

The Art of Learning Equality, Dignity, Democracy

Forum on the present and future of
citizenship and human rights education
in Europe with young people

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Draft Final Message

We, the participants of “The Art of Learning Equality, Dignity, Democracy - the Present and Future of Citizenship and Human Rights Education in Europe with Young People,” the 2022 Forum organised in Turin within the programme of the Italian Presidency of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, convey this message to all actors involved in, and responsible for advancing citizenship and human rights education.

We are practitioners - educators, activists, and human rights defenders, representing civil society, youth organisations, networks and public institutions. Our zeal and action are motivated by the fundamental role of education in human rights, democracy and rule of law, crystallised in the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE). This charter is a strong reference point for advocating our cause. We take note of the progress made according to the recent review of its implementation, but are concerned by the shortcomings and challenges portrayed in the review.

We welcome the positive examples demonstrated by member States in implementing the Charter’s principles and objectives, but also understand that there is a lack of holistic mainstreaming in the policies. We see the advancements made in pre-primary, compulsory primary and secondary education and in the professional development of practitioners, nevertheless, there’s still space for growth, in all sectors, especially in VET. The Reference Framework for Competences for Democratic Culture has proven to be effective and instrumental in the field, however, there is still a need for capacity building for schools, training teachers and other educational staff members. The review has revealed that assessment and evaluation are still areas for further improvement. In addition, the review also indicates challenges in the access to EDC/HRE for disadvantaged communities and outlines the lack of resources and capacity-building opportunities. The global pandemic has adversely impacted practitioners and advocates, and the restrictions imposed by national governments and other authorities have limited or deprioritised citizenship and human rights education. We acknowledge the limitations of the review; however, we recognise the resource provided by various civil society organisations, and we invite the member States to consult them to better understand the situation of EDC/HRE in their respective contexts.

The war in Ukraine is the brutal interruption of the world we believed in; this has shadowed our presence on the forum. It is a stark reminder that human rights and the legal system ensuring its standards in Europe and elsewhere cannot be taken for granted.

Inspired by the human rights documents and instruments, for us, EDC/HRE goes beyond the diplomatic consensus. Human rights education replicates the universal principle of human rights, and it should be illuminated and informed by the learners’ (rights-holders) lives and experiences. Given this, we acknowledge that life-long learning is an essential principle of EDC/HRE. We recognise the inherent transformative nature of citizenship and human rights education equipping learners to challenge the power-holders and hold them accountable according to human rights and democratic principles. We recognise the ever-evolving characteristics of human rights education practice to respond to and influence the change positively. EDC/HRE discourse should be at the frontline to respond to challenges, such as the global

pandemic, climate change, datafication, and armed conflicts. EDC/HRE is essential in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG4.

The general environment for human rights and human rights education remains more fragile than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic has created significant barriers for practitioners and learners. Many of them have to endure the precariousness and shrinking of the civic and democratic spaces. Hate speech, discrimination and structural violence are all too prevalent against marginalised groups in Europe. Practitioners and learners have to be supported and guaranteed the freedom to define and address the most burning issues within their communities, rather than the authorities cherry-picking the comfortable and appealing topics for them.

The Council of Europe was founded on the premise of "never again," expressing a determination to create a new Europe based on human rights, democracy and rule of law - enabling citizens to keep their governments accountable. Education enables people to embrace these values by fostering inclusion and cohesion. Today, the spectre and horror of war has returned to Europe with the Russian aggression on Ukraine. We are alarmed and dismayed to witness the suffering and displacement of millions of people and the gross violations of their human rights and freedoms. We are distressed because we are the witnesses of what was pathing the way to Russia's trajectory to this point. We are the witnesses of numerous red lines crossed - dismissing and violating human rights and democratic principles, disregarding human dignity, life and peace, cracking down on dissent, civil society and media, and, of course, undermining citizenship and human rights education in Russia and beyond. In addition, we are alarmed that some member States also create their own truth about human rights, democracy, and citizenship and human rights education.

These harsh realities as well as emerging opportunities galvanise and raise our voices in support of human rights and EDC/HRE. If there were setbacks and impediments previously, now we have to strongly assert our values.

In this spirit, we urge the member States of the Council of Europe to:

- Increase their efforts to implement the EDC/HRE Charter, by creating effective policy responses and by integrating its principles and objectives in a sustainable manner;
- Take further steps to integrate citizenship and human rights education into the formal education system, foster synergy between formal and non-formal education, increase cooperation and participation of civil society organisations and young people in educational sectors;
- Encourage national state bodies to be inclusive and open for collaborations with youth, human rights NGOs and other civil society members, especially when developing or reviewing educational programmes;
- Create capacity building opportunities for educational institutions, civil society and youth organisations involved in EDC/HRE;
- Support the training on Reference Framework for Competences for Democratic Culture, and the setting-up of a network of teacher trainers in cooperation with national teacher training institutions, and thereby addressing the need for capacity building for school communities, and fostering the Whole School Approach;
- Encourage higher education institutions to increase their provision of EDC/HRE in their programmes and strengthen the professional development of practitioners and researchers in the field;
- Safeguard access to citizenship and human rights education for disadvantaged communities, and especially for young people at risk of social exclusion, while adopting an intersectional approach when developing and delivering educational programmes for youth, ensuring that they are accessible for and sensitive to the most disadvantaged groups, who are negatively affected by discrimination on more than one ground;
- Review the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on EDC/HRE provisions and consider future preventive and response mechanisms in respect to right to education and right to participation;

- Address the urgency and take special measures to ensure the access to EDC/HRE for those affected by the war, support youth movements, civil society, human rights defenders and educators, particularly in Ukraine, Belarus and Russian Federation;
- Reinforce the role of youth policy and youth work in citizenship and human rights education;
- Recognise the transformative function of citizenship and human rights education in practice to address social injustices and inequalities;
- Support the further development of educational resources and activities for citizenship and human rights education within the Council of Europe, and secure the continuity of the Human Rights Education Youth Programme.
- Develop quality standard to monitor the provision of EDC/HRE in classrooms with participation of CSOs, and independent experts.

Human rights education is a human right itself and a catalyst for human rights.