



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

# The ABCs of Global Citizenship Education

UNESCO



Global  
Citizenship  
Education

# Introduction

**Q1.** What is the relevance of global citizenship to the contemporary world?

**A1.** Phenomenal advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have enabled people to connect and interact with others around the world anywhere, anytime. This has contributed to an intensified perception and reality of being inter-connected and living beyond local perimeters. Moreover, increased transnational migration is making local communities inevitably more heterogeneous, increasing the need to learn how to live together. Tensions and conflicts among populations that have causes and impacts beyond national boundaries, and challenges for sustainable development, including climate change, also call for cooperation and collective actions at both global and local levels.

**Q2.** What prompted the surge of interest in global citizenship education?

**A2.** The Global Education First Initiative (GEFI), launched in 2012 by the UN Secretary-General, includes global citizenship education as one of its three priorities, along with access and quality of education.<sup>1</sup> With GEFI, the world education community entered a new era in which education is expected to contribute not only to the fulfilling of individual and national aspirations, but also to ensuring the wellbeing of all humanity and the global community. In 2015, global citizenship education was included as one of the topic areas of Target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goal on Education that countries must promote and address. These two developments provided impetus for the world community to pay attention to this particular topic area at the policy level.<sup>2</sup>

**Q3.** Is there any shift or trend in the education sector that supports global citizenship education?

**A3.** Within the education community, there is a growing trend to complement the discourse of access and quality of education with that of content of education; to complement the discourse of cognitive skills with that of socio-emotional skills; to complement the discourse of skills and competencies for employment and the job market with that of skills and competences for learning to live together; and to complete an education that is focused on assessment with an education focused on relevance. The question of access is now complemented with concerns of quality and content. The world community is now asking if students are in school, what they are learning, and if what they are learning will contribute to making the world a better place for humanity.

## What is global citizenship education?

**Q4.** Is there a globally agreed definition of global citizenship?

**A4.** The definition of citizenship is discussed and there is no widely agreed definition of global citizenship. In all cases, global citizenship does not entail a legal status. It refers more to a sense of belonging to the global community and a common sense of humanity, with its presumed members experiencing solidarity and collective identity among themselves and collective responsibility at the global level. Global citizenship can be seen as an ethos or a metaphor rather than a formal membership. Being a framework for collective action, global citizenship can, and is expected to, generate actions and engagement among, and for, its members through civic actions to promote a better world and future.

**Q5.** What is the goal of global citizenship education?

**A5.** The goal of global citizenship education is to empower learners to engage and assume active roles both locally and globally to face and resolve global challenges and ultimately to become proactive contributors to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world. Global citizenship education has three conceptual dimensions. The cognitive dimension concerns the learners' acquisition of knowledge, understanding and critical thinking. The socio-emotional dimension relates to the learners' sense of belonging to a common humanity, sharing values and responsibilities, empathy, solidarity and respect for differences and diversity. The behavioural dimension expects the learners to act responsibly at local, national and global levels for a more peaceful and sustainable world.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/global-education-first-initiative-gefi/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/sdg4-education-2030/>

**Q6. What is the relationship between global citizenship education and civic education?**

**A6.** Increasingly, countries reflect the core values of global citizenship education in civic education. This has, in part, to do with the fact that local populations have become more heterogeneous, with an increased need for the learners, as part of their civic education, to learn how to live together with those from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This is a valid approach and there is no need for a debate on whether this should be called civic education or global citizenship education. Civic education is the most common landing ground of global citizenship education. The same logic should apply to peace education, education for sustainable development or education for international understanding as they advocate for the spirit of global citizenship education. The focus should not be on the naming issue, but on the spirit and core values to be promoted, for which delivery modes, structures as well as labels can vary.

**Q7. Is global citizenship education to be treated differently from education for sustainable development, peace education or education for international understanding?**

**A7.** These topics are not to be treated as independent areas of work to be opposed to each other. Global citizenship education is an education that promotes such values as non-discrimination, respect for diversity and solidarity for humanity. It is not conceptually different from peace education or education for international understanding. Both global citizenship education and education for sustainable development advocate a transformative and holistic pedagogy.<sup>3</sup> Both are concerned with global challenges and actions that are needed to tackle them, while the thematic topics associated with them tend to be specific – global citizenship education is more associated with global challenges related to peace and conflict, and education for sustainable development with global challenges related to environmental warnings and natural resources. It is neither constructive nor useful to set global citizenship education and other educational approaches against each other, when they are differently labelled efforts targeting related goals and objectives.

**Q8. How is global citizenship education related to education to prevent violent extremism?**

**A8.** Global citizenship education is being advocated as one of the useful tools to prevent violent extremism. By definition, violent extremism does not tolerate diversity or difference of points of view. By contrast, one of the fundamental principles of global citizenship and global citizenship education is the respect for diversity. Again, by definition, violent extremism resorts to the use of violent force to achieve an extremist ideologically motivated objective, whereas global citizenship and global citizenship education are grounded on the principles of non-violence, empathy and solidarity for humanity. Global citizenship provides conceptual antidotes to violent extremism. If the latter is a disease, the former is the treatment.

## Implementing global citizenship education

**Q9. At which school level should global citizenship education be introduced?**

**A9.** Considering that global citizenship education concerns global affairs and challenges, people tend to think it is an education mainly for “mature” students in post-primary levels. This is not the case. The most challenging dimension to address among the three dimensions of global citizenship education is the socio-emotional dimension that has to do with the formation of attitudes and values. Information and knowledge can be acquired through classroom learning, but values, belief systems and attitudes are formed through accumulated experiences and socialization processes. They are acquired through the learners’ developmental process rather than the schooling process. As such, early childhood is the best place to start with global citizenship education, where early learners acquire the right mindsets for global citizenship.

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3 Global citizenship education: preparing learners for the challenges of the 21st century, available for download at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002277/227729e.pdf>

Roadmap for Implementing the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development, available for download at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002305/230514e.pdf>

**Q10.** Do we need to create an independent subject of global citizenship education?

**A10.** Global citizenship education is not to be understood as an independent subject area. It is an education that promotes the core values of global citizenship, namely non-discrimination, respect for diversity and solidarity for humanity; therefore, its modes of implementation can vary. It can be delivered as an integral part of existing subjects, as much as it can be delivered independently, if such is desired. Civics, citizenship education, social studies, peace education or other similar subject areas addressing human rights, democracy, justice, international understanding, etc. While the modality of delivery may not be a major issue, the core values of global citizenship education must be reflected in and supported by education policy and the curriculum in order to deliver global citizenship education effectively.

**Q11.** What is the most effective pedagogy for global citizenship education?

**A11.** The cognitive dimension of global citizenship education can be addressed through conventional classroom learning combined with learners' accessing and analyzing other sources of information. To address the socio-emotional and behavioural dimensions, however, the pedagogy has to be holistic. Information and knowledge have to be combined with practice. Learners should be provided with actual experiences and opportunities to develop, test and build their own views, values and attitudes and to learn how to take actions responsibly. Participation in community activities and opportunities to interact with populations of different backgrounds or of different views are necessary. The core values have to be reflected and practiced in the learners' daily lives in and around the school environment.

**Q12.** Should there be a separate training programme for teachers on global citizenship education?

**A12.** In the same sense that teaching of global citizenship education can be integrated into teaching of other related topics, teacher training on global citizenship education can be integrated into training on other related issues, as much as it can be set up independently. While there may not be a need to set up a separate training programme, global citizenship education does require a transformative pedagogy, one which: encourages learners to analyse critically real-life issues and to identify possible solutions creatively and innovatively; supports learners to critically revisit assumptions, world views and power relations in mainstream discourses and to consider people/groups systematically underrepresented or marginalized; and focuses on engagement in action to bring about desired changes. So, through either an independent or an integrated training programme, teachers and education managers should be provided with opportunities to learn about this specific pedagogical orientation.

**Q13.** Do we need a global framework of curriculum for global citizenship education?

**A13.** Global citizenship education can be delivered by integrating its principles into existing subjects in education. It does not require a new, separate curriculum framework. Curriculum development is also a matter for national mandate, not one to be framed by an external influence. Considering the varying understandings of the global citizenship concept itself, it is doubtful there can be a globally agreed curriculum framework for global citizenship education. However, global citizenship education is a relatively new term to many experts in curriculum development, practitioners and education managers and there is a need to provide them with some pedagogical guidance. To that effect, UNESCO developed a global guidance document on the overall teaching and learning objectives of global citizenship education<sup>4</sup>, while leaving the specific ways of achieving those objectives to the discretion of the individual member states. Opportunities for countries to learn about good practices of other countries are also useful.

**Q14.** How can we assess the impact of global citizenship education on the students?

**A14.** The cognitive impact will be relatively easy to assess through tests on the students' acquisition of certain sets of information and knowledge. The assessment of the acquisition of socio-emotional and behavioural skills and competences may require different methods that allow us to measure development and formation of certain attitudes in students, as well as mindsets and behavioural patterns as part of their development as individuals. To achieve this, participatory assessments will prove useful, such as assignments, demonstrations, observations, projects and other performance tasks. Notably, the focus of assessment on the impact of global citizenship education should not be on the outcomes, but on the process of learning. In this regard, formative assessments are encouraged over summative assessments.

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4 Available for download at UNESDOC at the address: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002329/232993e.pdf>

**Q15.** Is global citizenship education concerned with global challenges and actions only?

**A15.** The fundamental spirit of global citizenship education is learning to live together. It promotes respect for diversity and solidarity for humanity. This ethos can be practiced globally, but also locally. Teaching students to treat immigrant/migrant children present in the local community with respect and dignity is a valid action for global citizenship education as much as teaching them to learn about cultures outside their national borders. Providing students with opportunities to learn about such fundamental values as non-discrimination and non-violence is a good starting point for global citizenship education. The care for and solidarity with the whole of humanity, those people that one does not know, start with the care for and solidarity with the people one knows. Local challenges and actions constitute valid issues to be addressed by global citizenship education.

**Q16.** Is global citizenship education for the global community, or for the individual who needs to survive in an increasingly globalized world?

**A16.** The question reflects the challenge of promoting simultaneously global solidarity and individual or national competitiveness. Global solidarity highlights what global citizenship education can contribute to the world, while the other focuses on what global citizenship education can do for individual learners, as an enabler for the acquisition of “21st century skills”. Tension is resolved when the two end results are seen within a continuum. The starting point can be the learners’ own interest for their competitiveness, but then they must be redirected, away from their own and local realities, and guided to see the connection of their realities to those of others. As they recognize the mutual impact of their respective realities, they will eventually be empowered to consider the inevitable necessity of mutual cooperation and solidarity. The tension is eased when the interaction, not the gap between the two interests, is emphasized.

**Q17.** How can one introduce global citizenship education in a society where the local or national identity is strong or exclusive, or even hostile to other identities?

**A17.** One facilitating condition for global citizenship education is a political, societal, cultural or religious climate that is open to universal values and the principles of diversity and pluralism. If the national/local context is not favourable, it is inevitable that the impact of global citizenship education will be limited and, in extreme cases, the initiation itself will not be possible. Where there is some level of openness to addressing the core values of global citizenship education, it will be useful to approach the concept of global citizenship from a point of view of solidarity among people in the local community who do not know each other. What underlies the concept of solidarity for humanity is the empathy and sympathy among people who do not know each other and who will never know each other. This approach, which is not likely to raise the issue of identification with people beyond the local boundaries, will still provide learners with an opportunity to experience and practice one of the fundamental principles of global citizenship education – solidarity for humanity.

## Global citizenship education and the Sustainable Development Goals

**Q18.** Target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4 on Education), where global citizenship education is mentioned, also includes other topics, such as education for sustainable development and lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and cultural diversity and culture’s contribution to sustainable development<sup>5</sup>. How should global citizenship education be implemented in this context?

**A18.** *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action*, the outcome document of the *World Education Forum 2015* held in Incheon, Republic of Korea, encourages mainstreaming these topics in the countries’ education systems, including curriculum, teacher training and assessment, but it does not specify, deliberately, the approaches to fulfil this objective, which are to vary across countries. This applies also to the choice of topics to highlight. When resources are not sufficient to address all topics, it is only natural to prioritize. In this process, global

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<sup>5</sup> SDG on Education Target 4.7: By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.

citizenship education, if prioritized, can be treated as an entry point to address the other topics, such as human rights, culture of peace, non-violence, and cultural diversity. Meanwhile, education for sustainable development could also serve as a useful entry point to issues related to lifestyles, global citizenship, human rights and culture's contribution to sustainable development.

**Q19.** Is there a global indicator to measure progress in global citizenship education?

**A19.** There is one single official global indicator<sup>6</sup>, which concerns the “*extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights, are mainstreamed at all levels in: (a) national education policies (b) curricula (c) teacher education and (d) student assessments.*” Global data on this indicator are collected by UNESCO through a survey questionnaire designed for the 1974 Recommendation Concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education Relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The Survey covers the key concepts of global citizenship education as well as education for sustainable development. Data are collected every four years; the sixth and latest data collection exercise was launched in 2016.

**Q20.** Does the single global indicator for Target 4.7 capture progress in all aspects of the Target?

**A20.** The global indicator does not monitor progress in all the topic areas mentioned in the Target. Even for global citizenship education and education for sustainable development, it falls short of capturing all their complex dimensions. UNESCO's position on the indicators for Target 4.7 is as follows: Data will be collected for the global indicator approved by the Member States through the survey tool for the 1974 Recommendation to enable the global community to ensure that there is some level of monitoring of progress, albeit a limited one. For the global monitoring of the specific aspects of global citizenship education and education for sustainable development, and other aspects included in the Target, UNESCO will compile, analyse and disseminate other available ad-hoc research and survey results. These may not be global in scale, but they can shed additional light on how the Target is being implemented.

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6 <http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs/>

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[www.unesco.org/new/global-citizenship-education](http://www.unesco.org/new/global-citizenship-education)

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