



Co-funded by
the European Union

UNDERSTANDING EU VALUES IN ADULT EDUCATION

PARTNER: ENCRE

COUNTRY: Belgium



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1. Introduction

This module explores the role of **European Union (EU) values** in shaping inclusive and democratic societies. It focuses on key principles such as **human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights**. These fundamental values are not only central to the EU's identity but also serve as building blocks for promoting social cohesion, lifelong learning, and active civic participation across Europe. By highlighting the importance of these values, the module aims to provide a deeper understanding of how they contribute to creating more inclusive, fair, and democratic communities.

Designed specifically for **adult educators**, this module offers **practical methodologies, real-world examples, and case studies** to support the integration of EU values into everyday teaching practices. Adult educators are equipped with tools that can be directly applied to their teaching contexts, enabling them to engage learners in meaningful discussions about democracy, citizenship, and European identity. These resources help educators empower their students to understand and embody the values that are essential for the democratic fabric of the EU.

The module holds significant value within the broader project context, as **it addresses the root causes of Euroscepticism and nationalism**. These issues are often driven by misunderstandings, misinformation, and lack of awareness about EU institutions and values. Rather than confronting these challenges with political arguments, the module emphasises education as a tool for positive change. By focusing on the shared EU values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights, the module encourages a more constructive and informed approach to addressing scepticism toward the EU. This value-based approach fosters dialogue and understanding, creating a space for learners to critically engage with and reflect on their place within the EU.

This module is especially relevant to **adult education**, where learners often encounter challenges such as misinformation, lack of civic engagement, and scepticism about European institutions. Through accessible and value-driven learning experiences, the module provides adult learners with the knowledge and skills they need to navigate these challenges effectively. It promotes active citizenship, encouraging learners to become informed, engaged participants in their communities and in the broader European project. By addressing these issues, the module contributes to building stronger, more resilient democratic societies where EU values can be effectively upheld and promoted.

In conclusion, this module is not only relevant for adult education but also crucial in the broader context of promoting EU values, addressing current challenges, and preparing individuals to actively contribute to their societies. It supports adult educators in creating learning environments that foster democratic resilience, critical thinking, and active participation, ultimately helping to shape a more inclusive and cohesive European community.

2. Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, educators will be able to:

1. **Explain the significance of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights in the European context.**

Educators will understand the EU's core values and their role in shaping European society. They will be able to explain how these values contribute to social cohesion, inclusivity, and democratic resilience, helping learners see their importance in the context of EU membership and governance.

2. **Develop strategies to incorporate these values into adult education programs.**

The module will provide educators with practical strategies to integrate EU values into their lessons. Educators will learn how to adapt these values to their learners' needs, creating inclusive educational experiences that resonate with adult learners and promote critical thinking and civic responsibility.

3. **Use real-world examples and interactive techniques to engage learners in discussions about EU values.**

Educators will be trained to use case studies and interactive activities that bring EU values to life. By engaging learners in discussions, debates, and scenario-based exercises, educators will foster a deeper understanding of these values and their application in real-world situations, making the learning experience more relevant and engaging.

4. **Encourage civic participation and critical thinking to strengthen democratic engagement.**

This module will help educators promote active citizenship among learners. Educators will learn how to inspire critical thinking, encouraging learners to engage with civic activities such as voting, volunteering, and public discourse, while also reflecting on their role in shaping democratic societies.

5. **Identify and address barriers to inclusivity in adult education settings.**

Educators will gain the skills to recognise and address barriers to inclusivity, such as language, cultural differences, and digital literacy. Strategies will be provided to ensure that all learners have equal access to the educational experience, fostering an environment where everyone can engage with EU values and contribute meaningfully.

3. Theoretical Background

This module is grounded in key social, political, and educational theories that support the promotion of EU values within adult education. These frameworks help educators understand the dynamics of identity, civic engagement, and democratic participation, which are central to the module's objectives.

1. **Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities":**

Anderson's theory of "Imagined Communities" explains how collective identities are constructed, particularly in the context of nations or regions. In educational settings, this theory helps learners understand their place within the European community, fostering a shared identity that transcends national or cultural boundaries. Educators can use this concept to encourage a sense of belonging to the broader European project, promoting solidarity among diverse groups of learners.

2. **Jürgen Habermas's "Constitutional Patriotism":**

Habermas introduces "Constitutional Patriotism," a theory where individuals identify with democratic values—such as human rights and justice—rather than with ethnic or nationalistic loyalties. This theory is especially relevant in the context of EU education, where fostering a civic identity based on democratic principles is key. Educators can apply this theory to help learners develop a connection to the EU's values, promoting unity and civic responsibility across diverse European societies.

3. **Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed":**

Freire's participatory pedagogy emphasizes empowering learners to critically engage with their social, political, and economic environments. Education, according to Freire, should be a collaborative process where educators and learners work together to explore societal issues. This approach aligns with the module's goal of promoting active citizenship, encouraging learners to participate in democratic processes and reflect on their role in shaping society. By using Freire's pedagogy, educators can foster critical thinking and civic engagement.

4. **The European Commission's White Paper on the Future of Europe:**

The European Commission's White Paper outlines the EU's vision for its future, emphasizing the role of education in sustaining democratic governance. It stresses the need to foster critical thinking, civic participation, and understanding of EU institutions. Educators can draw on this framework to engage learners with the EU's future challenges, encouraging them to reflect on their role in shaping Europe's trajectory.

These theories provide a comprehensive foundation for educators to promote democratic engagement, critical thinking, and a shared European identity. By incorporating these frameworks, educators can help learners become active, informed citizens who understand and engage with the core values that underpin the EU.

4. Understanding EU Values in adult education

4.1 Intro to the topic

Education plays a crucial role in promoting and sustaining the core values of the European Union. Schools, universities, and adult education programs provide spaces where individuals engage with concepts like democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. By integrating these values into curricula, educators help learners develop civic responsibility, critical thinking, and active participation in democratic processes. Education also helps counter misinformation, foster inclusivity, and encourage dialogue among diverse communities. This section explores how the EU's core values—human dignity, equality, freedom, democracy, rule of law, and human rights—can be integrated into adult education to create more engaged, informed, and socially responsible citizens. According to [article 2 of the Lisbon Treaty](#) and the [EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), the European Union is founded on the following values:

- **Human dignity:** Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected, protected and constitutes the real basis of fundamental rights.
- **Freedom:** The EU guarantees freedom of movement and protects individual freedoms like respect for private life, freedom of thought, religion, assembly, expression, and information, all safeguarded by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.
- **Democracy:** The functioning of the EU is founded on representative democracy. A European citizen automatically enjoys political rights. Every adult EU citizen has the right to stand as a candidate and to vote in elections to the European Parliament. EU citizens have the right to stand as a candidate and to vote in their country of residence, or in their country of origin.
- **Equality:** Equality is about equal rights for all citizens before the law. The principle of equality between women and men underpins all European policies and is the basis for European integration. It applies in all areas. The principle of equal pay for equal work became part of the [Treaty of Rome](#) in 1957.
- **Rule of law:** The EU is based on the rule of law. Everything the EU does is founded on treaties, voluntarily and democratically agreed by its EU countries. Law and justice are upheld by an independent judiciary. The EU countries gave final jurisdiction to the European Court of Justice - its judgments have to be respected by all.
- **Human rights:** Human rights are protected by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. These cover the right to be free from discrimination on the basis of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, the right to the protection of your personal data, and the right to get access to justice.

4.2 Application in Adult Education

a. Human Dignity and Equality

The EU prioritises human dignity as the foundation of all rights and freedoms. In education, this means:

- Promoting **inclusive classrooms** that welcome individuals of all backgrounds, genders, ethnicities, and abilities.
- Addressing and reducing discrimination through structured discussions on **diversity and bias**.
- Using **real-life testimonies and narratives** from marginalised communities to foster empathy and awareness.
- Encouraging **peer mentorship programs** where learners support one another in overcoming social and educational barriers.

b. Freedom and Democracy

Democracy thrives when citizens are informed and actively participate. Adult education can foster this by:

- Teaching **media literacy** to help learners identify misinformation and engage critically with news sources.
- Organising **debates and simulations** where learners practice democratic decision-making and civic engagement.
- Incorporating lessons on **historical and contemporary struggles for freedom** within and beyond the EU.
- Encouraging participation in **local governance and community initiatives** through structured civic engagement programs.

c. Rule of Law and Human Rights

The rule of law guarantees **justice, equality, and protection of fundamental freedoms**. In adult education, this involves:

- Educating learners on **how EU institutions function**, including the European Court of Justice and European Parliament and organising visits to **parliamentary sessions, courtrooms** to see democratic institutions in action.
- Discussing **landmark human rights cases** that have shaped EU policies.
- Teaching about **workers' rights, gender rights, and asylum rights** to empower learners in their personal and professional lives.

4.3 Case Studies and Examples

This section presents real-world examples of initiatives that effectively promote EU values through education, offering opportunities for critical reflection and adaptation:

1. Erasmus+ and Intercultural Exchange:

Erasmus+ programs contribute to fostering mutual understanding and cooperation by providing mobility opportunities for students, educators, and youth. These exchanges allow participants to experience different cultures, develop intercultural competencies, and deepen their appreciation of European values such as tolerance and diversity. Educators can encourage learners to reflect on how such exchanges influence their understanding of EU identity and values.

2. EU-wide Media Literacy Campaigns:

To counter disinformation and support informed civic participation, the EU has launched media literacy initiatives aimed at improving citizens' ability to critically assess information. These campaigns educate individuals on identifying fake news, navigating digital media responsibly, and engaging in fact-based political discourse. A critical discussion point could be the role of media literacy in strengthening democratic values and combating Euroscepticism.

3. Community Integration Programs:

Education programs targeting refugees and migrants within the EU serve as prime examples of promoting inclusivity and social cohesion. Successful initiatives provide language courses, cultural orientation, and skills development, ensuring migrants can participate fully in society. These programs highlight the importance of education in promoting equality, human dignity, and social integration, encouraging learners to discuss how similar programs could be expanded or improved.

4. Digital Platforms for Civic Engagement:

Tools like "Europe Direct" and "EU Youth Dialogue" are digital platforms that engage citizens, particularly youth, in EU policy discussions. These platforms encourage active participation in shaping EU policies and offer a space for feedback and dialogue. Educators can use these examples to explore how digital tools can enhance civic engagement and empower learners to contribute to democratic decision-making processes.

These real-world examples provide valuable insights into how EU values are integrated into education and civic engagement. By discussing and reflecting on these initiatives, learners can gain a deeper understanding of how EU principles are applied in practice and how they can adapt these strategies to their own contexts.

5. Teaching and Learning Methods

5.1 Methodology approach

To make the EU's core values engaging and accessible, educators can use various active learning methods that promote critical thinking and practical application. These approaches make abstract concepts like democracy, human rights, and equality more relatable and impactful.

1. **Problem-Based Learning (PBL):**

In PBL, learners collaborate to solve real-world problems. In the context of EU values, students explore issues related to democracy, rights, and justice, applying these concepts to practical challenges. This method fosters critical thinking, teamwork, and decision-making, encouraging learners to engage with diverse perspectives and find solutions to complex problems.

2. **Storytelling and Case Studies:**

Storytelling is a powerful tool for making abstract ideas more relatable. Educators can use:

- **Case Studies:** These allow learners to analyse real or hypothetical situations, applying EU values like fairness and equality to solve problems.
- **Personal Stories:** Sharing personal experiences helps create an authentic learning environment where learners connect with the material on a deeper level.
- **Fictional or Metaphorical Stories:** These simplify complex topics through allegories or metaphors, making abstract concepts like democracy more understandable.

3. **Interactive Workshops:**

Role-playing activities, mock elections, and policy-making exercises immerse learners in democratic processes. These workshops help learners develop essential civic skills like public speaking, collaboration, and decision-making.

4. **Service-Learning Projects:**

Service-learning encourages learners to engage in community-based projects that reflect EU values. Whether through volunteering or local initiatives, these projects allow learners to apply what they've learned in a real-world setting, fostering social responsibility and teamwork.

By using these methods, educators can create dynamic, interactive learning environments that help learners understand and apply the core values of the EU. These approaches empower learners to become active, informed citizens who contribute to a more democratic and inclusive society.

5.2 Suggested activities

Incorporating intergenerational and creative learning activities into adult education programs is key to promoting EU values like democracy, human rights, and social cohesion. These activities encourage collaboration between different age groups and stimulate creativity, helping learners engage with complex topics in meaningful ways.

1. **Intergenerational Storytelling Circles:**

A powerful activity is organising storytelling circles where participants from different generations share personal stories about their experiences with democracy, human rights, and societal changes. This activity fosters empathy and understanding, creating opportunities for meaningful connections and reflections on EU values.

2. **Collaborative Art Projects:**

Creative projects like collaborative art allow participants of all ages to express their understanding of EU values. Working together to create visual representations of concepts like equality or freedom encourages teamwork and dialogue. These projects provide a creative platform for participants to explore and express EU principles in a tangible way.

3. **Civic Engagement Workshops:**

Workshops combining role-playing, mock elections, and policy-making exercises engage participants from different generations in democratic processes. Older learners can share insights based on their experiences, while younger participants offer fresh perspectives, creating a dynamic environment for cross-generational learning and democratic participation.

4. **Community Heritage Projects:**

In these projects, learners of all ages collaborate to research and share local histories that reflect EU values, such as migration or civil rights movements. This activity highlights the importance of cultural memory while reinforcing EU principles like inclusivity, equality, and human dignity. It encourages mutual understanding between generations as they explore shared histories.

5. **Intergenerational Debates and Discussions:**

Debate sessions that pair older and younger participants allow for the exchange of ideas on EU values like freedom, human rights, and social justice. These discussions foster critical thinking and respect for diverse viewpoints, promoting democratic engagement and active participation in societal issues.

By incorporating intergenerational and creative activities, educators can create dynamic learning environments that encourage collaboration and deepen understanding of EU values. These activities empower learners of all generations to engage in critical thinking, problem-solving, and democratic participation, fostering a more inclusive and informed society.

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7. Conclusion

The European Union's **core values**—**human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights**—are fundamental in fostering inclusive, equitable, and democratic societies. These values are at the roots of a resilient and interconnected Europe. **Adult educators** have a pivotal role to play in embedding these principles within their teaching practices, helping learners understand not only the importance of these values but also how they can be **actively applied** in daily life. By integrating **interactive learning strategies, real-world case studies, and civic engagement activities** into their programs, educators can create environments where learners can engage critically with these concepts. Through **collaborative problem-solving, debates, and creative projects**, adult learners gain the knowledge and skills necessary to actively participate in democratic processes. As a result, adult educators contribute significantly to nurturing a more **informed, socially responsible, and engaged citizenry**, empowering individuals to uphold the EU's core values in both their personal lives and broader communities. By fostering a **deep, practical understanding** of these principles, adult education can help cultivate a **democratic Europe** that is both **inclusive and resilient** to the challenges of the modern world.



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Overcoming Nationalism and Euroscepticism Through Culture