

# Unit 4

## Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education – A short history of the Council of Europe approach<sup>26</sup>

### 1. Background

The Council of Europe, which is the oldest European organisation, was set up in 1949 in the aftermath of the Second World War. Its primary aim is to protect and promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe. The Council of Europe is active in many fields, including culture and education. Over 50 years, it has launched a number of co-operation projects in education in order to promote a culture of democracy and human rights throughout Europe.

At the beginning of the 1990s, as a result of the accession process of the new democracies of central and eastern Europe, the Council of Europe underwent a considerable transformation: the Organisation's membership more than doubled within a period of 10 years. In such times of change, more systematic work on democracy learning was needed. In 1997, a new project, Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC), was launched by the heads of state and government of the Council of Europe. This project has since grown considerably, acquired a strong human rights dimension and is now called the Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights (EDC/HRE) project.

By launching this project, the governments of European states acknowledged that people must learn how to become democratic citizens, that they are not born with these skills. At the end of the 20th century, European societies were faced with many problems, such as political apathy, migration movements resulting in increased social diversity, environmental threats and increasing violence. EDC/HRE was seen as a contribution to solving such issues. EDC/HRE is about promoting concrete participation in public life throughout one's life, about responsibility, solidarity, mutual respect and dialogue. It is in the unique pan-European setting of the Council of Europe that the best experts in the field from all over Europe have met over the last 13 years to work on this issue.

### 2. Outcomes of the EDC/HRE project

The first years of the project were devoted to defining concepts. Several basic publications were issued on the necessary strategies and skills for practising democratic citizenship. In 2002, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a Recommendation on education for democratic citizenship (Recommendation Rec(2002)12). This was the first political text issued on this topic at the European level (with the second major one being the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education,<sup>27</sup> see below). It specifies that EDC should become “a priority objective of educational policy-making and reforms”.<sup>28</sup>

In 2002, a network of EDC/HRE co-ordinators, which is composed of one person nominated by each member state, was set up in order to facilitate exchange and co-operation among the member states in this field. This network soon became an invaluable asset for the development and promotion of EDC/HRE. Specific projects were implemented in regions such as south-eastern Europe. 2005 was proclaimed the European Year of Citizenship through Education with the slogan “Learning and Living

26. By Ólöf Ólafsdóttir, Acting Director, Council of Europe Directorate of Education and Languages.

27. Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education adopted in the framework of Recommendation (CM/Rec(2010)7 of the Committee of Ministers.

28. Recommendation Rec(2002)12, Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member states on education for democratic citizenship.

Democracy”. The 2005 “Year” was a special moment for raising awareness in member states about EDC/HRE. Almost all member states took part in the “Year” in one way or the other, and the feedback from the various partners has been overwhelmingly positive.

However, it was clear from the beginning that giving education for democratic citizenship and human rights higher priority in education policies in member states is not an easy task, even if the situation varies considerably in different member states. Making EDC/HRE a key objective of education systems implies a new philosophy in terms of methodologies and work organisation. Studies carried out in the framework of the project, including the *All-European Study on EDC Policies*,<sup>29</sup> pointed to a strong need for practical instruments to help bridge policy and practice. Therefore, the preparation of instruments and tools, exchange of good practice and increased co-operation among and within member states were the priorities of the project in 2006-2009. There were three main areas of work: policy development, the training of education professionals and the democratic governance of educational institutions. For all areas the Council of Europe has developed a series of practical instruments like this series of manuals for teachers.

In May 2010, the many years of work outlined above culminated in the adoption of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education adopted in the framework of Recommendation (CM/Rec(2010)7 of the Committee of Ministers by all 47 member states of the Council of Europe). This framework policy document will be an important reference point for all of Europe and will be used as a basis for the Council of Europe’s future work in this field in the coming years.

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29. Birzea et al. (2004), *All-European Study on EDC Policies*, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg.

### 3. Practical instruments

#### 3.1 The EDC/HRE pack

The different tools prepared by the Council of Europe include essential background information on various aspects connected with integration of EDC/HRE in educational systems. The major ones, called the “EDC/HRE Pack”, are the following:

- Tool 1: Policy tool for EDC/HRE: strategic support for decision makers;
- Tool 2: Democratic governance of schools;
- Tool 3: How all teachers can support citizenship and human rights education: a framework for the development of competences;
- Tool 4: Quality assurance of education for democratic citizenship in schools;
- Tool 5: School-community-university partnerships for a sustainable democracy: Education for Democratic Citizenship in Europe and the United States.

These instruments have been developed by experts from the Council of Europe member states on the basis of the feedback and comments received from various target groups including the EDC/HRE co-ordinators. In addition to the EDC/HRE Pack, a host of supplementary material can be found on the Council of Europe website ([www.coe.int/edc](http://www.coe.int/edc)).

These practical instruments prepared by the Council of Europe in the field of EDC/HRE are generic instruments. In other words, it is recognised that they might need to be adapted to the various situations, developed and used as best suits the needs of each country.

#### 3.2 Six volumes on EDC/HRE in school projects, teaching sequences, concepts, methods and models

In many countries, teachers need assistance with the implementation of EDC/HRE. This is why the Council of Europe is also developing a series of manuals for teachers on citizenship and human rights



education. The volumes have been published in partnership with the Zurich University of Teacher Education, International Projects in Education. The Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation co-funded the manuals with the Council of Europe. This book, Volume I, *Educating for democracy – Background materials for teachers*, is the first in this series of six volumes. On the previous page an overview of these six manuals and its different target groups can be seen.

The manuals include lesson plans for all levels of education, with a view to promoting active citizenship based upon participatory and task-based learning in a democratic school community.

The unique feature of these manuals is that they are the outcome of a truly European project. The idea and the first version were developed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where many teachers and educators took part in the manuals' development. The authors and editors of the final version of the manuals come from many European countries and even further afield, and the manuals themselves have been tested and revised by a large number of people of different origins and different sensitivities. We hope that they will be useful to teachers and learners all over Europe.