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Policy Brief

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1. Civic education in school curricula

Definitions and purposes

In its broadest definition, **civic education** “means all the processes that affect people’s beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions as members or prospective members of communities”: it can therefore be considered as a synonym for the concepts of **Global Citizenship Education (GCE)** and of **Education for sustainable development**.

Within this policy brief, however, reference is made to civic education as defined in the **Italian regulatory framework**, which places it exclusively in the context of formal education, namely as a subject of school curricula - although recognising its inevitable correlation with social and civic life. Understood in this way, civic education finds its **first definition** already in **1953**, with the **Decree of the President of Italian Republic n° 585 (DPR 585)**, which introduced the subject in secondary schools “to meet the need to create relationships of mutual collaboration between School and Life. (...) If you look closely, the expression “civic education” underlies behind the term “education” the purpose and role of the school, and behind the term “civic” refers to the social, legal, political life, that is, to the principles that govern the community and the forms in which it takes shape”. The **main pillars** of “traditional” civic education consisted in the study of the Italian Constitution, of the institutions and organs of social life, of the rights and duties of citizens, and of the principles of international cooperation.

Nowadays, the definition of civic education can, instead, be found in the new **Italian Law 92 of 20th August 2019 “Introduction of the compulsory teaching of civic education”**, which in Art. 2 identifies it as “the transversal subject (...) that develops knowledge and understanding of the social, economic, legal, civic and environmental structures and profiles of the society. [...]”. With the law 92/19, the thematic pillars of traditional civic education are reinforced with **new conceptual nuclei**, including **digital citizenship**, **sustainable development** and **environmental education**.

The defining framework of this “new” Italian civic education has adapted to **the principles and objectives of the international community**, which considers it urgent to guarantee such education (civic education, global citizenship education and education for sustainable development), first of all within the schools. At the EU level, the **reference document for educational institutions, especially schools**, is the **“Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning”**, which includes among the 8 key competences also the **“citizenship competence”**, which refers to the “the ability to act as responsible citizens and to fully participate in civic and social life, based on understanding of social, economic, legal and political concepts and structures, as well as global developments and sustainability”. In the international context, central is **the target 4.7 of the Goal 4 “Quality Education” of the UN 2030 Agenda** on education for sustainable development and global citizenship, to which the **related Framework for Action - Education 2030** refers in an even more specific way, by recalling the need for “an education that helps build peaceful and sustainable societies (...) in a globalized world with unresolved social, political, economic and environmental challenges”, pointing out precisely how “**education systems seldom fully integrate such transformative approaches**”.



2. The situation in Italy

Regulatory changes, actors, good practices

The innovations of the law on civic education

In Italy, the 2019 civic education reform represented a key moment in the historical-normative evolution of this subject. Starting with the first law in 1953, civic education was indeed an existing subject in Italian schools, but always remained on the sidelines, with fragmented regulatory references, not requiring any evaluation and without a specific teacher. **The Italian law 92/2019, on the other hand, establishes civic education as a compulsory teaching course** *“in the first and second cycle of education”*: it becomes a subject with its own grade, with one or more professors in charge, and with a minimum number of hours (33 hours per year). Civic education finds a further field of application in kindergartens, where *“initiatives to raise awareness of responsible citizenship”* should be introduced.

The Italian legislator not only has made mandatory the teaching of this subject, but has also innovated it, both in terms of **content** and in terms of **methodology and organization**.

contents

Regarding the innovation of the topics, the Guidelines for teaching civic education, issued by the Ministry of Education in July 2020, firstly specify the **three conceptual nuclei** that constitute the pillars of the Law:

1. Italian Constitution, law (national and international), legality and solidarity;
2. Sustainable development, environmental education, knowledge and protection of heritage and territory;
3. Digital citizenship.

While point 1 is a well-established topic of “traditional” civic education, point 2 connects directly with **the goals of the UN 2030 Agenda** giving to the civic education a **global perspective** that cannot be separated from the international social, political, economic and environmental context. Point 3 is also a topic today more relevant than ever: **digital citizenship** is identified as *“the ability of an individual to make use of the virtual media consciously and responsibly”*. As the Guidelines underline, it is now **crucial to develop this ability at school**, *“with students who are already plunged into the web and who encounter every day the proposed issues”*, in order to develop a critical thinking, to raise awareness about the risks linked with the use of social media and online surfing and to contrast hate speech. The introduction of the digital citizenship concept, to which the same law dedicates an entire article (Art. 5), wants to represent the complexity of modern society, and the consequent need to promote among learners the **global citizenship competences applied to the world of internet and social media**.

methodology and organization



Concerning the methodological and organisational aspects, central is the one defined in the Guidelines as *“principle of transversality of the new subject, also due to the learning objectives and expected skills, which are not related to a single discipline and are not even exclusively disciplinary”*. This principle has effects on the implementation aspect of the law and on the organisation of the teaching course within schools: first, it is envisaged the **joint responsibility of the subject** to all the members of the Class Council and therefore its teaching is entrusted to one or more teachers.

Fundamental to the principle of transversality is also Art. 8 of the law *“Scuola e territorio (School and territory)”*, which states that teaching *“is integrated with extracurricular experiences, starting from building multiannual networks with other institutional subjects, with the world of volunteering and the Third sector (also called the non-profit sector), and in particular with those engaged in promoting active citizenship”*. In other words, the civic and social education of each pupil is possible only thanks to a *“connection between the disciplines (curricular, A/N) and experiences (extracurricular, A/N) of active citizenship that must contribute to creating the civic education curriculum”* (Guidelines, page 1). Extracurricular experiences must be offered by those subjects of civil society who demonstrate to have the knowledge and skills required. This perspective of openness and dialogue between the formal education sector and other sectors of society, primarily the third sector, **is consistent with the indications contained in the Italian Strategy for GCE**, according to which formal, non-formal and informal education must be combined to reach all areas of citizenship.

A further methodological innovation, introduced by the law 92/2019 in line with the GCE approach, is the one that considers the teaching of civic education no longer as a single transmission of **knowledge**, but also as a way to develop **skills** (analysis, understanding and participation in civic life kind of skills), and to trigger **behaviours** and **values**, thus promoting an educational approach, which must consider as fundamental *“the cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of learning”*, as also indicated by the Education 2030 Framework For Action. In fact, the aim is to contribute *“to train responsible and active citizens and to promote the full and active participation in the civic, cultural and social life of the communities, in compliance with the rules, rights and duties”* (Italian Law 92/19, Art. 1).

Due to its own features, the new civic education entails a **new definition of the evaluation criteria as well as** of the learning objectives/outcomes and, as a result, an **update of the school curricula**. In fact, the Guidelines give instructions to all educational institutions to *“update school curricula and teaching plan activities”*.

For the first 3 years of the law “experimentation”, **the school autonomies (i.e. the schools in their autonomy)** and not the MIUR (Ministry of Education, University and Research) should **decide the implementing measures** of the methodological and organisational innovations for the new teaching course: they are not only in charge of defining new evaluation criteria and of updating school curricula, but also of the activities organisation to be carried out in yearly 33 hours, of the procedures for appointing the teachers, as well as of the procedures for assigning the grade. **Only from the 2023/24 school year will be the MIUR, through the revision of the Guidelines, to define more specific application methods**, including the targets for the skills, the specific learning objectives as well as the expected results for civic education.

Actors and good practices

In these first 3 years in which the law 92/2019 is in force, the **Ministry of Education (ME)** takes on the responsibility of *“specific training actions and accompanying and support measures dedicated to managers and teachers”* as well as the *“monitoring of the activities carried out by educational institutions”*. There are several actors, institutional and non-institutional, who work alongside the ME to guarantee and facilitate the full and correct integration of the new teaching course in Italian schools.

The **Technical Scientific Committee (TSC)** was first established in May 2020 with the task of supporting the implementation of the law; in collaboration with **Indire**, the National Institute for

Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research (Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione, Innovazione e Ricerca Educativa), the TSC disseminates documents and seminars and defines the monitoring actions for the future integration of the Guidelines.

Therefore, in the July of the same year, the first protocol on the accompanying measures, the so-called **“Plan for the training of teachers for civic education pursuant to law 92/2019”**, was issued by ME. The Plan allocates resources and organizes training initiatives regarding the topics and methods of implementation of the new teaching course designed for teachers from all over Italy, making available 4,000,000 euros to finance the implementation of 1250 training modules at a national level (included in the [sofia.istruzione.it](https://www.sofia.istruzione.it) system) that will be conceivably able to reach all territories and schools. The document also outlines a governance structure for its implementation: other than the leading role of the TSC and of Indire, the **Regional School Offices** together with the **Hub Schools for education** act as coordinator of the training activities and supervisor of the educational initiatives, connecting the schools at local level and the TSC. Furthermore, the **“Implementing bodies”** of the training courses provide dedicated training packages (video lessons, webinars, documents), which will also include a “support on the job” throughout the first year of experimentation.

In October 2020 the ME made available the **Portal dedicated to Civic education** with the aim of collecting *“in a single section both **materials** and **good practices** to give visibility to the great work done every day in our schools on fundamental issues to grow as active citizens, who are aware and capable of analysing reality with a critical spirit and to live responsibly”* (**statement by the Minister of Education Lucia Azzolina, 29th October 2020**). The portal already contains some useful information tools, including the reference standards and **information videos made by Indire** before the beginning of the school year 2020-21. Indire has also the task of collecting the best local practices and of creating a standardised document repository to be made available to each educational institution, in accordance with the requirements of Art. 9 of the Italian law **“Albo delle buone pratiche di educazione civica** (Register of good civic education practices)”.

As it is understood by its roles and functions, **Indire**, among the private actors, is certainly a key subject for the implementation of the civic education law: for its own mission, the Institute is a point of reference more generally for educational policies, including the Italian Strategy for GCE. As already pointed out in the **MigratED GCE policy brief**, Indire contributes in various ways to the promotion of educational innovation, to the relationship between school and the territory and to the dissemination of training initiatives on sustainable development and global citizenship issues.

ASviS, the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development, is also a key player in the promotion of a sustainable development culture within educational institutions. Not surprisingly, in 2020 the collaboration between Indire and ASviS was strengthened, and it led to the enrichment of the portal **“Scuola2030: education for value creation”**, an initiative promoted in 2019 by the Ministry of Education, Indire and ASviS that is included among the actions envisaged by the Memorandum of Understanding **MIUR-ASVIS on sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda**.

During the experimentation phase of the law on civic education, the contribution of the Alliance has been fundamental in providing useful materials for the **training of teachers: the e-learning course on the 2030 Agenda** within the **Scuola 2030 portal has been made accessible** to all 800 thousand in-service teachers (in contrast to the 63 thousand newly-hired teachers for which it was initially made available), and the provision for both teachers and students of the volume **“A sustainable World in 100 photos”**. These measures have the aim *“of reinforcing the training pathways on this topic for teachers and managers of schools of all levels”*, since the 2030 Agenda is part of the learning goals (**ASviS 2020 Report**). The MIUR-ASviS Protocol also provides other types of activities, including the **Competition called “Let’s score 17 Goals”**, in its fourth edition in 2020, and which, despite the difficult period due to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, has raised interest among different educational institutions; the Protocol also led to the mention of the Alliance materials on the Ministry’s website, made available to educational institutions during the period of Distance learning (Didattica a distanza - DAD).



3. The educational action of WeWorld

The GCE approach and the MigratED project

The principles and objectives set out both in the internationally relevant references and in the new Italian law on civic education can also be found in the educational initiatives promoted by **WeWorld**.

Following a **multi-actor and trans-sectoral approach** between public and private, formal and non-formal education, profit and non-profit, WeWorld collaborates continuously with educational institutions, committing itself to introduce good educational practices, to promote dialogue between school and territory and to carry out advocacy actions with the aim of reforming the educational system as a whole.

WeWorld's GCE approach ¹ provides for specific lines of intervention in the context of formal education:

- Advocacy action aimed at **inserting, in a clear and defined way, the global citizenship skills in the regulations**, more specifically in the school regulations, and, consequently, at proposing the **revisions of the curricula**.
- Continuous **training activities for teachers and school directors**, which WeWorld carries out transversally within the GCE projects, with a training offer able not only to promote global citizenship, critical thinking, intercultural and digital skills, but also to activate virtuous behaviours and values.
- Educational paths in which **the interdisciplinary approach 'based on skills'** is developed by teachers and enriched by initiatives **in partnership with the local community**, to specifically promote global citizenship skills through didactic strategies centred on **experiential learning**.

The prospect of the Italian law 92/2019 certainly offers **new opportunities for the development of WeWorld's GCE** action in the school environment, starting from the thematic pillars: Agenda 2030, digital citizenship (media education, digital literacy, contrasting fake news and hate speech), environmental education and eco-sustainable development, promotion of active citizenship. Furthermore, the compulsory and transversal nature of teaching civic education and the dialogue between school and territory are principles consistent with WeWorld's GCE approach.

WeWorld's GCE strategic lines find a concrete application in **MigratED**, a three-year project, co-financed by the Erasmus+ programme, whose aims are also consistent with the innovative scenario introduced by the law 92/2019:

- To introduce **the issues of human rights, migration, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue in schools**, by promoting the acquisition of civic, social and digital knowledge and skills for students, teachers and the entire educating community;
- **To activate innovative educational practices**, based not only on the transmission of knowledge but also on triggering active citizenship behaviours, by promoting in particular the **dialogue between school and territory** and the collaboration with institutions in the social and reception sector;
- **To introduce technologies** in education, especially among young people, by promoting **critical thinking skills in digital environments**.

Due to these characteristics, the MigratED project can be considered as a pilot action and a good practice to be taken into consideration for a future and effective application of teaching civic education:

- It fosters the acquisition of **global citizenship, critical thinking and intercultural skills within Italian schools** and in other 4 European countries, with a methodology based on the use of technology and audiovisual devices in teaching, addressing its training activities to **325 teachers and educators and 800 young people** and producing both **documentary** and **audiovisual** educational materials, useful to further teachers for the realisation of educational activities on the topics of human rights, migration and the 2030 Agenda.
- It promotes the **dialogue between school and territory** (as recalled by Art. 8 of the law 92) by creating moments of education and dialogue between the school sector and that of non-formal education, but also through the organisation of 25 awareness-raising peer to peer events that actively involve young people and students, as well as through a communication action directed to the educational community as a whole.
- It requires **policy-makers to take regulatory action** aimed at renewing the school curricula, to include in them the teaching of GCE topics (with particular attention to migration and intercultural dialogue) and the use of technological tools as promoters of inclusive education.

4. Challenges and difficulties in Italy

The civic education law has given an initial response to the need for a regulatory framework that innovates the school curricula and that promotes within schools the introduction of civic, social but also digital, intercultural and critical thinking knowledge and skills.

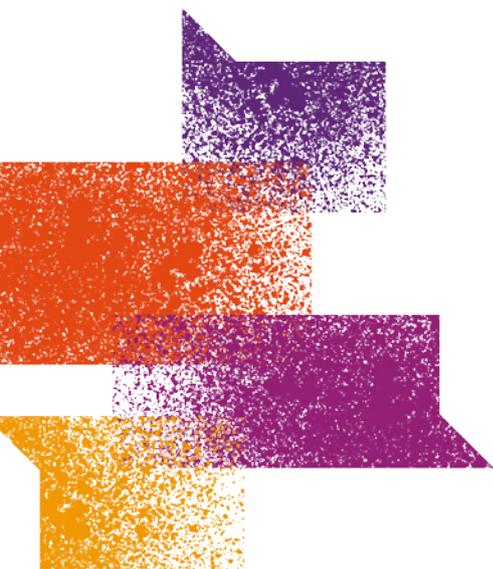
However, from the entry into force of the law, there are new and complex challenges that has to be faced, no longer related to the production of a regulatory reference, but to the correct and consistent implementation of the law itself.

The primary problem is that of financial resources allocated to education. In 2019, the former Minister of Education, University and Research resigned due to the insufficient resources provided for the education system by the 2020 Budget Law, having already threatened to leave the executive if at least three billions euros were not allocated to the relaunch of the education sector. **In 2020, the COVID-19 crisis had heavy effects on the education sector:** the lack of **devices** necessary for the Distance Learning, the learning loss linked to the new teaching methods, the closure of the schools, as well as the worsening of inequalities in the access to education. The crisis has made clear the importance **of the digital transition in every field and has brought out the shortcomings of the Italian system, starting from its infrastructures** ². Furthermore, the emergency logic that characterises school funding has become more acute, ³ causing the public debate to give little attention to the negative consequences of the lockdown in view of a sustainable and longer-term logic (**ASviS 2020 Report**).

The very implementation of the civic education law sees insufficient financial resources among its first obstacles. The decree containing the Guidelines is, in fact, implemented *“within the limits of human, instrumental and financial resources available under current legislation and in any case without new or greater burdens on public finance”*: the teaching course is to be carried out *“within the scope of the annual teaching activities”*, and, therefore, **without providing for resources, teachers, or additional hours**. The allocation of resources was provided exclusively within the framework of the teacher training Plan ⁴.

Time delays also constituted a further obstacle for an appropriate application of the subject: first, in 2019, the late publication in the Official Gazette postponed the entry into force of the law 92/19 from the school year 2019-20 to 2020-21. In the second place, the guidelines were also issued later (July 2020) than the beginning of the school year, and while the cabinet was focused on other priorities - the management of the health emergency and the reopening of the schools in safety. Finally, the Plan for the training of teachers, essential for transmitting to them the topics, methodologies and pedagogical tools appropriate for the new subject, was issued when the school year had already begun, actually preventing an effective application of the teaching of the subject during the first year of experimentation of the law.





Some critical issues in terms of application and **coherence among principles, methodologies, and organisational methods** described in the Guidelines: challenges that are mostly related to the first 3 years of experimentation of the law, and, more specifically, to the introduction of the subject in schools, which occurred in the same school year in which the educational institutions have been overwhelmed by the management of the Distance learning emergency:

- **The principles of transversality and joint responsibility**, although perceived as a possibility to customise the subject to the needs of individual schools, carry with them the risk of an excessive **fragmentation and disorganisation**. This was confirmed by the school managers respondent to a **survey carried out in 2020** by the Fondazione Intercultura Onlus and the Ministry of Education in collaboration with IPSOS. In fact, while the principle of transversality calls for a collective responsibility of all teachers, the Guidelines do not specify - at least for the first 3 years of application of the law - how to integrate the thirty-three hours of civic education per year in the didactic planning, nor how to distribute these hours among other subjects, making unclear **the coordination procedures and the division of tasks and responsibilities among teachers**.
- During the experimental stage, **the definition of the criteria for the evaluation of the subject is also largely delegated to the school autonomies** with the risk of making the assignment of the grade linked to the subjectivities of individuals (teachers and institutes). The Guidelines do provide targets of civic education skills to be integrated with those of other teaching courses; however, each institution must refer to learning objectives/outcomes and to skills that the faculty boards must independently identify. In addition to the risk of **arbitrariness of the grading**, there are also **technical and operational difficulties** on the part of the teaching staff in developing tools and evaluation grids suitable for a new subject, which is outside its own disciplinary sphere and which indeed includes in itself also “extra-disciplinary experiences”.

The **lack of a shared and centrally developed framework for civic education Competences** actually refers to a political problem, confirmed by the Italian government’s failure to adhere to the **Global Competence Framework** promoted in 2018 by the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) survey. **The need not only to define, but also and, above all, to evaluate and measure civic education/global citizenship competences has been highlighted in many studies and working groups of international relevance**. At the European level, other than the PISA survey on the global competences of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development), and the listing of the *citizenship competences* among the **8 key competences for lifelong learning identified by the European Parliament**, in 2013 the European Council also created the **Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture** (RFCDC), which contains tools and methods to be adapted in the different learning environments. UNESCO also offered its own defining framework for the GCE competences: in 2014, the **Working Group dedicated to Global Citizenship Education** defined 8 main global competences to be defined and measured according to different topics, learning objectives and degrees of education⁵. In the national context, it is worth mentioning the booklet “**Education for Sustainable Citizenship**” shared with schools in September 2020 by the former Minister of Education Lorenzo Fioramonti: creating a connection among educational paths, thematic pillars, transversal fields and specific learning objectives, the document aims “*to be a functional tool for teachers*” [...], and “*to provide valuable support in the pursuit of educational objectives within various training cycles*”. To ensure the effectiveness of the GCE actions, and in particular those of civic education in schools, **these documents and tools should therefore be implemented by the government**, re-adapted according to national and territorial educational contexts, and provided as part of specific training to educational institutions as a reference framework for the definition and measurement of civic education competences. **However, the ME has postponed** this complex process of identifying a framework of competences for civic education **to the school year 2023/24**, when the Guidelines will be updated based on the results of monitoring the activities carried out by the educational institutions.

In conclusion, the decision to delegate, although only for the first 3 years of application of the law, the methods of implementation of the teaching of the new civic education to school autonomies, providing little or no financial, methodological and organisational resources, has the risk of generating a contradictory picture, which is characterised not only by a **lack of responsibility of the teaching staff**, but also by a lack of effectiveness of the subject didactic planning, of the activity implementation monitoring, but, above all, a **gap between the innovative scope of the purposes and contents of the law and its methods of application**.



4. Proposals and solutions

How can we give a concrete application to the teaching of civic education?

Although on a formal level the principles, contents, objectives and methodologies of the new civic education have a strong innovative scope, they equally need transformative Guidelines, thus capable of introducing the subject in schools in an efficient, effective and fair way.

The urgent need is to envisage a redesign of school curricula by offering a new framework of learning objectives, which includes not only knowledge, but also skills, behaviours and values of global citizenship, by offering educational paths, which are both vertical within teaching and horizontal between the different subjects.

In order to do this, it is necessary to completely rethink teaching through **a planning action upstream** (and therefore at the central and ministerial government level) and an **implementation and evaluation downstream** (at the level of the EEPP, USR - Regional School Offices - and school autonomies), in a perspective of **continuous monitoring and improvement**. This process must also foresee the constant attention to new principles, studies and tools made available by the international community.

Here are some specific proposals to be taken into consideration to make the teaching of the subject consistent with the innovation of the principles and methodologies required by the new civic education:

PROPOSALS FOR AN EFFECTIVE DESIGN UPSTREAM:

1. Amend the Guidelines, foreseeing the revision of the curricula in terms of resources and additional hours to be provided for the teaching of civic education;
2. Define a **Competence Framework** for civic education valid at a national level and contained in the Guidelines, which each Local Authority and school autonomy can then adapt to its specific educational needs;
3. Provide public resources to be able to **pay teachers coordinator** of Civic Education subject, to avoid mechanisms of lack of responsibility;
4. Provide public resources for the **training of teachers on contents and methodologies**, providing specialised trainers and making multimedia educational tools available, also by collecting existing good practices. This need is even more urgent for the topics of digital citizenship (media education and hate speech);
5. Provide public resources for the **training of teachers on tools and techniques for assessing and measuring civic education competences**.

PROPOSALS THE APPLICATION AND EVALUATION DOWNSTREAM:

1. **Make the Art. 8 of the law "Scuola e Territorio (School and Territory)" effective**, by establishing the dialogue among the formal education sector, the non-formal and informal one and the local authorities, in particular in the social and hospitality sector. In this sense it would be useful to rediscover the role of school autonomy, to which strategic decisions are delegated, by deepening the perspectives of the **"community educational pacts"** introduced by the **Document for the planning of school, educational and training activities, issued by ME for the school year 2020-2021**;
2. Identify **monitoring mechanisms** capable of detecting the presence of heterogeneity in the quality of teaching among different school autonomies or territorial networks and transmit them effectively at a central level;
3. Identify **incentive mechanisms for teachers**, including non-coordinators, to participate in training on the teaching of civic education and to co-design, in each teaching body, ad hoc educational paths, consistent with the principle of transversal teaching;

4. Coordinate the teaching of civic education with the actions envisaged by the Italian **Strategy for GCE** (see the recommendations contained in the **Policy Brief on GCE** developed as part of the MigratED project);

5. Define a single national entity that is responsible for the evaluation of the Italian Strategy for GCE implementation and the teaching of civic education: **an Observatory which, with a clear public mandate, responds to all public and private stakeholders** (from ME to MAECI - Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, from Local Authorities to Regional School Offices, from Schools to Research Centres, from NGOs to youth associations, from teachers and managers to educators).

Footnote

1 The WeWorld Education Policy is programmed to be published in the first half of 2021, which will contain in a specific document the principles, methodologies and lines of action applied in the educational field by WeWorld, including the more specific GCE.

2 During the months of *lockdown*, the National Statistics Institute (Istat) has estimated that about three million students between the ages of 6 and 17 have had difficulty in following the lessons in distance learning mode, mainly due to the lack or inadequacy of computer devices in the family.

3 We are talking about 331 million to school managers for the safe reopening of schools, 400 million for the newborn Ministerial Fund 2020 for the epidemiological emergency, to which a further 600 million must be added for 2021.

4 The budget of the Ministry of Education has made available € 4 million for the year 2020 to finance 1250 modules nationwide; the allocation of funds is arranged in favour of the hub schools for training.

5 For further information on the work conducted by UNESCO, concerning the definition and assessment of global citizenship competences, please refer to the following links:

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