

# STRATEGY PLAN 2025-2030

THE EUROPEAN  
WERGELAND  
CENTRE



## Educating for a Democratic Europe



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The strategy plan 2025 – 2030 is based on the European Wergeland Centre's (EWC) vision of educating for a democratic Europe, where all individuals can fully enjoy their human rights. The Centre was established by Norway in close cooperation with the Council of Europe, as a joint initiative to promote democracy and human rights across Europe through education. Our mission is to strengthen the capacity of children and young people, educators, educational institutions, and educational systems to build and defend a culture of democracy and human rights.

Education can contribute to building or breaking democracies. The 2025-2030 strategy plan focuses on how education for democracy can address erosion of democratic values, human rights under pressure, social tensions, digital dis- and misinformation, and sustainability. EWC recognises that these challenges can only be addressed through strong partnerships and collaborations.

Guided by our core values - *inclusive, reliable* and *innovative* - EWC will focus on four thematic priorities towards 2030:

- **Democratic values and participation**
- **Inclusion, diversity and equality**
- **Citizens and digital technologies**
- **Sustainability, environment and engagement**

EWC will also carry out targeted actions to improve organisational effectiveness to strengthen the capacity of the centre to meet the aims of the strategy. A Theory of Change method will be used for strategic planning, focusing on evidence-based, needs-driven interventions, and targeted efforts.

## WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

The European Wergeland Centre (EWC) is an international resource centre serving all member states of the Council of Europe, supporting the implementation of the Council of Europe educational policies. As a “privileged partner” of the Council of Europe, we are uniquely positioned to promote systematic changes in education at all levels by working with a broad range of actors, including national and local authorities, teacher education institutions, schools, teachers, students, parents and civil society.

We are governed by a Board appointed by the Norwegian Minister of Education upon nomination from the Council of Europe and Norway. EWC is an independent organisation, organised as a foundation under Norwegian law. Our headquarters are in Oslo, with field staff in selected countries.

We will contribute to democracy in Europe through education. We will work to ensure that children and young people have access to quality education as defined by the Council of Europe<sup>1</sup>, and that they develop the values, skills, attitudes and knowledge and critical understanding necessary to uphold and

defend democracy and human rights; and that educators have the capacity to guide children and young people in their learning so they experience what it means to be a democratic engaged citizen in practice.

### Institutional History

**The Centre's previous strategy plans:**

#### 2009–2012

**Establishment:** aimed to establish EWC as a recognised actor and reliable partner.

#### 2013–2016

**Consolidation:** streamlining core capacity building models to improve quality.

#### 2017–2020

**Expansion:** further developing its position as a recognised and valued resource centre.

#### 2021–2024

**Partnerships:** increasing its outreach through partnerships throughout Europe.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/vision-for-a-quality-education>

## Core Values

### As an institution, we are:

- **Inclusive:**  
We uphold the principle that democracy and human rights are universal. We treat everyone with equal respect, ensuring that every individual feels valued and heard, and we foster an inclusive and welcoming environment for all.
- **Reliable:**  
We ensure transparency and integrity in all our actions, building trust and accountability with our partners, donors and staff.
- **Innovative:**  
We explore new ways and offer programs and educational resources that meet emerging needs and challenges. We seek partnerships and cooperation to reach further and make a larger impact. We believe we are stronger together.

### Vision:

Educating for a **democratic Europe** where all individuals can fully enjoy their human rights.

### Mission:

Our mission is to strengthen the capacity of children and young people, educators, educational institutions, and educational systems to build and defend a culture of democracy and human rights.

### Mandate:

- We bridge policy, practice and research on citizenship and human rights education
- We help European educators, schools and authorities improve their capacity to further democracy and human rights through education
- We serve as a meeting place where practitioners meet policy makers and researchers and explore challenges and solutions
- We help develop learning communities for teachers and other educators
- We contribute to research and develop quality, accessible, practice-oriented learning materials

## Challenges and Opportunities

### Europe faces a complex set of challenges towards 2030:

#### Erosion of Democratic Values:

Europe is witnessing a democratic backslide with a rise in populism, nationalism, and political polarisation. War and conflict are present once more in our daily lives. EWC will therefore enhance its focus on education that fosters critical thinking, active citizenship, and resilience, supporting people within the educational systems to make positive changes.

#### Human Rights Under Pressure:

Human rights are increasingly under threat, with rising discrimination, antisemitism, islamophobia and restrictions on freedoms. EWC's initiatives will therefore strengthen human rights education, ensuring that these fundamental principles are embedded and practiced in educational systems and ingrained in the values basis of young Europeans.

#### Increased Tensions:

Increased divisions and fragmentation have brought about tensions and challenges to social cohesion. EWC's initiatives will therefore emphasise inclusive education to bridge divides and promote mutual understanding.

#### Digital Misinformation and Media Literacy:

The proliferation of digital misinformation, particularly in social media, poses a significant threat to informed democratic participation. EWC will therefore reinforce our joint efforts with the Council of Europe to integrate digital literacy and critical media skills into programs, equipping children and young people to navigate the digital landscape responsibly.

#### Sustainability Challenges:

The urgency of environmental challenges and the need for change towards sustainable lifestyles call for education that fosters active citizenship, resilience and responsibility, which can be accomplished fully only in societies imbued with democratic culture. EWC will incorporate sustainability into its initiatives, aligning with broader global and European agendas.

There is a gap between policy and practice in education for democracy in Europe caused in part by lack of resources and funding for education, as well as political prioritisation of other subjects than civic education. Moreover, learning opportunities are missed when schools, teachers and other education institutions – for different reasons – choose not to bring in current societal and controversial issues into their teaching practices.

Education can contribute to building or breaking democracies. The fact that democratic values and civic education today are part of educational policy and curricula in most European countries provides a solid foundation for children and young people to experience education for democracy and human rights in practice. Moreover, we know from experience that schools, teachers and other educators across Europe, despite obstacles and challenges, are eager to learn and try out new teaching methods and make changes in educational practices towards a more inclusive and democratic education.

Addressing these challenges and opportunities requires EWC to adapt and innovate, ensuring that its 2025-2030 strategy effectively supports the development of a resilient, inclusive, and democratic Europe.

## Alignment with Policy and International Standards

Based on the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, the European Wergeland Centre:

supports the implementation of Council of Europe relevant policy recommendations in practice, following the Reykjavik Principles of Democracy “to invest in a democratic future by ensuring that everyone is able to play their part in democratic processes”, and complementing the Council of Europe’s Education Strategy “Learners First”.

contributes to the international efforts towards reaching the UN SD goals, specially, Goal 4-Quality Education, Goal 16-Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions and Goal 17-Partnerships.

supports Norwegian priorities for multilateral cooperation and educational policies, particularly concerning the Centre’s activities in Norway and through the EEA and Norway Grants.

*“We have a common responsibility to fight autocratic tendencies and growing threats to human rights, democracy and the rule of law. These core values are the bedrock of our continued freedom, peace, prosperity and security for Europe”.*

*Reykjavik Declaration:  
United around our values, Council of Europe 2023*

*“Education liberates the intellect, unlocks the imagination and is fundamental for self-respect. It is the key to prosperity and opens a world of opportunities, making it possible for each of us to contribute to a progressive, healthy society.”*

*United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 4:  
Quality Education*

## WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO

### Introduction:

**To frame the strategy work, EWC has applied a Theory of Change method, a systematic approach to strategic planning and execution, which helps to articulate the vision for desired change, define results (outcomes) leading to change, and agree on prioritised steps to achieve them.**

Strategic planning at EWC is guided by several principles:

- **Evidence-based and needs-driven interventions**  
The change EWC is aiming to achieve is based on research, expert consultations and our own experience. EWC interventions are developed in a close dialogue with partners and stakeholders to provide feasible, measurable and tangible results.
- **Targeted efforts in its own unique niche**  
Our work is grounded on the broad international experience and knowledge of local contexts, practical expertise in education for democracy and human rights, strong network of partners, teachers and other educators in Europe, and real impact on educational systems as an

institution established by Norway and the Council of Europe to bridge policy and practice across its member states.

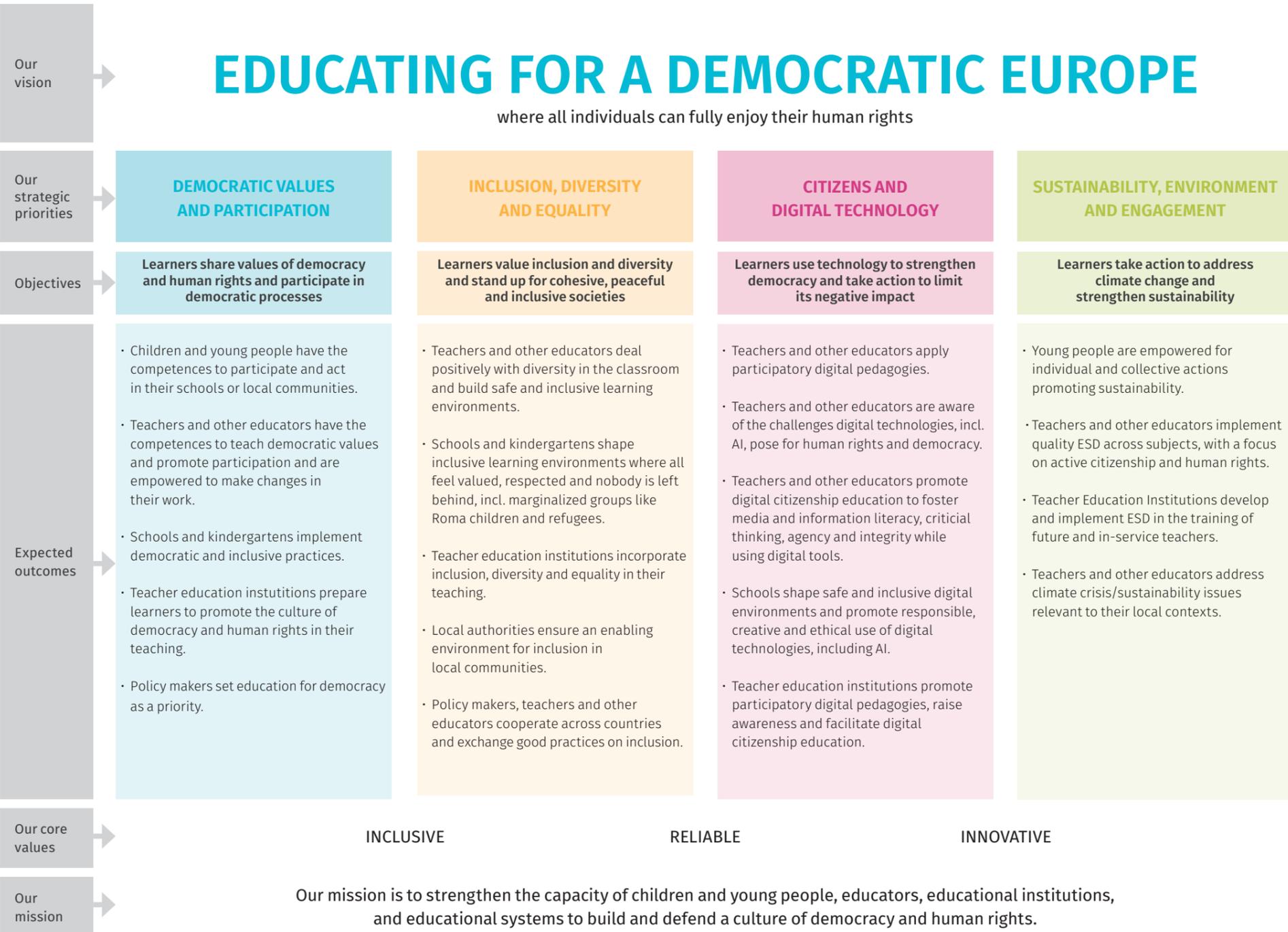
- **Focus on efficiency, flexibility and innovation**  
EWC facilitates regular evaluation and revision of strategic priorities and steps to achieve them. The Strategy plan is a relevant and efficient roadmap, responsive to emerging challenges, and open for innovation.

Research and EWC’s practical experience document positive impact of democratic changes in education upon society. To strengthen democracy in a society through education, it is recommended to increase participation, encourage civic engagement and promote inclusion in teaching and learning. As recommended by the Council of Europe’s Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights, learning for democracy has to be life-long and facilitated at all levels of education, both formal, non-formal or informal, with a broad partnership among the wide range of stakeholders at state, regional and local level, including among policy makers, educators, learners, parents, educational institutions, non-governmental organisations, youth organisations, media and the general public.

According to the Council of Europe’s *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture*, besides appropriate institutions, laws and procedures, democracy relies on a set of attitudes, and behaviors that are needed for these institutions, laws and procedures to function democratically in practice. These can be shaped by developing values, skills, attitudes, knowledge and critical understanding that are necessary to navigate in a democratic society.

In addition, several international documents emphasise the need to address the disruptive role of emerging issues upon democracy, like climate change and speedy development of digital technologies. The Council of Europe has developed a range of guidelines encouraging integration of digital citizenship education and education for sustainable development in teaching and learning for democracy and human rights.

These main recommendations on how to sustain and strengthen democracy in Europe inform the EWC’s strategic objectives for 2025-2030.



## STRATEGIC THEMATIC PRIORITIES:



## DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND PARTICIPATION

### Strengthening democratic values and participation

There is a need to strengthen democratic governance in kindergartens, schools, and local communities, supporting democratic learning environments, and democratic teaching and learning practices. Teachers and other educators must have the support and competencies to teach democratic values and empower children and young people to participate in democratic life.

The European Wergeland Centre will support democratic school development, offer training opportunities for young people, teachers and other educators (including civil society and cultural institutions providing education), and teacher trainers, and bring experiences and needs from practice to advise and influence education policy. We will base our work on the Council of Europe *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture*, and the Council of Europe “Learners First” Education Strategy, highlighting a Whole School Approach to education for democracy, while exploring innovative pedagogies.

#### Objective:

Learners share values of democracy and human rights and participate in democratic processes.

#### Expected Outcomes of EWC interventions:

- **Children and young people** have the values, skills, attitudes and knowledge and critical understanding to participate in, act as members of and contribute to their schools or local communities.
- **Teachers and other educators** have the competences to teach democratic values and promote participation and are empowered to make changes in their work.
- **Schools and kindergartens** implement democratic and inclusive practices.
- **Teacher Education Institutions** provide their students with the values, attitudes, skills and knowledge and critical understanding they will need to transmit a culture of democracy and human rights in their work as teachers.
- **Policy makers** set education for democracy as a priority and implement this priority in practice.

## INCLUSION, DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY

### Promoting inclusion, diversity and equality

There is a need to strengthen the capacity of schools, teacher education institutions, civil society organisations and cultural institutions to promote inclusion of all children and young people, particularly those from disadvantaged groups, and tackle discrimination and hate speech online and offline.

The European Wergeland Centre aims to make inclusion become a reality at all levels of education to create a more democratic Europe, where all people, including those from marginalised communities, can fully participate in democratic life. Teachers and educators must have the support and competencies to create inclusive learning environments for all learners.

#### Objective:

Learners value inclusion and diversity and stand up for cohesive, peaceful and inclusive societies.

#### Expected Outcomes of EWC interventions:

- **Teachers and educators** have the values, skills, attitudes and knowledge and critical understanding to deal positively with diversity in the classroom and build safe and inclusive learning environments.
- **Schools and kindergartens** shape inclusive learning environments where all feel valued, respected and nobody is left behind, especially for marginalised groups like Roma children, disabled children and refugees.
- **Teacher Education Institutions** make inclusion, diversity and equality a priority in their teaching.
- **Local authorities** ensure an enabling environment for inclusion in their local communities.
- **Policy makers, teachers and other educators** cooperate across countries and exchange good practices on inclusion.

## CITIZENS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

### Equipping learners with skills for the digital reality

There is a need to strengthen teachers' and other educators' understanding of a democracy and human rights approach to evolving digital technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) and to foster critical thinking to secure democracy and human rights in the rapid development of new information technology, tackle disinformation, misinformation, and fake news.

The European Wergeland Centre aims to give teachers and educators the necessary support and competences to empower children and young people to navigate in the rapidly changing digital reality.

#### Objective:

Learners use technology to strengthen democracy and take action to limit its negative impact.

#### Expected Outcomes of EWC interventions:

- **Teachers and other educators** have the values, skills, attitudes and knowledge and critical understanding to enhance teaching and learning experience with the help of digital technologies to provide students with flexible and inclusive quality education.
- **Teachers and other educators** have adequate knowledge and understanding of emerging digital technologies, including AI, and are aware of the challenges which they pose for human rights and democracy, and have an understanding of how to deal with them.
- **Teachers and other educators** have strong democratic digital citizenship competences and are empowered to foster students' media and information literacy, critical thinking, agency and integrity while navigating online or using digital tools.
- **Schools shape safe** and inclusive digital environments and promote responsible, creative and ethical use of digital technologies, including AI.
- **Teacher Education Institutions** promote participatory digital pedagogies, raise awareness about emerging digital technologies, and facilitate democratic digital citizenship education.

## SUSTAINABILITY, ENVIRONMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

### Equipping learners to address climate change and build a sustainable future

There is a need to address both climate change and sustainability across Europe through education, but teachers lack the training, resources and support to teach sustainability issues connected to citizenship effectively.

The European Wergeland Centre aims to embed Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) within citizenship education, with an emphasis on democratic participation and human rights.

#### Objective:

Learners take action to address climate change and strengthen sustainability.

#### Expected Outcomes of EWC interventions:

- **Young people** have the values, skills, attitudes and knowledge and critical understanding to initiate and take part in individual and collective actions promoting sustainability.
- **Teachers and other educators** have the values, skills, attitudes and knowledge and critical understanding to implement quality ESD across subjects, with a focus on active citizenship and human rights.
- **Teachers and other educators** address the climate crisis/sustainability issues most relevant to their local contexts through learning new content, using relevant and effective pedagogies, and accessing quality teaching and learning resources that link ESD with active citizenship and human rights.
- **Teacher Education Institutions** develop and implement ESD in the training of future and in-service teachers, drawing on EWC resources and capacity-building trainings, and consistent with the Council of Europe's *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture*.

# OPERATIONAL CAPACITY

**For the four strategic thematic priorities to become a reality, the European Wergland Centre as an institution aims at strengthening our operational capacity to improve our effectiveness and, as a result, the impact and sustainability of our work. Particularly we will focus on:**

- **Supporting staff engagement and development**  
EWC aims to be an innovative and flexible organisation that responds rapidly to emerging needs in education. We prioritise systematic professional development of staff to strengthen expertise, administration, structures and procedures. We welcome staff with regional and international competences, an understanding of national and local contexts, language skills and culture sensitivities.
- **Improving documentation and participation in research**  
To support the sustainability of our work, we build on previous experiences and lessons learnt to achieve synergies and assure efficient use of resources. We therefore aim to improve documentation and participate in research to reinforce our programs based on evidence.

- **Improve communication and visibility**  
EWC aims to strengthen its position as a privileged partner with the Council of Europe within education for democracy and human rights, particularly in strategic thematic priorities. We therefore will develop a communication strategy, aiming to support the achievement of EWC institutional strategy, as well as yearly communication plans in line with the organisation's activity plans.
- **Strengthening financial performance**  
As this strategy entails an expansion of EWC activities, we will work towards ensuring financial stability, managing budgets effectively, increasing revenue streams, and controlling expenses.

# PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships and collaborations are the core of EWCs mandate. EWC was created as a concrete result of an innovative partnership between a member state and an international organisation. Through our privileged partnership with the Council of Europe, we are able to complement its actions on the ground, joining efforts to implement educational policies in the Council of Europe member states.

Through strategic partnerships, we expand the support provided to individuals, institutions and systems. Partnerships allow us to increase operational efficiency, scale up programmes and projects, and access a wider range of funding opportunities.

For the period 2025 to 2030 we will develop a partnership strategy, defining EWC's principles for partnership with key actors in education such as national and local authorities, teacher education institutions, museums and learning centres, donors and civil society organisations that support schools and education for democracy.

# THE PROCESS

The present Strategy Plan has been developed through an inclusive and comprehensive process facilitated by an external consulting firm with involvement of the staff, the Board and a series of interviews with critical friends in the period from October 2023 to October 2024. It was adopted by the Board 14<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

THE EUROPEAN  
WERGELAND  
CENTRE



The European Wergeland Centre  
Karl Johans gate 2  
0154 Oslo

post@theewc.org

**[www.wergelandcentre.org](http://www.wergelandcentre.org)**