Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

Report of Austria
Period 2005-2008

Legislation

In place and constantly promoted are binding documents such as

- Civics Education in Schools: Decree on the integral educational principle
- Recommendation No. R (85) 7 on teaching and learning about human rights in schools (Council of Europe)

The focus of the "Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms" is covered by these regulations and the general laws on education.

A milestone on the road to young people's participation in political decision-making was set in Austria in 2007, when the voting age was lowered to 16. As a follow-up, comprehensive measures designed to provide young people with information and to get them involved were introduced. They constitute an important contribution to human rights education and education for democratic citizenship.

Implementation

The implementation of the Recommendation since 2005 is supported through various measures in accordance with the first phase (2005–2009) of the *World Programme for Human Rights Education* and the Democracy Initiative 2007-2008 launched by the Austrian Government.

a) Study on the current situation of human rights education in the school system – A stocktaking exercise prompted by the UN World Programme for Human Rights Education

In compliance with the Plan of Action, the Austrian Ministry of Education submitted an empirical analysis of the current situation of human rights education in the Austrian school system. The study was generated by Raimund Pehm (*time* / Tyrolean Institute for Human Rights and Development Policies) in cooperation with *polis* – Education for Democratic Citizenship at School – at the request of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture. It is based on data on initiatives and projects relating to human rights education in the school system supplied by heads of school throughout Austria. The data were acquired between September and November 2007, and the findings were presented and discussed with representatives of organisations and institutions specialising in human rights education at a round table on 8 May 2008.

The study reveals that Austrian teachers are aware of the importance of human rights education in the school system, but that there is some uncertainty about its core content. According to the author, this is due to the lack of a clear line of demarcation vis-à-vis

neighbouring disciplines. On the other hand, integration into thematic networks (e.g. on education for democratic citizenship or education for sustainable development) is a key element of human rights education.

The topics most frequently addressed under the broad heading of human rights education are contemporary history and National Socialism / the holocaust as well as children's rights and anti-discrimination.

Children's rights figure most prominently in primary schools, while "National Socialism and the holocaust" are dealt with exclusively at secondary level II. Human rights in the strict sense of the term are rarely chosen as a topic.

The regional distribution of relevant programmes is relatively irregular, a fact which may be due to the "infrastructure" available in terms of support measures (service facilities, etc.) The study leaves no doubt about the fact that teachers appreciate "small-scale material" (folders, brochures, magazines, etc.) in printed, manageable, clearly structured and multifunctional form, and that they are much less happy with initial, in-service and continuing training programmes.

The chapter on teaching practice analysed displays trends, accumulations, weaknesses and potentials. Among the development prospects for human rights education in the school system, the author mentions safeguarding of what has been achieved, innovation and tighter networking of regional and supra-regional facilities that provide human rights education.

b) Activities and Material

Award for outstanding projects

A jury, comprising representatives of Amnesty International Austria, of the Austrian Commission for UNESCO and of *polis,* selected especially outstanding examples among the projects analysed in the course of the study mentioned above. The prizes were awarded on International Human Rights Day 2007 (10 December).

Compendium of Good Practices in Human Rights Education

Two examples from Austria were selected for a compendium of international good practice examples of human rights education, education for democratic citizenship and education for mutual respect in the school system, issued at the request of OSCE/ODIHR, the Council of Europe, UNHCHR and UNESCO (see www.hrea.org > Global Human Rights Education Network > Good practices). Included in the compendium is the series of workshops for school classes entitled *Recht hat jedeR?! – Trainings zum alltäglichen Umgang miteinander* [Everybody's Right?! Coaching in day-to-day social interaction] and *SchulKOMPASS*, online support material for *KOMPASS* – Manual for Human Rights Education.

Compasito in German

In order to meet the need for teaching material identified in primary schools, COMPASITO (Manual on Human Rights Education for Children, published in English by the Council of Europe in 2008) will be translated into German in cooperation with partners also to mark the 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights for the child.

Manual "Democratic governance of schools"
The manual issued by the Council of Europe in English was made available in German ("Demokratische Schulgestaltung in Theorie und Praxis") and is constantly promoted and disseminated by various means.

Manual "Understanding Human Rights"
The second edition of the training material was distributed in Austrian schools (Information: http://www.etc-graz.at/typo3/index.php?id=712)

Workshops for school classes
- Rights for Everyone?! – Training programmes on how to get along with everyone in daily life
- Workshops on Human Rights, Children's Rights, Women's Rights, Gender Equality, Voting at 16 and Democracy, …

Examples of Action
- Human Rights Days 2005
- EDC Action Days 23 April to 9 May 2007
  Focal topic: Gender | Gender Equality | Gender Mainstreaming
- EDC Action Days (23 April to 9 May 2008)
  Focal topic: Intercultural Dialogue for Cultural Diversity.
  A classroom-oriented tool "Intercultural Dialogue – Intercultural Learning" has been developed. > www.aktionstage.politische-bildung.at
- Synchronized Action Days 2008 www.dare-network.eu/synact_2008.htm
  Democracy and Human Rights Education

International cooperation

International Conferences

Austria hosted important networking meetings:
1. The 14th EDC/HRE Coordinators Meeting / 13–15 November 2008 was organised in the context of the Council of Europe's programme EDC/HRE.
2. The DARE (Democracy and Human Rights Education in Europe) network conference "Intercultural Dialogue – Challenge for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education" / 14–16 November 2008. Its background was the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue.

Network TRIALOG: Human Rights Education in Austria, Germany and Switzerland
The Austrian Centre for Citizenship in school (working on behalf of the Austrian Ministry for Education), the German Institute for Human Rights (Deutsches Institut für Menschenrechte, Berlin) and the European Training Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (ETC) have launched a network focusing on Human Rights Education (HRE) in German-speaking countries. The practice-oriented network facilitates a closer collaboration between various institutions and organisations in Switzerland, Austria and Germany.

The first meeting (15 participants) took place in Graz (February 20th), a next meeting is planned for 2010 in Luzern. Mainstreaming of COMPASITO is one example for cooperation.

Conclusion

Promoting values and principles such as justice, equality and non-discrimination, democracy, fairness and friendship, tolerance and respect is an overall aim of education. In recognition of the important role education and school can play in implementing the goals of the recommendation the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture in co-operation with NGOs implements a range of measures on national and local level. To inform and encourage citizens is an ongoing process challenged by the given (global) developments in society.

The following examples illustrate the concrete work done in educational institutions:

- The Ministry of Education encourages schools to develop educational activities, both curricular and non-curricular, to raise awareness. In order to support teachers and schools in fulfilling this challenging task the Ministry provides teaching and learning material as well as trainings free of costs.
- With the nation-wide project “National Socialism and the Holocaust – Remembrance and the Present” the Federal Ministry for Education encourages and supports teachers at Austrian schools in promoting initiatives and projects in the classrooms to foster the long-term engagement of Austrian pupils with the issues of combating National Socialism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia. With a view to a sustainable approach and according to the most recent methodological and didactic findings, the project supports other provisions on citizenship and human rights education. (www.erinnern.at)
- Programmes initiated to prevent violence, bullying and related behaviour also can be seen as an important contribution to the implementation of the Recommendation.
- Several awareness-raising campaigns such as the *2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities for All* seeks to make people aware of their rights to a life free of discrimination.
- Debates on the benefits of diversity were a key topic of the *2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue*. It recognises that cultural diversity represents a unique advantage.

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Addendum - Legal aspects

Concerning education in schools, the **Schulorganisationsgesetz**, Fed.Law Gazz. I 1962/242, can be considered as the basic legislative text. Art. 2 of that law provides, inter alia, that pupils shall be led towards a tolerant mind-set vis-a-vis different political opinions, that they shall be enabled to participate in worldwide economic and cultural life and to follow the ideals of freedom and peace. The Schulorganisationsgesetz is the general legal base for school curricula too.

In order to carry out the Schulorganisationsgesetz, ordinances on school curricula have to be given by the Federal Minister of Education. In such ordinances civic education, beginning in the late 1970s, has been established as an integral general principle of education, sometimes as a subject too. In 2008, as a result of the lowering of the voting age to 16, the curricula for some school-types such as secondary modern schools etc. have been altered by ordinance of August 12, Fed. Law Gazz. II 2008/290: Now from grade 6 - 8 in those types civic education is forming a new subject in combination with history (cf. App. C 1 Z.7 of that ordinance).

Furthermore, detailed instruction on civic education is given to the teaching staff by internal regulations of the Minister of Education; a general regulation on civic education has been given in 1994.

Due to the federal structure of the Austrian state, the wide scope of the 1974 Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms comprises matters within the responsibility of either the Bund or the Länder (provinces). So, for instance, the matter of kindergartens, is up to the provinces. Yet, as education in school is concerned, it is the task of the Bund, with the Federal Minister for Education, Arts and Culture as the highest administrative authority.

The 1974 Recommendation as such has no binding character in a legal sense and cannot be regarded as having been "incorporated", in a formal sense, into Austrian law. Yet it can be argued that all the ideas and suggestions of the 1974 Recommendation can be found in the legal system of Austria.