



# International Civic and Citizenship Education Study

## Overview of Initial Findings from the 2009 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS)

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### ***Presentation of Initial Findings from ICCS 2009***

We are pleased to release the initial findings from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS). This important study investigated the ways in which young people are prepared to undertake their roles as citizens in modern societies. It reports on student knowledge and understanding of civics and citizenship as well as student attitudes, perceptions and activities related to civics and citizenship. The report from ICCS is based on data from more than 140,000 students in more than 5,000 schools from 38 countries. These data are augmented by data from more than 62,000 teachers in those schools and further contextual data collected from school principals and national research centers.

### ***Educating for citizenship***

Different approaches to civic and citizenship education are evident in ICCS countries. These approaches include providing a specific subject, integrating relevant content into other subjects and including content as a cross-curricular theme. Twenty-one of the 38 countries in ICCS included a specific subject concerned with civic and citizenship education in their curriculum. Civic and citizenship education covers a wide range of topics. The topics most frequently nominated by ICCS countries as having a major emphasis in civic and citizenship education were human rights (25 countries), understanding different cultures and ethnic groups (23 countries), the environment (23 countries), parliament and government systems (22 countries) and voting and elections (20 countries).

### ***Knowledge for citizenship***

Civic knowledge was defined broadly in ICCS as encompassing reasoning and analysis as well as knowing facts. In addition ICCS was concerned with understanding the elements and concepts of citizenship as well as those of traditional civics. The average scores of four countries (the Russian Federation, Lithuania, Spain and Austria) were

ICCS was conducted under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) by a consortium of three partner institutions: the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) in the United Kingdom, and the Laboratorio di Pedagogia sperimentale (LPS) at the Roma Tre University in Italy.

These institutions worked in close cooperation with the IEA Secretariat, the IEA Data Processing and Research Center, and the national research coordinators in participating countries.

not statistically significantly different from the ICCS average of 500 scale points. There were 14 countries with national averages that were significantly below the ICCS average and the average scores of 18 countries were significantly higher than the international average. The difference between the bottom quartile and the top quartile (i.e. covering the middle half of the averages for countries) was 60 scale points (the standard deviation was 100 points). At the top of the scale, 17 scale points covered the spread of average scale scores in Finland, Denmark, the Republic of Korea and Chinese Taipei followed by a gap of 22 scale points to the next country, Sweden.

Three proficiency levels were established that describe a hierarchy of civic knowledge in terms of increasing sophistication of content knowledge and cognitive process (from an engagement with fundamental principles and broad concepts and a mechanistic working knowledge, to being able to apply knowledge and understanding to evaluate or justify policies). In the four highest performing countries (Finland, Denmark, Korea, and Chinese Taipei) more than half of the students were at the highest proficiency level but in the four lowest performing countries more than 70 percent of student scores were in the lowest proficiency level. Sweden also performed well with 40 percent of its students performing in the top proficiency level.

Civic knowledge was associated with students' characteristics and family background. Girls had significantly higher civic knowledge scores than did boys in 31 of the 38 ICCS countries. The international average score for female students was 511 scale points and for male students was 489 scale points.

Parental occupational status was strongly and consistently associated with civic knowledge. On average, there was a difference of 72 scale points (or nearly three quarters of a standard deviation) between students with parents in the high occupational status category and students with parents in the low category. However, there was considerable difference among countries in this range. There were also smaller associations between civic knowledge and parental interest in social and political issues and immigrant background.

### ***Changes over ten years***

Previously, the IEA had conducted a study of civic education, called CIVED, in 1999. ICCS included some of the same items from that study and for 15 countries it was possible to obtain estimates of civic content knowledge scores in 2009 (a sub-dimension of the CIVED assessment of civic knowledge) that are comparable with those in 1999. The comparison suggests that, in seven of those countries, there has been a significant decline in civic content knowledge since 1999 and in only one (Slovenia) has there been a significant increase. On average the decline was one-fifth of a standard deviation. At this stage it is not possible to offer an explanation for this decline but it is also important to recognize that this is just one aspect of civic and citizenship education and that the results need to be interpreted with some caution given some changes in test design. In Finland and Sweden there was no change in civic content knowledge, although in Sweden one should take into account that for CIVED grade 8 students had been tested much earlier in the school year than for ICCS.

### ***Student perceptions and behaviors***

ICCS measured student perceptions and behaviors relevant to civics and citizenship: value beliefs, attitudes, behavioral intentions and behaviors. ICCS provides a number of interesting findings about the way students think about civic society and how they engage in it. Trust in civic institutions varied across

ICCS countries. On average about 60 percent of students across ICCS countries expressed trust in their national governments, the media and people in general, whereas 75 percent of students had at least quite a lot of trust in schools. The highest levels of trust in the national government were found in Austria, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, Finland, Indonesia, Italy, Liechtenstein, the Russian Federation, Sweden and Thailand. Political parties were typically the institution least trusted with only 40 percent of students expressing trust in political parties. On average half the students did not express any preferences for a particular political party. However, both trust and support for political parties varied noticeably. In some countries political parties had higher levels of trust or support whereas in others only small minorities of students expressed trust in them or stated any preferences.

Similar to the CIVED survey, ICCS shows that there is a strong endorsement of gender equality. On average more than 90 percent of students agreed with positively worded statements and between 15 and 29 percent of students agreed with the negatively worded statements about gender equity. However, there was notable variation across countries. Also similar to CIVED, the results from ICCS indicate that females were significantly more supportive of gender equality than male students in all ICCS countries.

Students had greater interest in domestic political or social issues and less interest in foreign issues and international politics. Only 28 percent of students expressed interest in politics in other countries, and 36 percent in international politics, but a majority of students reported to be quite interested in social issues (59 percent) and political issues (53 percent) in their country. Gender differences in relation to interest in political and social issues were generally small and inconsistent across countries. Student interest in politics and social issues appeared to be relatively little affected by immigrant or socioeconomic (measured through parental occupational status) background but was associated with student reports of their parents' interest in those issues. There is much more to be understood about how interactions in homes shape students' interests. However, this association appears to be independent of any influences of socioeconomic backgrounds.

Active civic participation in the community was not very common among those surveyed in ICCS whereas civic participation at school tended to be much more frequent.

Large majorities (on average 80 percent) of students intended to vote in national elections but only minorities expected to become politically active as adults. Approximately 26 percent said that they would join a political party or stand as a candidate in local election and 40 percent said that they would help a candidate during an election campaign.

### ***Classrooms, schools and communities***

ICCS shows that, although schools adopted different approaches to teaching civic and citizenship education, those approaches were often not closely connected to how civic and citizenship education was defined. Generally, only minorities of students (23%) in the target grade attended schools where principals reported that there was no specific provision for civic and citizenship education at all.

Most teachers regarded the development of knowledge and skills as the most important aim of civic and citizenship education. This included 'promoting knowledge of social, political and civic institutions' (33%), 'developing students' skills and competencies in conflict resolution' (41%), 'promoting knowledge of citizens' rights and responsibilities' (60%) and 'promoting students' critical and independent thinking' (52%).

The development of active participation in the future was not among the objectives named frequently by teachers as most important in any country (on average only 16 percent supported this as an important aim). However, it should be remembered that in this study the teacher sample consisted of all teachers teaching at the target grade level across different subject areas. According to those teachers, the school-based participation of students in civic-related activities appeared to be relatively widespread but focused on sport events and cultural activities. Only minorities of teachers reported school-based student involvement in human rights projects or activities to help the underprivileged.

### ***For the future***

This report on initial findings from ICCS provides some important insights about civic and citizenship education. Being based on data from 38 countries those analyses reveal patterns that might not be evident in the more constrained context of any single country. Subsequent analyses will investigate in greater detail the relationships between civic knowledge and attitudes to aspects of civics and citizenship as well as between these outcomes and approaches to civic and citizenship education and characteristics of students and their societies. They will also use a wider range of data that were collected and include more comprehensive multivariate analyses to review factors explaining central outcome variables.