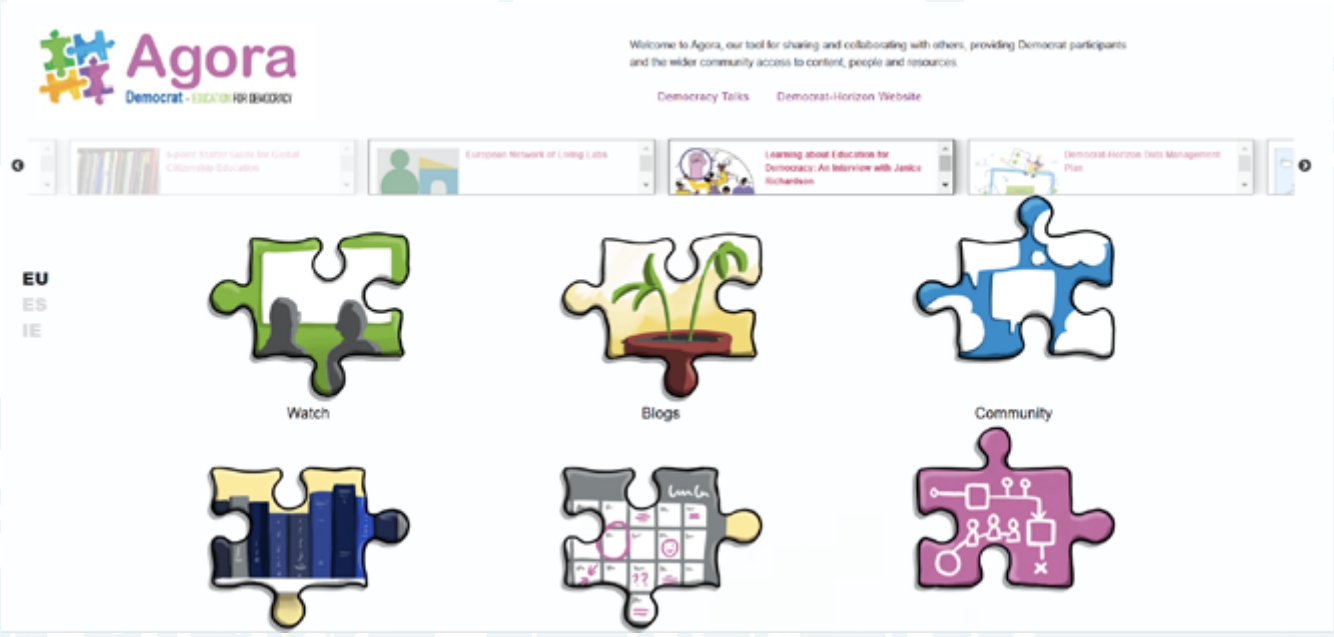
To date, three series of national and transnational workshops (Amsterdam, Helsinki and Dublin) have been successfully completed. These workshops focused on three topics: brainstorming ideas for the project's vision, validating the competence framework and curriculum, and designing local educational projects to test the framework in real contexts.

## Future Workshops

The next phase will comprise two workshop series (Düsseldorf and Barcelona). They will focus on monitoring and assessing the Local Pilot Projects, refining tools and materials, and developing strategies for scaling up successful innovations.

# AGORA

DEMOCRAT's digital platform Agora serves as the online backbone of the Living Labs. It enables stakeholders to participate digitally in each of the six national Living Labs, in addition to the physical participation already taking place. It is a tool for sharing and collaborating, offering a flexible structure that can be adapted to suit changing needs and welcoming the involvement of scholars, researchers, practitioners and other relevant stakeholders both from within and without the immediate project community.




## Transnational and National Agoras

The transnational **English-language Agora** is designed to facilitate cross-national co-creation through the sharing of experiences, mutual learning, and debate. The central Agora is populated by Agoras in the language(s) of the six constituted Living labs. The decision to adapt this structure was taken to ensure effective communication with the different national communities of educators, education policymakers, parents and students, which generally communicate in their national languages.

## Agora's services

The **Agora** is an essential platform for engaging the DEMOCRAT Project partners with a diverse range of stakeholders involved in EfD across Europe and beyond. The Agora enables the sharing of background documents, blogs, interviews and other videos with EfD stakeholders at the international and national levels. It is a flexible tool that can be adapted to address specific needs as identified by stakeholders, subject to available resources. In this context, the Transnational Agora already hosts "Democracy Talks" featuring a different EfD expert as a guest each time, at the initiative of the Democrat Project partners.

## Democracy Talks

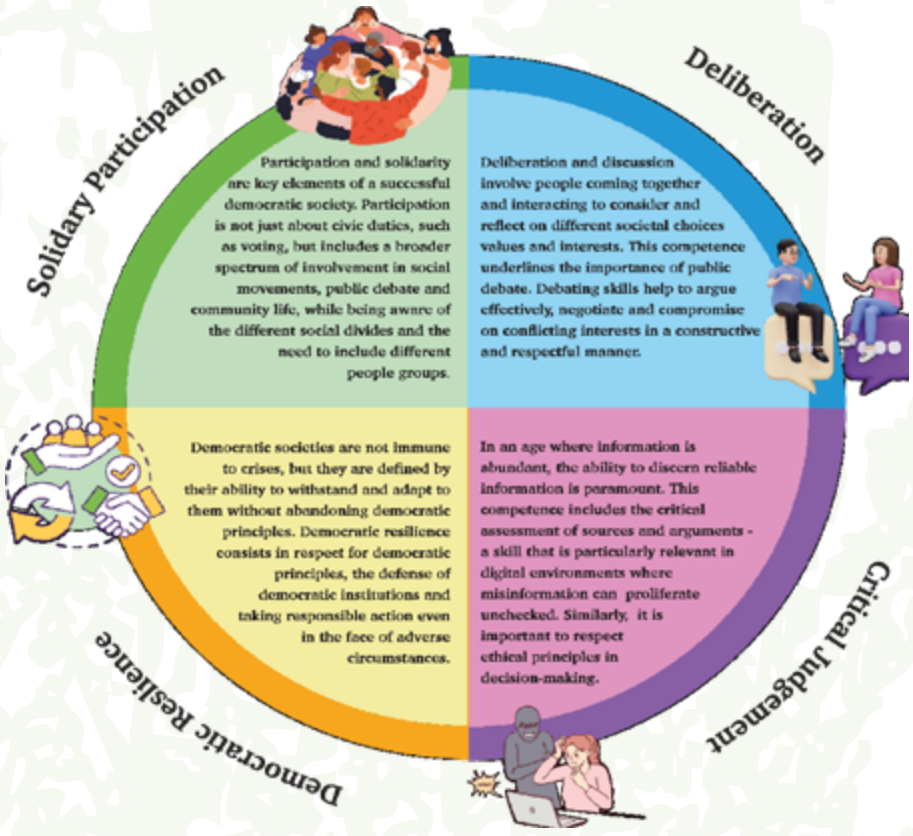
To encourage the involvement of international stakeholders and disseminate project outcomes, the transnational Agora features online sessions known as **Democracy Talks**, where international EfD academic experts share their knowledge and gain insights into the Democrat project. In 2024, the Democracy Talks invited university partners of the Democrat project to share insights on their respective countries. International experts, including Katarina Popović from Serbia (Secretary General International Council for Adult Education) and Valeria Damiani from Italy (Convener of the Research on Citizenship Education network,) also contributed to the discussions. Looking ahead to 2025, featured guests will include Ingeborg Breines, an international expert in Education for Peace, Global Citizenship and Democracy, and Timothy Murphy from the University of Limerick, who will discuss Pedagogical Thoughtfulness for Democracy

# Results

The DEMOCRAT project has successfully concluded its first project period with intensive work achieving the following results:

## Shared Vision and Competence Framework

During the first 6 month, the Democrat project has developed a shared vision for the future of Education of Democracy and outlined a Competence Framework for Responsible Democratic Citizenship, which include four competences: **solidary participation, deliberation, critical judgment and democratic resilience**.

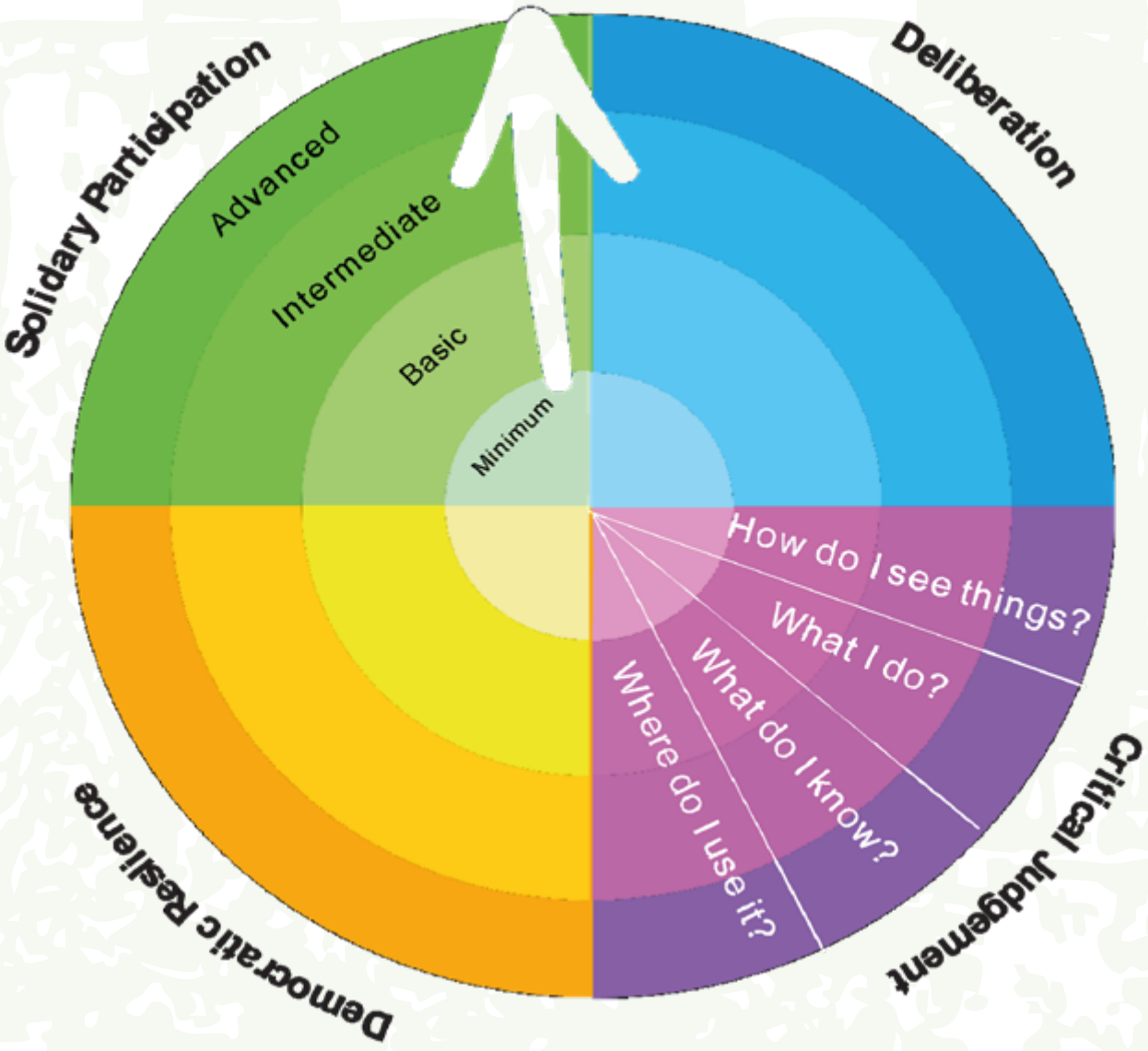



## Statistical Analysis

A statistical analysis has been conducted using the European Social Survey dataset to analysis the relationship between democratic ideals and attitudes and political participation. This was completed with data from the European Values Survey. It is assumed that an increase of a-democratic ideals and attitudes accompanied by higher political participation of these groups represents a risk for liberal representative democracies. The analysis also provides highly relevant indicators for the development of EfD programmes aimed at fostering to strengthen responsible democratic agency among young people and subsequently among all European citizens and non-citizens, with a particular focus on the social groups with low and medium political ideals.

## Outline of European Curriculum

Analysing civic education landscape across six European countries, their curricula and pedagogical practices has enabled the outline of a European Curriculum based on the Competence Framework for Responsible Democratic Citizenship. Both will be tested in Local Pilot Project. This outline facilitates also to advance in the development of the tools for the RDC competences assessment.






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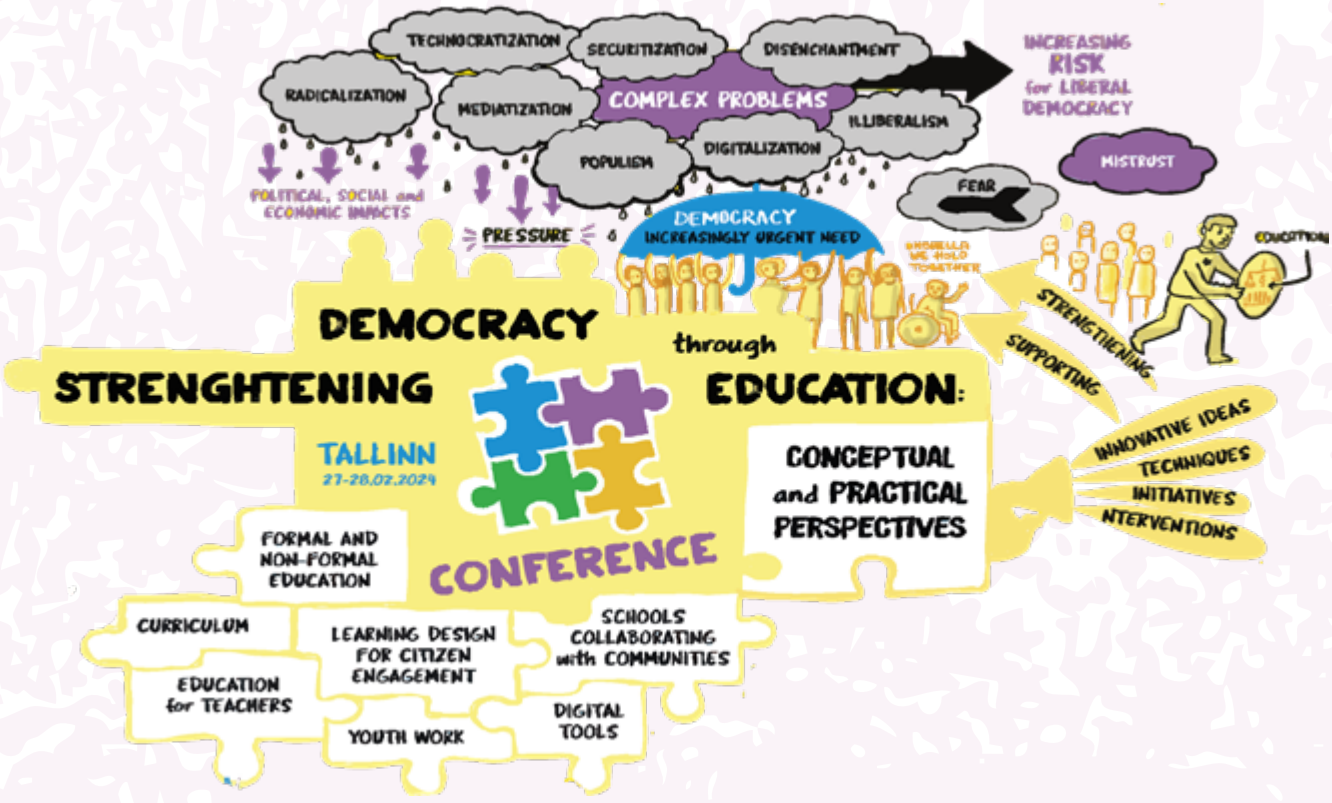
# Conferences

The project DEMOCRAT planned to organise a mid-term conference (M12) and a final conference (M34) targeting key national/international stakeholders to raise awareness on the project's activities, foster debate and disseminate the results achieved.

## 1st Conference in Tallinn

The successful mid-term conference was organised by TLU in Tallin in February 2024 and served as an additional tool to engage stakeholders and receive their valuable feedback. The event attracted more participants than originally planned with well over a 100 people in attendance. A detailed report can be found on the **project website.**

Its purpose was to present DEMOCRAT's vision of education for democracy and the competence framework, to present the preliminary results of the statistical analysis and outline if the European Curriculum, to open spaces for other European projects working on education for democracy, and to provide spaces for exchange of experiences and knowledge among practitioners in the field. More than 100 persons attended the conferences.



## Final Conference in Barcelona

The Final Conference will take place in Barcelona in turn of the 20th of November 2025. The conference will focus on results achieved with a view to strengthen and scale up EfD in national education systems. It will present the Local Pilot Projects and their interventions. It will formulate policy recommendations to support the adoption of the proposed EfD strategy by policy makers. Furthermore it will foster the uptake of the EfD toolbox (RDC competences framework, EfD curricula, pedagogical tools, etc) by practitioners and education centres

## Local Pilot Projects

In each participating country, Local Pilot Projects will be established compromising series of interventions in schools. Through these interventions the proposed solutions will be tested in practice, emphasizing the four key competencies: solidary participation, deliberation, critical judgement, and democratic resilience. The specific interventions will be conducted by the teachers and assessed by the national team. They will provide information to education practice to foster democracy.

## Guidance for Interventions

A guidance document has been drafted for the design of the interventions and will continue to be developed with input from the living labs. The document provides guidance on three key areas:

1. The development of county-specific networks and organisations.

2. The selection, development and implementation of interventions.

3. The assessment of interventions, pilots and the potential for scaling up.

## Monitoring and Assessment

A robust monitoring and assessment method will be established to assess and evaluate the outcomes scientifically. This method will include:

a) competence assessment by teachers, and

b) student self-assessment conducted at the beginning and the end of the interventions.

Both will cover the four RDC competence with 4 proficiency levels (minimal, basic, intermediate and advanced) and descriptors for each competence and proficiency level. This is further supplemented by c) a teachers' self-assessment aimed to identify training needs.

In addition, each intervention and each local pilot project will be subject to assessment. The first by the national teams while the second by consortium partners external to the national teams. The second aims to evaluate the scalability of successful interventions.



# Policy Recommendations

## Empower Democracy

To protect democracy in the EU, transformative EfD must become a priority. This involves encouraging mobility and mutual learning while staying ahead of rapid digital changes and environmental challenges.

## Competence Framework

The shift towards transformative EfD needs a clear competence framework. This should work in tandem with existing EU citizenship competences, paving the way for a structured approach to democracy education.

## European Curriculum

Outline a European Curriculum that guides schools in implementing dynamic transformative EfD strategies in schools. This curriculum should be flexible enough to fit to with pedagogical practices as each education centre is a landscape by its own, and with the heterogenous national and regional education systems.

## Novel practices in Education

The Outline of a European Curriculum aims to promote novel practices in education centres and environments.

## Revamp Curriculums

EU Member States should refresh their curricular frameworks to embed EfD as a core component in formal education, making it relevant and engaging for students.

## Turn schools into Democratic Hubs

Schools should transform into vibrant labs of democratic practice, incorporating democracy education into daily lessons—not just during a weekly civic class. They should actively engage with local, global, and digital communities, using participatory leadership methods.

## Encourage Responsible Citizenship

Students must understand their rights and responsibilities, and learn to act thoughtfully in their peer groups and with teachers and local authorities.

## Teachers' Training

The role of teachers is crucial. They need to create welcoming environments for students to explore and practice democracy. The EU and Member States should provide learning and mentoring opportunities to equip educators for this important task.