

CONCORD

European Confederation of NGOs working on sustainable development and international cooperation

Do we care enough about citizen engagement?

A qualitative look at global citizenship education funding in Europe

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the result of a qualitative study conducted in January 2024 on behalf of CONCORD. It is a follow-up to the report on Global Citizenship Education funding, Global Citizenship Education: How much do we care? (CONCORD 2018). The project involved desk research on strategic and operational documents on European level GCE funding and priorities, as well as individual in-depth interviews with experts from European institutions and NGOs implementing GCE activities at the European, national and local levels.

The identification of funding sources for GCE at the European level focused on the role of the Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) Programme, as well as other European initiatives that organisations are currently engaging with or trying to access in order to implement GCE activities. **The availability, effectiveness and sustainability of GCE funding at the European level has been an issue, due to unfavourable changes in the DEAR competition regulations** for small and medium-sized organisations. This has entailed a decrease in funding for many NGOs active in GCE. The common practice of combining national and European funding to ensure the sustainability of GCE activities emerged as a necessity for many organisations.

It became clear from the interviews that the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the delay in opening new DEAR calls for proposals and to adapting methods to the online learning environment. Additionally, other external factors were identified that influenced the type or themes of GCE activities, such as the escalation of Russia's war in Ukraine.

The findings from the interviews also cover monitoring and evaluation based on the DEAR Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Guide, as well as how organisations assess the effectiveness of their activities through internal procedures. The main challenges and strategic objectives for GCE at European level and their connection to the political situation at national level are outlined.

Based on this qualitative analysis, the report shares recommendations on both the DEAR Programme and on other related issues. It proposes increasing the accessibility, predictability and sustainability of DEAR funding along with simplifying the programme's procedures, complementing national funding schemes with DEAR to a greater extent, strengthening the reach of GCE through DEAR, a qualitative and long-term approach to monitoring and evaluation, and mainstreaming GCE within other relevant European grant programmes.



INTRODUCTION

This qualitative research report serves as a follow-up to the CONCORD study Global Citizenship Education: How much do we care? (2018). Focusing on an in-depth qualitative analysis, it presents the experiences of organisations working in GCE and those contributing to CONCORD's network.

In the documents and interviews analysed, the terms global citizenship education (GCE) and global education (GE) are used interchangeably. The understanding of the citizenship aspect of global education seems to be quite consistent and was not questioned or criticised. More attention was paid to citizenship or active/engaged citizenship by those actors who also implement non-formal or informal education activities, as well as campaigns or activities that support the active participation of young people related to global issues.

The authors employed qualitative tools, including individual in-depth interviews with experts in the field and comprehensive desk research. These instruments were crucial for gathering rich contextual insights into how support for GCE has evolved, including in the face of challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The study's

primary goal was to **understand the shifts in funding patterns and institutional support** by the EU bodies for GCE from 2019 to 2023. This involved **examining the implementation of the recommendations from the 2018 CONCORD report** and assessing their impact on GCE initiatives. Through qualitative inquiry, nuanced perspectives were uncovered on the strategic direction of GCE, including how it has adapted to global crises such as the pandemic.

There were two major types of organisations studied: 1) the institutions directly providing financial support and those influencing priorities and strategic direction (European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships – DG INTPA and Global Education Network Europe – GENE), and 2) the NGOs implementing GCE activities in the EU.

Despite the small number of organisations studied, the authors managed to build a diverse research cohort in terms of different organisational experiences, varying social, political and educational contexts of their operations, as well as geographical diversity. The study represents organisations from EU countries, both from the 'old' Union and those which joined in the 21st century.



FINDINGS

GCE definition, scale and activities

The understanding of GCE varies, encompassing a range of activities and approaches, from formal education to youth empowerment and their political engagement and can include various forms of learning and awareness raising. Some respondents define GCE in terms of formal education in schools, while others see it as including broader community engagement and advocacy work.

GCE combines the approaches of many types of education, such as education for sustainable development, peace education, gender or equality education, critical education or human rights education. The width and intersection of the conceptual ranges of GCE have the potential to be an umbrella term for engaged citizenship education not only in the DEAR Programme but also in many other strategic documents. This could be translated into future sources of GCE funding at both the European and national level. The interviews underlined an imbalance between thematic priorities in the calls for proposals, resulting in instances of developing certain themes within GCE at the expense of others. This means that in some countries GCE is predominantly focused on education for sustainable development (ESD) or climate education, while gender issues or migration topics are not tackled.

The role of civil society organisations (CSOs) is central to GCE, both in implementing programmes and serving as platforms for citizens to influence public policy. These organisations not only extend the reach of GCE but also enhance its impact, showcasing the multifaceted nature of global citizenship education.

GCE funding sources

The accessibility and visibility of funding programmes for various organisations, including smaller CSOs, are key to respond to dynamic social and environmental changes, and to promote diversity and flexibility in problem-solving approaches, especially in response to the COVID-19 pandemic or the rise of populism and xenophobia. These programmes benefit from being adapted to various national contexts, focusing on national and local needs and challenges. Financial programmes can also provide support in capacity building for organisations to effectively implement and manage their projects and promote collaboration and knowledge exchange among different stakeholder groups.


DEAR is a flagship EU programme in development education. It focuses on raising awareness and global citizenship education, engaging citizens in issues such as sustainable development, social justice and global citizenship, which are key aspects of promoting greater social awareness and mobilisation. However, the analysis of the interviews underscores a complex funding landscape for GCE, marked by a diverse donor landscape, challenges in access, the influence of EU institutions over programme content, synergies with national sources of funding and the need for sustainability in financing GCE activities.

Four factors play a pivotal role in shaping the funding opportunities for GCE initiatives: the ambiguity of GCE as a concept, the accessibility of DEAR funding, the transparency of the funding process, and the decreasing sustainability of GCE funding.

Ambiguity of GCE and funding flexibility

While CSOs use diverse European sources to fund GCE activities at the national level, not all of them refer explicitly to GCE or include it in their thematic priorities or programmes. Organisations take advantage of the flexibility of the concept of





GCE itself to engage with other programmes, often without explicitly calling these activities GCE. The wide range of European funding sources indicated in the interviews reflects the versatility and adaptability of GCE initiatives and demonstrates that the diversity of funding opportunities plays an important role in GCE.

The European Commission's programmes mentioned in the interviews are the following: Erasmus+; Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV); the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund; Creative Europe; Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI – Global Europe), including its thematic programmes such as Human Rights and Democracy; Civil Society Organisations; Peace, Stability and Conflict Prevention; and Global Challenges.

In addition to national and other EU funds, programmes like Erasmus+ provide the most straightforward opportunities while also posing challenges in terms of compliance and alignment with different funding criteria. Although they allow for more diverse projects to reach a wide range of audiences, they do not prioritise GCE but rather selected aspects of it, such as sustainability or climate action, which in the long-term can significantly affect the implementation of GCE in certain areas and underfunding of other topics.

Accessibility of GCE funding

There is a major challenge with accessing the main source of funding for GCE directly at European level, the DEAR Programme. Small and medium-sized organisations with a national focus are seeing reduced funding from DEAR and much more competition. Many of the CSOs that were previously project leaders are now barely among the partners due to the increase in the scale of the projects ('megaprojects', as indicated by the organisations), and some organisations which were previously consortium partners, especially from the EU13 Member States, have lost the opportunity to participate in DEAR altogether. The search for new sources of GCE funding is therefore a direct result of the diminishing opportunities as part of DEAR.

Organisations seeking funding face a number of challenges and limitations. These include the complexity of application procedures, particularly onerous for smaller organisations with limited resources, and unequal access to information about available funds, favouring larger, more established CSOs. Moreover, the provision of complex supporting documentation for the effectiveness of projects is often required, posing a challenge for new or innovative initiatives. These limitations underscore the need to simplify the application processes, increase transparency and accessibility of funding information, and develop more flexible evaluation criteria that consider diversity and innovation in projects.

The programme's strategies to include smaller and medium-sized organisations, such as sub-granting, are recognised as means for supporting local initiatives but do not provide access to stable funding. The struggle of balancing resource constraints with the aspiration to make a meaningful impact is common in the field of GCE. It is much easier for these CSOs to access EU funds provided by national agencies, as is the case for Erasmus+.

There are high thresholds for entry into large project consortia which include high management capacity at partner organisation level and considerable budgets, a significant proportion of which must be contributed through co-financing. Months of commitment are expected in preparing the grant application and project reporting.

Funding challenges, including application complexities and continuity uncertainties, add to the intricate nature of financial support in GCE. The changing or narrowed directions and priorities of funding sources require adaptive strategies from CSOs at the European level, support from national level funding sources and sometimes the private sector and foundations.

Transparency and sustainability of GCE funding

Regular announcements for project proposal submissions increase the transparency of the funding process and enable organisations to plan strategically. Improving transparency and



accountability while enabling CSO autonomy in project management is necessary to build trust and efficiency in funding distribution.

According to the interviewees, there is a need for greater transparency and support for organisations in the funding process. Many organisations find it challenging to navigate the complexities of grant applications and would benefit from more streamlined procedures and guidance. Enhanced support could lead to more equitable access to funding, especially for smaller or less experienced organisations. This could include partnership trials that used to be in place as well as training components to facilitate the preparation of applications, especially when implementing new tools such as the MEAL Guide.

There is an emerging lack of sustainability in GCE funding. Although in the short-term national funds are fairly stable (here we note substantial differences between EU Member States), it is crucial for organisations to be able to work through wide-reaching programmes, which enable strategic planning over several years. Sustainability is vital for the growth and continuity of GCE efforts, especially in the context of the European Declaration on Global Education to 2050 (the Dublin Declaration). The unpredictability of funding can severely disrupt ongoing projects and planning while funding uncertainty often results in a short-term focus, hindering the potential for a lasting impact of GCE in terms of social change. A balanced approach to funding, considering both immediate needs and future aspirations, is crucial for the sustainable and impactful progression of GCE initiatives, especially at the European level.

This was particularly evident in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the consultation process around the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), which significantly delayed the opening of a new DEAR call for proposals, as well as prolonging the competition process and the signing of contracts with project leaders and project partners. This situation had a detrimental impact on the effectiveness of the projects, as they were planned in a dynamically changing reality, and also created a significant time lag between the completion of ongoing projects and the start of new ones, which, at the European level, constitutes a funding gap. Although the EU

institutions emphasise that the DEAR Programme is not intended to provide funding stability to GCE implementing organisations in the Member States, this situation significantly reduced the scope of GCE activities and international exchanges in this field.


Effectiveness, monitoring and evaluation of GCE activities

One of our key findings is that the effectiveness of GCE programmes is based on their adaptation to the specific realities and needs of individual countries. It is clear that GCE should reflect local needs and global challenges and that a balanced approach in evaluating the impact of projects is necessary. This should combine both qualitative and quantitative indicators to assess the long-term effects of educational initiatives, especially on social impact and behavioural change.

The DEAR MEAL plays a crucial role in assessing the effectiveness of projects, providing for continuous project improvement, ensuring that projects are relevant and effective. MEAL also enables organisations to adapt to changing conditions and needs while ensuring transparency and accountability to stakeholders. The combination of DEAR and MEAL creates a comprehensive strategy that allows the necessary flexibility in educational and awareness raising activities while also ensuring effective implementation and evaluation of projects.

The analysis of the interviews revealed two important aspects of GCE project monitoring and evaluation, as well as some meta-level research reflections. Firstly, the expectations of the European institutions when funding GCE activities are oriented towards extensive monitoring and evaluation procedures as well as providing detailed quantitative, qualitative and measurable descriptions in project proposals. This practice is familiar to and scrupulously followed by NGOs. In their statements CSO representatives referred to the new MEAL guide as a good practice which helps systematise monitoring and evaluation in applications and during the implementation of a funded project. It also supports less experienced





organisations in producing outputs that match the planned activities.

Secondly, there is a certain disconnect between the monitoring and evaluation carried out for grant-giving institutions, especially at European level, and the internal practices of organisations and GCE educators themselves, who measure their success and social change in a personalised way. Representatives of organisations and institutions recognise the pitfalls in measuring long-term attitudinal or educational change, which is extremely difficult to assess and document over the course of a relatively short project lifespan of four years.

Beyond the possibility of effecting educational or social change are the opportunities arising from building relationships between NGOs and institutions. A number of ideas emerged from the interviews, such as multi-year programme funding or funding an organisation's educational strategy which would not require identifying detailed results or actions identified in advance. This would give more flexibility and facilitate processes of long-term social change. However, these proposals have not been tested and the current funding trends are flowing in the opposite direction; the opinions shared in the interviews acknowledged that these changes are potentially incompatible with current legal and organisational constraints, thereby necessitating a substantial shift in policy.

Impact of COVID-19 and Russia's war in Ukraine on GCE

The information gathered during the interviews confirmed that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly influenced the implementation of GCE activities, which were increasingly taken online. Several organisations and institutions noted that due to international networking, many tools had already been used to coordinate activities online and many organisations adapted their GCE methodologies to the online setting. While it can be challenging to implement GCE activities using an online format in formal education, the experience of member organisations during this period was positive and many successfully continue this way of working and also now train

teaching staff online. However, some types of empowerment activities, such as actions in public spaces, were difficult to move online. In the interviews, little reference was made to the issue of reduced financing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviewees, however, expressed the increased need for innovation and flexibility around funding in anticipation of similar challenges in the future.

While the COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly provided a space for discussion on global interdependence and reflection, organisations working on GCE saw it more as a missed opportunity for social change towards sustainability. The pandemic had a major impact on the ability to conduct advocacy activities around GCE. On the one hand, COVID-19 closed or significantly restricted access to institutions and decision-makers, both for young people who wanted to carry out their advocacy and campaigning activities vis-à-vis the European institutions and for advocacy organisations to access meetings and face-to-face information channels. Interviews suggest that this may have resulted in a low effectiveness of GCE advocacy efforts during this period. On the other hand, the situation normalised the delivery of high-level events online.

Among the external factors influencing GCE priorities, the escalation of Russia's war in Ukraine undoubtedly led many organisations to combine educational and humanitarian activities in support of Ukrainian refugees. In the longer term, organisations noticed an increased interest in the topics of migration or education for peace, especially in the neighbouring countries or those hosting refugees directly, although this spike in interest was only temporary. There was an increase of funding directly related to the situation in Ukraine and refugee issues, which influenced the organisations' activities and priorities, although to a lesser extent those related to GCE. Similarly, while Israel's war in Gaza was mentioned in the interviews, its direct impact on GCE activities was not perceived.



GCE directions and challenges

Strategic directions were defined in the interviews both in terms of individual organisations' strategies, strategies for GCE funding and coordinating activities at the national level, as well as maintaining resources and expert staff within organisations often despite the lack of stable funding.

One of the most important strategic documents for GCE at European level, the European Declaration on Global Education to 2050, was adopted in Dublin in 2022. Its cross-sectoral and intergenerational consensus process is particularly important for the present report, given its direct impact on the expectations and implementation of GCE funding levels and mechanisms. Following the adoption of the declaration, several national budgets for GCE activities were increased and some institutions made progressive funding commitments, including in relation to monitoring and evaluation issues or a systemic funding of CSOs.

Democratic, inclusive and activist methodologies were also identified in GENE's strategic orientations as the basis for the design of GCE activities. Civic engagement is both a strategic priority and a challenge for CSOs in the future. By its very nature, GCE involves European citizens and communities from the Global South that can participate directly or remotely in educational activities by providing knowledge and building relationships. This is a particular priority for organisations with a humanitarian or international cooperation background that strategically seek such non-European collaboration.

The political context at the national level is an important strategic aspect and, in many countries, also the biggest challenge due to the lack of support for GCE activities. This also translates into funding shortages but, above all, lack of support hinders the systemic functioning of NGOs and their GCE activities. This is one of the biggest challenges that often determines whether or not the activities are undertaken at all or whether some organisations reduce their actions. European declarative and financial support for GCE allows

CSOs to carry out at least basic activities, sustaining GCE structures and facilitating advocacy around the importance of GCE.

CSOs at European level point out to limited opportunities they have to influence the content of GCE calls for funding proposals which target them and therefore wish for more freedom, flexibility and involvement in the tendering process. This lack of consultation negatively affects the stability and predictability of GCE activities, but above all the distribution of thematic priorities. For instance, CSOs may seek funding for one thematic area that coincides with EU policy, such as the Green Deal or sustainable development, while other themes are not prioritised and it is therefore more difficult to implement comprehensive GCE activities in these fields. This imbalance also influences the exodus of GCE experts from less represented areas.

Reaching a broad spectrum of groups, including youth, educators and CSOs is essential to ensuring that global education is not limited to specific demographics. The value of diverse perspectives and joint efforts in developing effective solutions to global problems is key. International cooperation, especially with non-EU partners, is key in educational projects and campaigns, promoting knowledge exchange with a global perspective.


CONCLUSIONS

GCE has considerably broadened its conceptual field, due to a wider thematic range and better developed methods. In its diversity, GCE combines the approaches of many types of education in areas such as sustainable development, peace, gender and equality, critical education, and human rights. We should consider GCE as an umbrella term, at the intersection of these concepts, and work towards mainstreaming GCE in policy and programme documents.

DEAR is more important than ever given the rise of populism and xenophobia in Europe. However, the inaccessibility of the programme has made it increasingly difficult for smaller organisations to participate in the last five years. As a result, the initiative has ceased to be perceived as a go-to GCE programme at the EU level for many small and medium CSOs.

The main challenges of the DEAR Programme are:

- **High threshold for organisations to enter DEAR grant calls.** As a high entry threshold, organisations identify a set of provisions stemming from the competition regulations, such as the size of the overall project budget, the size of the project consortium, the complexity of the grant application, as well as the lengthy application process with limited chances of success. Some national CONCORD member organisations lack the capacity to participate at all for the above reasons. Others, while having the necessary experience, skills and resources, see less opportunity to form or take part in project consortia and are wary of investing their time in the complex grant process.
 - **Sustainability of funding.** NGOs at the national level do not consider DEAR a core funding source for GCE due to the unpredictable timing of calls for proposals, the lengthy application process, high competition for grants and extended procedures for both contracting and implementing projects. Most organisations, if they have the opportunity to enter the competition, treat DEAR as an additional
- funding source, allowing them to expand their baseline GCE activities. This is a qualitative change from the perspective of decades ago, when some organisations conceptualised their GCE programme activities around DEAR funding.
- **Monitoring and evaluation of DEAR projects: the new MEAL guide.** The MEAL approach is deemed more effective than the KPI-based methodology, focusing on measuring the impact of educational activities and offering users greater flexibility. Instead of concentrating on quantitative indicators such as participant numbers or workshop ratings, MEAL focuses on the qualitative aspects of global citizenship education and impact measurement. This is seen as a more holistic and effective approach, allowing for better alignment with the needs and objectives of projects. Although the MEAL approach is viewed favourably for its focus on impact measurement and global citizenship education, the way the new guide was introduced made it difficult to implement rapidly without additional educational materials or a training cycle for the applicant organisations.
 - **Adapting to changing political contexts.** DEAR needs to continually adjust to shifting priorities and political contexts. Its ability to adapt to a changing political and social environment, while seen as a strength, also presents a challenge in maintaining the programme's coherence and effectiveness. This applies both to political European trends, such as digitalisation, focus on young people or the Green Deal, and to the national contexts of EU Member States. NGOs using national funds for GCE activities tend to see DEAR as a source of funding that could support their activities in a crisis, for instance, if there is a significant reduction in national GCE spending or national policies that challenge Official Development Assistance spending. On the other hand, organisations from EU countries that have drastically reduced their GCE funding due to a change of political orientation (e.g. in



Hungary, Romania or Poland) are looking to the European level to fund their GCE activities.

- **Involvement of non-EU organisations.**

CSOs combining international cooperation or humanitarian aid activities with GCE programmes through DEAR project funding can strengthen collaboration with their non-EU counterparts. This is an important element of cross-fertilisation between the two fields of action within CONCORD and of programme complementarity for such member organisations. For substantively coherent GCE, a direct voice from the Global South is fundamental and contributes to its legitimacy. It should be noted, however, that GCE projects funded by DEAR primarily target and benefit EU countries and their citizens.

GCE funding is provided by several national and European sources. At European level, it is worth highlighting the following programmes that fund some aspects of GCE, although they do not name or prioritise it explicitly in their programmes or competitions:

- Erasmus+;
- Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV);
- The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund;
- Creative Europe;
- Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI – Global Europe), including its thematic programmes such as Human Rights and Democracy; Civil Society Organisations; Peace, Stability and Conflict Prevention; and Global Challenges;
- Active Citizens Fund as part of the EEA and Norway Grants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCORD considers DEAR a key funding programme for GCE. Given its crucial role in shaping public perception of international cooperation, the level of EU funding for DEAR should reflect the growing need for global citizenship education in our societies which are increasingly exposed to populist and xenophobic narratives.

The following qualitative recommendations are made based on the study findings:

- **DEAR accessibility.** Enhance sub-granting schemes to promote access to DEAR funding by small and medium-sized CSOs and thus address GCE funding gaps while reassessing the current focus on ‘megaprojects’ in order to reach a larger number of CSOs.
- **Simplification of DEAR procedures.** Simplify application and reporting procedures within the DEAR Programme, while maintaining the two-stage process including a concept note and full application stages. This process of simplification should be complemented by capacity building and training components for applicants and grantees. Moreover, sufficient time (more than two months) should be given to applicants to develop their proposals.
- **DEAR predictability and sustainability.** Publish calls for proposals on a regular basis and following a transparent long-term timeline, in order to allow CSOs to plan their work strategically and maintain the flagship role of DEAR in terms of EU level GCE funding.
- **Complementing national funding schemes.** Consider existing national funding schemes and their priorities in the design of DEAR calls for proposals. This would reflect the supportive nature of the EU’s competence in the area of education by offering a targeted approach for CSOs from countries where GCE is underfunded or where certain aspects of it remain neglected or opposed for political reasons.
- **Strengthen the reach of GCE through the DEAR Programme.** Support GCE activities in formal and non-formal education as well as broader community engagement and advocacy work, reflecting the importance of a multi-pronged approach to social mobilisation and attitudinal change and improving opportunities for lifelong learning and participation.
- **A qualitative, long-term approach to monitoring and evaluation.** Further improve evaluation criteria which consider diversity and innovation in projects while incorporating adaptability to changing social participation trends and political landscapes. More scope to include qualitative indicators would strengthen the capacity of GCE funding to bring about social transformation and reflect the aim of DEAR as an investment in long-term attitudinal change.
- **GCE mainstreaming beyond DEAR.** In addition to maintaining DEAR as a flagship GCE initiative, integrate GCE aspects into other European funding programmes so that, as far as possible, all thematic GCE areas are reflected in their budgeting and strategic priorities. Together with a transversal approach to GCE across different programmes, this would enhance policy coherence between GCE policy and other education and volunteering initiatives while strengthening civic engagement broadly in a changing political and social environment.



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