


**HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION**  
HIGH LEVEL OVERVIEW OF HRE INSTRUMENTS, MECHANISMS  
TO BE CONSIDERED IN CENTRAL ASIA

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# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S APPROACH TO HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

Human rights education (HRE) is one of Amnesty International's core objectives and is at the heart of its work.

## Amnesty defines Human Rights Education and Training as follows

(based on the UN Declaration for Human Rights Education and Training):

Human Rights Education can be defined as any learning, education, training or information efforts aimed at building a universal culture of human rights.

Human Rights Education encompasses:

- Knowledge - learning about human rights and human rights mechanisms
- Values, attitudes and behaviour - developing values and reinforcing attitudes and behaviour which uphold human rights
- Skills to take action - acquiring skills to apply human rights in a practical way in daily life and taking action to defend and promote human rights.

Amnesty International advocates for a holistic approach to high-quality human rights education in national, regional and international policies and educational systems. This includes:

International cooperation among various stakeholders, such as national human rights institutions, schools, and universities, student and teacher exchanges, is crucial to the dissemination of best practices and methodologies.

It is important that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can participate in delivering human rights education both in formal and non-formal settings. NGOs, especially rights-based ones, often can encourage students to take an active role in defending human rights in local communities, thus providing a necessary link between theory and practice.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In 2017, Amnesty International's Human Rights Education Network reached around 1.5 million people in more than 200 countries, 90% of them being young people. Educational methodologies used by Amnesty International are participatory, learner-centred and strongly linked to empowerment to speak up and take action to defend one's human rights. We carry out HRE in formal, non-formal, online, offline and blended-learning utilising Education Technologies (EdTech).

# INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION INSTRUMENTS, MECHANISMS AND APPROACHES

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are obliged under international human rights law to ensure that education is aimed at strengthening respect for human rights. Guiding documents that set out the standards for HRE to encompass principles of peace, non-discrimination, equality, justice, respect for human dignity:

- UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training
- World Programme for Human Rights Education and accompanying Plans of Action

The right to education that promotes human rights and fundamental freedoms can also be found in multiple international conventions and covenants, including article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on the Rights of the Child developed the concept in its very first set of General Comments.

Other standards can be found in:

- the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women;
- the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;
- the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families; and
- the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights obliges state parties to “strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” through education they provide<sup>2</sup>. In 1990, the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, the most widely ratified treaty in the world, provided a solid foundation for the various programmes of human rights education across the globe<sup>3</sup>. Its article 29 (1) (b) states that education of the child should be directed to the development of respect for human rights and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the UN<sup>4</sup>. The UN Committee that oversees its implementation underlined that, although HRE should provide information on the content of the treaties, it should start with a reflection on human rights values in daily life and human rights standards implemented in practice in communities.

In 2011, the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training was adopted by the General Assembly and it established an overarching framework for integrating HRE into national policy and practice.

Regionally, the Organisation for the Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) framework is relevant for all five countries in Central Asia. The OSCE commitments explicitly affirm the necessary and important nature of human rights education. Participating states agreed to “encourage in schools (...) the promotion and protection of human rights” and “to design effective human rights related curricula and courses for students of all levels (...) as well as those attending military, police and public service schools”<sup>5</sup>. OSCE Guidelines on HRE for Secondary School Systems offer participating states a comprehensive way on how to roll out HRE including core competencies, curricula, evaluation, and teachers support<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> <http://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2fPPRiCAqKb7yhSiQqI8gX5Zxh0cQqSRzx6Ze%2f9ZHeLGwBpr0TgNk7n2KwvLTyUpYZrr02J%2f7DofFSXC163SyvWMYMe2Uzx3UWwmY%2bEdPniS4vfn%2f9OXI938X>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/14310?download=true>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.osce.org/odihr/93969>

# HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION – A RESPONSE TO CHALLENGES IN THE REGION

HRE is increasingly recognised by governments and civil society organisations as a key and **effective response to some challenges of the modern world, first of all, “violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism”**<sup>7</sup>. HRE plays a crucial role in teaching young people critical thinking, how to verify facts and question stereotypes; it creates opportunities for self-reflection and the realisation of young people’s potential as human rights defenders (HRDs).

The UN Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism identified human rights education and training as an effective preventative strategy to address “violent extremism” and promote global peace and security: “Education should include teaching respect for human rights and diversity, fostering critical thinking, promoting media and digital literacy, and developing the behavioural and socioemotional skills that can contribute to peaceful coexistence and tolerance.”<sup>8</sup> Based on these recommendations, HRE as a tool to prevent “violent extremism” was adopted in several regional and national initiatives, for example, the European Union (EU) Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2015-2019)<sup>9</sup> and the Foreign Policy Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Extremism<sup>10</sup> in Switzerland.

Establishment of comprehensive HRE at various national levels also **supports the legitimization of the work of HRDs**. A rollback of human rights across all the regions, with a clampdown on freedom of expression and peaceful protest, poses a serious threat to activists and HRDs. HRE is effective at countering narratives against HRDs, especially if local activists are involved in formal or non-formal educational activities with local children and can lead by example. Communities equipped with knowledge about, and skills to defend human rights, are generally safer spaces for human rights defenders and rights-based organisations.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/the-state-of-citizenship-in-europe-e-publication/168072b3cd>

<sup>8</sup> A/70/674

<sup>9</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/eu-policy/action-plan-human-rights-and-democracy-2015-2019\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/eu-policy/action-plan-human-rights-and-democracy-2015-2019_en)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.news.admin.ch/NSBSubscriber/message/attachments/43587.pdf>

# HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION DEVELOPMENTS IN CENTRAL ASIA

There is evidence that some countries in Central Asia, primarily Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, are increasingly receptive to the inclusion of HRE in policies and education systems. For example, the Educational Development Strategy 2012-2020 developed in **Kyrgyzstan** includes as one of learners' outcomes "the ability to share the values of human rights and freedoms, gender equality, respect of cultural, ethnic and political diversity"<sup>11</sup>. In recent years **Kazakhstan**, **Kyrgyzstan**, and **Tajikistan** have included human rights in curricula of educational establishments attached to the Prosecutor's Office, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice<sup>12</sup>. Human Rights Ombudspersons throughout the region are active in delivering their obligations on HRE, though usually they do not have capacity to run long-term courses. In **Tajikistan** for example, the office of the Ombudsperson developed the National HRE Programme 2013-2020. In higher education, human rights as a subject is present in several legal disciplines in all five countries. In **Kyrgyzstan**, introductory training on human rights is mandatory for those pursuing careers in education<sup>13</sup>.

While these initiatives are positive steps towards the inclusion of HRE in national curricula, they do not represent comprehensive national systems of HRE with requisite overall strategies, appropriate training of teachers and trainers, and adequate follow-up of student evaluation.

## LACK OF HOLISTIC PROVISION OF HRE IN CENTRAL ASIA

A comprehensive HRE agenda for achieving target 4.7 of the *UN Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) is something that is missing in many regions of the world, including in Central Asia.<sup>14</sup> This target is set to "to ensure by 2030 that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education... on human rights".

At the national level, specific indicators to measure progress should be created, disseminated and monitored. The challenge of allocating necessary resources for HRE should be addressed by all interested parties.

Members of civil society should play a key role in ensuring the provision of high-quality HRE. They must be given sufficient latitude to participate in this process and representatives of marginalised groups, such as ethnic and linguistic minority groups must be included.

## INSUFFICIENT HRE IN SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULA

*Few countries in Central Asia have HRE components in their secondary school curricula.* Recently, **Kazakhstan** included an optional course on the "Basics of Human Rights" for Year 10 students for 34 academic hours per year<sup>15</sup>. **Kyrgyzstan** reported to the UN that it has mandatory courses on human rights principles and protection mechanisms in secondary school<sup>16</sup> though, as noted below, there is concern that the content of these subjects does not adequately reflect key HRE competencies. It is only in 2017 that the Ombudsperson in **Turkmenistan** urged parliament to consider adopting a National Action Plan on Human Rights Education and Awareness-Raising, which would ensure HRE in all aspects of public life.

HRE should be mainstreamed in all spheres of the educational sector. At the same time, a number of OSCE commitments, all relevant to the five Central Asian republics, have acknowledged the importance of targeting HRE at secondary school students. The schooling sector of children from 10 to 14 years of age is a prime target for HRE, as identified by the UN Declaration on HRE and Training and regional human rights institutions.

Advocating for the inclusion of human rights in national school curricula must always go hand in hand with the provision of **sufficient resources for training teachers** and the development of high-quality textbooks. If teachers and trainers are not ready to explain the difference between a right-holder and a duty-bearer, cannot themselves identify human rights violations or abuses or give relevant examples, the adoption of HRE curricula may negatively influence the respect for human rights in the country.

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<sup>11</sup> Educational Development Strategy 2012-2020 (II (1) (3) of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan

<sup>12</sup> Kazakhstan submission to UPR A/HRC/14/10 and Kyrgyzstan statement at High-level panel on HRE A/HRC/35/6 (para 37) in 2017, Ombudsman of Tajikistan report

<sup>13</sup> Kyrgyzstan statement at High-level panel on HRE A/HRC/35/6 in 2017 (para 36)

<sup>14</sup> And its global indicator – the extent to which ... education for sustainable development and human rights are mainstreamed at all levels in (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.adilet.gov.kz/ru/node/33114>

<sup>16</sup> Summary of the High-Level Panel Discussion on the Implementation of the UN Declaration on HRE and Training: Good Practices and Challenges (14 September 2016), para 35. A/HRC/35/6

## QUALITY OF HRE

HRE may be introduced in national curricula under various names and within different subjects, for example, as Citizenship Education. Moreover, states usually integrate HRE in their education systems in three different ways: as a separate mandatory or optional subject; through specific “carrier subjects”, for example, Social Studies; or in a cross-cutting manner, for example, through Foreign Languages, Geography or Political Studies. The name given to the subject and the method of delivery do not affect the quality of education if the modules reflect HRE core competences<sup>17</sup>, some of which are:

- Knowledge and understanding of human rights, not only as legal standards and norms, but also as the values that underpin them.
- Attitudes, including compassion for those affected by human rights violations and abuses, and confidence in claiming human rights.
- Skills, such as identifying human rights violations and abuses from an array of public problems and distinguishing between duty-bearers and rights-holders.

In 2017, **Kyrgyzstan** informed the UN High-Level Panel on HRE that human rights education in the country starts in pre-school with a programme called “Learning the Environment”. Pre-school children are taught about their human rights and their responsibilities in interacting with their peers and adults<sup>18</sup>. Considering that children are rights-holders, not duty-bearers, the focus on responsibilities raises the question as to whether these subjects are properly rights-based. The Kyrgyzstani authorities also mentioned that one of the subjects of secondary school curricula for Year 9 and partially for Year 10, is called “Humans and Society”, and includes legal topics. The latter does not clarify, however, as to whether there is a human rights component in lesson plans for this subject.

There seems to be similar confusion with secondary school curricula in **Uzbekistan**. The country’s report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and its specific obligations under Article 29 (2) to ensure human rights education stated that “one of the goals of education is to create on-going law-awareness”<sup>19</sup>.

*It is important not to confuse the study of law, knowledge of citizens’ rights and obligations and activities aimed at personal growth with Human Rights Education, the latter being “learning activities aimed at promoting universal respect for and observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms”.* Though each of these could be part of a coherent and comprehensive HRE framework, taken separately they may not reflect the core competencies of HRE and thus are unable to fully address the challenges modern society in the region faces.

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<sup>17</sup> See OSCE Guidelines on HRE for Secondary School Systems (OSCE/ODIHR, 2012)

<sup>18</sup> High-level Panel, Kyrgyzstan statement, A/HRC/35/6 (para 35)

<sup>19</sup> Report of Uzbekistan to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (para 866)