

Newsletter on European education

BY CORNERSTONE EU

TEACHING OF RELIGION



Happy new year, we are so back! It's January 2026. Time is flying and frozen at the same time. *New year, new me?* Maybe, but I really liked the old me too. I'm wondering if growing makes you someone else or if you're just a more developed but still you. **When have you changed enough to be someone completely new?**

As always, my new years resolutions are plenty, to read many many books, work out every day, do my skin care and brush my teeth, get out of bed, go to the forest as much as possible, keep in touch with people and the list goes on. Every year I exhaust myself with all these promises, but I still love new beginnings. The change of year is a powerful psychological tool and we should take advantage of it. **Did you guys make any new year's resolutions?**

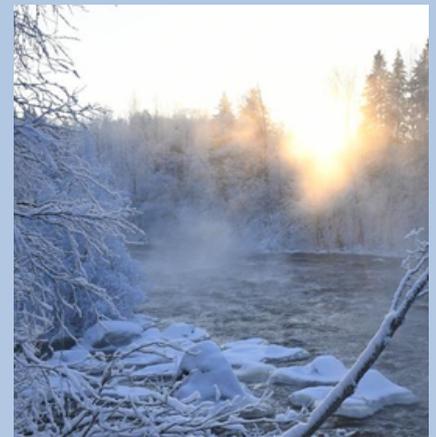
I spent my new years in Eastern Europe, sang a lot of karaoke, visited beautiful buildings and had interesting adventures. as I was returning was shocked to find out that the temperature in Finland had dropped to -20°C. Let's go baby, it's Winter and we are going to cross-country ski as much as we can now.

The second day of the year I visited a good friend in Bucharest, Romania. **They have just completed building Catedrala Mântuirii Neamului, which became the largest Orthodox church in the world.** Seeing the impressive building rising up to 135 meters tall, I started thinking about how religious education differs among European countries. Let's dive in.

Best,
Anna



Finally we have some snow



Winter Wonderland



Religious education in European schools

Europe is widely considered to be a secularized continent, where most countries have separation between church and state. That's why the framework of religious education is very interesting, since it's relatively hard for children to withdraw from it (check next page) and it's usually an assumption that they will complete this field of study in at least secondary and primary schools.

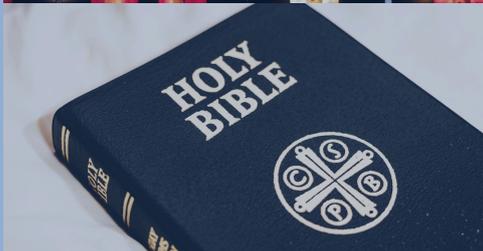
Majority of EU countries' population are Christian, and the religious education is mostly thought from the Christian angle. I myself remember that in school, although my religion classes felt quite neutral and respectful towards other religions, the main focus was for sure the Christian point of view.

Religious education across Europe is facing challenges due to increasing religious diversity. An international IRENE project led by the University of Eastern Finland has developed new methods and tools to improve teaching and cooperation among educators.

The project identified two main models: *a confessional model aligned with specific church traditions and a non-confessional, pluralistic model better suited for diverse school settings*, with some countries balancing elements of both. The guide they created **basically stated, that religious education today must move beyond traditional, confessional models and be re-oriented to meet contemporary socio-cultural needs by embracing diversity, pluralism, and effective pedagogical approaches.**

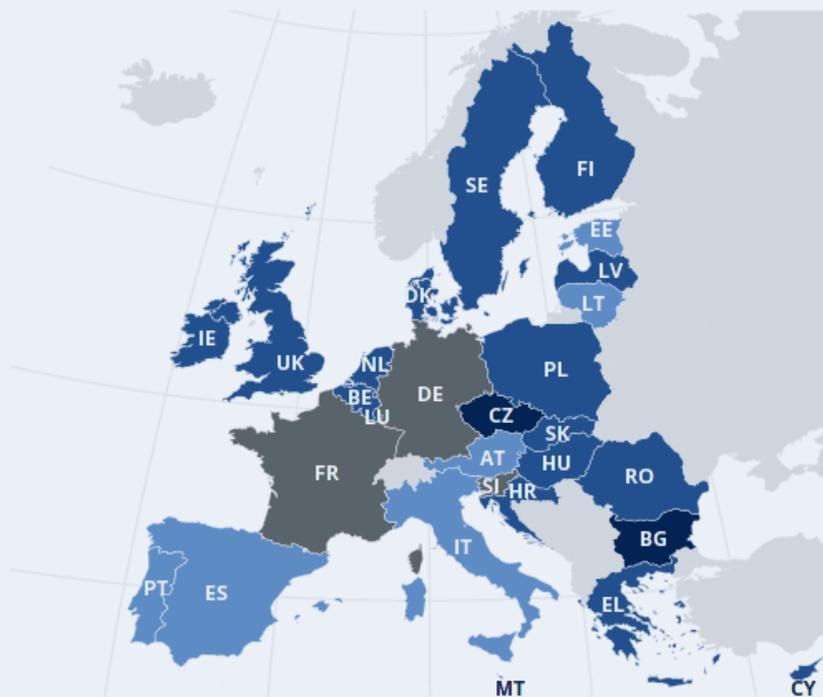
Another interesting part of religious education is the freedom of religion and belief, which is one of the fundamental human rights granted by EU, UN and many other constitutions as well as international and supranational agreements. So in my point of view, there are two interesting topics to discuss:

Should children have the right to choose their religion too? How about the religious minorities, especially in rural areas of Europe where only one religion is an option?



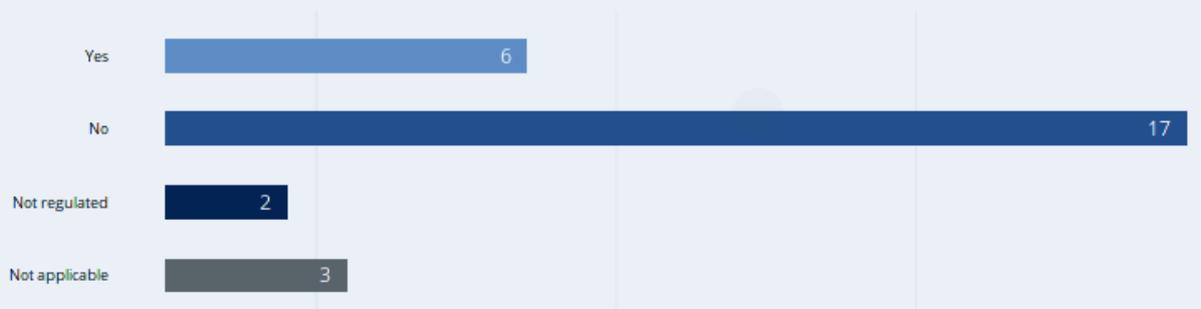
Compulsory religious education varies inside Europe

Possibility to withdraw from religious education at school without parental consent



© EuroGeographics for the administrative boundaries © FRA - All rights reserved - Minimum age requirements related to rights of the child in the EU, 2017
| Year: 2017
Source: FRA, <http://fra.europa.eu>

Possibility to withdraw from religious education at school without parental consent



There is variation across EU Member States in how and at what age children can legally withdraw from religious education classes, reflecting differences in national laws on parental and child consent. **In most countries parents must give written consent for a child to opt out**, but in several states (e.g., Italy, Spain, Austria, Lithuania, Portugal) older children can decide themselves from a specified age (often around 14–16 years) without parental approval. A few countries (like France and Slovenia) do not include religious education in the curriculum at all, **while Sweden makes it compulsory with no opt-out option** (interesting, since Sweden as a state is so secular), and Germany's rules differ by federal state. *The graph shows diverse legal approaches to religious freedom and children's autonomy in education across the EU.*

Europe is big time investing in education mobility, Erasmus+ and skills

EUROPE IS INVESTING ON EDUCATION MOBILITY, INCLUSION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT, BUT THE SCALE OF INVESTMENT IS UNDER DEBATE.

In 2026, the Erasmus+ programme will support more partnerships and mobility in the school sector. This initiative will help organisations test and implement innovative teaching methods conducive to basic skills, supporting EU efforts in civic engagement, democratic participation, and promoting shared values.

International student numbers projected to hit 8.5 million by 2030

THIS REFLECTS AN ANNUAL GROWTH RATE OF JUST UNDER 4%, IN LINE WITH LONG-TERM HISTORICAL TRENDS.

However, the path to 2030 is marked by uncertainty, shaped by geopolitics, economic pressures, policy changes, and evolving student expectations, according to the findings from QS' Global Student Flows initiative.

Greece cuts student population at universities by half after long study breaks are abolished

GREECE CUTS STUDENT POPULATION AT UNIVERSITIES BY HALF AFTER LONG STUDY BREAKS ARE ABOLISHED

The aim is to improve planning and academic performance. Interesting in the sense of the student's legal protection. On the other hand, ministry officials said that about 35,000 people successfully applied for reenrollment in 2025.

LINKS TO ALL CITED SOURCES CAN BE FOUND IN THE DOCUMENT LINKED BELOW

