

# PARENTS ON QUESTIONNAIRE ON DEMOCRACY AND CITIZENSHIP

Partners and global  
reports and conclusions



December 2015 to March 2016

## 1. Introduction

Firstly proposed and discussed on the 4<sup>th</sup> partnership meeting, in Kosice, September 2015, a questionnaire on citizenship and democracy has been approved on the following meeting, in Tomar, November 2016.

The importance of the different communities' participation "out of the school" was somehow important on our global point of view.

In fact, trying to understand how the families behave in this area might be an important glimpse to better understand pupils and their attitudes.

It was a delicate matter, though.

Although full of good intentions, it might be misunderstood by adults, so a preparatory work near the families has been important so that they became totally relaxed on the goals of our non-technical survey.

The general letter to the parents of all partner schools assuring total anonymity was an important step. Others initiatives taken by the partners according to their realities were a sort of reinforcement of those assurances.

The results are what they are and the following pages will show that.

## 2. The letter to the parents, translated to each and every national idioms

Dear Sir / Madam

As you know, our school belongs to an international partnership with six other schools from different countries. It is an ERASMUS + Partnership involved in a project named GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP STEPS IN EUROPE (Global Citizenship, for short). This project has been built over four main themes: Sustainability and Environment; Climate Changes; Citizenship and Democracy; and Migrations and Urban Development.

As well as involving pupils, we wish to give parents a voice with reference to the theme of Democracy and Citizenship.

This takes the form of a simple questionnaire.

We wish to ask 30 different parents (mother or father), in a rigorous anonymous way, their opinions on Democracy and Citizenship.

We decided on 30 questionnaires to facilitate the final treatment of the data of all seven countries. These questionnaires will be distributed so that they might represent the pupils' diversity.

The questions are related to the rights of citizens' participation on everyday life (country, region, or local).

Please, take good note that the questions may look "political". Rather they are in the sense of "civic" rather than the way political parties act.

By doing this, we firmly believe that we are crossing the school walls and making parents as an active part of our project.

Thanking you in advance for your contributions (note that a questionnaire that will be returned in blank is a valid contribution!). Here you have six "closed" questions and one "open" question.

Yours sincerely

The local project coordinator

### 3. The questionnaire

#### Parents questionnaire on Democracy and Citizenship

1. Do YOU vote when there are elections (local, regional or national)?

Yes   
No

2. Do YOU regularly follow the news on your Government / Parliament / Municipality?

Yes   
No

3. Have YOU written (or contacted by any other mean) YOUR politician (MP / Mayor / ...)?

Yes   
No

4. Apart from voting, which of the following ways do YOU use, or have used, to influence the political process:

Demonstration   
Protest   
Lobbying   
Media   
Petition   
Other  Which? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Do YOU belong to any of the following associations / societies / institutions?

Civic   
Cultural   
Recreational   
Sporting   
Parents Association   
Other  Which? \_\_\_\_\_

6. If so, have YOU become an actively involved person in that association / society / institution?

Yes   
No

7. Which of the following European Rights do YOU considered, for yourself, more important?

The right to move freely   
The right to vote in European elections   
The right to make references in the European Parliament   
The right to propose legislation through a citizens' initiative   
The right to have access to documents of the EU institutions

8. In what ways can YOU contribute to your community?

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## 4. The results

### GENERAL DATA ON % RELATED TO RECEIVED QUESTIONNAIRES

Different countries had a different name of responses and only the really received ones were taken in consideration.

Some of the questions have a "NONE" cell created because a few partners have related those answers as such.

On several questions the % total may not be 100 because persons might have answered several options or not have answered at all.

Only the received questionnaires were considered, so the % is related to the received ones.

## 4. 1. Sent and received questionnaires

Partner	Hellas	Ireland	Germany	Portugal	Slovakia	Spain	Sweden
Sent questionnaires / received questionnaires	30 / 30	30 / 19	50 / 5	30 / 30	49 / 47	30 / 17	60 / 6

## 4. 2. Answers 1 to 7 (on %)

1. Do YOU vote when there are elections (local, regional or national)?							
	Hellas	Ireland	Germany	Portugal	Slovakia	Spain	Sweden
Yes	100	44	40	93	96	94	100
No	0	56	40	10	4	6	0
2. Do YOU regularly follow the news on your Government / Parliament / Municipality?							
	Hellas	Ireland	Germany	Portugal	Slovakia	Spain	Sweden
Yes	93	44	75	80	60	94	100
No	7	56	25	20	40	6	0
3. Have YOU written (or contacted by any other mean) YOUR politician (MP / Mayor / ...)?							
	Hellas	Ireland	Germany	Portugal	Slovakia	Spain	Sweden
Yes	37	11	0	33	43	35	67
No	63	89	100	56	57	65	33
None	-	-	-	3	-	-	-
4. Apart from voting, which of the following ways do YOU use, or have used, to influence the political process:							
	Hellas	Ireland	Germany	Portugal	Slovakia	Spain	Sweden
Demonstration	33	0	40	30	0	94	67
Protest	43	6	40	12	19	47	67
Lobbying	17	11	0	0	4	5	11
Media	13	17	10	6	17	24	11
Petition	17	0	0	56	68	53	33
Other / Which	23	0	0	3	Not quantified	12	33
None	-	66	-	33	-	-	83
5. Do YOU belong to any of the following associations / societies / institutions?							
	Hellas	Ireland	Germany	Portugal	Slovakia	Spain	Sweden
Civic	10	6	20	3	17	35	0
Cultural	0	6	20	16	2	29	67
Recreational	4	0	0	26	2	0	0
Sporting	20	17	0	20	11	12	11
Parents Association	46	0	40	50	15	94	11
Other / Which	20	0	0	6	Not quantified	47	11
None	-	66	-	16	-	-	-
6. If so, have YOU become an actively involved person in that association / society / institution?							
	Hellas	Ireland	Germany	Portugal	Slovakia	Spain	Sweden
Yes	47	29	25	40	34	82	83
No	53	71	75	37	34	18	17
None	-	-	-	20	-	-	-
7. Which of the following European Rights do YOU considered, for yourself, more important?							
	Hellas	Ireland	Germany	Portugal	Slovakia	Spain	Sweden
Moving freely	50	66	2	53	64	100	17
Voting in European elections	0	6	2	26	6	29	67
Making references in the European Parliament	13	0	2	6	6	18	0
Proposing legislation through citizens' initiative	33	0	3	13	21	41	33
Accessing documents of the EU institutions	4	22	1	6	2	18	17
None	-	6	-	10	-	-	-

#### 4. 3. "Open" answer 8

(Open answers on questions 4 and 5 were included on question n° 8 assuming that they are "neighbours")

### **GERMANY**

No answers.

### **HELLENIC REPUBLIC**

With participation to local councils. With submission of propositions about local issue to the Municipality. Participation and activation. Participating to local councils actively. Active participation to community. With my election in a local responsible position or via some local cultural clubs. Helping to gather goods for poor families. With active participation and submission of propositions for the solution of various emerging problems.

### **IRELAND**

Voting and following news on aspects of government. Being involved in clubs and societies. Helping others in hardship. Contributing to community services, against racism and discrimination, against anti-social behaviours, social and community activism. Participating in voluntary work. Cleaning up locality. By getting involved.

### **PORTUGAL**

Be a member of local political institutions. Helping those who need (food, money, buying goods in my community contributing therefore to local economy. Promoting the gathering of citizens. Trying to solve problems patiently and politely. Being aware to what surrounds me and trying to help solving those problems. Volunteering work. Acting actively on social and educational matters. Be a member of local associations. Debating, using my right of free



speech. Political, cultural, sporting and civic debates, either formally or informally. Preparing my children to the future, respecting the others, saying them that discipline is important; in one word, to invest on our children. Regular monetary contributions to community initiatives. Being a member of church solidarity institutions.

## **SLOVAKIA**

Preparing projects, volunteering, activities at school - lectures, discussions, financial support, expressing interest, willingness, involvement. Personal intervention, pro-life march consultation. Participating in religious, environmental institutions.

## **SPAIN / CATALONIA**

Being involved in platforms and/or associations that defend the welfare state and require solutions to problems. Collaborating in acts of solidarity and actively participating in protests and/or demonstrations. I am very involved in the educative community and, in general in my neighborhood, to cooperate and assist in any aspect that can make possible the improvement of the common welfare. With more social activities. Participating in discussion forums, in activities aimed to improve the life of the community, raising my children in the values that sustain a fairer society. Collaborating to the extent possible in social action, NGOs, etc. With our example, being a reflection of the values that we promote. Being part of associations, voting, talking to representatives, demonstrating, collecting signatures, etc. Getting involved in the neighborhood association, actively involved with mobilizations required and/or needed. Providing ideas for improvement, respecting the ideas of the others, voting the given proposals, carrying them out. Leading by example the values of solidarity, cooperation and respect and instilling these values to the children to ensure continuity. Evaluating these values in all daily acts from recycling to the respect to older people. Making aware and promoting multiculturalism in the context of European cohesion. With an ethical, respectful and inclusive behavior of the cultural and religious differences. Participating in cultural activities in the neighborhood. Contributing financially or personally to initiatives or associations to allow the integration and decent living conditions of community members, regardless of their origin or culture. Being actively involved in PTA of the school and participating / encouraging all democratic processes that go happening in the neighborhood. Participating in associations such as Sindicat de treballadors. ONG. MSF. Greenpeace. Cooperativa d' economia sostenible. Ayuda a la pobreza infantil. Ayuda oftalmológica a

África. Asociación de promoción multicultural y multilinguismo de Catalunya. Creu Roja. Vicente Ferrer.

## **SWEDEN**

Being actively involved in cultural institutions or in parents associations. By voicing my opinion in the cultural community. Participate in NGO's. I can keep informed in matters that I care about, write to politicians and write on social medias, such as Facebook to spread the word in things that I find important, such as environmental issues. We have a very open home and many friends feel it's their second home. I try to be involved as much as my time allows in my children's activities and in my community. I wouldn't say I'm very politically involved. I sign name lists when I think politicians take too short term decisions but I feel it does not matter for them. So I vote what is the best for the moment and am very thankful for the free elections and I trust very much my government and that the taxes go to the people who need them most. Also I give since many years to an orphanage in Nepal.

## 5. Reports

Each partner  
wrote about what  
their questionnaires  
mean for them.

## 5.1.

### Report on German Questionnaires

The *Parents questionnaire on Democracy and Citizenship* helped many of our students to get an idea about political participation. Only a few talked about it with a parent, an adult.

To understand and explain the numbers of the few returned questionnaires in the Ernst-Hansen-Schule in Germany, there will be given some background information. Our special needs school teaches children with developmental problems in learning, emotion and social behaviour. Hence many of our 120 students come from a socially weak background. The parents of our students were born in over 25 different countries. Many of the parents are still learning the German language, some of them hardly understanding it. Some of the parents are practical illiterates. The engagement and participation of our parents in the school life is often small, compared to other schools in Germany.

Many of the families have a history of diverse migration. In Germany migrants from European countries have the right to participate in local elections. Migrants from Non-EU countries without a German passport have the right to participate in politics but are not eligible to vote. Of those parents born abroad about 80% joined from outside the EU and therefore have not the right to vote.

Class 7 started to read through the questionnaire. It took time to explain the idea behind the concept of participation in local politics and society. The students were asked to read the questionnaires to their parents or any other adult. The parents had about a fortnight to return the questionnaires.

Some of the students were then asked to distribute the questionnaires to more classes, by introducing the items to the other classes.

4 of about 50 questionnaires were returned by students (8%). The response rate does not reflect the percentage vote in federal elections (about 60%). One voice completely negated any political activity of the questionnaire. Two of the responding parents claim to vote when there are elections, the news on the government follow three of the 4. None of them has contacted a politician, they got engaged in demonstration, protest and one expressed their opinion in Media. 2 of them got involved in civic and cultural organisations, one of them stated to be *actively* involved.

Three of the participants considered “the right to propose legislation through a citizens’ initiative” to be important, two participants picked the rights “to move freely”, “to vote in European elections” and “to make references in European Parliament.”

## 5.2.

### Report on Hellenic Questionnaires

We have decided to create an online questionnaire (on Google drive) and we have sent the link and the letter by e-mail to the parents of all the classes. Not everyone responded immediately, so we sent it again by e-mail, just to remind them and finally we received 30 answers.

From the analyzing of the answers it seems that the parents of our school are especially active citizens and they take part in the political issues in various ways. Specifically they all take part in the elections. This percentage differs from the national average, as in the last years the percentage of the Hellenic people who take part in the elections is reduced gradually. E.g. in the last national elections of 2015 only 56% took part in them, although 65% had taken part in the previous ones. When we speak on European elections, this percentage is much smaller.

Concerning question 2, the majority of parents watch the news about the political development and they are informed daily. This percentage (93%) reflects a favourite Hellenic habit which is their information and the analysis of political development in their daily conversations.

From question 3 it seems that about 1/3 of the parents has communicated with a political figure, as it is common in Hellas for the citizen asking for something from the politicians or complaining to them. From the answers in question 4, it seems that they express their dissatisfaction in the political procedures in various ways, especially during the last years when the economic recession and the austerity measures affect the Hellenic people.

Finally a large percentage of parents consider that free movement is the most important right in the European Union. This answer, which is quite common to all the Europeans, is bigger than the European average (42%). Actually, free movement contributes to the establishment of the 'European identity', although doesn't focus to the active participation of the citizen in the political development of the European Union.

### 5.3.

#### Report on Irish Questionnaires

To get our sample of 30 respondents we targeted the parents of two class groups: second class (pupils 8 years old) and fifth class (pupils 11 years old). On a given Monday we gave the pupils the letters with the questionnaires for their parents. The parents had until the following Friday to return the questionnaires. We received 19 responses (63%). This response rate was similar to the percentage vote in a general election, and one response was blank (5%). This response rate was good in our school because sometimes pupils forget to deliver letters or parents forget to return them.

44% of those who responded did not vote in elections, and were not interested in political news. This percentage was below the national average.

89% never engaged with their local or national political representatives, and 67% never attempted to influence the political process. I was a little surprised at the high numbers here as I thought that people would have engaged with politicians on matters such as housing or health. The numbers may signify a disconnect between people and politicians.

67% never got involved in civic or sporting organisations. However, those who did get involved, also helped in the administration of the organisations. It also seemed that some parents got involved with a number of organisations.

The right to move freely in Europe was deemed most important by 67% of the respondents and 22% felt that people should have access to documents (I understand this to mean that there should be transparency). Very few people were interested in the political workings of EU.

44% contributed to their community in a variety of ways. Considering how busy people are I think shows a very positive attitude among parents.

## 5.4.

### Report on Portuguese Questionnaires

The 30 received questionnaires were answered by parents with kids from 4 years-old to 13 years-old, meaning that we had cooperation from kindergarden till preparatory school.

For the elders, it was enough to send to some selected families the questionnaires with no further information from the one given by the presentation letter.

On what concerns to families with children at the kindergarden or the primary school, the decision was to select the parents and personally explain to them what we had in mind.

That has been done because the theme might be misunderstood if there were not a face-to-face explanation in order to remove any doubts parents might get on seeing such a “political” questionnaire.

The selection of parents had nothing to do with political or civic involvement on society, but only towards those parents we knew they would accept such challenge with our explanation.

In general, the questionnaires were received also immediately to the delivery.

The percentage of those who vote is far ahead the Portuguese or local reality. In fact, in Portugal, the abstention has a high level either for local, general or presidential elections. The gap is even bigger if we speak on European elections.

As for question number 2, the high percentage of people following political news is acceptable and perhaps in the average. Following news and discussing politics is very common.

For question number 3, the results are not surprising. In fact, there is no tradition on questioning politicians in a normal basis, that is to say, going to them and asking or suggesting. As question number 4 reflects, we are more eager on confronting them, either on petitions (very common nowadays) or demonstrations and strikes.

On what regards to questions 5 and 6, the high levels of civic participation are real. From our common life here, in Tomar, belonging to a cultural, sporting, civic, religious or other is very common. In fact, the municipality of Tomar has a huge rate of associative organizations and a high level of creating events, no matter its nature. We can see that also on the summary of activities people wrote in the open question.

For the European rights question, the answers might be considered “usual” if we had a strong academic study on the matter. It is an intuition. However, the high percentage of answers on “moving freely” might be a reflex of the Portuguese History since the Discoveries, the migration movement of the 1960’s we had, the over two million migrants we have all over the world and, perhaps, the recent migration movement we had in the last few years due to the austerity measures and policies and huge rates of unemployment in Portugal.

## 5.5.

### Report on Slovak Questionnaires

We have decided to cooperate for getting the data from our parents with the sixth form pupils parents. We disseminate the questionnaire on the day of the parents assembly with explanation of the goals. They worked out the given questions and return the papers back in a one week time. There were back 47 from 49 that is high percentage. Asking for opinion (students, teachers and parents) is one of the main tools to get the feedback for developing processes in our school.

96% of respondents have answered that they vote in elections. It means that our parents are responsible enough and they want actively contribute to the political life of the country. It is highly above the national average. 60 % of participants are interested in political news but there is low - 43% of respondents that they have not contacted any politician. It seems that in Slovakia people have just begun to contact politicians it is the new way for them to enter actively and personally to politicians.

The more powerful way for the respondents to express their opinion on the political topics is to use the petitions 68% and they consider the demonstration as less appropriate way to solve the political issues.

The wide scale of answers for being a member of any association shows that parents participate in the political and social life in the area they live.

Because of the previous regime (25 years ago) that we could not travel and move freely 90% of our parents appreciate the most - the moving and travelling freely.

We consider the figures very interesting and our parents cooperative in many ways for giving right feedback

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## 5.6.

### Report on Spanish / Catalan Questionnaires

In our Erasmus + project, related to the citizenship and democracy block, we decided to develop an activity with the cooperation with the families in order to know how important the citizen involvement and our citizen rights are.

As it happens with the majority of the countries that participate in the project, Spain is going through complicated situations related to the current political decisions and the global human rights crisis. That is the reason why we decided to send a questionnaire to the families of the school, to know how they live these situations.

We distributed 30 questionnaires by email and 17 of these were answered. After looking at the results we decided to gather all the information.

One of the most important things that we have seen in the results is that we have realised that the majority of our families are involved in political matters. For example, with the first question we can see that 16 families use to vote in elections and they usually follow the news of our government, and only 1 of the families doesn't do it.

Another important result of the questionnaire is related to the third and fourth question, where we can see that our families follow the news and participate in elections and, furthermore, we can see that they use other ways to influence the political process, specially by demonstrations (16 results), petitions (9 results) and protests (8 results).

In the fifth question is where we think that the positive answer is essential, and we can notice that the families are very actively involved people in associations, societies and institutions as:

*Sindicat de treballadors (Labour unions); ONG (NGO); ONG Greenpeace (Greenpeace NGO); Cooperativa d'economia sostenible (Sustainable economy cooperative); Ajuda a la pobresa infantil (Help to children poverty); Ajuda oftalmològica a Àfrica (Ophthalmological help in Africa); Associació de promoció multicultural i multilingüisme de Catalunya (Multicultural promotion and multilingualism in Catalonia association); Creu Roja (Red cross); Fundació Vicent Ferrer (Vicent Ferrer foundation).*

Some of them are related to worker's rights, NGOs like Greenpeace and other associations to help children in different ways like poverty, needs in ophthalmology in Africa, Vicent Ferrer foundation and doctors in disadvantaged countries.

In the last questions, related to the human rights, we can observe that people considers that the most important thing is the right to move freely (17 results) and the right to propose legislation through a citizens' initiative (7 results).

In order to analyse all the answers we can say that the participation in the questionnaire is not really elevated because only 17 were answered and 13 were not. But if we look at the results of the families that have answered it, we can say that they are active people in citizenship and democracy.

## 5.7.

### Report on Swedish Questionnaires

We sent out the questionnaire to about 60 parents and just 6 answered. The ones that responded are also very active in voting and engaging in different opinions.

All 6 vote and follow the news in media. 4 of 6 have contacted a politician and demonstrated. It's mostly culture that attracts parents to engage and it's also common to get involved.

The most important European right is to vote, 4 of 6 think that.

Ways of contributing to the society is:

being actively involved in cultural institutions or in parents associations;

by voicing my opinion in the cultural community;

participate in NGO:s;

can keep informed in matters that I care about, write to politicians and write on social medias, such as Facebook to spread the word in things that I find important, such as environmental issues;

We have a very open home and many friends feel it's their second home. I try to be involved as much as my time allows in my children's activities and in my community. I wouldn't say I'm very politically involved. I sign name lists when I think politicians take too short term decisions but I feel it does not matter for them. So I vote what is the best for the moment and am very thankful for the free elections and I trust very much my government and that the taxes go to the people who need them most. Also I give since many years to an orphanage in Nepal.

## 6. General overview

1. This overview might not be accurate, since it is written by only one person, as it was decided in Barcelona; furthermore, the political options of the author may contaminate the words. So, please forgive, contradict, argue and give your own explanations. I have not read the other partner reports before writing this overview in order to get no influences. I put my name at the end of the text so that everybody may say that, for now, this is a personal view.
2. Having said this:
3. It is interesting on comparing as a whole questions number 1, 2 and 3: in general, the voting rates are very high except for Ireland and Germany; again, Ireland is in the tail of the issue “following news”; on the other hand, for question number 3, only Sweden has a sufficient rate of intervention and all the other partners have very low rates. Explanation? Only the ones of the kind “I think...”. As the three questions are somehow related, Ireland and Germany are steady democracies, what may explain those low rates if we consider that having the tradition on voting for so long, people started voting less because more used to trust, in abstract, on Democracy as something already acquired. However, Sweden, also a steady democracy for many years and with a tradition on social welfare state puts the Swedish as regular voters. We must also not forget that this is not an sociological inference. In fact, the cases of Ireland and Germany are special because the Irish school as a lot of migrants, travelers and foreigners; the German school is a special needs school. Those matters may be a reason for the results. On what concerns to Portugal, Catalonia, Hellenic Republic and Slovakia, the high rates might be explained, on the three southern countries as a result of early democracies and countries under economic surveillance for the past few years. Also Catalonia is now experiencing the rising of independence feelings that may very well enhance the Catalan participation on the political process. For Slovakia, the reason I find is being a country recently member of the European Union and a part of a country belonging to the former Eastern Europe before the Fall of the Wall.
4. On question number 4, our partnership is almost 50-50: Hellenic Republic, Spain and Sweden show high rates of participation; the others are more or less at the same level, but in a lower level. My explanation is the tradition of participation in Sweden and the contentious realities in Hellas and Catalonia, stronger than in Portugal, for instance.

5. Questions 5 and 6 demonstrate a high civic awareness in all partners. On the fifth question we see that there is involvement in general; on the sixth, we realize that many of our parents are civically active. We also see that on the open question with the huge variety of participation, as well as and, in my point of view, more important, the nature of the organizations and attitudes people reveal: citizenship, as our project wishes. Schools and families are tuned.
6. For question number 7 it is interesting to notice that the right to free movements inside the EU is far more voted than all the others. In my point of view, this is good and bad. Good, because people realize that a free and peaceful Europe is a common goal. We may cross borders and be citizen of another country. That is good. The bad perspective is that the commitment to the political process is given to our representatives without any worries. And that means no surveillance on politicians, which is bad.

Carlos Trincão