

THE PLAN OF ACTION FOR 2005-2009 IN BRIEF

This section summarizes the Plan of Action for the first phase (2005-2009) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education. It highlights key actions to be undertaken by ministries of education and other school and civil society actors working in partnership to integrate human rights education effectively in the primary and secondary school systems. The Plan of Action was adopted by all Members States of the United Nations General Assembly on 14 July 2005.¹

I. The World Programme for Human Rights Education (2005-ongoing)

What is human rights education?

Human rights education can be defined as education, training and information aimed at building a universal culture of human rights. A comprehensive education in human rights not only provides knowledge about human rights and the mechanisms that protect them, but also imparts the skills needed to promote, defend and apply human rights in daily life. Human rights education fosters the attitudes and behaviours needed to uphold human rights for all members of society.

Human rights education activities should convey fundamental human rights principles, such as equality and non-discrimination, while affirming their interdependence, indivisibility and universality. At the same time, activities should be practical—relating human rights to learners' real-life experience and enabling them to build on human rights principles found in their own cultural context. Through such activities, learners are empowered to identify and address their human rights needs and to seek solutions consistent with human rights standards. Both what is taught and the way in which it is taught should reflect human rights values, encourage participation and foster a learning environment free from want and fear.

Why a World Programme for Human Rights Education?

On 10 December 2004, the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed the World Programme for Human Rights Education (2005-ongoing) to advance the implementation of human rights education programmes in all sectors.²

Building on the foundations laid during the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004), this new initiative reflects the international community's increasing recognition that human rights education produces far-reaching results. By promoting respect for human dignity and equality and participation in democratic decision-making,

¹ General Assembly resolution 59/113 B.

² General Assembly resolution 59/113 A.

human rights education contributes to the long-term prevention of abuses and violent conflicts.

To help making human rights a reality in every community, the World Programme seeks to promote a common understanding of the basic principles and methodologies of human rights education, to provide a concrete framework for action and to strengthen partnerships and cooperation from the international level down to the grass roots.

II. A Plan of Action for human rights education in the primary and secondary school systems

Unlike the limited time frame of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004), the World Programme is structured around an ongoing series of phases, the first of which covers the period 2005-2009 and focuses on the primary and secondary school systems. Developed by a broad group of education and human rights practitioners from all continents, the Plan of Action for the first phase proposes a concrete strategy and practical ideas for implementing human rights education nationally. Its key elements are highlighted below.

A “rights-based” approach to education

Human rights education is widely considered to be integral to every child’s right to a quality education, one that not only teaches reading, writing and arithmetic, but also strengthens the child’s capacity to enjoy the full range of human rights and promotes a culture which is infused by human rights values.

Human rights education promotes a holistic, rights-based approach that includes both “human rights *through* education,” ensuring that all the components and processes of education—including curricula, materials, methods and training—are conducive to the learning of human rights, and “human rights *in* education,” ensuring that the human rights of all members of the school community are respected.

Although many factors contribute to the effective integration of this approach in primary and secondary schools, research and experience worldwide have identified five key components for success:

1. Educational policies. Understood as statements of commitment on the part of a Government, educational policies—including legislation, plans of action, curricula, training policies and so on—should explicitly promote a rights-based approach to education. These statements infuse human rights throughout the education system. Policies are developed in a participatory manner in cooperation with all stakeholders and fulfil a country’s international treaty obligations to provide and promote quality education, such as those called for in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

2. Policy implementation. To be effective, policies need a consistent implementation strategy, including measures such as the allocation of adequate resources and the setting-up of coordination mechanisms, that ensures coherence, monitoring and accountability. Such a strategy should take into account the multiplicity of stakeholders at both the national level (e.g., ministry of education, teacher training institutions, research bodies, non-governmental organizations) and the local level (e.g., local government, head teachers and their staff, parents and students), and involve them in putting educational policy into practice.

3. The learning environment. Human rights education strives towards an environment where human rights are practised and lived in the daily life of the whole school community. As well as cognitive learning, human rights education includes the social and emotional development of all those involved in the learning and teaching process. A rights-based environment respects and promotes the human rights of all school actors and is characterized by mutual understanding, respect and responsibility. It enables children to express their views freely and to participate in school life, and offers them appropriate opportunities for interacting with the wider community.

4. Teaching and learning. Introducing or improving human rights education requires using a holistic approach to teaching and learning that reflects human rights values. Starting as early as possible, human rights concepts and practices are integrated into all aspects of education. For example, curriculum content and objectives are rights-based, methodologies are democratic and participatory, and all materials and textbooks are consistent with human rights values.

5. Education and professional development of school personnel. For the school to serve as a model of human rights learning and practice, all teachers and staff need to be able to both transmit and model human rights values. Education and professional development must foster educators' knowledge about, commitment to and motivation for human rights. Furthermore, as rights-holders themselves, school personnel need to work and learn in a context of respect for their dignity and rights.

Practical guidance on how to implement these five components in the school system is provided in the appendix to the Plan of Action.

Should human rights education be a national priority?

By providing a set of guiding principles to support educational reform and helping to respond to current challenges faced by education systems worldwide, human rights education can improve the national education system's overall effectiveness, which in turn plays a fundamental role in economic, social and political development. In particular:

- By promoting child-centred and participatory teaching and learning, human rights education improves the quality of learning achievements;
- By promoting learning environments that are inclusive and that foster equal opportunities, diversity and non-discrimination, human rights education supports access to and participation in schooling;

- By supporting the social and emotional development of the child and by fostering democratic values, human rights education contributes to social cohesion and conflict prevention.

A concrete strategy for national action

To encourage and support human rights education in primary and secondary school systems, the Plan of Action assumes a process of change involving simultaneous actions in several areas, especially the five key components described above. It recognizes that the situation of human rights education in school systems differs widely from country to country, from well-developed policies and actions to little or none. Whatever the status of human rights education or the situation or type of education system, the development of human rights education should be on each country's education agenda. Each country should establish realistic goals and means for action in accordance with national context, priorities and capacity.

The Plan of Action proposes four stages for the national process of planning, implementation and evaluation of human rights education in the school system (i.e., the "national implementation strategy").

Stage 1: *Where are we?* - Analyse the current situation of human rights education in the school system.

This first stage calls for a national study on human rights education in the school system. With wide dissemination and discussion, this report can serve as a basis for developing a national implementation strategy for human rights education in stage 2.

Stage 2: *Where do we want to go and how?* - Set priorities and develop a national implementation strategy.

The strategy developed in this stage addresses the five key components (i.e., educational policies, policy implementation, the learning environment, teaching and learning, education and professional development) and focuses on issues that can have a sustainable impact. It sets realistic objectives and priorities and anticipates at least some implementation during 2005-2009.

Stage 3: *Getting there* - Implement and monitor activities.

In this stage, the national implementation strategy is widely disseminated and put into practice. Its progress is monitored using fixed milestones. Outcomes will vary according to national priorities, but might include legislation, new or revised learning materials and methodologies, training courses or non-discriminatory policies protecting all members of the school community.

Stage 4: *Did we get there and with what success?* - Evaluate.

Using evaluation as a means of both accountability and learning for the future, this stage calls for an assessment of what the implementation strategy has accomplished. It results in a report on the national implementation strategy for human rights education in schools, with recommendations for future action based on lessons learned.

During this first phase (2005-2009) of the World Programme, Member States are encouraged to undertake, as a minimum, stages 1 and 2 and initiate stage 3. Work in this area would then continue beyond the World Programme's first phase.

Funding for human rights education could be found among the resources allocated to the national education system in general, and in particular by optimizing funds already committed to quality education, coordinating external funds based on the actions set out in the Plan of Action and creating partnerships between the public and private sectors.

Who should be involved?

As ministries of education (or equivalent institutions) have the main responsibility for primary and secondary education, the implementation strategy proposed in the Plan of Action addresses their functions, such as educational policy development, programme planning, research, teacher training, development and dissemination of materials. However, others should be involved in the implementation of the Plan of Action, namely: teacher training institutions, teachers' associations, national human rights institutions, non-governmental organizations, parents' and students' associations, and so on.

Other key national agencies should also be involved in all stages of planning and implementation, especially educational research institutions, teachers' unions and professional organizations, legislative bodies and national committees for intergovernmental organizations. It is also suggested that additional stakeholders, such as other ministries, youth organizations, the media, religious institutions, community leaders, minority groups and the business community, should be involved to ensure effective implementation.

What are the coordination mechanisms?

The Plan of Action recommends a sequence of coordination mechanisms from the national level to the international level.

At the national level, ministries of education are invited to create or designate a unit within their structure responsible for coordinating the development and monitoring of the national implementation strategy for human rights education in the school system. This unit will also be responsible for liaising with the United Nations. Every country is also encouraged to identify and support a resource centre for collecting and disseminating related initiatives and information (good practices from diverse contexts and countries, educational materials, events).

At the international level, the Plan of Action proposes the creation of a United Nations inter-agency coordinating committee, composed of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other relevant international agencies. With the Office of the High Commissioner providing its secretariat, this committee will meet regularly to follow up on the implementation of the Plan of Action, mobilize resources and support actions at country level, as well as ensure United Nations system-wide support to the national implementation strategy. United Nations entities that monitor a country's compliance with its treaty obligations and other relevant United Nations mechanisms will be called upon to emphasize and report on progress in human rights education in the school system.

At the conclusion of the first phase (2005-2009) of the World Programme, each country will evaluate its actions and report to the United Nations inter-agency coordinating committee. On the basis of these reports, the committee will prepare a final report for the General Assembly.

What kind of support is available from the United Nations?

The national implementation strategies of Member States can be supported by international cooperation from the United Nations system and other international and regional intergovernmental organizations, organizations of ministers of education, non-governmental organizations and financial institutions. The close collaboration of these actors is indispensable to maximize resources, avoid duplication and ensure coherence.

These bodies may assist in a variety of ways, for instance:

- In the elaboration, implementation and monitoring of the national implementation strategy, in direct contact with the ministries of education or other relevant national actors;
- By facilitating information-sharing at all levels, including through the identification, collection and dissemination of good practices as well as information about available materials, institutions and programmes;
- By encouraging the development of human rights education networks;
- By supporting training and research.
