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Unleashing Human Rights
Révéler les Droits Humains

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

9-11 December 2025, European Youth Centre Budapest

Un forum pour promouvoir l'éducation aux droits humains universels pour, avec et par les jeunes

9-11 décembre 2025, Centre européen de la jeunesse de Budapest

Report

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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UNLEASHING HUMAN RIGHTS

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

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EUROPEAN YOUTH CENTRE BUDAPEST

9-11 December 2025

Report by
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The opinions expressed in this work are the responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe or of the United Nations.

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We extend our gratitude to the partners and contributors whose commitment, expertise, and support made this Forum possible. Their continued dedication to advancing human rights education has been instrumental in fostering meaningful dialogue and strengthening shared approaches across regions.

We also warmly thank all participants for their active engagement, insightful contributions, and collaborative spirit throughout the Forum. The diversity of perspectives and experiences greatly enriched the discussions and outcomes of this event.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the efforts of the many colleagues involved in the preparation and delivery of the Forum, including the European Youth Centre team, whose professionalism and dedication ensured its success. The outcomes of this gathering will contribute significantly to ongoing efforts to promote and strengthen human rights education at national, regional, and international levels.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HRE is defined as practices and activities which aim, by developing learners' knowledge, skills and attitudes, to empower them to act and contribute to the building and defence of a universal culture of human rights in society. The narratives and practice of Human Rights Education (HRE) need to be continuously reviewed, rethought and renewed to live up to its full potential. HRE needs to foster a culture of universal human rights and meet the challenges of the political and social moment – today and into the future.

On 9-11 December 2025, the "Unleashing Human Rights: A forum to further universal human rights education for, with and by young people" (Forum) brought together over 200 youth voices and perspectives from around the world at the European Youth Centre in Budapest with the aim of setting an ambitious agenda for HRE in a moment when the human rights project faces profound challenges worldwide. Conversations throughout the three days defined a unique moment in the HRE movement of 'looking back' and 'moving forward' in designing HRE to resist oppression, strengthen justice and build solidarity across regions. Young human rights educators, in particular, were recognised as drivers of future efforts.

The institutional background of the Forum organisers reflects the cross-sector nature of HRE, underlining cooperative dialogue between international, national and local partners; professionals and volunteers from the formal and non-formal education sectors; and governmental institutions and non-governmental organisations. Organisers of the Forum were 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 was also supported by the European Wergeland Centre, the Global Campus of Human Rights, Kandersteg International Scout Centre, Soka Gakkai International and Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights. It was led and prepared by a Steering Group that included representatives of the organisers as well as of the Advisory Council on Youth, the European Steering Committee for Youth and experts from a variety of specialised youth and human rights organisations.

The Forum aimed to reassess and affirm the potential of HRE towards peace and universal human rights by charting the contemporary status and role for HRE, taking account of all its diverse forms and contexts. The Forum also aimed 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. Through plenary presentations, workshops and small group discussions, the forum offered an environment to critically reflect on the achievements, practices, opportunities and challenges met by HRE today for addressing the global human rights concerns of young people, and its adequacy as a response to the current human rights crisis.

The three-day programme was organised in the following way:

> Day 1: From Lessons to Legacy: Decades of Human Rights Education ("looking back")
> Day 2: Opportunities and Challenges for Human Rights Education Today ("time to rethink?)
> Day 3: The Next Chapter: The Future of Human Rights Education ("looking ahead")

Each day, the Forum offered plenary sessions where practitioners and experts addressed key themes of the day, as well as parallel sessions where participants worked in small groups to share their experiences and perspectives on HRE. Highlights from each day are presented below, with details available in the full report.

Day 1: From Lessons to Legacy: Decades of Human Rights Education ("looking back")

Participants in the Forum noted numerous ways in which HRE itself has evolved in the past decades in better supporting the international human rights movement. Over time, and in parallel with the advancement and challenges of human rights on the ground, HRE policies and practices have come to incorporate a corpus of legacies.

Key legacies that were recognised:

- Supports, including intergovernmental organisation policies and ecosystems.
- Engagement of diverse actors.
- Understanding of what constitutes quality HRE.
- Recognition of the necessity of persistence, safety and taking the long view.

Day 2: Opportunities and Challenges for Human Rights Education Today ("time to rethink?")

Day 2 of the Forum focused on challenges for HRE and innovative responses. Parallel groups discussed specific themes, such as racism and shrinking civic space, and the violations that make human rights responses – including HRE – urgent.

<u>Human rights violations</u>

Examples of human rights violations that span the spectrum of civil, political, economic, social and cultural were shared throughout the three days of the Forum. In some situations, governments not only failed to protect human rights but were actively undermining them. Human rights harms affect the safety and well-being of individuals and communities, minorities, marginalised populations,

Indigenous peoples, youth and human rights defenders. Human rights educators mentioned experiences with surveillance, intimidation, criminalisation, invisibility, discrimination and violence.

Challenges for HRE

Much has been written about underlying conditions resulting in such human rights violations. Such environments include authoritarianism, conflict, and shrinking civic space. The main challenges for HRE are linked directly with those for the human rights field. The obstacles discussed in the Forum were:

- Political (e.g., narratives that deny the universality of human rights; attacks on human rights defenders; a lack of civic space and places for HRE).
- Resource and capacity constraints.
- Lack of access to human rights learners (e.g., in situations of conflict).
- Emotional and psychological barriers (e.g., human rights educator burnout).
- Conceptual challenges (e.g., decolonisation, moving away from human-centred rights).

These challenges speak to the need to design programming that helps to develop the capacities of individual actors (within constrained political spaces) while at the same time working strategically to change such conditions and promote systemic change - that is addressing the underlying political, social and economic causes of human rights violations.

Innovative HRE responses

Considering all this, how can HRE take place and in ways that strategically address violations as part of wider human rights efforts? How can access to quality HRE be ensured? Participants worked in break-out groups to identify a range of responses.

Forum participants felt that in restrictive contexts, it would be important to uncover new avenues of entry to teach sensitive topics in ways that are "legally palatable while advocating for rights." Moreover, it might be pragmatic to strategically reframe HRE to continue operating under restrictive political environments.

Educators shared innovative HRE approaches for peace and conflict resolution; authoritarianism; shrinking civic space; social rights; gender equality and LGBTI; racism; the climate crisis; digitalisation, including artificial intelligence.
Many of the good practices shared are applicable to other HRE challenges and areas of practice.

Day 3: The Next Chapter: The Future of Human Rights Education ("looking ahead")

Drawing on lessons learned from practice over the last decades, as well as innovative solutions to current challenges, participants considered how to position their own HRE work and that of the field in continuing to work towards human rights-respecting societies. These aspirations and insights are clustered into planning areas in the report. In addition, it should be noted that some participants felt that the global HRE community should advocate for a new convention or recommendation to address the outcomes of the Forum. There was also a call to create a global community of good practices in HRE.

Planning Area 1: Strengthening intergovernmental and governmental policies and supports

Participants pointed out that many HRE-friendly policies and programmes already exist but are not implemented due to a lack of political commitment and resources. These longstanding challenges are further exacerbated by shrinking civic space that affects HRE.

There was a clear call for stronger institutional support, better funding structures, meaningful youth participation in the development of HRE, and mainstreaming HRE in every learning sector. HRE promotion should be advanced within and across sectors in individual countries, as well as across Europe and other regions.

Planning Area 2: Expanding the diversity of HRE actors and cooperation

HRE work needs to be done across different education levels, in the formal, non-formal and informal sectors, and across all ages. At the national level, HRE actors might foster a range of partnerships, and with relevant government departments or committees (if feasible), encouraging multi-stakeholder cooperation and funding.

Numerous actors were proposed as allies in local HRE efforts, including other human rights organisations, CSOs, local authorities, community members, sports associations, schools, parent associations, trade unions, teacher unions, think tanks, private sector companies, human rights institutions and universities. Schools might strengthen their collaboration with universities and non-formal education organisations, and whole-school approaches to HRE involving school- and community-based stakeholders should be promoted.

Planning Area 3: Building systemic HRE

HRE acts as a multiplier, creating a ripple effect beginning with individuals who experience rights-based learning and then carry these principles into their families, peer groups, institutions, and wider society. Comprehensive HRE means that it is quality HRE available to all. HRE needs to be inclusive, meaning that it is

accessible to all people, with guarantees that it is offered to youth as well as those coming from marginalised groups. It also means that HRE should address deep, systemic challenges to human rights in a society, recognising the value of collective action for influencing those with power.

Building on earlier thinking in the Forum, participants offered a range of suggestions for supporting a comprehensive, strategic and sustained implementation of HRE in both the formal and non-formal education sectors. They mentioned that schools and public authorities must take responsibility rather than relying exclusively on CSOs.

Planning Area 4: Ensuring quality HRE

Quality HRE should be transformative – both for learners as well as the societies in which they live. Some characteristics of transformative HRE, which are further elaborated in the main report, are that HRE encompasses values, feelings, critical thinking and collection action; promotes the accountability of duty bearers; supports youth leadership; and is humanising, positive and forward-looking.

Quality HRE also means sensitivity to the opportunities and needs of the local environment. For example, HRE in authoritarian and post-conflict environments will need to support people in knowing their rights but also in understanding and disrupting structures that perpetuate human rights abuses. HRE itself should be self-reflective, integrating discussions around critiques of human rights, including those related to decoloniality.

Planning Area 5: Enabling persistence and safety

Across the three days of the Forum, it was recognised that 'small things matter.' The 'real action' can take place in the small details of HRE work, the everyday actions that connect us all. These small victories are essential for the cumulative work and 'ripple effect' of HRE in schools and communities. They also help to sustain human rights educators.

The Forum "Message" is entitled "Joy is Resistance". Participants affirmed the intrinsic hopefulness of HRE work, work that reflects our best understanding of quality and is rooted in strategic approaches to foster human rights.

INTRODUCTION

On 9-11 December 2025, the *Human Rights Education Forum: Unleashing Human Rights* brought together over 200 youth voices and perspectives from around the world with the aim of setting an ambitious agenda for human rights education in a moment when the human rights project faces profound challenges worldwide. Conversations throughout the three days defined a unique moment in the human rights education movement of 'looking back' and 'moving forward' in designing human rights education to resist oppression, strengthen justice and build solidarity across regions. Young human rights educators were, in particular, recognised as drivers of current and future efforts.

The Essentialness of 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 understood by the Council of Europe and the United Nations as practices and activities that aim, by developing learners' knowledge, skills and attitudes, to empower them to contribute to the building and defence of a universal culture of human rights in society.
HRE is a catalyst for all human rights. Only with full awareness, understanding and respect for human rights can we hope to develop a culture in which human rights can be fully enjoyed and are respected rather than violated. The right to HRE is a human right in international law, as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Moreover, various international and regional instruments have established a normative framework for HRE under international law. The challenge lies in governmental commitments to implementation, resourcing and political will.

> Human rights education develops capacities to become "agents of change" in all places.
>
> – Volker Turk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Unleashing Human Rights

The Unleashing Human Rights: A forum to further universal human rights education for, with and by young people (Forum) was organised to critically review the status, achievements and challenges of human rights education *for, with* and *by* youth. Young people, according to Nina Grmuša, Chair of the Council of Europe's Joint Council on Youth, are at the forefront of defending human rights.

The Forum provided a collaborative space for nearly 240 stakeholders of human rights education - including 50 from regions outside Europe - to share experiences, exchange ideas and discuss strategies for HRE for the upcoming years. The passion, solidarity, and insights of participants were palpable. The Forum was held during Human Rights Day 2025, stressing the leading role that HRE has in the promotion of a culture of universal human rights.

The European Youth Centre in Budapest was the venue for the Forum, which took place in English and French. The gathering brought together diverse perspectives and backgrounds. The participants included a variety of human rights educators and stakeholders, including human rights trainers and educators from the formal and non-formal education sectors, youth leaders and workers, international and domestic NGOs, representatives of government and public institutions responsible for Education and Youth policies, community-based organisations, advocates and activists, representatives from academia and representatives of international and regional intergovernmental organisations active in HRE.

The institutional background of the Forum organisers reflected the cross-sector nature of HRE, underlining cooperative dialogue between international, national and local partners; professionals and volunteers from the formal and non-formal education sectors; and governmental institutions and non-governmental organisations. Organisers of the Forum were 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 was also supported by the European Wergeland Centre, the Global Campus of Human Rights, Kandersteg International Scout Centre, Soka Gakkai International and Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights. It was led and prepared by a Steering Group that included representatives of the organisers as well as of the Advisory Council on Youth, the European Steering Committee for Youth and experts from a variety of specialised youth and human rights organisations.

Aims and objectives

The Forum aimed to reassess and affirm the potential of HRE towards peace and universal human rights by charting the contemporary status and role for HRE, taking account of all its diverse forms and contexts. The Forum also aimed 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. Through plenary presentations, workshops and small group discussions, the Forum offered an environment to critically reflect on the achievements, practices, opportunities and challenges met by HRE today for addressing the global human rights concerns of young people, and its adequacy as a response to the current human rights crisis.

> Tobias Flessenkemper, Head of the Youth Department at the Council of Europe, asserted that "Young people are writing the latest chapter…in addressing social justice." As Ileana Bello, Director General of Amnesty

International – Italy shared: "Human rights education carried out by youth, is energetic and sensitive…a new kind of solidarity."

As HRE is about human rights, the Forum naturally discussed the current attacks on a culture of human rights, including but not limited to:

- The rise of authoritarian practices, 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 HRE 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.
- Continued attacks on women's rights activists, LGBTI people, refugees, migrants and other marginalised communities.
- 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.

Participants from many countries made clear the stark challenges for human rights educators and defenders, but also provided models of courage, resilience, and creativity in the face of increasing pressure and a narrowing civic space.

The Forum considered the potential of certain global developments – for example, digitalisation - to be positive vectors for consolidating the accomplishments of HRE this far, and for equipping HRE to continue facing up to the challenges of human rights. This report and the experiences of participants in the Forum will hopefully contribute to a shared agenda for HRE at the global level that addresses these, and other, challenges and opportunities.

An additional outcome of the Forum was a Message that reaffirms HRE as a fundamental right; that is emancipatory, transformative and essential for the realisation of all other rights; and that urges educators to carrying out inclusive HRE that is critical, localised and rooted in the lived experiences of learners. Institutions are called on to remove systemic and structural barriers at the local, national and international levels to ensure that HRE is accessible in all education settings and stages of learning.

Programme and Structure of the Report

The three-day programme was organised in the following way:

Day 1: From Lessons to Legacy: Decades of Human Rights Education ("looking back")
Day 2: Opportunities and Challenges for Human Rights Education Today ("time to rethink?")

Day 3: The Next Chapter: The Future of Human Rights Education ("looking ahead")

Each day, the Forum offered plenary sessions where practitioners and experts addressed key themes of the day, as well as parallel sessions where participants worked in small groups to share their experiences and perspectives. The Programme is contained in Annex A.

The report is organised around the three-day programme of the Forum, integrating the input and reflections of both the plenary and breakout sessions. The report is not a comprehensive rendering of what transpired but highlights some key takeaways. The report, in combination with the Message generated by youth participants with the facilitation of Council of Europe staff, will hopefully provide inspiration, encouragement and wisdom for the essential and ongoing efforts of HRE.

SECTION I. LOOKING BACK: LEGACIES AND LESSONS OF HRE

For some, the origins of HRE hark back to the founding of the United Nations itself, with the UN Charter's commitment "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person" (United Nations, 1945). Since that time, the field of human rights has expanded in policies, practices and understandings, accompanied and carried by human rights education and training.

Participants in the Forum noted numerous ways in which HRE itself has evolved in the past decades in better supporting the international human rights movement. Over time, and in parallel with the advancement and challenges of human rights on the ground, HRE policies and practices have come to incorporate a corpus of legacies. Those that persist as supports and understandings of good practice can perhaps be considered the 'lessons' of HRE.

The evolution of HRE can be clustered into a few categories: organisational supports; the engagement of diverse actors; the characteristics of quality HRE; and the resilience and safety of human rights educators. Ideas emanating from the Forum in plenaries and parallel group work help us to understand the scope of HRE legacies.

Supports, including intergovernmental organisational policies and ecosystems

What constitutes support in the HRE field? On the one hand, there are legal and policy frameworks that validate the field as a whole and serve as a tool for advocating for HRE in different spaces. Numerous policy instruments have been promulgated since the founding of the UN, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) itself, which recognise the key role of education in promoting the core values of the United Nations, namely democracy, peace, rule of law and human rights.

At the international, UN level, there has been a remarkable progression from the Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004) to the World Programme for Human Rights Education (permanent and ongoing since 2005) and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (2011).

At the regional level in Europe, the Council of Europe passed the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (2010) and developed a key tool for designing EDC-HRE curriculum through the Reference Framework for Competences for Democratic Culture.

In conjunction with these policy supports, the Council of Europe and the UN have each developed an 'ecosystem' of support, including guidance and practical learning resources for both formal and non-formal education, the training of professional groups and lifelong learning, and pathways for participation in HRE of

young people committed to human rights. The dissemination of resources has been facilitated by the Internet and the digitisation of materials. These organisations have endeavoured to further support HRE across different education sectors by providing opportunities for the sharing of practices and information through conferences; by supporting capacity-building through training; and through other forms of technical and financial support.

Engagement of diverse actors

The work of these intergovernmental institutions with governments has explicitly recognised and endorsed the role of HRE and the responsibilities of governments to support such efforts. And if governments do not take on HRE through such guidance, civil society organisations within countries can use these policy tools to persuade their governments to incorporate HRE in the formal education sector.

The past decades have shown increasing evidence of government support for HRE, and international studies have shown that 'human rights' is more present in school textbooks than at any point before. However, it cannot be said that the treatment of human rights in the formal education system is systematic or that it meets the methodological standards now set for the field. Moreover, the recent backlash against democratic spaces and human rights may influence this progress in certain political environments. Yet, we have seen progress overall in terms of government engagement. Elena Ippoliti, Coordinator of the HRE Unit at the OHCHR, who has worked in the office since 1995, noted that the year she began her job only two governments reported to her office some human rights education activities, in conjunction with the UN Decade for Human Rights Education. Reporting has progressively increased throughout the years, both in terms of quantity and scope of action reported. As an example, for the 2025 report on implementation of the World Programme for Human Rights Education, 34 governments submitted reports, some of which were very extensive.

In the field of higher education, we have also seen an expansion of HRE outside of law schools and into inter-disciplinary settings. The Global Campus of Human Rights offers eight regional master programs in human rights and has thousands of graduates. Secretary General Manfred Nowak stated that while there are now more master programs offered in human rights, there remains a gap in the teaching of human rights at the undergraduate level. So, as with other areas of HRE practice, there are legacies of progress but also work to be done. Integration of human rights-based approaches (HRBA) in university curricula, along with training for lecturers, contributes to long-term systemic change favouring a human rights culture.

Engagement in the HRE field has been particularly pronounced among non-governmental organisations – both international and national – and especially since the 1990s. Amnesty International's HRE efforts reached 3 million people in 2024, according to Kate Moriarty, Head of Human Rights Education at Amnesty International, and is now "stronger, richer and more diverse." Non-formal HRE,

often led by young people, has been essential for supporting human rights learning and action. "Young people have engaged in HRE and shaped it," according to Natalia Kallio, board member of the European Youth Forum. Non-formal educators have developed and shared innovative practices that have spread across organisations and sometimes into the formal education sector. It is in non-formal education that we see the extent to which HRE has been effective in reaching out to marginalised populations, including youth without access to mainstream education.

Many of the Forum participants were based at the grassroots level, including in civil society organisations organised by and for youth. The engagement of youth is an essential foundation for HRE, reflecting both on the legacies of the movement and the future that lies ahead. Young people are key multipliers and monitors of the human rights message. They have also become increasingly visible in decision making forums such as youth advisory boards addressing human rights-related issues, and in community-based, governmental, and intergovernmental settings. As one break-out group reported back: "Youth are being recognised as the leaders of today, not leaders of the future."

A final area in which engagement with human rights has become more pronounced and visible is in community-based organisations, a form of civil society organisation (CSO). The infusion of the human rights-based approach to community development offers a new language for understanding community needs and assisting in programming to meet them. Moreover, work at the grassroots level in communities has validated many of the 'good practices' that have emerged for HRE over the years, and which are presented in the next section.

This range of diverse HRE actors invites cross-sectoral cooperation and the growth of solidarity across groups and sectors. Such cooperation helps in sustaining motivation and resilience among human rights educators. Strengthening partnerships with NGOs, youth groups, and associations can result in long-term cooperation. Cooperation between civil society and governments was mentioned as important to support decision making in areas where government officials lack understanding and experience with human rights. Participants noted that in terms of engaging governments and other leaders in the substance and practical application of human rights, it is important to train ministers and government officials, civil servants and other government employees. Cooperation between actors in the formal and non-formal education sector has also proven to be fruitful. Such cooperation can support educators in carrying out effective HRE originally piloted by grassroots organisations. These relationships are also assisting educators in gaining access to learners in hard-to-access environments.

Finally, the wider engagement of organisations and individuals in HRE results in a ripple effect, with individuals who experience rights-based learning often carrying these principles into their families, peer groups, institutions, and wider society.

This scaling effect makes HRE an even more powerful tool for promoting human rights, democracy and peace.

Understanding What Constitutes Quality Human Rights Education

Perhaps one of the most pronounced legacies and lessons of HRE over the past decades has been the clarification of what constitutes quality HRE. The UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training asserts that quality HRE is *about, through* and *for* human rights, a definition that reflects many years of grassroots work in this area. Quality HRE is understood to involve:

- learning *about* human rights as internationally agreed and in a way that is relevant and can be applied by the learner.
- learning *through* methodologies that are participatory, inclusive and learner-centred and which take place in a learning environment reflective of human rights culture.
- learning *for* human rights, that results in knowledge, skills and values that contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights.

Localisation

Both lived experience and scholarship have helped to elaborate this dimension of quality. As Elena Ippoliti of the OHCHR shared: "Human rights education makes human rights a lived experience everywhere." HRE must build on human rights as found in local traditions, culture and contexts. She referred to a 1968 UNESCO research project that looked at how human rights are embedded in every culture and tradition.[1] Throughout the Forum, participants called for HRE to be 'decolonised,' reflecting the contexts, values, epistemologies and priorities of non-western countries.

There was general agreement that HRE needs to be localised and not 'imposed from above.'
Marie Struthers, Director of the East European and Central European region of Amnesty International, felt that human rights educators have not done enough to localise human rights. She warned that we have "to tell the story locally to avoid stigmatisation of the 'outsider' accusation."

Adaptation demonstrates respect for local communities and is also practical, as an imposition of a human rights agenda may be met with resistance. Accommodation of local context involves many considerations, including use of local languages and attention to human rights priorities in the local environment. Adapting HRE to local contexts and cultures also invites intercultural learning and diverse perspectives. A decolonial approach welcomes critical discussions about the western history and origins of the legal human rights framework within HRE so as to foster genuine dialogue.

[1] See https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000219297

Some contexts have challenges, such as conflict or authoritarianism, which require sensitivity and precautions about how HRE should be approached. Participants noted that HRE is closely intertwined with the political situation of each country. Participants felt that it was important to emphasise that human rights offer protections for everyone. They also strongly agreed that HRE should address marginalised youth and communities, including refugees, LGBTI persons, Roma, religious minorities and those living in economic deprivation. Those who do not identify as being part of a vulnerable group now might become one in the future.

There is some tension – and perhaps a lack of clarity – among human rights educators about how to address the claim of universality across a range of cultural contexts and outlooks. While HRE should be customised to meet the genuine needs and interests of communities, it also needs to retain its core values, for example, drawing a line for what constitutes a human rights violation. In some places where human rights is a politically sensitive topic, it may be necessary to strategically frame HRE within less sensitive frames such as 'peace' or 'ethics' – though there is a risk that the human rights message – particularly calls for human rights action – will be left aside.

Inclusion and learner-centred methodologies

Returning to the "through" of quality HRE, HRE methodologies have also evolved over the past decades. HRE participants shared many approaches, all meant to encourage engagement, inclusivity, and connections with the lived experience of learners. Quality HRE means that the content and spaces where it takes place are accessible and safe - linguistically, physically, emotionally, and psychologically. There was agreement that HRE should be 'transformative' – both individually and society-wide. Human rights educators need to understand and apply this in their respective context. In all places, people need to know their rights and how to practically defend them. HRE also needs to be anti-racist and decolonial, the latter raising many other questions throughout the days of the Forum about what constitutes decoloniality within HRE.

Participants noted the importance of intentionally incorporating intersectionality in capacity-building. This helps to ensure that HRE reflects the diverse identities and experiences of communities, and that educators deal with the profound impact of those on group dynamics in learning situations. For example, organising awareness-raising and training programmes that involve both people living with disabilities and those not, can promote inclusivity while addressing stigma. Training that involves members from both majority and minority races or religions can encourage mutual understanding. Multilingual approaches help break barriers and create more inclusive spaces.

Not surprisingly, participants had a great deal to say about HRE methodology. HRE can help support a learner-centred, humanistic educational approach, and is about co-creating knowledge and action. Key strategies include storytelling;

embracing feelings and social emotional learning; and maintaining a focus on critical thinking and reflection. Given the polarisation that now exists in many countries, an emphasis was placed on the facilitation of dialogue, especially with those we disagree with, in order to 'build common ground and retain our humanity.' HRE should facilitate 'honest conversations,' with a focus not on political ideology but one's own human rights-related experiences.

> "Human rights education is an act of hope that may not show results the next morning."
>
> – Ruxandra Pandea, Council of Europe

Recognition of the necessity of persistence, safety and taking the long view

A final category of HRE legacies reflects the emotional wisdom that our own history – and that of the field – can offer us: that is, how to persist. Many Forum participants are working in situations of conflict or environments hostile to human rights. In some cases, these situations have dramatically changed for the worse over the past few years, requiring human rights educators to recalibrate and find renewed strength. Communities and countries that have become authoritarian are no longer necessarily safe for those engaged in HRE. Moreover, in some contexts it has become risky to address issues considered controversial and polarising – e.g., the gender backlash.

Some of the advice shared by participants included being patient and recognising that it may take some time for political environments to change or for us to see the 'fruits of our labour' with learners. Human rights educators and defenders may feel that they are sometimes operating in 'survival mode' but in fact should view and plan their work in such a way that it addresses systemic, root causes of human rights violations. Human rights change is a long-term proposition, and our efforts need to be recognised as such.

In conjunction with this long-term view, advice was shared that efforts to sustain individual human rights educators and defenders should be as comprehensive as possible. This means helping to build the capacities of youth and providing them with safe spaces where they can talk and share feelings and opinions.

Human rights educators cannot shy away from challenges and difficult questions. They also need to be protected as human rights defenders. Both safety and resilience are key for the long game. The Mentimeter Word Cloud activity that took place on Day 3 asked participants to share one word that 'stuck' with them following their discussions on Day 2 about HRE challenges and opportunities. Strikingly, "burnouts" was the most cited word.

The Forum affirmed the intentionality with which the self-care and well-being of human rights educators need to be fostered. Safety and security are top priorities, and solidarity and moral support help to sustain the work under difficult circumstances.

And there are moments of breakthrough and affirmation, not to be forgotten. As Esso-Dong KONGAH of the Centre for Human Rights Documentation and Training (Togo) said on Day 2: "Celebrate the little wins."

SECTION II. HUMAN RIGHTS CHALLENGES AND INNOVATIVE RESPONSES FROM HRE

Day 2 of the Forum focused on challenges for HRE and innovative responses. Parallel groups discussed specific themes, such as racism and shrinking civic space, and the violations that make human rights responses – including HRE – urgent.

> "Resist, disrupt and transform!"
> – Amnesty International Secretary General, as quoted by Kate Moriarty, Head of Human Rights Education, Amnesty International

Human rights violations

HRE efforts are strongly affected by a country's human rights situation. Examples of human rights violations that span the spectrum of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights were shared throughout the three days of the Forum. In some situations, governments not only fail to protect human rights but are actively undermining them. Human rights harms affect the safety and well-being of individuals and communities, minorities, marginalised populations, Indigenous peoples, youth and human rights defenders. Human rights educators mentioned experiences with surveillance, intimidation, criminalisation, invisibility, discrimination and violence.

Much has been written about underlying conditions resulting in such human rights violations. Such environments include authoritarianism, conflict, and shrinking civic space. These were conditions explicitly discussed in the Forum. These challenges speak to the need to have HRE carried out strategically to address these conditions and to promote systemic change, not just the individual transformation of learners.

Examples shared by participants in breakout groups showed common patterns, and included:

- Laws that enable broad, arbitrary marginalisation, restriction, and punishment of civil society organisations, journalists, educators, and other individuals viewed as threatening to the state.
- The 'blacklisting' of organisations receiving foreign funding, constricting their resources and making them targets for smear campaigns.
- Pressure on the general public to report on those considered 'terrorists' by the government.
- Restrictions against peaceful protests.
- Use of chemical agents, arbitrary arrests, and torture against protesters, as well as police brutality with impunity.

- Restricted access to information and censorship, or even persecution, of independent media.
- A banning of the teaching of certain topics, such as gender.

Internationally, there have been political attacks on the European Convention on Human Rights, especially in migration cases, reflecting attempts to weaken human rights universality. Across all settings, authoritarian practices foster fear, isolation, self-censorship, and shrinking space for dialogue, with young people facing disproportionate risks.

Rising authoritarianism and the lack of civic space

The rise of authoritarian practices in many countries and concurrent constrained political spaces affect people living on the territory. Illiberal democracies can result in a lack of trust in the government, vicious cycles of exclusion, media propaganda, and education systems that reinforce bias.

The effects can be quite direct for human rights educators. Participants have observed a 'chilling effect' and a sense of fear and burnout among activists due to pressure from the government and hostile narratives. Many of these symptoms were discussed in the parallel groups on Day 2 in conjunction with the challenges and opportunities for HRE to address them, which are now presented.

Challenges for Human Rights Education

The main challenges for HRE are linked directly with those for the broader human rights field. Throughout the Forum, there was considerable discussion of these challenges, in conjunction with authoritarianism, shrinking civic space, conflict, and persistent discrimination against vulnerable populations. These challenges speak to the need to design programming that helps to develop the capacities of individual actors (within constrained political spaces) while at the same time working strategically through other interventions to change such conditions.

These challenges for HRE were a specific focus of the parallel group discussions on Day 2. These challenges identified by participants are briefly presented below, clustered according to political challenges; resource and capacity constraints; lack of access to human rights learners; pedagogical challenges; emotional/psychological barriers and conceptual challenges. Of course, these challenges are interlinked, and they are certainly not representative of all the barriers faced by human rights educators.

<u>Political challenges</u>

- Repression of human rights defenders, who are portrayed as foreign or dangerous.
- Legal and administrative restrictions on human rights NGOs.

- Government denial, censorship, or politicisation of human rights-related issues, such as those associated with vulnerable groups, women, LGBTI persons, migrants and climate, affecting what gets taught in formal education.
- Weak judicial or democratic structures, and contexts where political and religious influences shape or restrict HRE.
- General restrictions on freedom of speech and a lack of academic freedom, including a 'chilling effect' through self-censorship.
- Limited access to training for educators, with a resulting lack of expertise that impedes HRE implementation.
- Societal mentalities and cultural attitudes, including resistance, stereotypes, and lack of openness to human rights values.
- Lack of access to reliable information and media propaganda and misinformation that affects public perceptions of human rights.
- Shrinking civic space for HRE in the non-formal education sector.
- Safety risks for students and educators engaging in activism.

Resource and capacity constraints

- Lack of funding, materials, and compensation for civil society organisations and human rights NGOs, exacerbated by cuts in international development assistance, thus reducing organisational capacities for HRE.
- A general environment of competition for scarce resources.
- Volunteerism due to lack of funding, resulting in HRE that is not always sustainable and educator burnout.

Lack of access to human rights learners

- In conflict settings, security concerns result in a lack of access to schools and other learning settings.
- The entrenched criminalisation of human rights defenders, resulting in the delegitimisation of human rights and restrictions on NGO visits to schools.
- Resource limitations, such as a lack of electricity, affecting access to the Internet and the use of digital HRE.
- Intentional shutdown of the Internet, impeding access to learners digitally as well as to information.
- Lack of spaces– physical, digital and mental ("hearts & soul") – negatively affect opportunities to offer HRE to learners.

Pedagogical challenges

- Confusion around the term "human rights," due its being 'hijacked' in the political environment and the term being misused and misunderstood.
- Challenges in organising debates and dialogues in education settings that touch on sensitive topics.
- Tokenism when institutions 'teach' about global challenges, such as climate issues, without meaningful action.

- A shift from 'genuine engagement' to a more detached approach to human rights activism through posting online and use of social media.
- Difficulty connecting global challenges to local realities.

Emotional and psychological barriers

- Human rights educator burnout and depression.
- A sense of overwhelm due to the scale and diversity of the multiple crises being experienced.
- Learners perceived lack of agency.
- Disengagement of young people due to fatigue or mistrust.
- In the area of climate change, eco-anxiety and climate grief.

Conceptual challenges

- Helping people to become aware that all forms of oppression are interconnected and mutually reinforce one another, calling for a collective struggle against all types of oppression for the broader outcome of justice.
- A need to explore what it means to 'decolonise human rights', for example, taking into account the historical origins of human rights, the need to retain the universality of the human rights framework, and recognising the importance of local culture and lived experiences. Caster Semenya, South African Olympic champion and advocate for human rights, had her court case ultimately brought to the European Court of Human Rights, illustrating a deep contradiction in having to bring her case to a western court, in a region that 'historically had colonised South Africa and stripped them of their rights'.
- A need to shift from a human-centred model of rights to incorporate ecosystems, indigenous knowledge, and care for the planet.

Innovative HRE responses

Considering all this, how can HRE take place and in ways that strategically address violations as part of wider human rights efforts? How can access to quality HRE be ensured?

Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, has asserted that "human rights are our compass in turbulent times." Each of these challenges call for innovative solutions, and for HRE that is 'proactive' rather than 'reactive.' Forum participants felt that in restrictive contexts, it would be important to uncover new avenues of entry to teach sensitive topics in ways that are "legally palatable while advocating for rights." Moreover, it might be pragmatic to strategically reframe HRE to continue operating under restrictive political environments.

In the Forum, educators shared innovative approaches that were often specific to a human rights/HRE challenge, such as racism or conflict. However, many of

these good practices can be applied to other HRE challenges and areas of practice.

1.Peace and conflict resolution

HRE plays a crucial role in addressing and transforming the conditions that lead to human rights violations in conflict settings. By working at the micro level, HRE equips individuals and communities to recognise, question, and challenge harmful narratives, gradually influencing broader peace, social and political dynamics.

Values

A key contribution of HRE is the promotion of values associated with a culture of peace, such as respect, empathy, equality, and non-violence. Through structured peace education and dialogue, HRE helps people uncover and reflect on their own biases, enabling them to re-evaluate the beliefs they have inherited from their communities or identities.

Bringing communities together

One set of innovative solutions demonstrates the value of bringing communities together for dialogue and for building common understanding. Examples from the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR) and the Council of Europe are presented below.

BOX 1.

ADHR, (Buffer Zone, Cyprus)
This organisation brings the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities together in the UN buffer zone. Initially rooted in dialogue work, ADHR has expanded into anti-racist education, peacebuilding, and human rights education. Despite the unresolved political situation, the project focuses on grassroots conflict transformation by fostering intercommunal understanding. Through programmes such as *The Imagine Project*, students from both communities first engage with HRE activities (e.g., from *Compass*) and then meet each other through structured encounters. These experiences help dismantle stereotypes and normalise cooperation. The project also collaborates with the national teachers' network, combining formal, non-formal, and informal education methods to influence younger generations.

Council of Europe, Peace Camp
Designed as a 'safe space,' the Peace Camp brings together young people from various conflict-affected regions. Through facilitated dialogue, participants openly discuss experiences and perspectives with those considered 'others.' These encounters often produce transformative personal shifts and are particularly valuable in "frozen conflict" contexts where communication between sides is otherwise rare.

2. Authoritarianism

In the opening of the Forum, Matjaž Gruden, Council of Europe Director for Democracy, shared the "New Democratic Pact for Europe" (NDP), an initiative in response to democratic backsliding and the need to reinforce democratic values and the rule of law. He encouraged participants to distinguish between failures of democracy and failures of leaders, and to find innovative ways to restore democracy. Gruden underlined that all areas of policy making could benefit from young people's 'impatience' and their 'disruptor' quality.

Participants working under conditions of authoritarianism testify to how HRE efforts can create pockets of local stability, even when national political systems are unstable or unpredictable. Principles and values transmitted through HRE can persist and protect communities despite shifting authorities or state-level uncertainty. HRE can reduce isolation and fear, fostering solidarity and community resilience. HRE helps societies understand what rights should look like in practice, making them more prepared to resist restrictive measures.

HRE aims and content within authoritarian contexts

Participants shared specific HRE aims and content taking place under such political uncertainty and human rights restrictions.

- Integration of civil/political rights with economic, social and cultural rights, reinforcing indivisibility as a human rights principle.
- Critical engagement with citizenship education to ensure it does not become exclusionary, i.e., a tool to withdraw rights from non-citizens.
- Reinforcement of human rights values and universality in countering xenophobia, propaganda, and narratives that isolate activists.
- The building of critical thinking, enabling people to identify in their environment indications of selective law enforcement and early authoritarian shifts.
- Sticking to the (pre)existing human rights narrative, rather than reacting narrowly to authoritarianism and contributing further to polarisation, while also identifying locally grounded pathways for HRE.

Strategies for HRE access in authoritarian settings

Strategies to help ensure access to HRE under authoritarian conditions include:

- Advocating with national education authorities to integrate human rights into the national curriculum, in order to help legitimise HRE.
- Supporting safer youth engagement by offering low-risk pathways for wide-reaching participation. Digital tools can bypass offline risks and support flexible learning. For example, "Human Rights Workouts" offers interactive

online learning based on European Court of Human Rights cases that is "adaptable, youth-friendly, and safe to access across borders."
- Diversified delivery methods (micro-learning, hybrid models, peer-learning).
- Offering HRE discreetly by committed teachers who integrate human rights content without public visibility.
- Integration with media literacy, essential in contexts of disinformation and artificial intelligence manipulation.
- Strengthened emergency support mechanisms for educators and human rights defenders, including available funding.

3. Shrinking civic space

Participants shared many strategies for offering HRE within shrinking civic spaces and for positioning learners and their communities to safely resist restrictions. These practices are presented as legal training for youth; community action and cross-border collaboration; HRE for professional groups; and public awareness raising.

Legal training for young people

HRE can empower people with knowledge by teaching them about their rights and how to navigate the legal system to defend those rights. Learners can learn about how to use Freedom of Information requests to force transparency and compel authorities to operate within a legal framework. Practical guides and training can help people to understand their rights, for example the guide to demonstrating produced to help young people understand their rights, what laws they can appeal to, and practical tips for protesting. Legal training for protesters was also highlighted as a key practice in one breakout group.

> "Be resilient, persistent and stubborn."
>
> – Manfred Nowak, Secretary General, Global Campus of Human Rights

Community action and cross-border collaboration

Participants shared many examples of HRE supporting community action and cross-border collaboration.

- Local and direct civic action can be very effective for reclaiming civic space. Connecting with local organisations to put pressure on city councils and exchange directly to people can be more effective than engaging with national decision-makers. Even small civic groups have been successful in putting pressure on courts.
- Fostering connections at the community level can help to build bridges between different groups and initiatives. 'Showing up' for others' protests, even if not directly connected to one's own work, can build broader solidarity.
- At the local level, strategic cooperation across NGOs and civil society organisations can help to maximise the use of resources in an environment of shrinking civic space and funding, by combining meetings, strategies, and creating networks of collaboration and solidarity.
- Working together beyond borders can also support collective solidarity. Examples shared in the Forum included support and mobilisation for Pride marches, civil action and strikes.

HRE for professional groups and public awareness raising

Participants also recognised the importance of continuing efforts to broaden access and involvement in HRE across wider target groups. Educating law professionals, teachers, professors, and decision-makers can help to change hostile narratives from the inside, using their own professional language and frameworks. Awareness-raising through artistic approaches, such as art exhibitions, has proven to be very effective in allowing young people to express their right to protest in solidarity with human rights defenders.

4. Social Rights

There is growing public concern about social rights issues, especially housing and labour precarity, which creates openings to frame social challenges in human rights terms. HRE practices for social rights shared in the Forum highlighted, among other things, a focus on marginalised groups and intersectional approaches. Other strategies mentioned included cross-sectoral initiatives and youth-led activism.

Intersectional approaches

HRE content oriented towards knowledge and advocacy for social rights should include marginalised groups and intersectional approaches. Specific HRE approaches that were shared are presented below.

- Implementation of diversified, and intersectional outreach strategies to ensure inclusion of Indigenous groups, women in low-wage sectors, and youth in precarious labour markets.
- Clarification of duties and responsibilities, helping young people understand both their rights and the obligations of governments and institutions. Shift cultural perceptions by reframing rights from "privileges granted" to "entitlements owed."
- Application of intersectional approaches to HRE for social rights that enable a robust integration of gender, Indigenous perspectives, and socio-economic rights.
- Provision of critical tools to analyse platform economies, housing markets, and labour exploitation using a rights-based approach.
- Empowerment of communities to identify social rights violations, especially when structural issues are normalised or invisible. Support accountability efforts, including monitoring, public reporting, and engaging media to counter misinformation.
- Addressing contradictions in authoritarian contexts. For example, some authoritarian states provide free housing but embed restrictive conditions—such as requiring formal political loyalty, limiting women's autonomy, or using allocation processes that reinforce gender inequality. HRE can unpack these trade-offs and help communities articulate the hidden human rights costs.

Youth-led activism

Youth-led HRE and activism are also linked with social rights. In particular, participants referenced the following practices:

- Local youth-led organisations that operate through decentralised community engagement where activists are criminalised, with young people acting as intermediaries to access communities safely.
- Youth networks mobilise transnationally, providing powerful channels for peer-to-peer HRE and solidarity.

Cross-sectoral HRE initiatives

Cross-sectoral cooperation was seen as a key legacy of past HRE efforts and were reinforced as innovative practices through creative use of partnerships. Examples shared included:

- Cross-sectoral HRE initiatives that involve business and media stakeholders, aimed at creating shared language and horizontal, non-hierarchical relationships between duty bearers and affected populations.

- Collaboration with non-traditional actors (e.g., platform companies, housing associations, the financial sector) to embed rights norms in market-driven environments.
- The use of data partnerships—such as the Amnesty–Youth Council collaboration—to strengthen evidence-based advocacy that uses housing-related statistics and the use of rights -based framing to engage the public and inform policy debates.

5. Gender equality and LGBTI

Participants considered it essential that HRE directly address issues that are underrepresented, such as the violence and invisibility faced by queer youth. Several strategies for effective HRE were shared by the parallel group that discussed gender equality and LGBTI.

Lived experience

One strategy was the use of lived experience and local stories to encourage empathy and understanding. This approach can also promote dialogue that challenges stereotypes and internalised oppression. Some participants use emotions, including collective anger, strategically to foster solidarity and mobilise for change.

Taking action at the local level

Different actions to address violence and discrimination, and for building safe spaces and allies, were shared at the Forum. Strategies mentioned included:

- Expanding trans-inclusive policies in schools, including legal name recognition and healthcare access.
- Using youth councils and student-led initiatives to educate peers and families on gender equality.
- Strengthening community coalitions to support marginalised or less-resourced LGBTI groups.
- Establishing coalitions to provide legal and structural support to smaller LGBTI organisations.
- Emphasising both local and global approaches to human rights protection and utilising global networks to share best practices and solidarity initiatives.

Intersectionality and universality of human rights

Participants felt that it was important to highlight the universality of discrimination as a basis for fostering broader inclusion. This means not only linking discrimination of LGBTI persons with discrimination against other vulnerable groups in society but also teaching intersectionality to ensure no group is overlooked within LGBTI advocacy.

6. Racism

Racism manifests in both subtle everyday behaviours and systemic barriers that limit opportunities and inclusion. HRE has long encompassed anti-racism, and several strategies were highlighted by participants.

Building allyship

Allies from across civil society, schools, social movements, and communities are essential to anti-racist education. Allies exist across both formal and informal networks. Informally, allies include peer groups and community members who can be educated and engaged in meaningful dialogue. Formally, allies include civil society organisations**,** other human rights organisations**,** teachers**,** youth groups**,** social movements, and certain government departments or equality institutions/courts, and anti-discrimination councils.

Focus on youth multipliers

HRE focused on anti-racism includes equipping young people to be multipliers**,** involving them in the co-creation of policy**,** engaging them in drafting or assessing shadow reports**,** and helping to reduce the gap between institutions and communities.

Anti-racist pedagogy

Effective anti-racist pedagogy reflects many of the good pedagogical practices of HRE, emphasising experiential learning**,** safe spaces, and inclusive methodologies**.** Multilingual approaches can also help in breaking down barriers and creating more inclusive spaces. Intercultural mediation through shared activities like food has proven effective in bringing people together.

Many practitioners use art, drama, debate, digital tools, and real-life youth-led experiences to help participants engage deeply with issues like racism, discrimination, and language use. Tools from the Council of Europe - such as *Compass* and activities such as "Take a Step Forward" - allow participants to step into others' shoes and build empathy.

Modelling human rights

Effective practice means 'walking the talk.' This involves modelling respectful behaviour and language, so others become more aware of and reduce the use of harmful terms. Human rights educators can challenge microaggressions, practice empathy, and use examples from one's own circles (friends, family, etc.) to illustrate why certain comments or behaviours are hurtful.

7. Climate Education

HRE through climate education highlights strategies of 'place-based' pedagogy and community engagement.

Community engagement and synergies with activism

Community-based approaches in climate education help to ensure attention to local needs and priorities, important for all HRE practices. Examples shared in one of the parallel groups:

- A climate education effort that links water shortages to climate rights to localise the issue.
- Online workshops that simplify and democratise climate science.

HRE linked with climate education can also be linked with climate action, or rights-based advocacy. There can be synergies between environmental and human rights movements and educational efforts. One environmental NGO uses bottom-up engagement, raising awareness in communities about island privatisation and environmental destruction, and involving them in protests. Such efforts are intended to expose environmental crimes. Public awareness and concern are further raised in the unfortunate circumstances when environmental activists are incarcerated.

'Place-based' and creative pedagogy

A key pedagogy for climate change education is 'place-based' pedagogy, which locates both awareness raising and climate action in the specific challenges and opportunities of the local community. Climate education has incorporated creative approaches, involving gaming and the arts. One NGO has created a board game to involve youth in climate issues. Another NGO draws on a range of mediums **-** podcasts, storytelling, films, and field trips - to bring attention to climate impacts. Climate education is also pushing the boundaries for HRE, calling for Indigenous ways of knowing and consideration of the right to a healthy environment. Finally, through the 'greening' movement, there is increasing inclusion of climate education in national curriculum as well as the 'greening' of schools and other organisations. The latter mirrors some aspects of the human rights-based approach and, again, offers an opportunity to think holistically about human rights and care for the planet and all living things.

8. Digitalisation, including artificial intelligence

Accessibility

Use of digital platforms has already been mentioned as one of the strategies for engaging youth as well as offering an alternative learning space when in-person meetings are not convenient or feasible. The rising use of artificial intelligence (AI) offers both new opportunities as well as potential harmful effects that HRE can address.

On the positive side, social media platforms are places of high engagement and can even be used for crowd funding HRE activities. Learning platforms can help to make learning more accessible, not only because of its online nature but because of designs that increase accessibility for people with vision impairments or other disabilities that create barriers to participation. Apps can help make HRE engaging and fun.

Digital platforms can also offer an alternative space to organise activism without the restrictions of physical space. Peer education among young people has been used to demonstrate how to use the digital space to organise as well as to teach.

Furthermore, numerous AI tools supporting learning and activism/cyberactivism were mentioned: Kling AI animation, SUNO AI music, cloudAI creativity (for edutainment), Midjourney, Meta AI Quizlet, Microsoft Teams, Perplexity, Gemini, ChatGPT Copilot, and Claude.

Risks

On the cautionary side, participants in the Forum acknowledged that equal access to digital and AI tools is not always guaranteed and should be a consideration for the HRE movement. Participants recognise the importance of addressing AI-related governance to ensure the minimisation of risks resulting in the violation of human rights (e.g., right to privacy, non-discrimination, ecological concerns). HRE can respond to these issues by developing an understanding of them among learners and the ways in which these AI-related harms can be avoided or prevented. Participants shared a list of potential topics to address in human rights-informed AI learning:

- Educating how AI works and is coded.
- AI and human rights.
- Epistemic bubbles and universal truth as challenges.
- AI governance.
- Source fact-checking skills.
- Disinformation campaigns.

Human rights are "human, human and human again."
– Rui Gomes, as quoted by Ruxandra Pandea, Senior Project Officer in the Youth Department, Council of Europe

SECTION III. PLANNING THE FUTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

According to Michael O'Flaherty, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, "Human rights is the roadmap 'par excellence' for the honouring of human dignity". He encouraged human rights educators to root their work in human dignity as the foundation for the universality, indivisibility and message of equality of human rights. Caster Semenya, the South African Olympic champion, encouraged participants to "own your story" and "shape up the world to do better".

Drawing on lessons learned from practice over the last decades, as well as innovative solutions to current challenges, participants were invited on the final day of the Forum to consider how to position their own HRE work and that of the field in continuing to work towards human rights-respecting societies. These aspirations and insights are clustered along categories similar to those found in Section I.

Planning Area 1: Strengthening intergovernmental and governmental policies and supports

Participants pointed out that many HRE-friendly policies and programmes already exist but are not implemented due to a lack of political commitment and resources. These longstanding challenges are further exacerbated the rise in authoritarian practices that affects HRE.

There was a clear call for stronger institutional support, better funding structures, meaningful youth participation in the development of HRE, and mainstreaming HRE in every learning sector. HRE promotion should be advanced within and across sectors in individual countries, as well as across Europe and other regions. Support to and solidarity with human rights defenders and educators working countries and environments that are experiencing extreme stresses related to conflict or authoritarianism were recommended.

Some participants felt that the global HRE community should advocate for a new convention or recommendation to address the outcomes of the Forum. There was also a call to create a global community of good practices in HRE. One idea was to revive the International Contact Group on Human Rights Education that in the past brought together the key players in HRE (CoE, UN, OSCE and several key civil society organisations).
The Council of Europe and the UN are seen as key actors capable of facilitating dialogue among member States, improving accountability, and strengthening the ecosystems necessary for HRE to flourish at the national level. The Council of Europe was called upon to expand opportunities and programmes within its relevant departments that address HRE and, specifically, to strengthen interdepartmental cooperation to ensure that HRE is integrated across the

Education and Youth Sectors. Some participants felt that the Council should explore a legally binding instrument that could further reinforce the EDC/HRE Chater and position the Reference Framework on Competences for Democratic Culture as a central took for the integration of HRE within national curricula. The UN was encouraged to continue its efforts to support human rights with governments. The roles of UN Special Rapporteurs were specifically mentioned. In the past, reports of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education have taken up HRE-related issues, such as academic freedom, and future links with HRE should be encouraged. Given the hostile environment that many human rights educators are operating within, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders might highlight the protection of human rights educators at risk.

The list of proposed intergovernmental actions were: encouraging national governments to prioritise and invest in HRE; emphasising the importance of retaining the 'human rights' component of any citizenship education programming; the strengthening of networks of HRE organisations; the promotion of national-level training courses (such as those based on the Council of Europe's *Compass*); and promoting funding for HRE as well as its equitable and transparent allocation.

Governments were called on to systematically gather information about youth needs related to HRE, and to create additional spaces for young people to meet, organise and learn. Funding was a primary focus for Forum participants. Some key ideas shared:

- Governments have a duty to ensure human rights are respected, which means supporting HRE educators with the necessary financial or non-financial means to carry out their work.
- International and national funding for HRE might be linked.
- In order to address funding instability, funders should move beyond short-term funding cycles and provide operational grants that allow organisations to work on and plan multiple projects.
- Funders should be aware of, and try to rectify, funding gaps for particular organisations, for example, those working on sensitive political issues or with minority populations. In conjunction with this, funding decisions should be more transparent and funding structures decolonised (for example going directly to global south organisations rather than through international organisations).
- Funding for HRE should reflect allocation to youth-led initiatives and organisations.

The HRE community needs diverse, alternative resource avenues to sustain their activities. Participants suggested exploring collaboration, synergies, fundraising, volunteerism, and partnering with the private sector.

Participants recognised the importance of doing budgetary analyses and understanding the genuine impact of HRE-funded programming. In conjunction with this observation was a proposition that the next review of the implementation of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (2026-2027) could include an analysis of the costs and long terms benefits of HRE. This could also be an opportunity to create a model for research on HRE and its impact, in association with the academic community. In parallel, research might be undertaken into what are the social and other negative impacts (including cost) of not investing in HRE.

Noted by some is that the value of HRE and the potential for increased support would be enhanced if the field was able to quantify and qualify its impact and establish progressive targets. The topic of improving impact evaluation practices raised another issue, that of re-evaluating what meaningful HRE monitoring and evaluation is. Funders typically require reports for short-term project results. However, the field requires meaningful measurement of medium- and long-term impacts. Therefore, a persistent challenge for HRE is how and when to measure impact.

Planning Area 2: Expanding the diversity of HRE actors and cooperation

HRE work needs to be done across different education levels, in the formal, non-formal and informal sectors, and across all ages. This versality is especially important for changing political environments, for example, in relation to authoritarianism. At the national level, HRE actors might foster partnerships with other NGOs and CSOs, and with relevant government departments or committees (if feasible), encouraging multi-stakeholder cooperation and funding.

Numerous actors were proposed as allies in local HRE efforts, including other human rights organisations, CSOs, local authorities, community members, sports associations, schools, parent associations, trade unions, teacher unions, think tanks, private sector companies, human rights institutions and universities. Schools might strengthen their collaboration with universities and non-formal education organisations, and whole-school approaches to HRE involving school- and community-based stakeholders should be promoted.

Participants reaffirmed that it was crucial to expand HRE within youth organisations and civil society; to reach local authorities; to improve accessibility and democratise access to HRE; and to localise and diversify the spaces for HRE. Cooperation between youth organisations and teachers should be fostered to support HRE policies and practices.

Participants also emphasised the crucial role of NGOs and CSOs in promoting sustainable peace, including in post-conflict settings. These organisations often remain active when governments cannot or will not provide education, adapting swiftly to crises, reaching marginalised communities, and maintaining continuity in

rights-based and peace-related learning. Their grassroots nature allows them to innovate, reroute, and keep HRE alive despite adversity.

Building community among human rights allies is essential. Allies can also be created informally, for example among peer groups and community members, all of whom can be educated in HRE. Moreover, HRE can itself assist in community building. The solidarity and moral support these relationships provide can be crucial when there are attacks on human rights. Such allies can offset the 'chilling effect' of government repression, especially in circumstances where the government is messaging against human rights but there are no legal restrictions in place. Human rights NGOs should work in coalition with other NGOs that are being targeted or have aligned interests, for example in areas such as anti-corruption. This coalition work might also be pragmatic in environments of shrinking resources.

Participants highlighted the importance of engaging young people, especially those who are marginalised, in HRE program design, implementation and evaluation.

Specific recommendations included:

- Ensure bottom-up youth representation to ensure that local needs are reflected in policies and programmes, for example, by a mechanism of rotation of local youth representation.
- Consult youth in strategies and programmes for young people with specific spaces and mechanisms for vulnerable groups, invisible groups, and groups with specific needs.
- Organise training and mentoring programmes for young people to learn about policies, how to measure them, and ways to monitor and assess their impacts. Young people need to learn who to hold accountable.
- Find physical and digital spaces for marginalised communities to self-organise and ensure HRE practice.

Throughout the Forum, participants expressed the importance of expanding HRE institutional spaces and cooperation, as exemplified in the Forum itself. Cooperation can be enabled through structured forms of collaboration, partnerships, networks, coalitions; in delivering training, setting standards and pedagogical innovation; in conducting advocacy; and in carrying out monitoring activities.

Diverse forms of organisational cooperations serve multiple purposes:

- Learning from each other.
- Facilitating shared activities.
- Showing solidarity with the struggles of different HRE educators.

- Linking local struggles with global justice efforts, which can increase the visibility of movements and pressure on governments.

Planning Area 3: Building systemic HRE

HRE acts as a multiplier, creating a ripple effect beginning with individuals who experience rights-based learning and then carry these principles into their families, peer groups, institutions, and wider society. HRE at the individual and community levels can foster human rights knowledge, values and motivation resulting in human rights action, especially in local spheres of influence.

A challenge for HRE is for it to address the structural and political levels, in at least two ways: (1) ensuring that quality HRE is offered to all, including in basic education, and (2) intending HRE to address deep, systemic challenges to human rights in a society, and with this aim in mind, recognising the value of collective action for influencing those with power.

Building on earlier thinking in the Forum, participants offered a range of suggestions for supporting a comprehensive, strategic and sustained implementation of HRE in both the formal and non-formal education sectors. They mentioned that schools and public authorities must take responsibility rather than relying exclusively on CSOs.

Curriculum and systemic HRE in formal education

- Integrate human rights education into mandatory national curricula at all levels, including age-appropriate HRE at the pre-primary, primary, secondary and higher education. Be mindful of curriculum revision cycles and endorse the strengthening of HRE. Such curricular processes should be inclusive ones, bringing together not only policymakers but also teachers, academic experts, and representatives of local and international NGOs in order to ensure diverse perspectives, strengthen legitimacy, and support effective implementation.

- Continue to expand HRE's reach into formal education. HRE can continue to be integrated into key subjects, such as world history, citizenship/civics and moral education courses. However, caution should be taken about integrating HRE within citizenship education as the sole key carrier subject, as in some national contexts migrants may have limited citizenship rights; an additional caution is that the incorporation of HRE within citizenship education should not be overly focused on responsibilities (rather than rights). Establish dedicated subjects focusing specifically on Human Rights Education when possible.

- Integrate HRE in a cross-curricular manner with other subjects, such as math and sports, as well as through a whole school/human rights-based approach. Needs assessments and mapping studies can be carried out to inform such curriculum development.

- Embed HRE in higher education through a multi-disciplinary approach and at all levels of tertiary study, including liberal arts and pre-service professional training.

- Link HRE with 'hot topics' and other educational approaches, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, global citizenship education, and climate change, which are all entry points for introducing human rights. This introduction should result not only in awareness of related human rights topics but also ways to address them through taking action. These new topics will likely require new HRE curricula and learning resources.

- Adapt HRE to critically address the digital world and artificial intelligence, bearing in mind both potential human rights opportunities and harms.

- Associate HRE with other educational practices aligned with community action, such as community service.

- Enhance institutional accountability for delivering quality HRE. Introduce public consultations to allow educators and students to provide feedback on HRE policy and programme development and implementation.

- Develop a decentralised and equity-based funding system to support schools engaging in HRE.

Non-formal education

- Formalise HRE within community programmes and link it with community building.

- Link non-formal HRE with other services, such as providing legal advice.

- Co-create HRE at the grassroots level by developing HRE curriculum based on peoples' lived experiences. One example shared by a participant was their work with war veterans in conflict situations, which can have an impact on the individual veteran, their peers, and the community they live in.

- Invite human rights NGOs to participate directly in educational activities in both non-formal and formal education settings.

- Improve communication with young people so they are informed about available HRE opportunities and activities.

- Ensure meaningful youth participation and involvement in local decision-making processes and create and maintain institutional spaces where young people can engage in discussions about HRE.

- Strengthen awareness and implementation at the local level of the Council of Europe's EDC-HRE Charter and the UN World Programme for Human Rights Education.

BOX 2.
HRE within Esso-Dong Kongah's work with the Centre for Human Rights Documentation and Training in Togo is carried out with marginalised groups, including women and children and those impacted by mining practices. In addition to carrying out in-person training and public messaging through social media, the Centre provides legal assistance, carries out research on human rights-related violence and has cultivated a network of human rights defenders.

Informal education

- Don't underestimate the power of informal learning through everyday conversations with people.

- Carry out awareness-raising at the local level that is linked with issues the community cares about (e.g., access to water) through simple messaging that appears on items such as t-shirts, water bottles and cups, being sure to use the local language and dialect.

- Build community ownership through carrying out programming such as conflict mediation.

Training and capacity building

- Organise mandatory, high-quality and accessible training for teachers and other educators so they can implement HRE effectively.

- Develop innovative pre-service training for teachers, for example involving them in the design and piloting of HRE curriculum in schools as part of their studies.

- Deliver training for police, law enforcement, and other public sector workers and officials on human rights, violence, gender-based violence, systemic

inequalities, and racism. A 'strong culture' of mainstreaming HRE within public institutions should be promoted.

- Develop and deliver training of trainers (ToT) grounded in lived experiences.

Advocacy and awareness

- Raise awareness among education authorities, policymakers, and educators about the importance of HRE, advocating for support, implementation and accountability.

- Engage media, political parties, communities, and influencers to support HRE.

- Use advocacy tools (materials, social media campaigns) targeting decision-makers.

- Carry out HRE in non-traditional spaces, such as juvenile detention centres and at breaks during sports events.

Other support for systemic HRE

- Create human rights glossaries and dictionaries to ensure a common understanding of basic concepts.

- Develop a narrative, imaginative and visual vocabulary about HRE to support improved communication about the role and benefits of HRE.

- Maintain links between HRE and the rule of law and democracy, especially in formal education. In illiberal democracies, HRE in the non-formal education sector can help maintain the democratic vision.

Some participants felt that minimal standards for HRE policies and programmes might be developed as templates to be adapted to the local context. These standards might focus, among other things, on the elaboration of HRE competences; the customisation of HRE with links to local culture, knowledge and history; the simplification of complicated content for younger, less literate learners or those experiencing barriers or challenges to learning; and support for a diverse set of translations of written documents as well as visual support materials.

Planning Area 4: Ensuring quality HRE

Features of quality HRE were shared in all days of the Forum and are mentioned throughout this report. Participants felt that quality HRE needed to be

transformative – both for learners as well as the societies in which they live. Quality HRE also needs to be inclusive.

Transformative HRE content

Some characteristics of transformative HRE are that:

- HRE strengthens youth leadership and collective action capacities.

- HRE helps people understand their rights, demand accountability, and ask critical questions, which is especially important in authoritarian contexts. Rather than focusing solely on political resolutions, HRE shifts attention to the mindset and attitudes of individuals, and to the structures in society and the power-asymmetries that underlie and perpetuate human rights abuses.

- In conflict settings, human rights education plays a crucial role in addressing and transforming the conditions that lead to human rights violations. By working at the micro level**,** HRE equips individuals and communities to recognise, question, and challenge harmful narratives, gradually influencing broader peace, social and political dynamics.

- HRE is value-based, rooted within local and traditional contexts. A key contribution is the promotion of values associated with a culture of peace, such as respect, empathy, equality, and non-violence.

- Human rights advocates and educators focus on issues that large segments of the population prioritise, such as poverty or displacement.

- HRE is humanising, contextualised and inviting of learning about other cultures and exchange between each other. HRE should encourage dialogue and solidarity.

- Human rights messages around social and economic rights are sharpened and these rights elevated to the same status as civil and political rights, with a central focus on the human dignity of all people.

- The HRE narrative is positive and forward-looking, calling for societies characterised by democracy and rule of law. Human rights educators can proactively develop a narrative that supports human rights when there are early warning signs that government repression is forthcoming.

- HRE embraces its affective dimension, helping people to deal with fear, grief, and disillusionment, and making engagement sustainable. HRE should be a safe space where learners can share their emotions, for example, related to eco-anxiety.

- HRE is used to address the critique of human rights. For example, human rights educators need to embrace reflexive practices around coloniality and HRE. HRE can be informed by the history of colonialism, and explore how neocolonialism, colonial trauma, and colonial cultures/attitudes continue to contribute to human rights violations.

- HRE creates a space for shifting human rights thinking toward recognising the rights to a healthy environment, intergenerational justice, and Indigenous epistemologies.

- HRE emphasises hope, community action, resistance, and dignity. This message of hope can be conveyed through art, pop culture, gamification and other uses of creativity. Human rights can be fun, and joy can be found in human rights and resistance. Joy is a form of resistance.

Inclusive HRE

Inclusive HRE means that it is accessible to all people, with guarantees that it is offered to youth as well as those coming from marginalised groups. Groups specifically identified by participants included:

- Youth-led organisations, which should be recognised as human rights actors and experts, both by States and by other stakeholders of civil society.

- Young people and affected communities, who should be involved in the design of HRE curricula.

- Women and girls.

- LGBTI persons and people belonging to other marginalised communities.

- People living with disabilities, whether visible or invisible.

In addition to ensuring these groups have access to HRE, the content of HRE should be tailored to their lived experiences, with adaptations that consider intersectionality and trauma. HRE requires appropriate tools and resources, and requires inviting, supportive and safe (learning) environments. HRE educators need to work with local communities in fostering inclusive and intersectional approaches.

Planning Area 5: Enabling persistence and safety

Across the three days of the Forum, it was recognised that 'small things matter.' The 'real action' can take place in the small details of HRE work, the everyday actions that connect us all. These small victories are essential for the cumulative work and 'ripple effect' of HRE in schools and communities. They also help to sustain human rights educators.

The Forum "Message" is entitled "Joy is Resistance." Participants affirmed the intrinsic hopefulness of HRE work, work that reflects our best understanding of quality and is rooted in strategic approaches to foster human rights.

Participants also endorsed the importance of ensuring that human rights educators and learners are safe. HRE can teach safe and strategic activism methods, including digital security, and legal frameworks that can protect human rights defenders. Although duty bearers are responsible for respecting and protecting the work of human rights educators, HRE community members also needs to take it upon itself to identify ways to protect themselves, adopt supportive measures, learn from each other how to frame their narratives and adapt HRE to hostile environments.

Suggestions that were shared include:

- In environments hostile to human rights, rewording HRE requests to be less sensitive. For example, rather than presenting HRE work as 'women's reproductive rights,' present it as 'women's reproductive health.'
- Use of digital tools that can bypass offline risks and support flexible learning, while ensuring digital security.
- Use of artistic expression, such as art exhibits, allows young people to express their right to protest in solidarity with human rights defenders.
- Providing mental health support for activists can help them face challenging times and prevent burnout.
- The development of practical guides and training to help people understand their rights, what laws they can appeal to, practical tips for protesting, and legal training of protesters.
- Support safer youth engagement through offering low-risk pathways for participation. For example, when access to the public school system is denied, consider working in private schools, online and/or in the non-formal education sector.
- Reduce isolation and fear and fostering solidarity and community resilience through the development of small, local support groups.
- Build community between different groups and initiatives, 'showing up' for others' protests, both in the local environment and beyond borders.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

HRE is essential not only for knowledge but for building resilience, agency, and solidarity. Despite repression and resource limitations, meaningful HRE is possible.

Yet, the narratives and practice of HRE need to be continuously reviewed, rethought and renewed in order to live up to its full potential. HRE needs to foster a culture of universal human rights and meet the challenges of the political and social moment – today and into the future.

The Forum "Unleashing Human Rights" was therefore an occasion to reflect, discuss and learn about the major social, political, cultural, and educational challenges to universal human rights and HRE, to review existing HRE practices that serve as inspiration, and to collectively develop strategies for safeguarding, strengthening and advancing HRE. As such, the Forum aimed to be a space for both realism and hope, a place of pragmatism while not compromising values, a location for frank deliberation, focused on what should be done, not only what can be done.

On Human Rights Day, participants in the Forum read aloud the individual articles of the UDHR in their native language, affirming the power and unity of human rights. This symbolic activity revealed the "joy" of pursuing human rights through cross-border educator solidarity.

Some of the discussions and recommendations emanating from the Forum reflect long-standing strategies for HRE, for example, supporting learner-centred pedagogy and cross-curricular approaches. HRE organisations have often struggled for resources and have been encouraged to collaborate with others. However, the past few years have revealed new challenges for HRE and required responses from the field. Many of these ideas were addressed in this Forum report. However, here we highlight some of the distinct developments for the field in recent years.

A key political development is rising authoritarianism, with increasing threats to the safety of human rights defenders. Human rights educators are increasingly operating as human rights defenders and need to be aware of ways to remain safe and resilient and to protect their learners. Anticipating such environments, or at the early stages, human rights educators should develop relations, networks and support systems, for both educators and learners.

Rising authoritarianism and shrinking civic space have also curtailed spaces where HRE can take place, necessitating expanded and innovative approaches across the formal, non-formal and informal education sectors. This report details a range of possible strategies, including the use of the digital environment and the 'reframing' of human rights concepts into less sensitive language, while retaining the core meaning of human rights. Community-based approaches, particularly in low-resource areas, remind us how awareness raising can happen through daily conversation and 'messaging'.

Technological and environmental changes, such as artificial intelligence and the climate crisis, have also become more evident in the past years. These new topics require a human rights lens and also offer new entry points for HRE. Human rights educators can critically teach about these new developments and human rights-based guidance provided by intergovernmental organisations such as the UN and the Council of Europe.

The rise in the discourse of 'decoloniality' challenges the human rights movement – and, by extension, HRE – to respond. A longstanding good practice is the localisation of HRE while retaining the core, universality of the international human rights framework. Human rights learning has often included a discussion of the western origins of individual rights. The 'decoloniality' lens is still evolving but already calls for HRE, in its treatment of systemic and historic discrimination and oppression in some countries, to recognise links with colonialism. HRE can continue to advocate for national sovereignty and decolonisation, as well as systems that continue to perpetuate inequality among States.

Finally, although young people have always been central to human rights activism, their leadership is now even better recognised, facilitated and formalised. Young people are not 'future citizens'. They are leaders with insights, creativity, commitment and courage that are central to the future of the human rights movement, including HRE.

This is, as one participant said, "a generation of hope", and HRE should harness that hope to build alternatives. Marie Struthers, Amnesty International, shared a moving quote from an Azerbaijan human rights defender: "Hope is not naïve. It is optimism with a broken heart." –The Forum and its accompanying Message affirm that human rights educators, cognisant of the challenges faced, should remain hopeful and joyful, in solidarity with each other and with a shared vision of a better world.

ANNEX A

PROGRAMME

Monday 8 December

Arrival of participants

21:00 Welcome drinks at the European Youth Centre Budapest

Tuesday 9 December – *From Lessons to Legacy: Decades of Human Rights Education*

09:30 Opening of the Forum

Matjaž GRUDEN, Director for Democracy, Council of Europe
Francesco MOTTA, Regional Director, Regional Office for Europe, Central Asia, Middle East and North Africa, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
Nina GRMUŠA, Chair of the Joint Council on Youth, Council of Europe
Marie STRUTHERS, Director, Eastern Europe and Central Asia regional office, Amnesty International

10:30 Break

11:00 Panel discussion: The long arc of Human Rights Education

Manfred NOWAK, Secretary General, Global Campus of Human Rights
Ruxandra PANDEA, Senior Project Officer, Education, Training and Cooperation Division, Council of Europe
Elena IPPOLITI, Coordinator, Human Rights Education Unit, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
Natalia KALLIO, Board Member, European Youth Forum
Kate MORIARTY, Head of Human Rights Education, Amnesty International

Followed by Q&A and audience interaction

13:00 Lunch at the European Youth Centre Budapest

15:00 Parallel working groups: achievements and lessons learnt in Human Rights Education
Including coffee break

17:00 Working groups outcomes

17:30 End of Day 1

Human Rights Education fair

19:00 Dinner

Free evening

Wednesday 10 December – *Time to rethink?*

9:30 Feedback from Day 1 and video messages from:
Volker TÜRK, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
Michael O'FLAHERTY, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

09:45 Equality Is Not a Competition – It's a Right, Conversation with Caster SEMENYA, Olympic Champion and Human Rights Advocate, facilitated by Payoshni MITRA, Executive Director, Humans of Sport
Followed by Q&A and audience interaction

10:30 Break

11:00 Panel discussion: Emerging challenges to Human Rights Education, and how to overcome them

Lisa MEAN, Mother Nature Cambodia
David VIG, Director, Amnesty Hungary
Lynda EMMANUEL, Senior Program Officer and Gender Focal Person, Mercy Corps, Nigeria
Esso-Dong KONGAH, Centre for Human Rights Documentation and training, Togo
Glenn MITOMA, Senior Lecturer, Institute for the Study of Human Rights (ISHR), Columbia University
Andriy DONETS, Programme Coordinator, the European Wergeland Centre

Followed by Q&A and audience interaction

13:00 Lunch at the European Youth Centre Budapest

15:00 Parallel working groups
Including coffee break

Exploring, creating and sharing: Human rights themes and their implications for Human Rights Education practice

- Ensuring social rights, including education and housing
- Environment and climate crisis
- Challenges with the rise of authoritarianism
- Working in shrinking civic space
- Combatting different forms of racism
- Peace and conflict resolution

- Ensuring gender equality and LGBTI rights
- Digitalisation, including artificial intelligence

16:30 Working groups outcomes

17:00 Marking Human Rights Day: Our Rights, Our Future: Human Rights Education, for, with, and by youth across continents

18:30 End of Day 2

20:00 Reception to mark Human Rights Day

Thursday 11 December – *The Next Chapter: the Future of Human Rights Education*

9:30 Feedback from Day 2

How do we picture the future of Human Rights Education?

10:30 Break

11:00 Parallel working groups: What can I do next?

13:00 Lunch at the European Youth Centre Budapest

15:00 Parallel workshops organised by partners
Including coffee break

17:00 Committing to the future

Presentation by the Forum Rapporteur, Felisa TIBBITTS

Presentation of the Forum's messages

Closing remarks by the Organising partners:

Sergiu GURIN, Secretary of State for Youth and Sports of the Republic of Moldova, on behalf of Moldova's Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe
Elena IPPOLITI, Coordinator, Human Rights Education Unit, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
Ileana BELLO, Director General, Amnesty International Italy
Tobias FLESSENKEMPER, Head of the Youth Department, Council of Europe

18:00 Closing of the Forum

19:00 Dinner

21:00 Farewell party

Friday 12 December

Departure of participants

ANNEX B

FORUM MESSAGE

"Unleashing Human Rights" is not a catchphrase, nor is it just the title of this Human Rights Education Forum. This message captures our vision, our concerns, and our commitment to ensuring that Human Rights Education remains bold, inclusive, and transformative for the future. 2025 is a landmark year for human rights and for the Human Rights Education Youth Programme of the Council of Europe and the World Programme for Human Rights Education of the United Nations. It marks decades of progress, commitment, and innovation at international and national levels. As a community, our collective mission has and continues to be the creation of a world in which all human beings are born and can live free and equal in dignity and rights.

Yet, we stand at a moment of risk and opportunity that demands clarity, courage, conviction and honesty. The legacy of past achievements must be honoured, the challenges of today faced with courage and solidarity, and the future shaped by our collective will for justice, dignity, and inclusion.

Human rights cannot be fully realised without Human Rights Education. Human Rights Education is not a supplement. It is not an add-on. It is the foundation and the DNA of a culture of democracy and human rights. Learning human rights is an act of protection and a practice of collective resilience. It empowers individuals to reclaim agency in the face of injustice, and it strengthens communities to respond to challenges together.

We reaffirm that Human Rights Education is a right, not a privilege.

We affirm that Human Rights Education is emancipatory. It exposes the systemic inequalities that shape our world and gives power to those otherwise unheard. It nurtures solidarity by affirming our collective responsibility to one another and the planet. It cultivates intergenerational commitment and social cohesion, elevating respect for all.

We affirm that every human rights educator is a human rights defender. Human rights educators everywhere, whether in classrooms, communities, youth centers, informal and digital spaces, play a vital role in advancing human rights. We demand safety, support, recognition, and resources, particularly in contexts where speaking about human rights is discouraged, weaponised and suppressed. Human Rights Education is a stabilising force: strengthening our collective resilience against misinformation, exclusion, and narratives that undermine human dignity.

We affirm our determination to face the challenges of our time. Too many among us are forced to do Human Rights Education while being bombed, forcibly displaced, living through genocide, conflict and violence. Too many among us have been surveilled, socially isolated, threatened, attacked and imprisoned. Too many among us have had their rights violated for simply being who we are. Too many among us

live in societies in which the legacy of harm done by colonialism continues to negatively affect daily life.

For justice to prevail, the crimes of the past and of the present must be acknowledged and accounted for.

We carry with us the understanding that Human Rights are universal, inalienable, interdependent and indivisible. Yet we see that these principles are challenged by persistent economic, social, and gendered inequalities and the erasure of certain identities. Recognising and making these contradictions visible is necessary to change systems of oppression and injustice. Furthermore, we feel the emotional weight of seeking justice from a Human Rights protection system that still lacks the mechanisms and consideration to deliver the justice we want. Human Rights Education has a fundamental role to play in transforming that system.

Therefore,

We call on the United Nations and the Council of Europe to strengthen institutions and accountability.

The Council of Europe, the United Nations and their respective member States must strengthen and upscale their Human Rights Education programmes to ensure the full realisation of the Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, and the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, in line with their commitments.

We call on local, national and international authorities to strengthen and, where necessary, to build supportive systems for Human Rights Education. For the Human Rights Education ecosystem to grow stronger, we need stable, well-resourced structures of support. This must include policies that recognize the essential role of civil society and the research community in developing and delivering quality Human Rights Education. These policies must translate into structural resources, namely financial support for grassroots initiatives, youth-led work, youth centers, public institutions and other spaces that make Human Rights Education possible.

We call on local, national and international authorities to ensure Human Rights Education is present and accessible in all educational settings, from formal to informal; from early childhood to life-long learning. Non-formal education and youth work must be properly recognised, resourced and integrated into national Human Rights Education strategies to ensure inclusive, continuous learning pathways.

We call on local, national and international authorities to ensure access, inclusion and safety in Human Rights Education. Structural barriers to participation in Human Rights Education must be removed. No one should be denied participation because of who they are or because of their circumstances. Inclusivity should be a foundation of Human Rights Education. Every person, irrespective of "race", colour, descent, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, language, religion or belief, political affiliation, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation and other personal

characteristics or status, should be able to access Human Rights Education and participate in safety.

We call on all Human Rights Educators to root Human Rights Education in lived experiences and local realities. This requires decolonising and localising practices, engaging the communities facing rights violations in the co-creation of context-specific programmes that reflect local knowledge and history. These programmes must be available in languages that are accessible to the communities concerned.

We call on all Human Rights Educators to future-proof Human Rights Education for contemporary challenges. Educators must face up to and address historical, current and emerging issues, however sensitive and difficult. Reflective practice, including learning from past mistakes, should strengthen the critical thinking of learners and practitioners. As a community of practice, it is upon us to reach beyond our comfort zone to embrace new and unconventional approaches, methods and resources, to seek unlikely partnerships, and to engage new allies.

We call on all Human Rights Educators to uphold youth agency and participation. Educators must advocate for the meaningful involvement of young people and the civil society in decisions regarding Human Rights Education policy, and sustained support for Human Rights Education initiatives.

We call on all members of the community of practice to commit to a shared and sustainable future. Duty bearers, educators and all stakeholders of the Human Rights Education field must secure long-term political commitment for Human Rights Education. Strengthening cooperation, expanding access and investing in Human Rights Education communities are essential. It is only in allyship that we will succeed.

Together, we affirm that Human Rights Education is essential.

Together, we commit to protecting, strengthening and expanding it.

Together, we continue the work.

Together, we stay the course.

ANNEX C

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

ACHER Illan	Amnesty International, Switzerland
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ANNEX D

Online HRE Resources

Council of Europe: The Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) - Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture

Human Rights Education through youth work and non-formal education

- *Compass* and *Compasito*
- Training in Human Rights Education
  - Living Compass - Human Rights Education Youth Programme
  - Compass Training Courses on Human Rights Education - Human Rights Education Youth Programme
- Youth Sector Programme: www.coe.int/youth

Human Rights Education in Schools and formal education settings

- Home - Living Democracy

Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals

- About HELP - Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals

Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Publications and Resource collections

- OHCHR human rights education and training publications
- OHCHR Human Rights Education and Training Resource Collection
- OHCHR Human Rights Education and Training Database

Online courses

- E-course on the Human Rights of LGBTI People
- E-learning tool on the rights of indigenous peoples

Multimedia educational tools

- Changemakers: Stories of Young Human Rights Educators (multimedia educational tool)
- "A Path to Dignity: The Power of Human Rights Education" (educational film)

Other resources

- OHCHR and Youth
- Youth Rights Advocacy Toolkit

Amnesty International

- Amnesty Human Rights Workout (online micro-learning based on ECtHR casework): https://eduworkout.org/en