



# How are human rights put into practice by youth organisations?

## Human rights education and contributions to a culture of human rights

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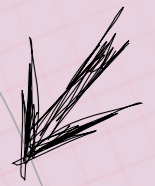


If one looks at international-level advocacy for human rights education in the last two years, there are at least a couple of reasons for joy: one is the adoption by the United Nations of a Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training in December 2011 and the second one is the adoption by the Council of Europe of the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education. Little by little, the conversation about advocacy for human rights education is continuing. Activists should not ignore these two documents. They obviously complement the international human rights treaties in which articles constantly mention that education is also about knowing one's rights. They also steer and define a bit more clearly who is to do what when it comes to human rights education.

human rights



### BUT WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?



"Human rights education and training comprises all educational, training, information, awareness-raising and learning activities aimed at promoting universal respect for and observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and thus contributing to, *inter alia*, the prevention of human rights violations and abuses by providing persons with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviours, to empower them to contribute to the building and promotion of a universal culture of human rights."

"Human rights education and training encompasses education:

- (a) About human rights, which includes providing knowledge and understanding of human rights norms and principles, the values that underpin them and the mechanisms for their protection;
- (b) Through human rights, which includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners;
- (c) For human rights, which includes empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others."

(Article 2, UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/education/training/UNDHREducationTraining.htm> )

"'Human rights education' means education, training, awareness raising, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, to empower learners to contribute to the building and defence of a universal culture of human rights in society, with a view to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms."

(Council of Europe, Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education )

## How are human rights put into practice by youth organisations?

### *Human rights are not only for lawyers*

This is one of the first things one can learn from the Council of Europe's youth programmes for human rights education.

Human rights education is simply about "education for human dignity", to quote the title of a well-known work of Betty Reardon on the matter. And, as with human rights, it ideally "starts with breakfast". In youth organisations, these simple words become projects dealing with human rights, human rights movements, educational programmes for people of all sorts, short-term or long-term engagements, or even processes aimed at reorganising institutions in order to make them more in line with human rights principles. It is a mosaic of practices.

Human rights education (hereinafter, HRE) in youth work also means to follow and apply the principles of non-formal education and therefore, to be learner centred and based on the needs of the group we work with, although within a larger societal context. This, combined with subjacent HRE topics, has shown a more systematic development in recent years, at local, regional, national and international levels. A sign of this process, and at the same time very much the beginning of a path, is the adoption in 2010 by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, a policy document whose potential for mainstreaming HRE in all member states of the Council of Europe, as well as in serving as an advocacy tool for youth organisations and civil society in general, should now be explored!

A conference in Strasbourg on "Human Rights and Democracy in Action – Looking Ahead" (29-30 November 2012) brought together 200 participants, including governments, civil society organisations, international institutions and education professionals. They discussed how democracy and human rights could be promoted through education, with the help of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education. They identified key concerns and also proposed a way forward for mainstreaming HRE in formal and non-formal education. A roadmap for the next five years was defined on this occasion. Practitioners

have reasons to be happy: the European framework paves the road for mainstreaming HRE at national and local levels. Want to learn more? Have a look here: [www.coe.int/edchre](http://www.coe.int/edchre).

HRE does not exist in a vacuum. In other words, each educational process, beyond the impact of the learners – which extends from attitudes, values, skills and knowledge to capacity to bring about change in each person's life – also has an impact or is related to other processes, which are not only educational. HRE thus contributes and complements a variety of actions youth organisations can take. COMPASS provides the reader with a list of possible actions youth organisations can do or undertake for human rights, such as:

1. fighting individual violations of human rights directly by using existing instruments;
2. offering direct assistance to those whose rights have been violated;
3. lobbying for changes to national, regional or international law and/or regulations;
4. helping to develop the substance of laws and promoting new protection mechanisms;
5. promoting knowledge of, and respect for, human rights among the population;
6. changing the way we work in youth organisations, to make our work based on human rights;
7. research on human rights and human rights violations;
8. learning from other groups and building partnerships;
9. covering for the lack of government services for those whose rights are violated;
10. taking public actions to raise awareness.

Considering the above and because a story speaks more than a label can, we decided to explore, with the support of human rights activists and educators from youth organisations, how HRE is intertwined with other human rights work. The collection of responses is of course by no means exhaustive; it does not need to be. As human rights are a living instrument, so should a healthy human rights movement be a flexible, creative and adaptable movement.

Let's have a look at the responses and examples we received.



### Youth democratic citizenship through the work of Dínamo

#### *(Portugal)*

For this association, "youth democratic citizenship as a human right at local level shall be more than words". Many challenges arise when tackling youth democratic citizenship at local level, such as the lack of opportunities to learn about, through and for participation; institutional resistance to change; lack of mechanisms and of general conditions to ensure a friendly environment for young people to participate; misguided processes where "youth participation" turns out to be manipulative or have young people as the main "decorative furniture"; a lack of internal evaluation practices from local public institutions which compromises their ability to respond to young people's needs, often failing to be accountable for their human right to be equal actors in participating in social transformation.

As a local Portuguese organisation focusing on youth participation, Dínamo responded to these complex challenges by creating a complex strategy: "Sintra is also yours!" aiming to provide young people in the Sintra region with tools, competences, activities, conditions and alternatives to promote, motivate, enhance, strengthen and facilitate their active participation in the civil society in general and in the Sintra region in particular. In the framework of this strategy, Dínamo is implementing the project "Regional Networks for Meaningful Youth Participation" where a group of young people is given the resources and conditions they need to create a large network of social actors dealing with youth in the region.

The participants went through a first phase focusing on capacity building, an educational process that allowed them to learn together

about democratic citizenship (DC) and to better understand what rights they are not fully enjoying in their community. The next phase focused on empowerment and lasted about four months. The young people began to develop an ownership of the overall process, going from being highly dependent, to participation, to end up promoting and facilitating a one-day local meeting with about 50 participants (young people, youth workers, NGOs/institutions' representatives).

Not only did they succeed but they also managed to create a public Charter of Recommendations with the network members. As we write these lines, the next steps will be to further assess young people's needs on the ground to then evaluate whether those needs are satisfied. Given the right conditions and the opportunity, young people are the best defenders and practitioners of their (human) right to participate equally.

In the 37 years of the Portuguese democratic state, there is an irony of fate: young people end up finding their own way to build the conditions they need to participate as equals in transforming civil society, including securing their right to education (for DC). But for young people this still means competing with other obligations such as studies or the need to "work for money" which, often and considering the actual situation in Portugal, seem to have more of an inhibitive effect rather than the opposite. Whenever a state is failing to make it possible for young people to shape their own futures, there shall be an NGO providing conditions for young people to advocate for a change. That's what we do at Dínamo.

## LGBTQ rights through the work of ANSO

The Association of Nordic and Pol-Balt LGBTQ Student Organizations (ANSO) is an umbrella organisation working with young people and students in the Nordic and Baltic regions as well as Poland. Occasionally, it is possible for the organisation to get involved in campaigns and actions at national level in its member countries.

Such an opportunity occurred in January 2012 when a handful of Swedish LGBT organisations started a campaign in order to abolish legislation regulating recognition of a new legal gender for transgender persons in Sweden. According to the law, in order to have their new legal gender recognised, transgender persons are forced to undergo a

surgical operation that results in permanent sterility. After the Swedish Government, influenced by the conservative Christian Democrats, refused to alter the discriminatory law, the campaign against the law was born. In a true activist spirit, several organisations working for the human rights of LGBT persons came together to fight against discrimination, ANSO was one of them.

The campaign had many elements: from articles to blogs, to meetings, to lobbying, to one of the biggest petition actions ever, run by the organisation AllOut.org, which turned out to be a huge success with over 70 000 signatures from all over the world. What would activism be without mobilising people, demonstrations and powerful speeches? On a cold morning in early January, the demonstration gathered around 400 people who wanted to express their disapproval and listen to many empowering speeches given by activists and politicians. Despite the winter weather and freezing cold, the atmosphere was hot.

In order to keep the activist spirit alive, we organised, after a few weeks, an evening activity for the community. It was a safe space full of performances, food, music, and time for mingling and planning revolution! It was a very empowering evening which connected people coming from various organisations, experiences and paths of life.

“What about results?” one may ask. After a few weeks of intense campaigning, the Christian Democrats issued a statement saying that they had changed their position on the law. This was received by the LGBT movement with a sense of relief, but also impatience to see tangible proof of the promised changes.

This ad hoc campaign proved that if there is a will and people who believe in change, anything is possible! And even though there were frustrating and stressful moments, we had loads of fun. Not only did we come closer to changing the discriminatory legislation, but we also empowered the LGBT community.



## Girls' and women's rights through the work of WAGGGS

“Stop the violence” is a global campaign from the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) which aims to stop all forms of violence against girls and young women. Because WAGGGS believes any form of violence against girls and women is wrong and must stop, the organisation is gathering voices to help our message grow from a whisper to a shout.

Some 45% of women in Europe have experienced gender-based violence. Girls in every country across the world are being subjected to many forms of violence: from forced marriage and female genital mutilation in some countries to domestic violence and bullying in others.

At this stage, nearly 7 500 people from over 80 countries have added their voice to the “Stop the violence – speak out for girls’ rights” voice counter, with more added every day as we work towards a target of 5 million voices.

On top of adding their voices to the campaign, Girl Guides and Girl Scouts worldwide are taking action in different ways, speaking out and acting against violence. Girl Guides associations in the UK, Denmark, Malta and Finland are piloting a non-formal education programme which teaches girls and boys, young women and young men about girls’ rights, helping them develop the skills to claim those rights for themselves and others. In Cyprus, they held a convention to discuss these issues while facing their communities and decided on an action plan to stop violence. In Malta, they officially launched their “Stop the violence” campaign in March 2012, in partnership with the National Council for Women, the Commissioner for Domestic Violence and the Maltese Confederation for Women Organisations. Last but not least, with the support of the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe, the Europe Region WAGGGS is organising a training programme on the campaign for Girl Guides and Girl Scouts leaders in Europe to help them develop action plans for the campaign at national and local levels.

**Wherever you live, you can help us to make a difference by sharing your voice with our campaign.**

**Please add your voice to the campaign counter at [www.stoptheviolencecampaign.com](http://www.stoptheviolencecampaign.com).**



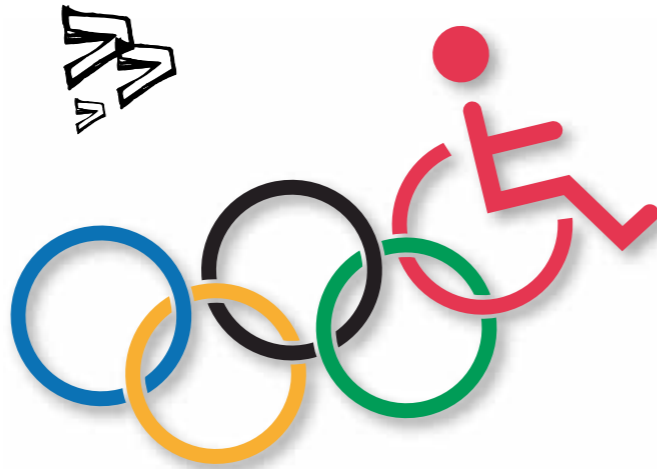
## How are human rights put into practice by youth organisations?

### Inclusion through sport with a focus on young people with and without intellectual disability, promoting social inclusion on and off the playing field, through the work of Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia (SOEE)

The Special Olympics' core activity is sport for people with intellectual disabilities. One of the key goals is to change attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities and to achieve their social inclusion through the means of sports and related initiatives. The Special Olympics Youth Unified Sports® programme is essential in the work of Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia to reach this goal.

Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia is a regional branch of the global Special Olympics organisation with 58 accredited national programmes<sup>1</sup> in Europe/Eurasia. Unified Sports brings together young people aged 12 to 25, with intellectual disabilities (athletes) and without (partners) in equal numbers on inclusive sports teams for regular training and competition following a specific concept to match players with similar abilities on the same teams.

Youth Unified Sports became a focus for SOEE in 2004 as a response to the increasing demand for inclusion in European societies, reflected for example in moves towards inclusive education and anti-discrimination legislation for sport clubs. But in many countries in Europe the reality of inclusion is far from the standards set in legally binding documents such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Educators, coaches and institutions lack tools and expertise to put the right to inclusion into action. Special Olympics Unified Sports became a widely recognised tool to fill this gap. Youth Unified Sports has successfully grown from 1 000 players in five countries in 2005 to 30 000 in 30 countries across Europe in 2011. It is the starting point for inclusive youth leadership programming in Special Olympics in Europe: young Unified Sports players with and without intellectual disabilities go far beyond playing sports together, they become "advocates for change". They go out to spread the word about how great and easy inclusion can be; they go out to grow Unified Sports opportunities and inspire others to join; they play sports together and show how inclusion can work beyond the playing field.



The main goal is to empower the young people with and without intellectual disabilities to jointly take responsibility for raising awareness of, and covering for, the lack of government services for people with intellectual disabilities whose rights are violated, using as a reference Articles 3 and 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. People with intellectual disabilities face a lack of opportunities to participate in community life including local sports structures. Inclusive education is still in early development stage in most countries which means most youths grow up segregated from each other and platforms to interact are missing inside the education system as well as in community life. Educators, coaches and other adult leaders – even in countries that have implemented inclusive education – lack tools to facilitate and guide inclusion inside and outside the classroom, on the sports field and in community structures.

In Special Olympics, the youth leaders have various opportunities to develop themselves as people, leaders, messengers for inclusion and active European citizens through dynamic and non-formal learning.



### Ending human rights violations by police officers through the work of Russian human rights movements

The "day of watching for documents" is a part of broad campaign on the observance of human rights violations by police officers, with a large part of these violations taking place in the streets through stopping people to ask for their documents and pressuring them to pay money for release. This is often accompanied with threats and sometimes illegal searches of people directly in the streets, which is totally against Russian law. At the same time, the new law on the police requires all police officers to wear a badge with photo, name, number of police station, etc., as this would make it easier for people to understand who this police officer is and how to appeal his or her action in case of pressure or a violation of rights.

Hence, the action "day of watching for documents" was especially developed to find out how many police officers wear their badges and as well to ask for their documents, with the argument that citizens may do this freely, while the police should have serious reasons for asking for people's documents in the street.

The action took place on 22 April 2012 in various cities of Russia and especially in Moscow where this illegal police practice is very common. During the

action, people went into the streets, approached police officers to ask for their documents and badges, filming them and providing them with awareness-raising leaflets about civil watch and police obedience.

The whole action was managed by a group of people from youth human right movements and other organisations that developed the idea as well as material such as leaflets and instructions for all the participants. The instructions were filmed and uploaded onto YouTube while information about the action was widely shared through social networks and the Internet so as to make it available to as many people as possible. Each city had its own co-ordinating group that distributed the guidelines among local participants, trained them if needed, consulted and provided support.

All the cases where police officers were to be found without a badge could be considered as a violation of the law. In fact, the whole action was meant as an awareness-raising tool for violators and their possible victims, fixing existing violations and promoting the general idea of civil society watch and of a human rights culture.

**Once again, these are only a few examples among many others. And you, what do you do to support the human rights movement?**