

# CRITICAL CHANGE LAB

## DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES IN EUROPEAN SCHOOLS AND INSTITUTIONS PROVIDING NON-FORMAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES

### POLICY BRIEF

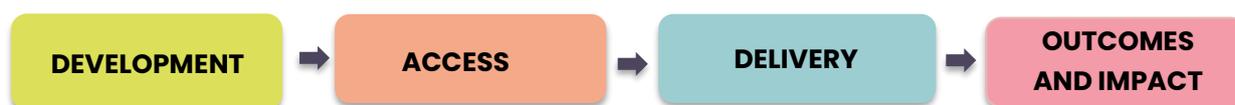
#### ABOUT CRITICAL CHANGELAB

The overall goal of Critical ChangeLab project is to strengthen democracy in Europe by creating and implementing a flexible model of democratic pedagogy using a bottom-up approach that empowers young people to 'own' everyday democracy and engage in direct action towards justice-oriented transformations. This policy brief is based on insights gathered from research activities within the Critical ChangeLab project, which involves partners from 9 European countries: Austria, France, Croatia, Slovenia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Finland, and the Netherlands<sup>1</sup>.

#### DO EUROPEAN SCHOOLS AND INSTITUTIONS PROVIDING NON-FORMAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES FOSTER DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES?

The aim of this policy brief is to provide insights into research findings on democratic practices in European schools and institutions offering non-formal educational programmes, as well as to offer recommendations for improving the practices of the respective institutions. More than 1200 heads of European educational institutions or those in charge of educational programmes provided their perspectives on the importance and current state of democratic practices within their institutions. Democratic practices are related to the values of participation, accountability, transparency, equality, diversity and inclusion and eco-social responsibility.

Democratic Health Questionnaire (DHQ) included estimations on scale from 0% (not at all) to 100% (very much) regarding the importance and current level of 26 practices related to the four domains representing the life cycle of an educational programme.



DHQ is envisaged as a self-assessment tool that educational institutions can use to estimate the current state of their democracy and plan future activities to improve this important organisational characteristic.

#### WHAT IS PRESENTED?

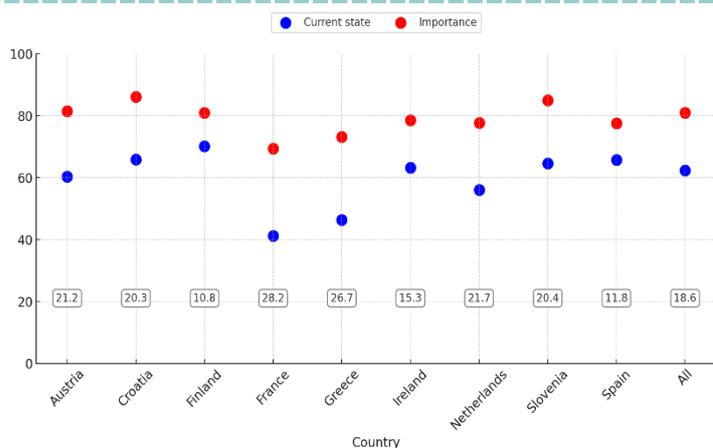
Results and recommendations for schools and institutions providing non-formal educational programmes are presented separately. For each of four domains results feature *gap* calculated as institutional rating of importance of democratic practices subtracted by their rating of current state of democratic practices. The results are highlighted at EU level and across participating countries.

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<sup>1</sup> In the section "Democratic practices in institutions providing non-formal educational programmes" the results for the Netherlands were excluded due to the small number of responses collected.

## RESULTS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS – DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS

### DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME



Numeric expressions in boxes represent gap calculated as institutional rating of importance of democratic practices subtracted by their rating of current state of democratic practices.

#### EU level

- At EU level the gap between the current state and importance of democratic practices concerning Development of Educational Programme is 18.6 (Importance 81.0 – Current State 62.2).
- *Collaborative decision-making* was identified as both the most important democratic practice and one with the highest current state within domain of Development of Educational Programme in schools.
- Current state of *addressing the needs of diverse groups within wider community* had lowest estimations across sample.

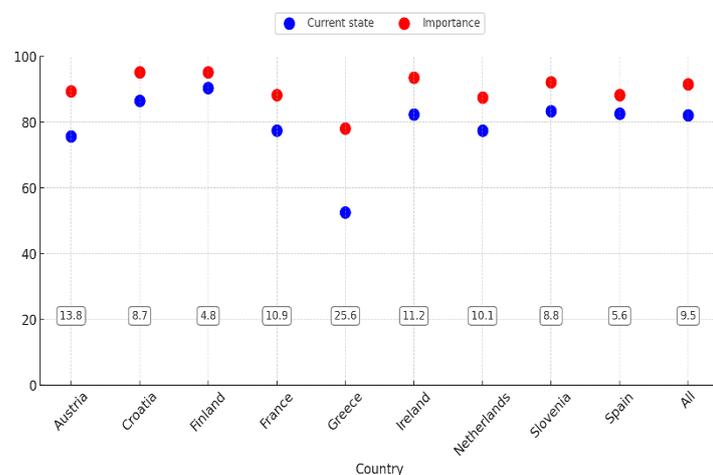
#### Cross-country comparison

- The current state of democratic practices within Development of Educational Programme ranges from 41.2 (France) to 70.2 (Finland).
- The largest gaps are present in France, Greece, and the Netherlands, where the current state is also the lowest.
- Three countries (Croatia, Slovenia, and Spain) have a smaller gap than the average.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- When planning activities and content of educational programme over which the school has autonomy, it is necessary to consider the needs of the broader community and the needs of diverse groups.
- Implement collaborative decision-making processes that actively involve stakeholders from diverse backgrounds in the development of activities and content. Encourage open dialogue, consultation, and consensus building to ensure that the needs and interests of all community members are considered.
- Offer professional development opportunities for staff involved in programme development to enhance their cultural competency, sensitivity to diversity issues, and skills in creating inclusive educational programmes.

### ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME



#### EU level

- At the EU level access has been assessed as highly important (91.6) and is currently largely addressed (82.1).
- *Ensuring equal opportunities for access to school educational programmes for individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds* emerged as the most important democratic practice.
- Although at high levels, the current state of *ensuring access for students from diverse groups within the community, as embedded in institutional policies and procedures*, was rated slightly lower.

#### Cross-country comparison

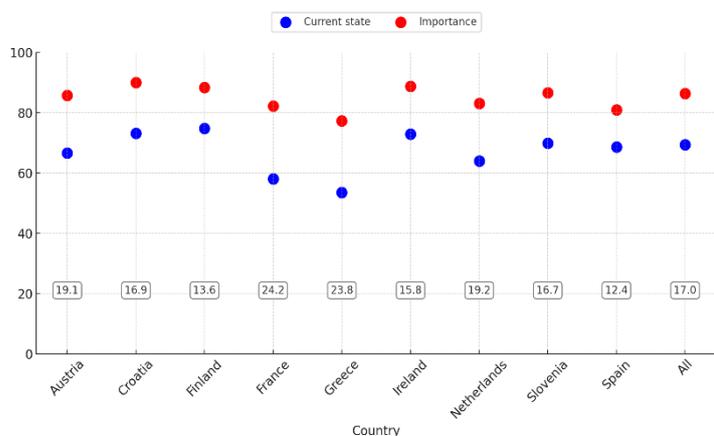
- Cross-country comparisons indicate that the largest gap is present in Greece suggesting a high potential for change.
- Access to educational programme has been assessed as extremely important in Croatia, Finland, Ireland, and Slovenia with scores above 90 in all countries.
- The highest estimated current state regarding access to educational programme is evident in Finland (90.4) and Croatia (86.5).

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Engage with diverse community groups and stakeholders to identify barriers to access and develop strategies to address them.
- Establish partnerships with community organizations, cultural institutions, and local leaders to support outreach efforts and promote collaboration in order to attain educational equity and inclusion.
- Commit to ongoing review and evaluation of institutional policies and procedures regarding access to the educational programme to ensure they are responsive to the evolving needs of diverse student populations.

## RESULTS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS – DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS

### DELIVERY OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME



#### EU level

- The gap at EU level between the current state and importance of democratic practices concerning Delivery of Educational Programme is 17, with four countries showing a larger gap.
- *Ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to complete their education* emerged as the most important democratic practice, followed by *encouraging respect for diversity in learning groups*.
- The least present practices in schools were related to *students' influence on the choice of teaching and learning methods, as well as learning content*.

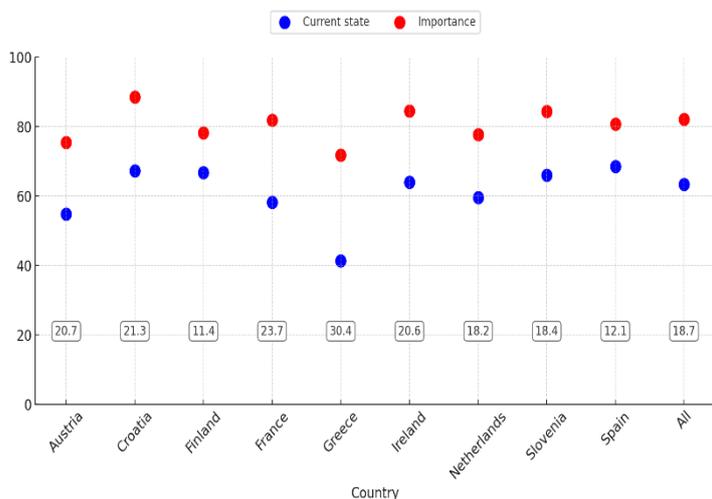
#### Cross-country comparison

- In all countries estimation of importance of democratic practices regarding Delivery of Educational Programmes are above level of 75.
- Three countries (Finland, Croatia, and Ireland) have estimated current state of democratic practices regarding Delivery of Educational Programmes above 70.
- The largest gaps are present in Greece and France.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implement regular surveys and feedback mechanisms to gather input from students regarding their preferences, experiences, and suggestions for improving the learning process. Encourage teachers to seek feedback on their teaching methods and incorporate student input into instructional practices.
- Encourage teachers to collaborate with students in co-creating individualized learning plans that align with students' interests, strengths, and learning styles. Provide training and support for teachers to adopt flexible and responsive teaching strategies that accommodate student preferences and needs.
- Support student-led initiatives and projects that empower students to take ownership of their learning experiences. Encourage students to propose and implement innovative learning activities, projects, and events that reflect their interests and promote active engagement in the learning process.

### OUTCOMES AND IMPACT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME



#### EU level

- The gap between the current state and importance of democratic practices regarding Outcomes and Impact of Educational Programme at the level of the entire sample is 18.7 – the largest among all four domains of democratic practices in schools.
- *The development of students' competencies for active citizenship* is considered the most important democratic practice.
- *Sharing and discussing outcomes with the wider community, as well as evaluating the impact of the programme on the wider community*, were regarded as the least present practices.

#### Cross-country comparison

- There are significant differences in the estimation of importance of democratic practices within domain of Outcomes and Impact ranging from 71.7 (Greece) to 88.5 (Croatia).
- Results in five countries (Greece, France, Croatia, Ireland and Austria) indicate large gaps between current state and importance of democratic practices in this domain.
- The current state regarding democratic practices within domain of Outcomes and Impact of Educational Programme is relatively low, with Spain having the highest estimation.

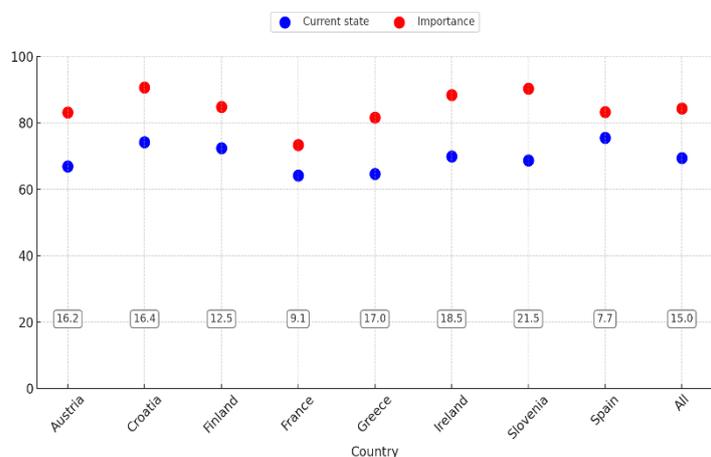
### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implement mechanisms to evaluate the impact of the school's educational programmes on the wider community. This may involve conducting surveys, focus groups, interviews, and other data collection methods.
- Establish regular communication channels to share educational outcomes and updates with the wider community.
- Conduct regular consultations with community members, parents, local organizations, and other stakeholders to gather feedback on educational priorities, concerns, and aspirations.
- Provide training and resources to educators, school administrators, and community leaders to enhance their capacity for effective community engagement and impact evaluation.

## RESULTS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS – DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES IN INSTITUTIONS

### PROVIDING NON-FORMAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES

#### DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME



Numeric expressions in boxes represent gap calculated as institutional rating of importance of democratic practices subtracted by their rating of current state of democratic practices.

#### EU level

- The estimated current state of democratic practices within domain Development of Educational Programme for the entire sample is 69.4.
- All practices were rated as very important, with the overall importance level for the entire sample being 84.6.
- Considering a variety of approaches and viewpoints* within domain Development of Educational Programme was identified as the most important democratic practice.
- Collaborative decision-making* was considered the least present among the democratic practices in domain Development of Educational Programme.

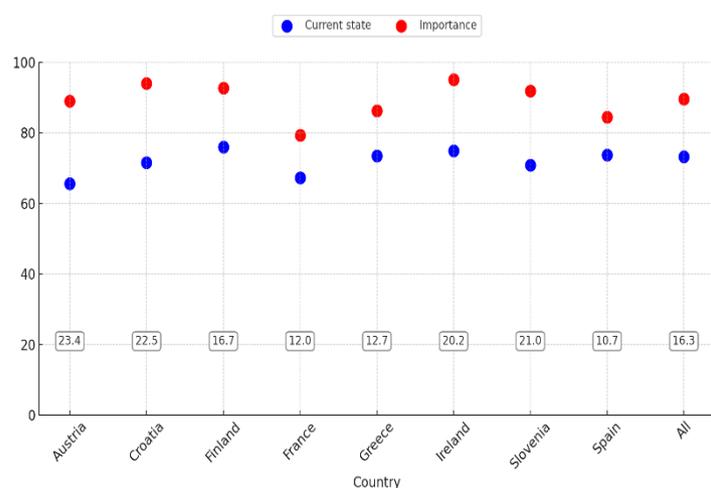
#### Cross-country comparison

- The gaps between current state and importance of democratic practices in this domain range from 7.7 (Spain) to 21.5 (Slovenia).
- Three of the four countries (Slovenia, Ireland, and Croatia) with the largest gaps also show the highest levels of importance, indicating a high potential for change.
- The highest estimate of the current state of democratic practices within domain Development of Educational Programme is in Spain, and it is slightly over 75.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create a structured process for staff members to propose new ideas for educational programmes. Consider setting up regular brainstorming sessions or suggestion platforms where staff can freely contribute innovative ideas.
- Ensure that programme development involves open discussions and the exchange of views among staff. This could be facilitated through regular workshops or meetings, where diverse perspectives are encouraged to promote creative and inclusive thinking.
- Conduct needs assessments to better understand the specific requirements of diverse groups within the wider community. This could involve engaging with local community leaders, surveying potential learners, or organizing focus groups to gather input on what types of programmes are most relevant.

#### ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME



#### EU level

- The gap between the current state and importance of democratic practices regarding Access to Educational Programme at the EU level is 16.3.
- All democratic practices in this domain were evaluated as highly important, and on average, they were assessed as being considerably present.
- The practice of *ensuring access for participants from diverse groups within the community, embedded in institutional policies and procedures*, was reported to be slightly less present than other practices in Access to Educational Programme domain.

#### Cross-country comparison

- Three countries (Spain, France, and Greece) show a smaller gap between current state and importance of democratic practices than the average.
- Although France is among the countries with the smallest gap, it also has the lowest assessment of both the current state and importance suggesting challenges in potential improvement.
- The highest estimate of the current state of democratic practices within domain Access to Educational Programme is in Finland (76)

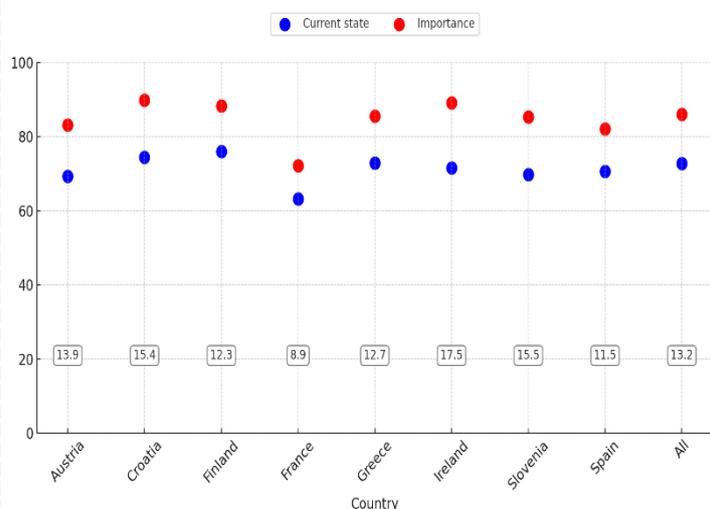
#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implement targeted outreach and recruitment strategies to engage with underrepresented and marginalized communities and encourage their participation in non-formal educational programmes.
- Provide financial assistance and support services to reduce financial barriers to participation for individuals from low-income or marginalized backgrounds.
- Develop and offer culturally responsive programming that reflects the needs, interests, and preferences of diverse participant groups within the community, with the goal of encouraging their inclusion.

## RESULTS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS – DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES IN INSTITUTIONS

### PROVIDING NON-FORMAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES

#### DELIVERY OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME



#### EU level

- At the EU level, the gap between the current state and importance of democratic practices in domain Delivery of Educational Programme is 13.2, the lowest among all four domains concerning democratic practices in institutions providing non-formal educational programmes.
- The most important democratic practice reported in domain Delivery of Educational Programme is *resolving conflicts that arise during programme in a constructive and inclusive manner*.
- The least important democratic practices in this domain are related to the *participants' influence on the choice of teaching and learning methods, as well as learning content*.

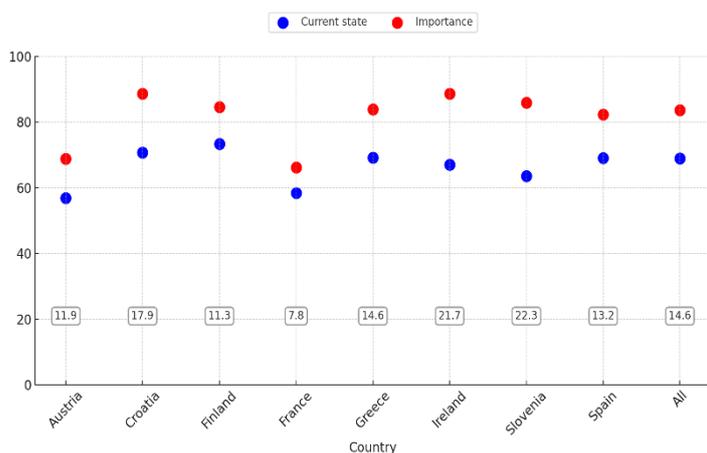
#### Cross-country comparison

- In all countries, the gap between current state and importance of democratic practices in domain of Delivery of educational programme is below 17.5.
- France has the smallest gap, but also the lowest assessment of the current state and importance indicating somewhat limited potential for change.
- In three countries (France, Austria and Slovenia) the estimate of the current state of democratic practices in Delivery of Educational Programme domain is below 70.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish mechanisms for soliciting participant feedback on teaching and learning methods, as well as learning content, to ensure that their voices are heard and their preferences are considered in programme delivery.
- Encourage flexibility and adaptability in programme delivery to accommodate diverse learning styles, preferences, and needs of participants.
- Commit to continuous improvement in programme delivery practices by regularly assessing participant satisfaction, engagement levels, and learning outcomes.

#### OUTCOMES AND IMPACT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME



#### EU level

- The importance level of democratic practices within Outcomes and Impact of Educational programme domain for the entire sample is 83.6.
- The democratic practice of *using participants' evaluations and feedback to improve educational programmes* emerged as the most important in Outcomes and Impact of Educational Programme domain.
- The least important and least present democratic practices within domain of Outcomes and Impact are related to *sharing and discussing the outcomes of educational programmes, as well as their evaluation, with the wider community*.

#### Cross-country comparison

- In 5 countries the importance is rated higher than the average.
- The largest gaps between current state and importance of democratic practices are found in Slovenia, Ireland, and Croatia, primarily due to the high importance attributed to democratic practices within this domain indicating a potential for change.
- Austria and France have the smallest gaps, but also the lowest assessment of the current state and importance.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implement transparent communication channels to share information about educational programme outcomes, activities, and impact assessments with the wider community.
- Establish regular consultation forums comprised of representatives from diverse community groups, including local residents, community leaders, businesses, and local public/government institutions.
- Commit to continuous learning and improvement in community collaboration and impact assessment practices.
- Publish annual financial reports detailing how funds are allocated and spent, ensuring donors, participants, and the community can track financial integrity.

# CRITICAL CHANGE LAB

**Critical ChangeLab** is a three-year long EU funded project that aims to build a resilient European democracy by reinvigorating the relationship between youth and democracy through civic interventions in which young people envision alternative futures for (shared) European democracy, and act on that.



Education



Research



Culture

