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DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN FINLAND

In co-operation:

IHMISOIKEUSKESKUS
MÄNNISKORÄTTSCENTRET
HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE



MINISTRY OF JUSTICE
FINLAND



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



UNESCO Chair on
Values, Dialogue and
Human Rights

WHAT IS DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION?

Democracy and human rights education gives knowledge, skills and attitudes for promoting a culture of respecting human rights and democracy. They promote participation in society, interaction skills in diversifying society and empower persons to respect rights of others and their own. Important contents and values are equity, gender equality, societal awareness, respecting diversity, critical thinking and constitutional state.





Great steps have been taken in Finland during the past few years in terms of developing democracy and human rights education. The issue has been promoted by officials, institutions of higher education and non-governmental organisations. This brochure describes the key measures and responses to development challenges. It also provides a list of resources on democracy and human rights education.

FIRM LEGAL BASE

In Finland, the Constitution and international human rights conventions and declarations safeguard not only fundamental and human rights but also our democracy. The Constitution also obliges public authorities to protect fundamental and human rights. The legislation on equality and non-discrimination requires institutions of education to operate in an equal and non-discriminatory manner. In addition to national legislation, The UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (2011) supports human rights education.

HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY AND THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) is the foundation of teachers' professional ethics. The principles of democracy and human rights education permeate the fundamentals of all curricula, from early childhood education to upper-secondary education. The fundamentals of early and basic education place an additional emphasis on the responsibilities of the teacher in addition to values and broad-based, transversal subject skills. Broad-based skills are a key component of the operative culture of schools where democracy and human rights education can be provided.

It is important that teachers are able to prevent discrimination while promoting equality. Schools face challenges relating to discrimination, racism, gender segregation and equal access to education relating, for example, to special needs, disability and other reasons.

Together with robust legislation, the curricula provide an excellent environment in which to develop teaching that respects equality, non-discrimination, human rights and democracy.



FUNDAMENTAL VALUES IN EDUCATION

Trust, autonomy, respect for human dignity, equality and democracy are central values of the education system in Finland.

TEACHER EDUCATION

Previous investigations have shown that democracy and human rights education in the Finnish teacher education is unsystematic. Between 2016 and 2017, the University of Jyväskylä coordinated a development project for democracy and human rights education in teacher education, which yielded a national network of higher education as well as new practices around Finland. Universities of applied sciences promoted participation and human rights based approach in a project *Toimintaa ja kohtaamisia (Action and encounters) 2017-19*. They published a [website supporting teachers](#). [The Human Rights, Democracy, Values and Dialogue in Education](#) project 2018–2020 was launched in cooperation with the Human Rights Centre, the Ministry of Justice and the University of Helsinki [UNESCO Chair on Values, Dialogue and Human Rights in Education](#). The project also received funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture (MinEdu). The project coordinated an extensive cooperation network of 14 teacher education units, governmental bodies and NGOs.



EDUCATION IS NEEDED

A total of 96% of teacher students participating in pilot studies thought that democracy and human rights education should be a part of teacher training.

CHALLENGES

Democracy and human rights education is unsystematic and left to individual teachers

Democracy and human rights education is disconnected to its legislative basis

Teacher education is “full” and there’s a lot of competing interests and wishful thinking

Who bears responsibility – is it the government, NGOs, universities?

MEASURES AND SOLUTIONS

Investigate possibility for national harmonisation while respecting the autonomy of universities

Pilot studies linked to legislative basis and practices tested around Finland

Restructure existing content, not just add new elements to studies

Seek ways of carrying responsibility together and in cooperation



“A conscious understanding of human rights and democracy education is a strong guideline for everything we do, and helps alleviate insecurity if we need to, for example, address problems.”

The project responded to the stated challenges by designing a web-based special course on democracy and human rights education from the perspective of education professionals. The project also studied the current situation in Finland and compiled materials onto the website of the Finnish National Agency for Education (Democracy, human rights and participation, in Finnish and Swedish) to support teaching and learning.

Early education teacher student

CO-OPERATION

In Finland there is a tradition of cooperation with public authorities, NGOs and institutions of higher education to promote democracy and human rights education.



NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

Non-governmental organisations (NGO) have a long history of working to promote democracy and human rights education by providing resources to teachers and by influencing society.

Ihmisoikeudet.net is a website supporting human rights education. Information has been collected in NGO co-operation and it is currently maintained by

The Finnish League of Human Rights.

Fingo is NGO platform for 300 Finnish civil society organizations. Fingo has coordinated the global citizenship education network since 2000 and for example, **Mailma koulussa** (“The world at school”) seminar at teacher education around Finland. In the seminar, NGOs have organised continuing education for teachers through workshops and lectures. Teacher training cooperation has been ongoing since 2009.

Opinkirjo supports schools in democracy education. For example, their **Youth Parliament**, organised jointly with the Finnish Parliament, has an attendance of 350 pupils from around Finland. In the event, the participants serve as pupil representatives and journalists. **The Finnish National Youth Council** Allianssi organises a politics week, with more than 350 schools participating in 2018. **UNICEF** has piloted a school model based on **children’s rights**.

PUBLIC OFFICIALS

The Finnish National Agency for Education is in charge of the curriculum planning processes during which representatives of various organisations are heard. The Agency for Education operates in the important space between MinEdu and working teachers and schools. The Agency organises an annual democracy and participation forum and invites representatives from NGOs, institutions of higher education and public authorities to discuss their best practices. The Agency is involved in international cooperation, for example, with the Council of Europe, while serving in expert networks and translating materials for schools.

The Human Rights Centre has been an important promoter of human rights education in Finland ever since its establishment 2012. The Centre’s broad baseline study into the starting levels of human rights education in 2014 built the foundation for development and further measures. The Human Rights Centre has produced an expert lecture series on fundamental and human rights. The Human Rights Centre conducts various forms of cooperation with many different organisations, and has provided training, for example, for judges and education sector leadership in Finland.

The Ministry of Education and Culture launched the investigation and has supported development projects in teacher education. Other ministries, such as the **Ministry of Justice and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs** have provided support in the development of global, democracy and human rights education. Ministry of Justice has coordinated actions related to youth participation and democracy and human rights education in the Finnish Government as part of national democracy politics.

“Is there anything more important than for Finland in the future to have an active, critical, functioning society that respects human rights?”

Class teacher student



TIMELINE

2012

- The UN issues recommendations to Finland in Universal Peer Review process, such as making human rights education *a mandatory component of teacher training*.
- Finland *rejects* this recommendation, citing the *autonomy of its universities*.



2014

- As a result of investigations by the Human Rights Centre and the Ministry of Education and Culture (MinEdu), Finland's *teacher education on democracy and human rights is deemed unsystematic and in need of improvement*.
- *New national curricula* further emphasise democracy and human rights education.

"At the end these topics are not self-evident. You grow into them, you can learn them. If you follow public discussions, you can see that the need is evident"

Teacher student of adult education

2016-2017

- MinEdu launches a project coordinated at the University of Jyväskylä. A network of 14 units of higher education is created, along with nation-wide practices. At the end of the project, participants call for *continued cooperation, development of web-based material and further boosting the topic by supporting research*.
- The National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights 2017–2019 is adopted, with an emphasis on human rights education. The Democracy Policy Programme supports democracy education.
- In 2017, Finland receives further UN UPR recommendations on HRE and accepts them.
- The Human Rights Centre publishes an expert lecture series on fundamental and human rights.

2018-2020

- The UNESCO Chair on Values, Dialogue and Human Rights in Education 2018–2021 is granted to Arto Kallioniemi at the University of Helsinki.
- The Human Rights, Democracy, Values and Dialogue in Education project, coordinated at the University of Helsinki, is launched to promote cooperation in teacher education, develop a pilot course as well as to collect and publish related materials. The project report is published in 2019.
- Democracy and human rights education is part of National Democracy Program 2025.



THE FUTURE

- Fully establishing best practices and continuing cooperation, bolstering the basis on research and ensuring equal democracy and human rights education nationally..

