

# **Reflections on HRE in Norway: Legislation, curriculum and practice**

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2nd of May, 2023, Bratislava.



# Social challenges in school



# The Norwegian Constitution

- In 2014, **amendments** were made to the Norwegian Constitution as part of the bicentennial celebration of the Constitution (1814 – 2014).
- The amendment of **paragraph 109** confirms that “**education shall safeguard the individual’s abilities and needs, and promote respect for democracy, the rule of law and human rights**”.
- This **amendment made HRE a constitutional right** (Osler and Skarra, 2021, p.194).
- The **Constitutional Commission did not recommend changes in the Education Act**, arguing that the amendment of article 109 “only reflected the aims of education enshrined in the purpose clause of the Education Act” (Lile, 2019, p.147).

# The Norwegian Education Act

The purpose clause in the **Education Act**, Section 1-1 states that:

*Education and training must be based on fundamental values in Christian and humanist heritage and traditions, such as respect for human dignity and nature, on intellectual freedom, charity, forgiveness, equality and solidarity, values that also appear in different religions and beliefs and are rooted in human rights.*

- This **formulation equates Christian and humanist values with human rights**, which may exclude students coming from other religious backgrounds (Osler & Skarra, 2021).
- As such, there is **room for improvement in Norwegian educational legislation** for a more inclusive approach to HRE that does not equate Christian and humanist values with human rights.

# The Core Curriculum

- In 2017, the new core curriculum was adopted for primary and secondary education and training in Norway. This document presents the main values and principles for education. **Children's rights are explicitly expressed in the Core Curriculum:**

*Based on human dignity, human rights are an important part of the foundation of our constitutional state. They are based on universal values that apply to all people regardless of who they are, where they come from and where they are. The UN Convention on the rights of the child is also a part of human rights, giving children and young people special protection. The education and training given must comply with human rights, and the pupils must also acquire knowledge about these rights (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.5).*

This document may contribute to make teachers aware of how **education should be rights-based**, although this formulation has been criticized for being very general and without direction for the curriculum (Lile, 2019).

# The subject-specific curriculum: Social studies

In Norway, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training provides national curriculums in each subjects. In social science education for primary and secondary school (SAF01-04), some competence aims are related to HRE, as learners should:

- **Present and give examples of children's rights** in Norway and in the world, and **what children can do when these rights are violated** (2<sup>nd</sup> grade)
- Present human rights and children's rights, and **reflect upon why these rights exist** (4<sup>th</sup> grade)
- Discuss **human worth and equality**, and compare how **human rights have been and are safeguarded** in various countries (7<sup>th</sup> grade)
- Explore and describe how **human rights and indigenous rights** and international agreements and cooperation is of importance for national politics, human lives, equality and worth (10<sup>th</sup> grade)
- Explain **the foundation of human rights** and **explore and give examples of human rights violations nationally or internationally** (11<sup>th</sup> grade, upper secondary school)

## Some reflections on teachers' practice

- Vesterdal's (2016) study among social science teachers portray that Norwegian teachers tend to teach about **human rights violations abroad** rather than human rights violations in Norway.
- In Osler and Skarra's interview study with Norwegian teachers, they find that teachers at times do what they please depending on personal interest, which illustrates **teachers' autonomy** when implementing the curriculum.
- **"Teacher autonomy needs to be matched by a recognition that learners have the right to HRE"** (Osler and Skarra, 2021, p.202).



# Children's rights and teacher education

**The curriculum regulations for Norwegian teacher education include children's rights**, and particularly express the importance of how teacher students should acquire knowledge about violence and abuse targeting children:

*Knowledge of children living in difficult circumstances, including knowledge of violence and sexual abuse against children and young people, of children's and young people's rights in a national and international perspective and on how to take necessary action under current legislation (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2020, p.2).*

# Concluding remarks

- There is **room for improvement** regarding the **Norwegian educational legislation** as Christian and humanist values are equated with human rights.
- There are **good intentions in the Core Curriculum** stating that education should be in concordance with human rights, and in particular children's rights.
- The current **regulations for teacher education are clear about the importance** of how teacher students should acquire knowledge about **children's rights**, and **action-capacity** in particular concerning prevention and protection from violence and child abuse.
- In school, there is **still a gap between rhetoric and practice** concerning ensuring children's rights, and the way in which human rights education is implemented **depends at times on teachers' personal interests** and how they choose to use their **autonomy**.

**Thank you** for your attention.