

## Education to tackle polarisation and enhance democracy

7 March | 10:00 - 11:30



**Organised by:** Life Learning Platform, Philea & EESC SOC Section

### Report

The workshop aimed to investigate and start to collectively brainstorm potential responses by education systems to polarisation. During this workshop, the link between education and polarisation was discussed through the perspective of the intergenerational aspect.

Education plays a critical role in preparing members of society to be active and responsible citizens. The very idea of a ‘shared experience’ is undermined by our increasingly polarised society because we can no longer agree on basic truths.

Understanding polarisation, its dynamics and its impacts on society is the first step to allow the education sector to plan its responses in preparing future citizens.

We tackled and investigated the issue following a holistic perspective that included formal, non- formal and informal education sectors and an inclusive approach that started from practices in promoting a democratic dialogue in classrooms at the school level, then understanding and maybe changing narratives surrounding the role of education at the society level, as well as working on adapting the education systems accordingly and how to involve all the actors and stakeholders of non-formal and informal education settings.

## **Key messages from the workshops**

**Maarten Van Alstein** (researcher at the Flemish Peace Institute), focused his contribution on how to change the classroom climate and dynamics in schools to promote dialogue and debate based on democratic disagreement rather than toxic polarisation.

What we should do:

- create spaces and time in classrooms to discuss polarising topics
- open classrooms to the global context and transform conflicts into democratic disagreement

**Erika Stael von Holstein** (Chief Executive of Re-Imagine Europa) addressed the narratives in and on education. Narratives are how we give meaning and understanding to the world, in this sense, the power of education in cultivating emotional intelligence and therefore democratic dialogues is huge. The paradox of our current society is that we are more connected than ever, but more isolated than ever!

What we should do:

- move away from a 'right vs wrong' paradigm
- increase dialogue and emotional intelligence that make it possible to face the challenges of the future

**Dominic Richardson** (Director of the Learning for Well-being Foundation) drove the focus of the debate on the level of education systems and the support to school system to address the causes of polarisation: tackling polarisation by making education work.

What we should do:

- protect the development of innate human skills
- decrease insecurity that generates polarisation by focusing on increasing emotional intelligence that determines success

Finally, **Andrea Lapegna** (Deputy Director of the Lifelong Learning Platform), raised the points of the meaningful role that the non-formal and informal sectors play in fighting polarisation by fostering mutual understanding.

What we should do:

- depolarise minds before depolarising society
- connect people from individual to the collective, also looking outside schools including by following a bottom-up approach applied by civil society organisations.