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UNLEASHING HUMAN RIGHTS

A forum to further universal human rights education
for, with and by young people

European Youth Centre **Budapest**
9-11 December 2025

Concept Note



LEARNING EQUALITY,
LIVING DIGNITY.
Human Rights Education
Youth Programme



With the support of:



Unleashing the Right to Human Rights Education

Human rights education (HRE) remains “essential for the promotion and achievement of stable and harmonious relations among communities and for fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and peace” (1993 World Conference on Human Rights).

HRE is defined by the Council of Europe and the United Nations as, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, to empower learners to contribute to the building and defence of a universal culture of human rights in society, with a view to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Only with full awareness, understanding and respect for human rights can we hope to develop a culture in which human rights are respected rather than violated. The right to human rights education is a human right in and of itself under international law, as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Human rights education is a catalyst for all human rights.

As recalled by the 2022 Forum [The Art of Learning Equality, Dignity and Democracy](#), Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education goes beyond the diplomatic consensus:

Human rights education replicates the universal principle of human rights, and it should be illuminated and informed by the learners’ (rights-holders’) lives and experiences. We recognise the inherent transformative nature of citizenship and human rights education equipping learners to challenge the power holders, and to hold them accountable according to human rights and democratic principles. We recognise the ever-evolving characteristics of human rights education practice to respond to and influence the change positively. EDC/HRE discourse should be at the frontline to respond to challenges, such as the global climate change, datafication, and armed conflicts.

There remains, however, very important gaps and discrepancies between statements and policies, between intentions and practices, between declarations and resources allocated for HRE. The transformative potential of human rights education is limited by the lack of accountability of duty-bearers and the alienation of rights-holders. This has to change. Hope and empowerment must have space to grow.

Beyond celebration

2025 marks the convergence of important anniversaries and milestones for human rights and human rights education:

- **75** years of the European Convention on Human Rights
- **30** years of the European Youth Centre Budapest
- **25** years of Compass and the Human Rights Education Youth Programme of the Council of Europe
- **20** years of the UN World Programme for Human Rights Education
- **15** years of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training
- **15** years of the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education of the Council of Europe
- **10** years into the agenda of the UN Sustainable Development Goals

- **10** years of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Citizenship
- **5** years into the Council of Europe 2030 Youth sector strategy.

While these occasions should be moments of celebration, they are also solemn and offer pause for collective reflection on human rights education, its contributions, and its challenges in relation to the achievement of universal human rights. This is even more important given the global political and social climate increasingly characterised by polarisation, transactional global politics, deepening democratic deficits, a growing authoritarianism, war and a culture of violence, and impunity in the face of flagrant human rights abuses.

The Council of Europe Youth Department, together with its Education Department, and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, with their non-governmental partners including the European Youth Forum and Amnesty International, are proud to announce the co-organisation of a forum to critically review the status, achievements and challenges of human rights education for, with and by youth, as conceptualised and practiced by them and their partners.

The Forum will ensure a global perspective which is essential in view of the universality of human rights and, consequently, of the need to universalise the commitments, understandings, and praxis of human rights education, while localising it in specific social, political and educational contexts.

Holding the Forum during Human Rights Day 2025 stresses the leading role that human rights education should have in the promotion of a culture of universal human rights.

This forum will provide the opportunity for the community of human rights educators to gather, share, reflect and nurture human rights education practice for the upcoming years, underlining cooperative dialogue between international, national and local partners, whether professionals or volunteers from the formal or non-formal education sectors, whether governmental institutions or non-governmental organisations.

The co-organisers recognise that narratives and practice of human rights education need to be continuously reviewed, rethought and renewed for to live up to human rights education's potential and promise of learning about, through and in a culture of universal human rights, and to meet the challenges of the political and social moment – today and into the future.

The forum Unleashing Human Rights will therefore be an occasion to reflect, discuss and learn about the major social, political, cultural, and educational challenges to universal human rights and human rights education, to review existing human rights education practice to serve as inspiration and to collectively develop strategies for defence, pushback, and constructive development. As such, the Forum aims to be a space for both realism and hope, a place of pragmatism while not compromising on values, a location for frank deliberation, focused on what should be done, not only what can be done.

While dedicated to human rights education, the forum will discuss the current attacks on a culture of human rights, including but not limited to:

- Backsliding on democratic values, illiberal democratic rhetoric, shrinking spaces for civil society, aggressive nationalist discourses and backlashes against human rights.
- Threats to the sustainability of human rights education programmes and to the safety/freedom of human rights educators and human rights defenders.

- Growing impunity in the face of global human rights violations, including within the many ongoing armed conflicts taking place worldwide, which daily undermine the very principles of universal human dignity and of the indivisibility and interdependence of human rights.
- Global crises and threats faced by humanity, including climate change, growing inequality and continued social injustice worldwide and the potential risks posed by artificial intelligence.

The Forum will consider the potential of latest global developments to be positive vectors for and for consolidating the acquis of human rights education thus far, and for equipping it to continue facing up to the challenges of human rights such as:

- Benefits, both visible and yet to be understood and discovered, of rapid technological development and digitalisation, including the mainstreaming of AI.
- Increasing local competence and capacity for addressing universal human rights challenges through contextualised practices of human rights education.
- Increasing democratisation of human rights education, extending its reach to communities of practice beyond academia, the formal and non-formal education sectors.
- Steady growth of social and even political recognition for the fact that facing up to global crises is a matter of intergenerational responsibility.
- Continued attacks on women's rights activists, LGBTI, refugees, migrants and other marginalised communities.

Aims and objectives

The Human Rights Education Forum aims to reassess and affirm the potential of human rights education towards a culture of peace and universal human rights by charting the contemporary status and role for human rights education, taking account of all its diverse forms and contexts. The Forum also aims to strengthen the commitment of the Council of Europe and the United Nations system to their shared agenda of support for the global community of practice concerned with educating *about*, *for*, and *through* human rights.

The objectives of the forum are to:

- critically reflect on the achievements, practices, opportunities and challenges met by human rights education today for addressing the global human rights concerns of young people and its adequacy as a response to the current human rights crisis.
- identify areas for innovation in, as well as potential resources for and policies supporting human rights education, including strategies for mainstreaming in the youth and education sectors and for the development of a more enabling environment for human rights education.
- encourage and motivate young people engaged in human rights education and human rights activism to continue their work and to provide them with opportunities to finding partners and support for their efforts and advocacy to support the provision of and access to the right to human rights education.
- identify appropriate approaches, good practice and key partnerships to support implementation of the fifth phase (2025-2029) of the World Programme for Human

Rights Education of the United Nations dedicated to human rights education for children and youth with a focus on digital technologies and human rights, gender equality, and environment and climate change.

- review lessons learned from 25 years of the implementation of the Human Rights Education Youth Programme of the Council of Europe and identify important directions for its further development including, considering key developments in the youth and education sectors of the Council of Europe.
- strengthen the connections between the programme of the Council of Europe youth and education sectors regarding human rights education and those of the World Programme for Human Rights Education of the United Nations.
- foster international cooperation, solidarity and partnership building among stakeholders of human rights education as a contribution to supporting the resilience and solidarity of the community of practice.

The Forum's conclusions will contribute to a shared agenda for human rights education at the global level that addresses, among others, the agendas of achieving gender equality, combating climate crisis and environmental injustices and digitalisation.

Organisers

The Forum is co-organised by the Council of Europe and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in cooperation with the European Youth Forum and Amnesty International. The Forum is also supported by the European Wergeland Centre, the Global Campus on Human Rights, Kandersteg International Scout Centre and Soka Gakkai International. It is led and prepared by a Steering Group that includes representatives of the Advisory Council on Youth, the European Steering Committee for Youth and experts from a variety of specialised youth and human rights organisations.

Participants

The Forum will bring together approximately 250 participants, of which 50 are from world regions beyond Europe. The participants should correspond to the following profiles:

- Young multipliers, activists and advocates for human rights education.
- Education professionals from both the formal and non-formal sectors.
- Representatives of governmental and public institutions responsible for Education and for Youth policies.
- Young people and youth leaders of initiatives and projects of civil society organisations for citizenship and human rights education, including projects supported by the European Youth Foundation.
- Partners of the Human Rights Education Youth Programme, such as organisers of Compass training courses, publishers of Compass and Compasito in national languages.
- Representatives of international and regional organisations active in human rights education.
- Human rights activists and representatives of national human rights institutions active in promoting the right to human rights education.

Working languages

The Forum will be held in English and French with simultaneous interpretation.

Programme

The programme of the forum will be held over 3 days, from 9 to 11 December 2025. The daily programme is being prepared by the Forum’s Steering Group. However, the structure and flow of the days of the programme should correspond to the scheme below.

Tuesday 9 December	Wednesday 10 December	Thursday 11 December
Opening by UN and Council of Europe - Sharing diversity in human rights education - Keynote speech on universality of human rights education	Human Rights today Reflections and discussion on the role of education with human rights officials	The future of HRE with young people Workshops and working groups on selected issues for a common agenda (including digital technologies and human rights, gender equality, and environment and climate change)
Celebrating achievements of the HRE Youth and Education Programmes and the World Programme for Human Rights Education	Workshops on practices in addressing current global challenges through EDC and HRE (issues and solutions)	International cooperation for human rights education Conclusions and resolutions Closing of the forum
Preparing Human Rights Day	Celebrating Human Rights Day	Farewell evening

The day before the Forum, Monday 8 December, will be dedicated to parallel meetings of partners and stakeholders, including a thematic seminar to review Council of Europe *Enter!* recommendation on access to social rights and the European Space for Citizenship Education.