

THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S WORK ON HISTORY EDUCATION

Teaching history, grounding democracy

INTRODUCTION

The Council of Europe's work on history education is founded on the assumption that understanding the past is essential for building a shared future, for fostering European democracies, and for strengthening active democratic citizenship. The History Education Division promotes teaching and learning history based on multiperspectivity to foster learners' critical thinking skills, empathy, and democratic competences. This approach contributes to safeguarding the principles of the Council of Europe, from the *European Cultural Convention (1954)* to the *Reykjavik Declaration (2023)*.

History education at the Council of Europe is organised around three main pillars:

- 01 Standard-setting:** the intergovernmental programmes on history education and on Holocaust remembrance and prevention of crimes against humanity cover all 46 member states of the Council of Europe.
- 02 Research and data:** the Enlarged Partial Agreement on the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe (OHTE) conducts research on history education in its member states, enhancing our understanding of the many ways in which history is taught and learnt.
- 03 Cooperation activities:** the Division runs the Transnational History Education and Cooperation Laboratory (HISTOLAB), along with bilateral activities with member states, ranging from seminars and symposiums to workshops and training sessions.



WHY HISTORY EDUCATION MATTERS

History has long been instrumentalised, distorted and manipulated by various actors to undermine democratic societies. In recent times, this has been no more apparent than in the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine.

History education is imperative, now more than ever, for fostering understanding of the shared values of the Council of Europe member states. By enabling us to build competences such as critical thinking skills, teaching and learning about history contributes to the protection of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, including the fight against phenomena like disinformation and discrimination.

At the same time, the ways in which we engage with the past are rapidly changing. Digital evolution presents both opportunities and challenges for history education, with developments such as generative artificial intelligence having a profound impact on how learners encounter history and amplifying phenomena such as disinformation. In the classroom, foundational historical methods like source analysis remain important, but new innovations can supplement and be used to enhance traditional tools.

In parallel, the nature of our shared historical memory is changing: for example, the passing on of firsthand witnesses of the Holocaust in the 21st century demonstrates that remembrance is not static and must be continually reaffirmed. In this context of change,

both learners and educators require comprehensive support to develop relevant competences and engage with history constructively and responsibly.

History education is also impacted by various constraints. For example, teachers are often concerned about the time allocated to history in school, curricular overload, exam pressures, and access to quality resources. Many perceive a discrepancy between what they think is relevant and what happens in the classroom in practice. Moreover, there is frequently a gap between academic historical research and the history taught in schools, whether reflected in curricula, resources, or methods. This highlights not only an ongoing need for research on how history is taught and learnt, but also for platforms that enable stakeholders to exchange knowledge and good practices.



➤ OHTE GENERAL
REPORT 2023

Key findings

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR IMPLEMENTING QUALITY HISTORY EDUCATION

The Council of Europe's work on history education is anchored in its political and legal framework, from the European Cultural Convention (1954) to the Reykjavík Declaration (2023), and is further shaped by ongoing reflections towards a new recommendation on history education in the digital age. These frameworks underpin our strategic priorities:

Strengthening evidence-based policy

- Expanding research through the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe (OHTE) to inform national policies and bridge the gap between academic research and classroom teaching.
- Using data-driven insights to enhance quality, inclusive, and democratic history education.

Consolidating normative frameworks and practical resources

- Promoting key Council of Europe recommendations on quality history education and remembrance and developing standards for the responsible integration of digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) in history teaching, ensuring they serve democratic and human rights principles.
- Addressing the risks of AI-driven disinformation while promoting digital tools that enhance critical historical thinking.
- Equipping educators with practical resources, including guides on multiperspectivity, critical thinking, and disinformation.

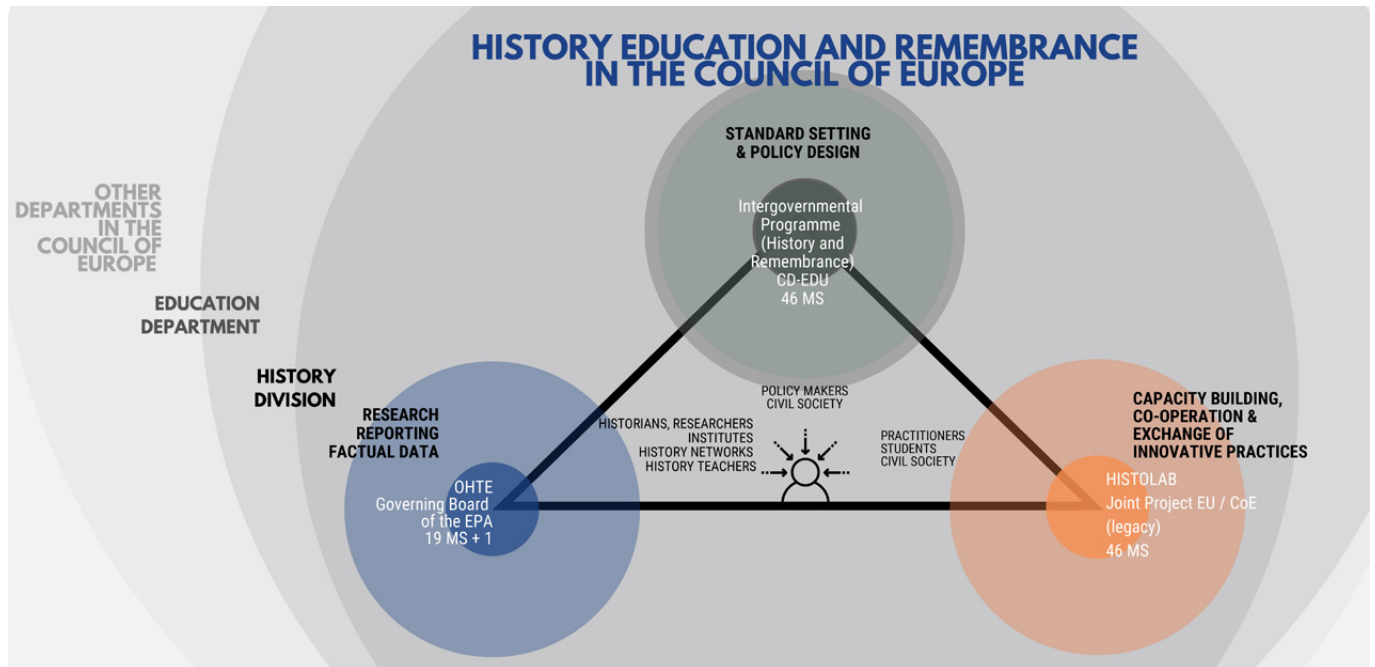
Fostering innovation, dialogue, and cooperation

- Facilitating exchange among policymakers, researchers, educators, and civil society through the Forums for History Education, HISTOLAB activities, and OHTE Annual Conferences.
- Strengthening partnerships across formal and non-formal education sectors to support democratic resilience.

Promoting historical consciousness and democratic vigilance

- Moving beyond static remembrance towards active engagement with history.
- Equipping learners to critically analyse historical narratives and resist manipulation, strengthening permanent democratic vigilance.

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE HISTORY DIVISION COVER THREE KEY AREAS



Research and data collection

- 01 The **general** and **thematic** reports of the OHETE directly capture the views and needs of stakeholders and beneficiaries. For example, the first general report on the state of history teaching in Europe surveyed 6 521 teachers from across Europe and gathered their views on history education in their respective countries.
- 02 OHETE research contributes to a clearer picture of various aspects of history education across its member states, from curricula and resources to classroom methods and exams. The quantitative and qualitative data collected can inform the policies and practices implemented by ministries, teacher training institutions, and schools.
- 03 All member states of the Council of Europe are encouraged to join the OHETE in order to contribute to its research and dissemination of good practices.

Recommendations, guidelines and resources

- 01 Recommendations stress the political importance of history education and provide frameworks within which member states can implement quality history education. This includes transversal support for programmes on priority areas such as Holocaust remembrance and prevention of crimes against humanity.
- 02 Principles such as multiperspectivity, the **Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture**, and the **Guidelines for quality history education in the 21st century** are guiding frameworks that can be used by education authorities at all levels.
- 03 Resources such as the **guide on multiperspectivity for teachers** and **HISTOLAB toolkit on disinformation and fake news** can be used directly by educators in the classroom or other settings.

Co-operation and knowledge exchange

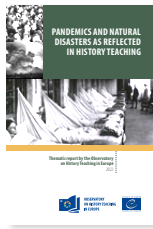
- 01 The annual Forums for History Education organised under the intergovernmental programme provide a setting for policymakers, academics, civil society organisations, students and other stakeholders to talk about history education and how it can be improved. The Forum discussions provide impetus for national and regional authorities to act on, for example strengthening support for academic freedom and access to archives.
- 02 The **HISTOLAB Hub** provides a platform for exchange among educators, researchers, civil society representatives and other stakeholders, connecting formal and non-formal learning as well as expanding opportunities for on-site learning (e.g., through museum education).
- 03 The Annual Conferences of the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe, as well as seminars and symposia held at the national and international levels allow for knowledge and good practices to be shared among policymakers. Recently, these events have included a roundtable discussion on the legacy of the Slovak National Uprising in cooperation with the Permanent Representation of the Slovak Republic to the Council of Europe, the Athens seminar on "Antisemitism and antigypsyism: historical roots and post-Holocaust legacies", the Belgrade History Teaching Symposia, as well as panels on history at the **World Forum for Democracy**.



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FURTHER READING & RESOURCES

↘ OBSERVATORY ON HISTORY TEACHING IN EUROPE



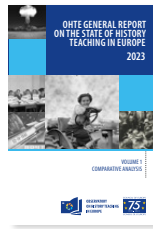
↘ 2022

Thematic report on pandemics and natural disasters as reflected in history teaching



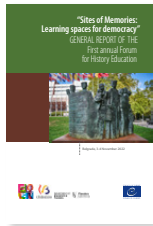
↘ 2023

Teaching history, grounding democracy: an exhibition and an accompanying booklet on the history of history education in the Council of Europe



↘ 2024

General report on the state of history teaching in Europe and Infographics



↘ 2022



↘ COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Reports on the Annual Forums for History Education



↘ COUNCIL OF EUROPE · 2018

Quality history education in the 21st century



↘ COUNCIL OF EUROPE · 2018

Multiperspectivity in history teaching: a guide for teachers

COUNTRY COMPOSITION

All Council of Europe member states participate in the intergovernmental programme and the cooperation activities. **Member states** of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Cyprus, France, Georgia, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Portugal, Republic of Moldova (Observer), Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Türkiye, Ukraine.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



↘ CM/REC(2022)5

Recommendation on passing on remembrance of the Holocaust and preventing crimes against humanity



↘ CM/REC(2020)2

Recommendation on the inclusion of the history of Roma and/or Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials



↘ CM/REC(2011)6

Recommendation on intercultural dialogue and the image of the other in history teaching



↘ CM/REC(2010)7

Recommendation on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education



↘ CM/REC(2001)15

Recommendation on history teaching in twenty-first-century Europe



↘ CM/REC(1983)4

Recommendation concerning the promotion of an awareness of Europe in secondary school

COUNCIL OF EUROPE EDUCATION STRATEGY 2024-2030 "LEARNERS FIRST"

History education is fully integrated into the Council of Europe's Education Strategy 2024–2030, "Learners First," contributing to its three main pillars: renewing the democratic and civic mission of education, enhancing the social responsibility and responsiveness of education, and advancing education through a human rights-based digital transformation. It supports inclusive curricula, promotes diversity, and fosters innovation through projects like **HISTOLAB Awards for Innovative School Projects in History Education**, **European Innovation Days in History Education**, and **OHE** initiatives. A strong emphasis is placed on the cross-cutting principle of inclusion and participation, with learners actively involved in shaping how history is taught. Future research, including the **General report on the state of history teaching in Europe**, will further centre student perspectives through surveys and workshops.



↘ LEARNERS FIRST

Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024-2030



↘ www.coe.int/education

↘ **Observatory on History Teaching in Europe**

