


EUROPEAN STATES ON CHARACTER EDUCATION

 European Character
and Virtue Association

This country states on character education brings together national contributions for the European Character and Virtue Association (ECVA), offering a snapshot of character and virtues education across Europe. It highlights key developments in research, policy, and practice, reflecting the vitality and growing momentum of this field.

2025

Introduction

Character education is a rapidly emerging field across Europe with governments, academics, and educationalists showing increasing interest in the area. Much of this interest has been inspired by the work of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham as well as the Aretai Centre at the University of Genoa together with the newly established European Character and Virtues Association. The following series of brief summaries offers a sketch of the activities and initiatives in various European States in advancing character education. The focus is on three key levels - academic, policy and practice. These sketches will be updated each year.

At the international level, the OECD has emphasised the centrality of character and flourishing in its [Learning Compass 2030](#) and [Education for Human Flourishing](#), which frames education not merely as the acquisition of knowledge and skills but as the cultivation of values, attitudes, and virtues that enable individuals to thrive and contribute to the common good. Similarly, UNESCO's report [Reimagining Our Futures Together](#) (2021) places human flourishing at the heart of education, highlighting the urgent need to form learners who can live meaningful lives and respond wisely to global challenges. Both frameworks converge on the conviction that education must address the intellectual, moral, and civic dimensions of the human person if it is to prepare future generations for the complexity of the twenty-first century.

In this context, the development of dedicated centres for character and virtues across Europe is not a luxury but a necessity. These centres provide intellectual depth, research evidence, and pedagogical innovation needed to translate the international discourse on character and flourishing into concrete educational practice. They also seek to create platforms for collaboration between scholars, policymakers, and practitioners, trying to ensure that character education is not a marginal initiative but an integral part of Europe's educational landscape and future. These centres and initiatives try to offer the infrastructure required for character education to take root and grow in diverse national contexts in Europe, contributing in this way to the flourishing of individuals and societies alike.

AUSTRIA



In 2024 the University of Salzburg established the Chair of Christliche Persönlichkeitsbildung (Christian Character and Virtues Education), the first dedicated Chair in character education created in Europe outside the UK with Professor Ines Weber appointed to the position. The establishment of the Chair has sparked growing interest in character education across Austria. The University of Teacher Education Vienna/Krems, with Prof. Roland Berhard, is also contributing to the field. In 2025 the University hosted the annual European Character and Virtues Association conference bringing with it a great deal of media and policy attention to character education in Austria. Austria is also actively engaged in the Teachers and Parents Character Education Project (TEPACE), which connects teachers' and parents' perspectives on character education across Europe.

CZECH REPUBLIC



The Centre for Character Education (CERC) is currently the only institution in the Czech Republic dedicated specifically to research in character education[VF1] [TH2] . It has published on the TEPACE research project in Pedagogika, the country's most prestigious peer-reviewed education journal, and continues to work on comparative studies evaluating didactic materials. At the policy level, a milestone was reached in 2024 with the revision of the national curriculum framework (RVP), which formally introduced Personal and Social Education (OSV) into schools, with CERC anchoring OSV in a virtue-based framework. In practice, September 2025 will see the launch of the Academy of Character, a training programme for educators and faculty preparing future teachers. CERC also cooperates with the organisation Ethical and Character Education and with Trnava University scholars Brestovanský and Rajský on a forthcoming manual for school headmasters titled School with Character.

DENMARK



The Danish Center of Character Education led by Jonas Norgaard Mortensen was established in 2022 and brings together schools, municipalities and 12 leading professors and researchers in Denmark who contribute to research, education, and public debate on character and virtues. The Centre will soon publish an anthology on Character Formation called 'Elevation to Humanity'. At the policy level the Danish Government's Commission on Wellbeing highlighted character education as important and recommended that it be written into the purpose clauses of all schools and educational institutions. More broadly, political discourse has recently shifted toward strengthening moral formation in Denmark. The Centre currently collaborates with 15 selected schools that integrate character education into leadership, pedagogy, culture, parent collaboration, and daily school life. There is a real movement to build capacity so that the practice of character education is expanded across all educational institutions.

ESTONIA



The University of Tartu's Centre for Ethics is a key driver of research and policy on values and character education. It participates in the EU-funded DIACOMET project on communication ethics and in the OECD's High Performing Systems for Tomorrow: Education for Human Flourishing, with a conceptual paper to be published in 2025. At the policy level, the long-running Values Development in Estonian Society programme was discontinued in 2024, though the Centre for Ethics continues to support the government's transition to Estonian-language education by helping schools and kindergartens in Russian-speaking regions create values-based environments. The new national AI Leap initiative is also collaborating with the Centre to develop ethical guidelines for integrating AI into education. In practice, many schools and kindergartens participate in values-based and whole-school programmes, often inspired by the Centre's Good School and Good Kindergarten initiatives. Despite recent funding cuts, Estonia retains a strong culture of school autonomy and innovation, with values education remaining central to educational life.

FINLAND



At the University of Helsinki, the Department of Education has led several major projects on wellbeing and moral formation. The Strength, Happiness and Compassion project (2015–2024) was among the first large research initiatives in Finland, using RCT designs to evaluate interventions with students, staff, and parents. This was followed by Study with Strength (2019–ongoing), which enhances study skills and wellbeing among upper secondary students. The Haru Project (Schools for Empathy), also based at the University of Helsinki, focuses on social-emotional learning and positive education. Alongside these research-based initiatives, a small number of private practitioners work directly with schools to promote positive education.

FRANCE



Moral and civic education in France is delivered primarily through Enseignement Moral et Civique (EMC), a compulsory subject in both public and most private schools. EMC aims to instil the Republican values of liberty, equality, fraternity, laïcité, solidarity, justice, respect, and non-discrimination. Since the 2015 terror attacks, increasing attention has been given to EMC by the Ministry of Education, including anti-bullying and sexual awareness campaigns. All teachers are now required to complete training in EMC as part of their preparation. However, EMC has been criticised for lacking an explicit framework of virtues, relying instead on broad civic dispositions and leaving unresolved tensions between values such as laïcité and non-discrimination. While France has a long history of normative moral education, current approaches remain vague and fragmented. There is growing awareness in both public discourse and government of the need for a stronger ethical dimension, with character education identified as a possible way forward.

GERMANY



The Centre for Ignatian Pedagogy in the Heinrich Pesch Haus in Ludwigshafen began developing a new initiative on character education in 2017 and has developed a character framework for German Jesuit schools. Recently, academics at the University of Bonn, led by Professors Jochen Sautermeister and Michael Zichy, have organised a conference on character education for 2026 indicating the growing interest in the field. A key player in promoting character education has been Jörg Schulte-Altedorneburg who organised a seminar in Berlin with government officials and politicians in 2018 to explore character at the policy level with the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues. At the practical level many teachers and schools have indicated an interest in character education, but overall, character education in Germany is a controversial subject because of the previous National Socialist regime which tarnished the meaning of character. However, progress and interest continue.

GREECE



A landmark development in Greece is the creation of the Center for Character Education at Deree, The American College of Greece, the country's first academic center dedicated to character and virtue education, led by Thomas Giourgas. The centre seeks to bridge research and practice through curriculum development, teacher training, and policy consultation, drawing on Aristotelian ethics and moral psychology. It has announced an annual conference, a forthcoming Master's programme, and international collaborations. At the policy level, the Greek Institute of Educational Policy has proposed an Ethics module at the elementary school level as an alternative for students opting out of Religious Studies. While this initiative promotes inclusion and global citizenship, it does not explicitly address character education, indicating that Greece still lacks policy-level commitment to this field.

ICELAND



Character education in Iceland is driven mainly by individual academics, often from philosophy and the arts, who study the role of literature and the arts in moral formation. A master's student is currently researching teachers' and parents' views using the TEPACE questionnaire, and an Icelandic philosophy journal is preparing a special issue on virtues and character. At the policy level, there are no direct government initiatives, although the 2022 Children's Prosperity Act references flourishing, and the national curriculum mentions character and virtues in general aims without clear implementation strategies. In practice, interest is growing across schools and universities. The first initiative began in 2005 in Akureyri, and in 2018 the University of Akureyri launched a teacher-focused character education programme. With funding, translations of the Jubilee Centre's Knightly Virtues project were produced. Today, two universities offer elective courses in character education, signalling a gradual expansion of the field.

ROMANIA



Gritty Education, a non-profit initiative led by Liliana Hadji, is leading character education efforts in Romania by promoting virtues among children, parents, and educators. Drawing on positive psychology, the Jubilee Centre framework, and virtue ethics, the organisation develops hands-on programs such as GrittyLabs—character training camps for children—alongside parent and school workshops. It also offers a Character Science Consultancy for adults and organisations, produces the Gritty Podcast, and publishes the children's Character Journal "Playing with Gritty". These projects represent a growing grassroots movement, bringing character education into Romanian schools, families, and communities.

SPAIN



Character education in Spain is rapidly establishing itself as a field of research, practice, and policy. The Virtues and Values Education Centre (CEV) at Universidad Francisco de Vitoria (Madrid), led by Professor Verónica Fernández, and founded in 2022, has become a national and international hub, particularly in Latin America. Inspired by the Jubilee Centre, it has developed a culturally adapted framework and is leading several projects on character education. Other key institutions include the UNIR Character Project at Universidad Internacional de La Rioja, led by Francisco Moller, formerly a research fellow of the Jubilee Centre and the University of Navarra's Research Group on Education for Citizenship and Character (GIECC), led by Concepción Naval and active since 1997. CEV hosted the first European Character and Virtues Association in 2023 and has developed strong partnerships and associations with politicians, school leaders and Church figures in Spain. Veronica has co-written a book on character education for the Spanish speaking world with Professor James Arthur entitled "En vista del fin excelente: La educación del carácter en las universidades" (2023) and a book for Challenges and Opportunities for Character Education in Europe with Prof. Tom Harrisson, Prof. Kristján Kristjánsson and Prof. Roland Bernhard. She is also the Vice-President of the European Character and Virtues Association.

SWEDEN



In Sweden, several universities and school networks are advancing character and values education. A group of Swedish academics have proposed to organise and run the European Association of Character and Virtues Conference for 2027 [TH1] hoping to stimulate greater interest in character education in Sweden. In 2023 the Stockholm School of Economics launched the Centre for Wellbeing, Welfare and Happiness, led by Professor Micael Dahlén, where all new students take a course on wellbeing and happiness – character education is part of this course. At a policy level the government has not promoted character education but focused instead on discipline and order in schools. Nevertheless, there are schools, such as the Vittra network, that include character education as part of primary education. In addition, the AcadeMedia Academy is embedding character education within its wider agenda of learning and wellbeing across its schools, making it one of the central institutional actors in the Swedish context.

UNITED KINGDOM



The United Kingdom has a long history of character education as the stated aim of education. However, in the 1950s character education became less prominent in schools. By the 1990s there was a re-emergence of interest in character education that culminated in the first book published on character education for forty years entitled 'Education with Character'. The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues was founded in 2012 and was the successor of the Learning for Life project which was established in 2008 - both founded by Professor James Arthur. Both centres stimulated academic interest in character, virtues and flourishing and published numerous research reports, articles, and books. In policy terms the Jubilee Centre influenced government, professionals, and practitioners. The Department of Education restored character education as an aim of education and issued guidance on character education to every school. The national inspection body, OFSTED, included character education as part of its inspection of schools. At the practical level the term character is widely used in schools, communities, and among professional education bodies. The Jubilee Centre also established the Association for Character Education (ACE) in 2014, which is a growing national network that supports schools. Character Scotland was also part of the Centre's efforts. It also established the European Association of Character and Virtues in 2022. The Jubilee Centre is now run by Professor Tom Harrison and is widely considered the most prominent centre in the world for character education and has received many international awards. It has a recognised international standing and is influencing government policies in many countries.

