

#### **Education Sector Technical Notes**

# **Human Rights Education**

ADG/ED

Dear colleagues,

The Education Sector is called to implement a significant and broad mandate, covering many challenging issues in education in a diverse and fast-changing world. More than ever, we need to better focus and ensure greater cohesion in implementing this mandate. This document is part of a series of Technical Notes that have been developed by colleagues in the Education Sector in order to facilitate programme delivery in thematic areas related to the work of the Sector. The Technical Notes are meant to serve as a quick reference tool for UNESCO staff, providing a brief overview including basic knowledge, key priorities for UNESCO and future directions as well as practical information on each topic. They will be available both in print and electronic versions, and they will be updated regularly.

I hope that the Technical Notes will be useful in your daily work.

Qian Tang, Assistant Director-General for Education

### At a glance

- Human rights are enshrined in international law, and states have an obligation to respect, protect and fulfil them. Despite this, human rights violations remain widespread.
- Educating children and adults on human rights is essential. Individuals and groups must understand their rights in order to see them upheld and to ensure that their own behaviour does not compromise the rights of others.
- States have an obligation to promote human rights and human rights education is now recognized as a right in itself.
- UNESCO, along with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, co-leads the World Programme for Human Rights Education (2005-ongoing).

### Defining the issue

Human rights education is education, training and information aiming to build a universal culture of human rights. It provides knowledge about human rights and the mechanisms that protect them and also creates a human rights-friendly environment. Human rights education nurtures the skills needed to promote, defend and apply human rights in daily life, such as critical thinking, problem solving and communication based on respect. It covers a broad range of issues and themes, encouraging reflection on core human rights values such as non-discrimination, equality, justice, non-violence, tolerance and respect for human dignity. Quality education based on a human rights approach means that rights are implemented throughout the whole education system and in all learning environments.

Human rights education is a fundamental part of quality education, as Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) 1989 – the most widely-ratified human rights instrument – sets out:

"1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to: (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations."

Reiterated in other major international instruments, human rights education is an integral part of the right to education and has gained recognition as a human right in itself.

People of all ages should have a human rights education, starting early in childhood and lasting throughout their adult lives. It should be part of both formal and non-formal education, and of lifelong learning. As human rights education often involves 'unlearning' prejudices and attitudes of intolerance, UNESCO promotes human rights education that is interactive, based on active student participation and reflection. The knowledge of rights and freedoms – one's own and those of others – is essential for guaranteeing the respect of all rights for each and every person.

Human rights are universal. All people, regardless of gender, nationality, ethnicity, religion, language, age, class or other forms of identity, are equally entitled to human rights without discrimination. Through teaching human rights and by promoting a rights-based approach to quality education, the work of UNESCO in the area of human rights education contributes to creating a learning environment free from gender-based violence; in particular to protect girls and women from threats to their physical, social and psychological well-being. Furthermore, human rights education strengthens the relevance of education through providing gender-sensitive curricula, textbooks and teaching methods.

#### **Context and trends**

Despite increased recognition of the importance of human rights for development and of the need to place human rights education within normative frameworks, human rights education is frequently considered a secondary issue, separate from the core Education for All goals (even though quality education, as defined in legal instruments such as the CRC, includes the development of respect for human rights – see above). Furthermore, the systematic integration of human rights education within formal curricula remains limited.

The UN Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2005) raised the profile of human rights education, and the current World Programme for Human Rights Education (WPHRE; 2005- ongoing) has led to increased interest in and action by governments in this field. In December 2011, the UN adopted a new Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, asking governments to intensify their efforts in this area. It sought to "send a strong signal to the international community to strengthen all efforts in human rights education and training through a collective commitment by all stakeholders".

Many countries have developed action plans for the WPHRE and other action plans that reflect the basic values contained in the 1974 Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation, Peace and Education Relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. In their respective education plans, countries address a wide range of key themes related to: (i) existing human rights frameworks, mechanisms and institutions; (ii) learners' everyday lives, including religious issues, racism, discrimination, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, Holocaust remembrance, apartheid, slavery, intolerance towards Muslims and violence in schools; and (iii) moral and ethical values relating to, for example, fairness, justice, responsibility, democracy, dialogue, solidarity, tolerance, non-violence, respect, membership, equity, peace and human dignity. Particular attention is also paid by many countries to gender parity and equality throughout the education system. Intercultural education and multilingual education have also become an important part of education objectives in many countries.

UNESCO promotes the integration of human rights education into policy and plans, the development of appropriate curricula, and more participatory and democratic methods of teaching. The work of the Organization in this area aims to foster mutual cooperation and mutual appreciation among members of school communities, encouraging tolerance and appreciation of diversity. UNESCO's Associated Schools Network – the largest schools network in the world, with more than 9,450 institutions in 180 countries – plays an instrumental role in the advancement of human rights education and other UN priorities, and in the development of global citizenship among young people. The network, which celebrates its 60th anniversary in 2013, reaches teachers and students directly to increase their knowledge and understanding of critical issues related to human rights, peace and sustainable development, and is an important tool for UNESCO's work in this field.

While some important progress has been made in the provision of human rights education, better understanding is needed of the benefits of human rights education in delivering more inclusive and sustainable educational outcomes. UNESCO can use its influence to push human rights education further up the international agenda, making it central to education policy and practice in Member States, a core feature of donor policy, and a key advocacy agenda for civil society groups.

### **UNESCO** key priorities and future directions

UNESCO's primary objective here is to support greater integration of human rights education into policy and programming at national level. UNESCO co-leads and actively promotes the World Programme for Human Rights Education (2005-ongoing). The Organization cooperates closely with international, regional and national partners to promote an integrated approach dealing with curricula, textbooks, training for teachers and educators, teaching methods, and learning environments from a human rights perspective. This commitment is a strategic priority for UNESCO, along with other targeted and specific areas of intervention.

Other current priority areas for UNESCO in human rights education include addressing prejudice and identity-based discrimination; tackling attitudes and behaviours that underpin bullying and violence in schools; highlighting issues of inclusion and the importance of multilingual education; promoting and piloting transformative methods of teaching and learning in support of global citizenship; and developing an analytical framework for measuring the impact of human rights education. UNESCO encourages adherence to normative frameworks, such as the 1974 Recommendation, and other major international instruments, such as the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. UNESCO works to increase understanding of existing violations and to develop policy guidance and capacity for addressing these challenges, as well as to strengthen understanding of human rights globally through formal and non-formal education.

UNESCO aims to increase its visibility as a global actor and leader in the field of human rights education and to work with Member States to ensure that children and adults have the opportunity to learn about their rights. The Organization advocates for a rights-based approach to quality education that places human rights and global citizenship at the heart of the post-2015 education and development agendas.

Particular attention is being paid to efforts undertaken to promote human rights and values in African school systems. In Botswana, Burundi, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, South Soudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda and Zimbabwe, among others, UNESCO assists ministries of education and other key stakeholders in developing education for peace and human rights while taking into account the socio-cultural context and particular needs of each country.

### Target groups and key partners

UNESCO mobilizes senior government officials and policy-makers, experts, academia, educational institutions, international development bodies, NGOs, civil society, public and private partners, teachers, parents, communities, young people, goodwill ambassadors and other players engaged or interested in nurturing multidimensional and holistic efforts in promoting human rights education.

Its key partners are:

- International Contact Group on Citizenship and Human Rights Education (OHCHR, Council of Europe, OSCE/ODIHR, European Commission, European Agency for Fundamental Rights, ALECSO and the Organization of American States)
- Member States (e.g. ministries of education, national human rights institutions...)
- Academics
- Civil society
- ASPnet members

#### **Key resources**

Contemporary Issues in Human Rights Education http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002108/210895E.pdf

Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education Relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by the General Conference at its 18th session (1974)

http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0001/000115/011563mb.pdf

UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001478/147878e.pdf

A Human Rights-Based Approach to Education for All: a framework for the realization of children's right to education and rights within education

http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001548/154861E.pdf

World Programme on Human Rights Education (2005-ongoing) http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/education/training/programme.htm

Plan of Action, World Programme for Human Rights Education – first phase http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001478/147853e.pdf

Plan of Action, World Programme for Human Rights Education – second phase http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002173/217350e.pdf

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Annex IX, General Comment N°1 (2001), Article 29 (1): The Aims of Education.

http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/GC1\_en.doc

UNESCO's Associated Schools Network: www.unesco.org/education/asp

# **Advocacy** messages

- ▶ Human rights education is key to quality education; it equips children and young people with the knowledge, skills and values necessary for global citizenship in respect of diversity, and for meeting the challenges of the 21st century.
- ▶ Human rights education is critical to ensuring equity in access to education and in learning outcomes for all children through its promotion of non-discrimination and non-violence.
- Human rights education has a vital role to play in reducing prejudice and shaping attitudes and behaviours that ensure respect for human rights and dignity for all people.
- Human rights are not dividends of development, but rather fundamental building blocks of development, and education about and for human rights is essential for peaceful and sustainable futures.
- Governments have a duty to promote human rights in and through education.

The UN Secretary General's new Global Education First Initiative is a key opportunity for UNESCO to highlight the importance of the values, attitudes and skills that lie at the heart of human rights education. High-level fora, such as the UN General Assembly and Global EFA Meeting (GEM), and fora discussing the post-EFA and Millennium Development Goals (MDG) agendas, provide ideal opportunities to lift human rights education out of its niche and position it more visibly on future global, regional and/or national agendas. UNESCO will strengthen its connections with human rights organizations, such as the Human Rights Council and the Committee on the Rights of the Child. UNESCO will also continue to participate in major international days such as International Human Rights Day, International Child Rights Day, International Women's Day and many others, to promote its work on human rights education.

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