

Final report of the study session

Advancing at Constructing Safe Learning Spaces in Non-formal Education

held at the European Youth Centre in Budapest
1-5 November 2022



SCOUTS
Creating a Better World



This study session was held by

Human Rights Education Youth Network (HREYN)

and

World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM)

in cooperation with the

Youth Department of the Council of Europe

This report gives an account of various aspects of the study session. It has been produced by and is the responsibility of the educational team of the study session. It does not represent the official point of view of the Council of Europe.



Table of Contents

01 Executive summary

a complete overview of the information in the report about the study session.

02 Introduction

the background to the session, aims and objectives, participants, organisations and main contents discussed

03 Programme

flow of the sessions and outline of the content of the discussions that took place during the study session

04 Results and conclusions

main findings on the issues discussed, learning points for participants and evaluation results

05 Follow-up activities

overview of follow-up activities developed by participants and organisers

Executive summary

During 1-5 November of 2022, Human Rights Education Youth Network (HREYN) and World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM) implemented the study session “Advancing at Constructing Safe Learning Spaces in Non-formal Education” at the European Youth Centre in Budapest, in cooperation with the Youth Department of the Council of Europe.

Our main goal was to increase the quality of non-formal education and human rights education in participating organisations, by raising awareness, sharing practises and increasing competencies of trainers, educators and youth workers for safer space development.

The Study Session confirmed to organisers the importance of creating spaces for dialogue on human rights, human rights education, acceptance of diversity and intercultural learning with young people. HREYN and WOSM addressed the concept of “safe space” in this joint international activity, which allowed the team and participants to explore how to ensure safety for young young people in very diverse settings. The exchange of experiences of participants also showed that youth civic space is promoted, protected and even allowed differently in Council of Europe member states. The main conclusion of this session could be that the concept of "safer space" in human rights education should be one of the criteria for study sessions in the future.



One of the most important outcomes of the study session were the knowledge, skills and attitudes that participants gained, which mainly covers the knowledge about the importance of safer learning spaces in the context of NFE and HRE, definition of terminology around the topic of safe spaces, awareness of youth workers, educators, NGO workers or practitioners on safe space development and practical tips for implementing this knowledge in their daily work. On a larger scale, this will also benefit the organisations they represent, because the participants will act as multipliers to challenge and improve human rights educational practice in their local context.

During the study session participants worked in groups to prepare two main outputs. These outputs were drafted on the last day and the working groups were created to follow-up and finalize the results in a format that can be published and spread through our networks and organisations represented in the study session. The final products are presented in this report:

1. The glossary of relevant terms in constructing safe learning spaces;
2. The reader of tips for practitioners to support the creation and maintenance of safe learning spaces in their educational activities.



Introduction to the report

This report presents the main conclusions, learning outcomes, and recommendations from the study session “Advancing at Constructing Safe Learning Spaces in Non-formal Education”, conducted by the Human Rights Education Youth Network (HREYN) and World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM), in cooperation with the Youth Department of the Council of Europe.

In this document you will find information about the study session, background and context, implemented program, main results and conclusions, as well as outputs prepared by participants as part of follow-up activities. Therefore this report is prepared by the team and the participants of the study session.

About the study session

Background context

The project idea was born on the residential training of trainers on human rights education 2021 (TOTHRE) in Budapest. On this project participants discussed the concept of 'Safe Space' in more detail and recognized the complexity of the topic and limited resources available for practitioners like themselves. HREYN suggested working on this topic, with WOSM, as an organisation with experience and policy in place to support the broad topic of 'Safe' participation in non-formal education, to enhance the offer and availability of tools, methodologies and approaches across the region. This session was needed for both organisations, to continue to work towards their objectives, but in safer spaces.

Aims and objectives

The aim of this study session was to increase the quality of non-formal education and human rights education in participating organisations, by raising awareness, sharing practises and increasing competencies of trainers, educators and youth workers for safe space development.

The objectives of the study session were:

- To gather trainers, educators, youth workers and other practitioners in non-formal learning and human rights education to discuss and have a shared understanding of safe space and related concepts in education;
- To map existing practices to create and hold safe spaces in educational settings, sharing and valuing different experiences;
- To challenge and improve the existing non-formal methods and examine their ability to ensure safe spaces;
- To identify key indicators for safe, respectful, and equal space in the group learning settings and create guidelines and recommendations for practitioners and organisations;
- To plan future actions and collaborations to further enhance safe spaces in participants' contexts.



Organisations

The study session was implemented with the cooperation of:

Human Rights Education Youth Network - an independent non-governmental human rights education organisation composed by youth associations as well as trainers, activists, youth workers, youth leaders, teachers, researchers, volunteers, professionals and other people committed to promoting human rights education and the protection of human rights. You can get acquainted with the network here: www.hreyn.net

World Organization of the Scout Movement - world's leading educational youth movement empowering 57 million young people and volunteers to be active global citizens and agents of change in their communities. Scouting is a global movement connected together through 173 National Scout organisations that deliver quality Scouting programmes, events and initiatives locally and nationally. WOSM supports the growth and development of Scouting worldwide to enable more young people and volunteers to experience Scouting's life-changing educational offering. Learn more here: www.scout.org

Profile of participants

The study session gathered 31 participants (including team members), who are individuals coming from HREYN or WOSM, or outside our networks. This group was a mix of youth workers, educators, facilitators, study session coordinators, organisational decision makers, and others involved in educational activities in their organisations. Therefore, most participants already had experience with non-formal education and faced a challenge of creating safe learning environments. It should be noted that the group had diverse backgrounds, as they came from 17 different countries and they also had different levels of experience in this field.

Team

Tamar Tsatskrialashvili, HREYN, Course Director

Sian Bagshaw, WOSM, Team Member

Emilia Astore, HREYN, Team Member

Chiara Gullotta, HREYN, Team Member

Alfredo Musse, WOSM, Team Member

Ida Kreutzman, CoE, Educational Advisor



Safe Space

Human rights education and youth work brings participants from various backgrounds in the field where they challenge and question self and society. In the group building and learning process, natural differences and various perspectives between the learners (and trainers) manifest, which can potentially lead to unresolved conflict or suppression of expression. How to develop the space which ensures learning, critical thinking, respect, safety, equality, and equity of learners is the task of the human rights educators, participants themselves, and youth workers.

A safe space can describe a physical space where people feel that there is no risk, they are sheltered and at ease. But this expression also describes a state of mind and mood where people feel comfortable, safe from harm, trusting and willing to open themselves.

Human Rights Education and non-formal education should be a safer space for people to learn without risk, be fully present, surface their assumptions, and to question their previous perceptions and judgments. It can ensure participants do their best to suspend their judgments and take the risk out of sharing their feelings and perceptions, while creating space to surface their deeper questions, without losing sight of the aim of learning. In a safe space, we learn and adapt, we fully engage with each other, thus increasing our mutual trust. When these changes are mutual, it transforms the relations between the parties from adversarial to respectful, opening the way to create stronger relationships.



In a safe space, we travel through our comfort, stretch and panic zones, it's challenging but equally necessary as part of the learning journey. The learning happens in our stretch zone and appropriate safe space enables us to navigate this process and interactions with new people, ideas or situations. A safe space promotes better coexistence and cooperation between people which fosters the discovery of both what is shared and what is different in our respective experiences, communities and personal lives.

Programme

Day 1 (Nov 1)	Day 2 (Nov 2)	Day 3 (Nov 3)	Day 4 (Nov 4)	Day 5 (Nov 5)
Introduction Ice breaker Getting to know each other	Mapping participants contexts, experiences and their competences	What is a safe space and why do we need it? (Through Dialogue)	Revealing potential challenges and solutions	Creating outputs
Objectives and expectations	Mapping participants contexts, experiences and their competences (Continued)	What is a safe space and why do we need it? (Through Dialogue) (Continued)	Revealing potential challenges and solutions (Continued)	Creating outputs (Continued)
Ground rules	Intro to NFE and HRE	Training the competencies	Planning/Improving existing methods	Planning follow up
Getting to know each other better; Language and definitions	Intro to NFE and HRE (Continued)	Training the competencies (Continued)	Planning/Improving existing methods (Continued)	Evaluation and closing
Free evening	Sharing educational tools	Dinner out	Open space	See you soon party

Inputs and discussions

In this chapter we will describe the main content of sessions and discussions that took place, organised in sections day by day. We will also summarise the inputs by team members, Council of Europe staff and invited speaker, as well as highlight main outcomes and conclusions.

The study session was opened with an informal welcome evening and introduction by the team. After a short presentation of the venue and key information on timetable and working spaces, the team introduced a first session of ice-breaker activities to get to know each other and start setting the learning space for participants.

Day 0

These activities opened the space where everyone could find out something about each other, personal and professional backgrounds, experiences and interests in relation to the study session content, which created the initial feeling of familiarity and comfort within the group.

Day 1

The first session of day 1 was dedicated to the official opening of the study session since not all the participants could attend the Welcome Evening. The educational advisor gave a general introduction to the Youth Department of the Council of Europe and the history of the European Youth Center of Budapest.

Afterwards, information about the background of the study session was shared together with a short introduction of the main organisation partnering in the study session: HREYN and WOSM. The second part of the session was dedicated to ice breaker activities to get to know each other better, such as name games and a team building activity. After the break, the objectives of the study session were shared and approved by the group and the facilitators proposed a group activity to explore the expectations, fears and hopes of the participants. The third session was dedicated to establishing the ground rules, which will be described below. The last session of the day followed the need of participants to start discussing terminology and definitions. Through a group activity they brainstormed and made a mind map of concepts such as safety, comfort, space and power. At the end of the session they had to prepare a short act to represent the meaning of the word assigned to them. At the end of the day, the course director presented the reflection groups and the participants went into a guided reflection with their assigned facilitator.

The ground rules

Afterwards, the group, led by the facilitators, established the ground rules. This was an activity that was particularly complex. As the study session was centered around the concept of safe spaces and how to implement them in non-formal education activities, this session was presented as one of the instruments that trainers have to ensure a safe space. However, since it was at the very beginning, participants had long discussions around what is a safe space and the session was still very theoretical and not based on actual agreements. Therefore the team decided to continue the discussions and summarise the ground rules on the next day. The main conclusion from this session is that on the one hand it's important to go deeper into each agreement that are sometimes written on a flipchart on a superficial level, for example, "don't take things personally" or "agree to disagree", that could actually have more negative impact on safe expression and learning process instead of supporting it. It's also possible that these rules are understood differently between each other, which is why these discussions are very beneficial to establish clear boundaries. However, on the other hand, there is a risk that these conversations lead to endless discussions about hypothetical scenarios and lose the focus on reaching a group agreement. Therefore we recommend to dedicate enough time to establishing ground rules that gives the opportunity to be more authentic, but also keep the focus on the objective of the session if participants go too off-track.

Day 2

The day started with an energizer and summary of the first day's program and main outcomes. Participants were then welcomed officially by Balint Molnar, Deputy Director of the EYCB. During this session participants got to know better the purpose and activities of the European Youth Centers of the Council of Europe, priorities of the Youth Department and cooperation with youth organisations and networks.



The morning continued with further discussion on the group's ground rules and "Walkie Talkie", an activity to get to know each other better and explore each other's perspectives, challenges, values relating human rights, human rights education, non-formal learning. In order to connect local to human rights education principles and practices, participants were then invited to discuss in pairs about themselves, their contexts, their target groups and educational experiences. The morning closed with small group discussions and a debriefing in plenary on experiences and perspectives about safe spaces in non-formal learning.

The afternoon was dedicated to Human Rights principles, Human Rights Education approaches and practices through experiential learning. The sessions combined different methods: input and discussion in plenary, individual reflection and group work through the activity "Flower Power" from Compass, videos and exchange of practices to reflect on opportunities and threats to safe spaces in human rights education and non-formal education.

The main conclusion was experiencing the tool that explores human rights to see how the specificity of human rights education creates the need for sensitivity and safety to be able to freely express yourself without the fear of disagreements, which are also part of the learning process.





Day 3

On the third day, the program started with a recap of the days before and the approval of some changes to the agenda. The first activity of the morning used the method from the Compass activity "Where do you stand". The purpose of the activity was to start challenging the concept of safe spaces and dive deeper into the difficulties that it entails.

After the break, there was a group work on "case studies" as possible scenarios of disruption of safe spaces. This activity was a useful continuation of the discussion from the previous session, where participants started referring to their context and developing tools to implement safe spaces. The program moved on to let participants work on their competences related to NFE and safe spaces. This was done through a reflection activity in pairs, where participants had to draw each other and use the method of "Head, heart and hands" to share their strengths as practitioners, as well as their room for improvement. This activity was useful to reflect on the self as a trainer and an educator and on their competencies in regards to constructing safe spaces in their daily work with young people. Afterwards, there was a group work on "case studies" as possible scenarios of disruption of safe spaces. This activity was a useful continuation of the discussion from the previous session, where participants started referring to their context and developing tools to implement safe spaces. The last session of the day was dedicated to the first introduction of the external expert, Evdokia Romanova. The expert brought to the plenary a reflection on her story as an artist and an activist who worked in an environment where safe spaces were systematically endangered. The main conclusions of this day were that safe spaces are not an ideal, they are a complex issue, based on different conceptualizations of freedom, safety, comfort and power. To implement a safe space is a shared responsibility that has to be implemented activity by activity and has to be looked at critically both by facilitators and by participants.

The fourth day was particularly intense, as it combined again a variety of training methods and asked participants to gradually stretch out of their "comfort zones". The morning started with real-case scenarios provided by the external expert challenging participants to find common approaches in small groups on safety for human rights activists in hostile contexts, cyber-security, respect of diversity and intercultural dialogue, access to sexual and reproductive rights.



Day 4

Participants shared results using different creative methods including drawing, collage, mime and theater play, before a final debriefing on topics discussed and group-work processes.

The afternoon started with a presentation and debate on identity (what it is, how we see it, its impact on our work as activists and educators) and individual reflections on identities by drawing “identities stars”, helping participants to visually represent their own identities through an intersectional lens. Participants were then invited to choose aspects of themselves that they found most relevant and then completed an exercises in which these identities were “taken away” one after the other, in moving pairs. The tasks helped the group understand how identity features are invisible, sometimes not valued or even not accepted in social interactions, and how often this happens to young people belonging to minorities and vulnerable groups. In the second part of the afternoon participants were asked to place themselves in the working room according to their own comfort, stretch or panic zones in relation to certain methods or topics. The final part of the session invited participants to stretch-out of their comfort zones through a deep-dive to the Dialogue method, using the 10 principles of dialogue to discuss if “safe spaces in non- formal learning is an ideal” and “our biggest fears as facilitators in human rights education”. This was a particularly emotion, thought provoking session that helped challenge the idea of group safe space and individual safe space. It encourage participants to see safe space as sitting in discomfort or challenging for themselves and others.

The last day was centered around the final outputs. In order to help the participants to see the overall flow of the past days, the first session of the day was a walk through the tools and processes used in the study session to implement safe spaces. This session was useful to recall the milestones and the key points of the session in order to have them clear when working on the outputs.



Afterwards, the participants were divided into two groups. One worked on creating a glossary of terms linked to safe spaces, the second worked on tips and guidelines for trainers that want to advance in implementing safe spaces in their activities. These two groups created a first version of the two outputs that were among the objectives of the study session. At the end of the session two small groups were created of participants interested in keeping on working on the outputs in order to finalize them.

After lunch, participants brainstormed on possible follow ups. In order to introduce potential funding opportunities for this follow-up plans, a presentation of the European Youth Foundation was organised. After a short break two types of evaluation of the session were conducted. The first one was a non-formal evaluation, where participants had to draw how close in the perception the objectives of the study session were reached. The second evaluation was online, through a questionnaire and participants were given time to fill it in plenary. A final round of reflection and goodbyes closed the study session.

Results and conclusions

The main outcomes of the study session are the increased levels of knowledge, skills and attitudes when it comes to constructing a safe learning environment in non-formal educational activities, especially in human rights education. As the participants of the activity were mostly active practitioners, educators, youth workers and NGO workers, they will pay particular attention to the phenomenon of “safe space” in their future practice and, therefore, will enhance the quality of their work in HRE. This will also benefit the organisations they work with, as they will act as multipliers and share their experience with their colleagues.



The main issues discussed during the study session were what is a safe space with a focus on terminology and some examples of how to build safe space. The discussion topics included more general and overarching topics, such as what are human rights and what is human rights education, as well as more topic-specific and practical issues, such as the possible harms and obstacles to safe space and the pitfalls in a safe space oriented approach. Finally, participants worked on practical outputs such as tips on how to ensure safe space and a glossary of relevant terminology.

The main findings and conclusions to the discussed topics confirmed to organisers the importance of creating spaces for dialogue on human rights, human rights education, acceptance of diversity and intercultural learning with young people. The concept of “safe space” was addressed for the first time by HREYN and WOSM in a joint international activity, and it allowed the team and participants to explore it in pedagogical terms and investigate how to ensure safety for young young people in very diverse settings. Ranging from formal/non-formal education, human rights activism and youth work, the exchange of experiences of participants showed that youth civic space is promoted, protected and even allowed differently in Council of Europe member states. One of the main conclusions of this session could be that the concept of “safety” in human rights education should be one of the criteria for study sessions in the future.

The discussions revealed that the feeling of “safety” can be understood in various ways, which creates certain controversy around the topic. Is it a matter of feeling comfortable, free and understood, a sense of belonging, or is it the environment that encourages difficult conversations around topics that are often avoided in fear of conflict? Can too much obsession over "safety" and "comfort" hinder the learning process? During these discussions participants expressed that a balance is to be found between the feeling of comfort and stress - a middle ground, a sacred space where different opinions are expressed with respect and civility, without the fear of being judged or attacked. Deeper discussions also uncovered various details to facilitation and organisation of NFE activities that build or restrict safe space, which can have such big influence that it affects the overall success of the learning goals, for example, setting the ground rules in a way that is not superficial and has the actual merit by going deeper into discussion and examining commonly used rules. Participants included other conclusions and opinions in the reader produced as an output, which is attached to this report.

The added value to these discussions came from the diverse backgrounds of participants. The additional efforts to include participants from 17 different countries (even from outside of the Council of Europe) led to more interesting and eye-opening exchange of opinions and experiences. Having a participant with a physical disability also contributed to peer-to-peer learning and opened a conversation about accessibility while constructing safe learning space.

Learning points for participants

The learning outcomes outlined by the participants in the evaluation form are closely related to the objectives of this study session. They mention that they gained knowledge about how to create and maintain safe learning spaces and why they are important, as well as the impact of accessibility to safe safe and LGBTQI+ inclusion. They also gained knowledge about human rights, safe and equal dialogue, various understandings of safe space in different countries and contexts. Besides the topic-related learning, participants have outlined their learning outcomes connected to facilitation and practice in NFE, such as the new learning methods, non-formal educational techniques, practical tools and self-reflection models that will support them in future work. According to their reflection, participants also learned about the opportunities offered by the EYF, roles of HREYN, WOSM and Council of Europe, and have a better understanding of non-formal educational environment.



Evaluation results indicate that, as well as communication and language skills, participants also improved their ability to reflect more about their personal experience and develop safer spaces in their future activities.

Among the attitudes participants have mentioned increased open-mindedness, motivation to disseminate their knowledge to create safer spaces and increased perception on NFE techniques to be more inclusive and safe. They outline that this intercultural experience encouraged them to discover themselves, strengthen some of their thoughts and change some ideas that they thought were true. They're also more aware of the importance of safe learning spaces, reflection groups and flexibility to adapt the program if needed.

Evaluation

The study session was overall appreciated by the participants. 53.8% of them rated their overall experience with the score of 5 out of 5, and the rest rated with 4/5. The majority felt satisfied with the accomplishment of their learning objectives and felt that the team put in place relevant tools to ensure a safe space making this a useful experience to learn from and to adapt and replicate in future projects.

Link with the Council of Europe

The study session contributed to the strategic priorities of the Council of Europe, in particular to priority 4 - Youth Work. This study session touched upon the improvement of practice quality of non-formal education, youth work, and human rights education, by exploring the issue, mapping, creating and improving relevant non-formal learning methodologies.



The Study Session contributed specifically to Advocating the importance of an expanding space for youth civil society organisations (under expected result 1); Continuing the Human Rights Education Youth Programme and reviewing the implementation of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, Mainstreaming rights-based approaches in youth policies, programmes and projects (under expected result 2); Enabling young people to promote peaceful societies, Mainstreaming inclusiveness, equality and intersectionality (under expected result 3); Advance Youth Work policies and practices (under expected result 4). Though the Study Session did not directly focus on youth policy development, it contributed to advance youth work practice and youth participation within organising networks and their members.

Follow-up activities

This study session strengthened the cooperation between two international organisations - HREYN and WOSM, therefore this partnership will be a great asset while we continue working on human rights education in our future activities. At the next stage we plan to multiply the impact of the study session and spread our outputs further. Participants have had the main role in this process, as they finalized the work started on the last day of the study session and created publications after the study session in small working groups.

This study session will be followed-up by the social media campaign to promote the outputs, including this report, a glossary - in order to spread the relevant terminology and a reader - to share tips and suggestions for practitioners to support the creation of safe learning spaces in non-formal education. The campaign will include informational posters that feature take-aways from the study session and will aim to raise awareness about the importance of safe space in NFE environments. These materials will also be disseminated internally within the organisations represented by the participants, as well as the member organisations of our networks.

Besides the outputs, participants decided on the online platforms to keep the newly-built network active and keep in touch with each other about upcoming plans and potential cooperations.



List of participants

Albania

Ervin Kurti - Institute of Human Rights and Non-formal Education

Armenia

Meri Vanesyan - Youth Development Center of Armenia

Azerbaijan

Kamran Azizli - Q-Collective initiative
Saadat Aghayeva - Association of Scouts of Azerbaijan
Turana Nuriyeva - AZAD LGBTI Azerbaijan
Nazrin Allahverdiyeva - Baku Community Space

Croatia

Matea Jakolic - Scout and Guide Association of Croatia

Egypt

Ahmed Genidy

Finland

Eucharia Imoesi - Africans and African-European Association

France

Ali Noor - Voices of Young Refugees in Europe
Jamalekdein Omer Abdalla Adam - Doctors Without Borders

Georgia

Amirani Koridze - XELI
Kristine Gongadze - Civic Education Teachers Forum
Mikheil Lazginiani - Center of Yezidi Culture
Ani Gabedava - Umbrella

Hungary

Eszter Luca Szarka

Kosovo

Erblina Selmanaj - Youth Peace Ambassadors Network

Netherlands

Razan Damlakhi - Voices of Young Refugees in Europe

Poland

Volha Turlo - NESEHNUTI Brno
Weronika Knowska - Youth Peace Ambassadors Network

Romania

Nicoleta Vlad - GEYC / Erasmus Student Network

Serbia

Olivera Draško - Scout organisation of Serbia
Nina Portolan

Spain

Marta Concepción Mederos - ASDE Scouts of Spain

Türkiye

Aysel Savash
Fatih Kaymakci - Sancaktepe Municipality Youth Center

Preparatory team

Tamar Tsatskrialashvili
Sian Bagshaw
Emilia Astore
Chiara Gullotta
Alfredo Musse

Invited speaker

Evdokia Romanova

Council of Europe

Ida Kreutzman - Educational Advisor
Irisa Veizaj - Programme Assistant

The outputs

1. The glossary of relevant terms in constructing safe learning spaces;
2. The reader of tips for practitioners to support the creation and maintenance of safe learning spaces in their educational activities.

Reading material about safe spaces

From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces by Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens

Being safe from what and safe for whom? A critical discussion of the conceptual metaphor of 'safe space' - by Karin K. Flensnera and Marie Von der Lippe

Creating and Maintaining a Safe Space in Experiential Learning - by Veronika Kisfalvi and David Oliver

Visibility of this study session

Article by one of the participants - Amuka Koridze

Instagram post

Instagram video 1

Instagram video 2