



human rights, conflict resolution, and tolerance education

UNRWA has been teaching Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Tolerance (HRCRT) in its schools for more than twenty years. Guided by its HRCRT Policy, endorsed in May 2012, UNRWA continues to strengthen its approach.

The HRCRT Policy, a key element of the wider UNRWA Education Reform, is a statement of commitment and sets out a common Agency approach for the teaching and learning of human rights, conflict resolution, and tolerance. Its vision is to provide a human rights education which empowers Palestine refugee students to enjoy and exercise their rights, uphold human rights values, be proud of their Palestinian identity, and contribute positively to their society and the global community. Throughout the HRCRT Policy, the importance of alignment with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the related instruments in the international human rights system, and the World Programme for Human Rights Education, is emphasised.

Reflecting this, UNRWA adopts the definition of human rights education described in the World Programme for Human Rights Education (WPHRE), as below:

Definition of Human Rights Education

“Education, training and information aiming at building a universal culture of human rights through the sharing of knowledge, imparting of skills and moulding of attitudes directed to:

- The strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- The full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity;
- The promotion of understanding, tolerance, gender equality and friendship among all nations, indigenous peoples and minorities;
- The enabling of all persons to participate effectively in a free and democratic society governed by the rule of law;
- The building and maintenance of peace;
- The promotion of people-centered sustainable development and social justice.”

World Programme for Human Rights Education, 2005.

Human Rights, Conflict Resolution, and Tolerance in Schools

The UNRWA HRCRT education programme is designed to create an environment in which human rights are practised and experienced in the daily life of the whole school community. In this regard, human rights education is integrated in all subjects taught in UNRWA schools with students provided with guidelines and examples of what this means. In addition, the School Parliaments in every school have been strengthened through the HRCRT programme and they continue to play a key role in enhancing students’ participation in school life and help forge stronger links with the community.

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Teacher preparation and professional development

Human rights are an integral part of the professional development of teachers and School Principals. All education staff have received training based on the HRCRT Toolkit, which was specifically developed to support their teaching in the classroom.

The HRCRT Toolkit equips the teachers and school leaders to implement the Policy and to embed the UNRWA approach to the teaching and learning of human rights in everyday practices. It provides a general guide on planning for the integration of human rights within all curricula subjects, and includes activities to help develop students' knowledge, skills and attitudes towards a culture of human rights.

In addition to the training on how to use the HRCRT Toolkit, there are supplementary training tools for teachers, such as a training video, alongside continuous support by the Education Specialists.

UNRWA Student Parliaments

While the HRCRT Toolkit provides a range of participatory teaching methods and activities to realise the HRCRT educational approach, School Parliaments play a fundamental role in supporting students to practice their rights and actively participate in school decisions that can impact on their lives. Every year, UNRWA schools hold elections to form School Parliaments; the elected students are tasked with representing all students and supporting their local communities. In addition, there are elected Student Parliaments at the Area and Field levels. In 2016, UNRWA decided to expand the student parliament model to include an Agency-Wide Student Parliament (ASP) comprising School Parliamentarians from all the Agency's Fields of Operation. The overall goal of the ASP is to increase the participation of UNRWA students across the Agency, as well as locally, regionally, and globally. The first ASP was elected in November 2017. Members of the ASP have, for instance, actively contributed to key events, such as the UN General Assembly and the League of Arab States meetings.

Enhancing community awareness of human rights

The community plays a key role in forming the attitudes and values of children. Therefore, increasing the community awareness of human rights and human rights education is an important step towards strengthening a culture of human rights beyond UNRWA schools. This is achieved through school-level Human Rights Day celebrations and 'Standing together to Stop Bullying' Day events, conducted each year with active participation from parents and community members. HRCRT animated videos were also developed to raise the community's awareness about human rights and the HRCRT programme.

Making a positive difference towards quality education in UNRWA Schools

The UNRWA approach helps students of all ages learn how to practically apply their knowledge of human rights towards establishing a rights-based environment in their school, as well as contributing towards positive social change in their community. These actions are realised practically in the classroom by beginning with the experiences of children, encouraging them to reflect and discuss their reflections with others and, then, encouraging them to act by applying what they learned. The "Experience > Reflect > Apply" learning approach is achieved through a range of participatory teaching methods.

Responding to the COVID-19 crisis

During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNRWA continued to support the implementation of the HRCRT programme, while working to maintain the safety of students and education staff.

School Parliament elections still took place but at the classroom level only as school-level elections, which require students from all the classrooms to gather in one room, were deemed unsafe. School-level guidelines for conducting Human Rights Day and 'Standing Together to Stop Bullying' Day, were also modified so that the objectives of each day could be achieved, but without posing any risks to the students and their communities.

UNRWA also developed an awareness-raising animated video, which presented health messages, within a story wherein the School Parliament is working to raise awareness on the COVID-19 in the community. A key role of School Parliaments is promoting good citizenship and supporting their community. Therefore, this video was also aiming to encourage School Parliaments to lead on health-related initiatives in the future. The video included five main messages; 1) ways COVID-19 is transmitted; 2) respiratory hygiene practices; 3) washing hands properly; 4) social distancing; and 5) the importance of good nutrition in enhancing immunity. All the messages were presented in a child-friendly way and key here was using the HRCRT animated characters that UNRWA students are familiar with – in the HRCRT Toolkit and through the existing HRCRT videos.

For more information

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united nations relief and works agency
for palestine refugees in the near east

www.unrwa.org

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 with a mandate to provide humanitarian assistance and protection to registered Palestine refugees in the Agency's area of operations, namely the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. Thousands of Palestine refugees who lost both their homes and livelihood because of the 1948 conflict have remained displaced and in need of significant support for over seventy years. UNRWA helps them achieve their full potential in human development through quality services it provides in education, health care, relief and social services, protection, camp infrastructure and improvement, microfinance and emergency assistance. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions.