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**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL SUBMISSION
TO THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE: DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP AND HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION
CHARTER REVIEW (2017 TO 2021)**

INTRODUCTION

Amnesty International welcomes this opportunity to provide input to the five-year review of the state of implementation of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education. Human rights education and training (HRE) is one of Amnesty International's core objectives and is at the heart of the organisation's work. In 2021, Amnesty's HRE Network reached over 4 million people and led more than 728 thousand supporters to take action to defend human rights in 212 countries and territories, 86% of them being young people.

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

- Ensuring international cooperation among various stakeholders, such as national human rights institutions, schools, and universities, student and teacher exchanges, as this is crucial to the dissemination of best practices and methodologies.
- It is imperative 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.

CHALLENGES

In the last few years, we have been witnessing an increase in legal and policy restrictions on HRE such as banning HRE in schools, restricting access of NGOs to schools to conduct HRE, censorship of HRE (e.g., in sexuality education, LGBTI, gender, racism, etc). If the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has impacted HRE severely, the impact of Russia's war in Ukraine and beyond is unfathomable and has already led to a human rights crisis of unimaginable proportions – with dramatic consequences for HRE.

We substantiate these challenges with a few examples seen from Amnesty's HRE work in Europe. These examples are by no way exhaustive of the length and breadth of HRE challenges in the region. But they provide a flavor of the urgency to rectify this by increasing HRE efforts in the region.

Belarus – Though Belarus is not the member-state of the Council of Europe, it is a contracting party to 11 Council of Europe treaties, and in the last CoE Action Plan for Belarus (2019-2021) the state agreed “to promote human rights education for young people, develop democratic and inclusive environments in schools and enhance dialogue between national authorities and civil society, while paying particular attention to gender equality”. The Action Plan also claims that “Belarus participates actively in activities related to the implementation of the EDC/HRE Charter principles”¹. Nevertheless, we can see that there is a near-total destruction of the human rights sector, including human rights education in schools, universities and other institutions. According to our partners, the few HRE projects in place before the current human rights crisis which started in the summer of 2021, are no longer operational in any form. Hundreds of human rights defenders, including human rights educators and activists promoting general principles of human rights are **persecuted**,

1 168098f1bd (coe.int) p 24

silenced and often imprisoned. Moreover, most NGOs which were promoting HRE across the country have since been liquidated². Since the beginning of the human rights crisis in Belarus, students and teachers have been at risk of various forms of persecution, including expulsion from universities, dismissals from working places, arrests, prosecution, lengthy prison sentences and even torture and ill-treatment. An example is the case of **Katsyaryna Vinnikava**, a law student from the Belarusian State University who was sentenced to 15 days of detention after giving a graduation speech honoring human rights and the rule of law. Hundreds of students have been persecuted while participating in peaceful protests³. Such a crackdown on students and teachers for promoting human rights principles in the country directly leads to **delegitimising HRE efforts in Belarus and has a corrosive effect for the state of HRE in the region.**

Russia - HRE in Russia is sparse in both formal and non-formal educational sectors. Although some elements of human rights education are included in the curriculum, it is minimal and over-legalized. We already see those international providers **working on HRE in and with Russia are labelled as non-desirables** (the Council of Europe School of Political Studies, Prague Civil Society Centre, etc). Russian-based **NGOs labelled as foreign agents cannot have access to educational systems.** The liquidation of Memorial (a historical and educational centre) and the closure of its 20-year-old educational programme for schools, where students developed research projects on family history, the history of GULAG and the Stalin repressions are indicative. Since 2013, Russia's notorious Anti-Homosexual Propaganda Bill has outlawed all 'propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships among minors expressed in the dissemination of information', **effectively banning all educational and raising awareness activities about the rights of LGBTI persons**⁴. In March 2021, the Russian Federation President signed a new law that obliges all governmental educational institutions, including schools and universities, to seek approval for non-formal, international, and collaborations with foreign entities. All non-formal initiatives would have to be pre-approved by the government, effectively introducing a censorship mechanism. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Non-Formal Education ("Prosveshchenie") would be in charge of monitoring any "incorrect information about historical, national, religious or cultural traditions of the nations". Such a necessity **can effectively block non-governmental organisations access to educational systems, making projects on various topics, including human rights, impossible.**

Hungary – In Hungary, a "Russian-style" propaganda law contravenes human rights and threatens LGBTIQ+ people⁵. On 26 May 2021, MPs of the governing party Fidesz submitted a bill to the Parliament on "Harsher sentencing for paedophile criminal offences and set-up a criminal registry for perpetrators of such offences". Without public consultation, on 10 June 2021 the Parliament's Legislative Committee submitted a series of amendments containing discriminatory provisions targeting the members of the LGBTI community. Despite widespread domestic and international criticism, the governing majority in Parliament adopted the law and it came into force on the 8th of July. **The ban on depiction or discussion of diverse gender identities and sexual orientation in schools, television, and advertising in Hungary violates several human rights, including the rights to freedom of expression, to equality and non-discrimination, and to education.** The provisions of the new law differentiate between employees and partners of educational institutions providing specific programmes and when these programmes are provided by others, for example, civil society organizations and external individual experts. If the programme is provided by others, only "a person or organisation registered by the body designated by law shall be allowed to hold, in the framework of the regular curriculum or other activities organized for the students". The person conducting an unregistered lecture, training or workshop and the head of the institution could be held liable for committing a newly introduced petty offence which is punishable by fine or community service. The legal changes followed a communication campaign that had lasted several months and attacked educational programmes that raised awareness on LGBTI related topics. The programme called 'Melegség és Megismerés' (Getting to know LGBTI people), provided by two Hungarian LGBTI NGOs, Labrisz and Szimpozion Associations, had become the primary target of these attacks in the government-aligned media. **Amnesty International's own human rights education programme was also heavily smeared.** We saw that some school principals and teachers were afraid to invite Amnesty and other LGBTIQ programmes to their schools. The law does not provide sufficient clarity about the criteria for the registration of the programme service providers, which leads to a lack of legal certainty and allows for discretionary decisions by the authorities. If school programme providers are permitted or denied the registration in an unclear, arbitrary and non-transparent way, children will not have

2 Belarus: Sweeping closure of dozens of NGOs as the crackdown on civil society continues (amnesty.org)

3 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/05/belarus-university-students-expelled-from-universities-and-imprisoned-for-peaceful-protest/>

4 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/12/former-soviet-states-entrenching-homophobia-and-demoralizing-lgbti-rights-activists/>

5 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur27/4492/2021/en/>

access to information and support that may be vital as a part of their comprehensive sexuality education. Consequently, their right to access quality education under international human rights law will be violated.

Poland - In 2021, the Ministry of Education in Poland proposed a bill according to which government-appointed officials would be given greater powers to appoint and dismiss school headteachers. They would also have more control over which external organisations are allowed into schools. **That would mean the schools will have to obtain permission from a government-appointed superintendent before entering cooperation with any external organisation.** So far, non-governmental organisations were the main force behind HRE projects and workshops in public schools. The bill has been vetoed by the President, however, the President explicitly stated being in favour of some of the provisions of the new law. There is still a risk that the modified law will be proposed again which will result in obstructed access for non-governmental organisations to HRE in schools. We also see threats to sexuality education. In 2019, a regressive bill on sexuality education was proposed by Members of Parliament⁶. In a country where sexual and reproductive rights are already extremely limited, education about sexuality is crucial to help young people decide on issues such as consent, contraception and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. As of April 2020, Members of Parliament voted to send the bills to parliamentary committees, and this has not proceeded since. However, **the threat to sexuality education in Poland remains serious and the proposed law, although not implemented, already has a freezing effect on teachers and schools.**

Turkey - In Turkey, we have seen **smear campaigns against human rights educators as human rights defenders.** Smear campaigns are seen in the press, social media, especially referring to education on LGBTI-related topics and the Istanbul Convention. Over the last few years, Amnesty Turkey's publication on gender discrimination (Feminist Alphabet) was targeted with threats of punishment and prosecution against the editorial team on social media. Amnesty has been unofficially prevented from carrying out HRE activities in public schools for a long time. **The few private schools that invite Amnesty are reporting they feel under pressure.** It is almost impossible to sustain HRE work in state schools or even in co-operation with government related departments and ministries. Teachers use educational materials in the classrooms without administrative permission, but they do so at the risk of administrative investigation. Apart from teachers, Amnesty Turkey can also reach public officials through trainings organized in partnership with their professional organisations and unions as it is not possible to organize trainings directly with public institutions.

In addition, the **Covid-19 pandemic** has highlighted and aggravated existing threats to human rights, from the rights to life and health to the right to education and many more. Many states have failed to prioritize effective delivery of HRE amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. Lack of alternatives to in-person training programmes in many countries has excluded millions who have unequal access to technology. In 2021, Covid-19 continued to have an impact on Amnesty HRE network in Europe and Central Asia, especially on formal education projects, although not as strongly felt as in 2020. Projects continued to use a variety of digital alternatives to reach their audiences, however there are some signs of digital fatigue, with projects reporting challenges in retaining beneficiaries throughout longer digital programmes.

In these existing and emerging human rights crises, **young people** in particular are **facing a growing list of challenges, from intersectional discrimination to arbitrary restrictions on their freedom of expression, assembly and association.** And this comes at a time when young people are increasingly demanding action to address the growing human rights emergency as result of climate change.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S HRE NETWORK IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

Europe and Central Asia is the region with the largest number of projects and reporting Amnesty entities, with a total of 85 projects from 26 entities. The region reaches a sizeable proportion of youth through HRE, with over 91% of people reached in the region in 2020 being youth. 46 of the projects reported are conducted within the formal education setting with teachers, children and youth being the key target groups for the region. In 2020, Amnesty entities in Europe and Central Asia reached 473,375 people via HRE project in formal and non-formal settings⁷.

Covid-19 & human rights – Amnesty Human Rights Academy

Amnesty's Human Rights Academy is a multilingual, free, online learning space that aims to provide quality HRE for all. In 2020, we saw an example of successful rapid response HRE with the production of a 15-minute microlearning course

6 Poland: Law criminalizing sexuality education “recklessly retrogressive” - Amnesty International

7 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol32/4026/2021/en/>

on COVID-19 and human rights. The course outlines the human rights implications of COVID-19, describes states' human rights obligations in relation to the pandemic and leads learners to promote social solidarity and response to COVID-19 that is compliant with human rights. 2020 was a significant year for the Human Rights Academy as the pandemic led to increased global growth in online learning, resulting in exponential growth for the Academy. By the end of the year, the Academy had over 200,000 registered learners, was available in 25 languages and offered 84 courses. In 2020 itself, we had 39 courses, from which five were new, and 34 were translations of existing courses.

Human Rights Workout – gamification of the European Court of Human Rights caselaw

Human Rights Workout⁸ is an interactive micro-learning platform which provides young learners with gamified cases of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). It was released in 2019 and as of December 2021, Human Rights Workout reached 10,000 learners. The platform has three interactive modules in English, Ukrainian, Romanian, Italian, Slovak and Russian. In the first module, based on the 2017 ECHR case *Lashmankin and others v. Russia* learners navigate a panorama of small-town Russia and the bureaucratic obstacles and excuses protestors face. It was drawn directly from real-life responses from Russian authorities as protestors tried to organise a peaceful assembly. The second micro-module is based on *Identoba and others v. Georgia*, in which complainants participated in a peaceful rally against homophobia in Tbilisi in 2012. The protestors had requested state protection from counterdemonstrators but were severely beaten with the acquiescence of police officers. This module deals with the positive obligation of the state to protect peaceful protestors. In November 2020, Amnesty International released a third online educational module that helped thousands of learners to understand the obstacles rape survivors face and the importance of consent. The module is based on the emblematic *EB v Romania* case of the European Court of Human Rights, which unpacks how the issue of sexual violence intersects with human rights.

Integration of HRE in the new curriculum in Ukraine

Since 2015, a new curriculum for Grades 1-12 has been created in Ukraine with the active participation of Amnesty Ukraine. One of the crucial features is that civic education and human rights are mandatory and cross-cutting components which means that they should be included in all educational subjects. The development of civic competencies and human rights competencies is based on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education and the Competence Framework for a Culture of Democracy.

HRE Advocacy in Central Asia – integrating HRE into the core subject standard for schools

In 2021, Amnesty carried out a **mapping of the state of HRE in Kyrgyzstan**⁹ and organised a multi-stakeholder discussion of its findings. This project **led to the official acknowledgment** of gaps in delivering human rights education and the **commitment** to integrate HRE into core school curriculum. Amnesty International works with officials of several affiliates of the Kyrgyz Ministry of Education on the holistic integration of HRE into the revised standard for the core subject in Kyrgyzstan secondary schools.

Other highlights:

Me and You Together (Amnesty Greece) - Me and You together is a nationwide education project in Human Rights Education for Secondary Schools in Greece. The Ministry of Education and Religion approved the educational material to be one of the main training tools for teachers and educators for HRE in schools, through the national educational platform. The project combines the training of teachers and educators and training for parents. In 2020 Amnesty Greece more than doubled the number of schools in which the project is carried out, increasing from 70 schools to 153, reaching over 8,000 students, 600 teachers and 300 parents. The project aims to foster a deeper understanding of human rights while promoting the development of a culture of respect for diversity, an understanding of sexual orientation and freedom of choice, accessibility, and inclusion, by providing students with advocacy tools and safeguarding methods of their rights.

“Justice Warriors” HRE project about Human Rights Defenders in Schools (Amnesty Denmark) - The Justice Warriors is an HRE project based on learning about people's experiences as human rights defenders with the aim of inspiring students and developing their ability to engage and take action themselves. Carried out as a pilot project aimed at students aged 12-16 years old and their teachers, Amnesty Denmark developed materials for students with case stories from five Human Rights Defenders, a teachers' guide, a teacher Facebook page and held a series of school events together with the

8 <https://www.eduworkout.org/en>

9 Kyrgyzstan: Mapping the state of human rights education in formal secondary education in Kyrgyzstan - Amnesty International

American LGBT activist Jamie Nabozny. As a result, some students expressed a positive change in their well-being, and in one school an anti-bully group was set up.

The Start the Change! (Amnesty Italy and partners) – Start the Change project¹⁰ was active from 2017 to 2020 and aimed to raise the awareness of young Europeans on the United Nations 2030 Agenda, the program of action for people, the planet and prosperity signed in September 2015 by governments of 193 UN member countries. Made in collaboration with teachers and educators, Start the Change! has implemented an innovative educational model in order to increase the involvement of young people within their communities. At the same time, the project strengthened the network between schools, civil society organizations and local authorities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Amnesty International believes it would be important for the Council of Europe, as it reviews the implementation of the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE) and decides on its future work, to effectively address the following challenges to HRE:

- I. **HRE in hostile and conflict environments** - Considering the devastating impact of the war in Ukraine to youth and civil society in Ukraine and neighbouring countries, and the ongoing crackdown on civil society, it is crucial that future programmes of the CoE focus on **ensuring support to youth movements, in particular in Ukraine, Belarus, Russia**, where the prospects are grim. This support should include selecting more participants from the affected countries for international events, especially from Ukraine, accommodating translations of events and outputs into Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Russian languages, financing activities of the NGOs and supporting with humanitarian visas if necessary. Also, given the departure of Russia from Council of Europe, it is crucial **for the CoE not to exclude Russia's civil society, HRDs, educators and academics from its educational and youth programmes**. In the long term, Council of Europe should **focus these educational and youth programmes on how to monitor and document human rights violations, and transitional justice with an emphasis on human rights abuses**.
- II. **HRE and thematic priorities** – Given the largest refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War, and the unprecedented crackdown on civil society in a number of CoE states, the Council of Europe should prioritize the following thematic areas when developing educational and youth programmes: **the rights of refugees and migrants, freedom of expression and the right to protest, women's rights and the right to be free from sexual violence** including in the war context.
- III. **HRE in formal education** – The Council of Europe should **address the lack of access to formal education for NGOs** specializing on HRE/EDC and make an effort to encourage national state bodies to be inclusive and open for collaborations with youth and human rights NGOs, especially when developing new educational standards or reviewing the current standards. The Council of Europe should organise a regional summit to hold governments to account on the implementation of the EDC/HRE Charter and **ensure a holistic and meaningful integration of human rights and EDC into curricula**, exposing both challenges and successes from across the region.
- IV. **HRE and marginalised groups** – The Council of Europe should adopt 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, for example, girls from rural neighbourhoods, refugees with disabilities and LGBTIQ people from racialized communities, etc.
- V. **HRE for and with young people** - It is critical that **young people are enabled to lead the ideation, design and implementation of HRE programmes focusing on addressing major global human rights concerns**.

¹⁰ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/education/2021/03/start-the-change-project/>