

# Democracy and Human Rights

▶▶ START WITH US ◀◀

**Council of Europe**  
Charter on Education  
for Democratic Citizenship  
and Human Rights Education

**CHARTER**  
**for ALL**

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE



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Editor:  
Elena Díez Villagrasa

Reviewer:  
Annette Schneider

Proofreader:  
Catherine Rowles-Holm

Graphic design,  
layout and illustrations:  
Pampaneo

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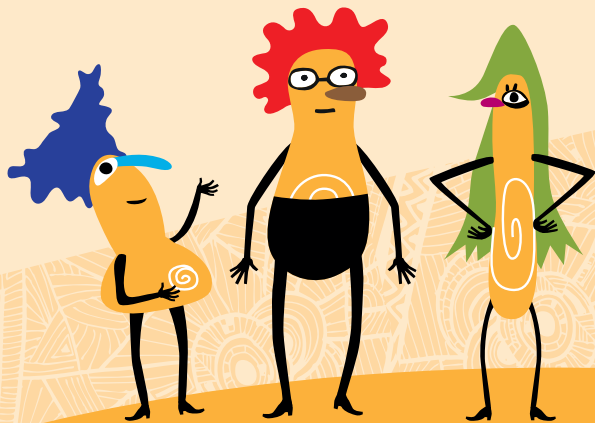
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The Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education is a legal document about things that concern everyone.

In this publication you can find out what this Charter is about and how it relates to your daily life.



Throughout the text, you will also find different elements to help you better understand the Charter:

Examples



Ideas for taking action



Important ideas to consider



Reflection.

Turtles are a symbol of wisdom in many cultures. Whenever you find one, take some time to think about the ideas there are!

# 1 Why a Charter?

The Council of Europe, created in 1949, brings together countries which share the values of:

- ▶ **HUMAN RIGHTS:**
- ▶ **DEMOCRACY:**
- ▶ **THE RULE OF LAW.**

The **Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education** was developed to make sure these values are promoted in and through education. A charter is usually a legal document, which explains what governments from different countries agree to do in a specific area.

The **RULE OF LAW** means that authorities in a country, such as the government, have to follow the law as all the people in the country do; they can not do what they want to do just because they are the authorities.

To know more about **HUMAN RIGHTS** and **DEMOCRACY** check out Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.



In 2010, all 47 member states of the Council of Europe adopted the Charter. By doing so, the governments of these countries:

- ▶ recognised the importance of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education;
- ▶ agreed to follow the ideas and recommendations written in this document, always respecting the laws and rules of their country and the main priorities for the people living there.

Do not confuse the Council of Europe with the European Union, which has 27 member states!



But it's also up to all the people to make sure that the proposals in the Charter are followed where we live.

Here you'll find those proposals and some ideas on how you can participate as well, because democracy and human rights start with us!

The Charter is about Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education. But what exactly does it mean?



## 2 What are human rights?

**Human rights** reflect what people **need** to live in dignity. When human rights are not respected, people are treated as if they were not human.



Human rights are what nobody can take away from you.

What things do you need in order to live well, safely, healthily, and to grow up?

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Do you need any of these things because you are not yet an adult? If yes, which ones?

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Human rights are not always respected, so international legal documents have been written throughout history in order to protect them. One of the most important documents is the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**. With this document, for the first time, countries from all around the world agreed to protect human rights. But it is not the only one; for example, in Europe one very important document for the protection of human rights is the **European Convention on Human Rights**.

This happened in 1948 after two terrible World Wars, where human rights were not respected at all.

Find more information at [www.echr.coe.int/ECHR](http://www.echr.coe.int/ECHR)



Human rights are the same for all human beings, everywhere in the world.

Children have specific needs: they are more vulnerable because they are growing up and developing. This is why they have their rights written in a specific way, and in a separate document, the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**.

Human beings under 18 years old.





- ☐ Look back to the list of needs you wrote and check in the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** whether what you need is listed as a right.

### EXAMPLES OF RIGHTS INCLUDED IN THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

- ☐ the right to life and development;
- ☐ the right not to suffer from discrimination;
- ☐ the right to a name and nationality;
- ☐ the right to be cared for by parents or other responsible people;
- ☐ the right to be protected from all forms of violence and abuse;
- ☐ the right to health and health care;
- ☐ the right to live in good conditions that help you to develop;
- ☐ the right to education;
- ☐ the right to leisure, play and culture;
- ☐ the right to express your views and have them taken into consideration;
- ☐ the right to have your own thoughts, beliefs and religion;
- ☐ the right to meet and join groups and organisations with other children;
- ☐ the right to privacy;
- ☐ the right to access to information;
- ☐ the right to special protection for refugee children;
- ☐ the right to special protection and support for children with disabilities;
- ☐ the right of children of minorities to learn and use the language, religion and traditions of their families;
- ☐ the right to special protection of children affected by wars.

Find the full version of the document, agreed upon on 20 November 1989, at <http://www.unicef.org/magic/briefing/uncorc.html>

Do you know of any situation in which human rights were not respected (from friends, books, TV, something you have witnessed, etc.)?

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Have you ever felt that your rights were not respected? What did you do?

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What should people do when their rights or other people's rights are not respected?

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Minorities are groups of people who speak a different language or have different beliefs or traditions than the majority of the population in a certain place.



# 3 What is democratic citizenship?

**Democracy** is one of the possible ways to organise a group of people. It is a form of government of a country, or even of a small village or a classroom.

How can we recognise a democracy?



Check whether the place where you live is a democracy

- People are the ones to decide on things that are important to them.
- In most cases, people do not make decisions directly, but they vote to elect the people who will represent them and their ideas at the moment of decision making.
- The elected people take action for the benefit of all the people and do not take action in their own interest. So they need to clarify the reasons for their actions, and they are also responsible for them.
- People can take other actions – apart from voting – to influence decisions; for example, people can demonstrate if there are things they do not agree with, or take part in associations.
- In a country, the constitution and other laws reflect the agreement among **citizens** – the people of the country – on the rules and principles to be followed.
- The decisions are taken according to what the majority of the citizens think, but the opinion of the minority is also taken into consideration and minority groups are protected.

A constitution defines how laws are made and protected and by whom, as well as the relations between the government and citizens.



Democracy is a system for organising groups of people. So **democracy can really start with ourselves!**

In your school, team or club, is there any set of rules that all of you follow in order to work, live and do things together?

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What rights and responsibilities do you have?

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Who created the rules?

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Can they be changed? If so, how?

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What happens when people don't follow the rules?

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Both words together, **democratic citizenship**, refer to the important role that people in a community or country need to play: they need to take an active part in the decisions affecting themselves and their community.



I'm too young to vote...  
so I can't participate!

No, that's not true!  
You can participate in other ways,  
not only by voting. Look at me! I'm going to this  
organisation where we do things together:  
once we cleaned the forest outside the city,  
and once we joined a group of elderly people  
to do activities together.

We are doing something  
for our neighbourhood,  
for other people.  
So we are participating,  
it's just different!

You're right! There is a skate-park next  
to my school where we usually go during  
breaks; once the city hall planned to build  
a block of flats there. We were not happy  
at all, so a group of students and teachers  
wrote a letter against it. Everybody in  
the school and neighbourhood signed! We  
didn't vote but made a change in the final  
decision: we still have the skate-park!

Through associations, youth  
organisations and non-governmental  
organisations (NGOs), which are  
created and managed by citizens  
themselves, people can influence the  
life of the community.

# 4 What is education for democratic citizenship and human rights education?

The Charter is not about **human rights** and **democratic citizenship** alone, but also about **education!**



Education is a right, but also a way for making other rights possible.



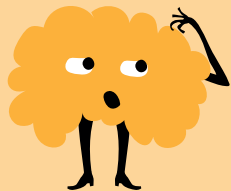
In my neighbourhood there are many problems: poor health, many people are unemployed, a lot of young people drop out from school. I took part in a project with other young people about our rights. There I learnt about my rights and about where to find help to make sure my rights are respected. In this project I found out about scholarships for secondary school students: I applied, and I got one!

To find out more about projects for young people's access to rights, check [www.coe.int/enter](http://www.coe.int/enter)



Both **education for democratic citizenship** and **human rights education** deals with things that are important to you, as a person and as part of the society you live in.

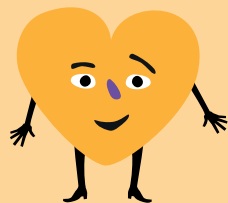
Both **education for democratic citizenship** and **human rights education** help us to



understand our human rights and democracy;  
**LEARN ABOUT THEM;**



put our rights and democracy into practice,  
and defend our rights and those of other people,  
if they are not respected;  
**LEARN FOR THEM;**



experience and feel the principles of human rights and democracy;  
**LEARN THROUGH THEM.**

**Education for democratic citizenship** and **human rights education** are so closely related that in this document we talk about them as a single idea.



**Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education = EDC/HRE**

- Have a look at **Compasito**:  
[www.coe.int/compasito](http://www.coe.int/compasito)
- Have a look at **Living Democracy** manuals:  
<http://www.coe.int/edc>
- Ask your teachers or youth leaders if they know about them. Those manuals include EDC/HRE activities to learn **about**, **for** and **through** human rights and democracy.



# 5 What are the principles of human rights and democracy?

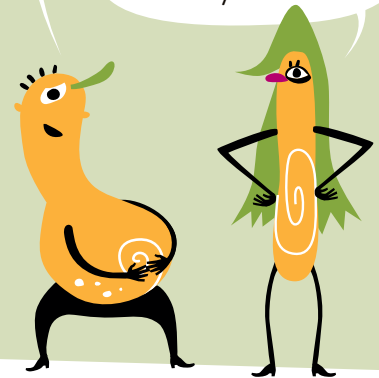


Our governments should make it possible for education to respect and promote these principles.



All people should respect and promote these principles too.

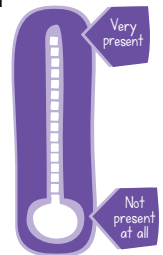
But this is not always so easy in real life...



Are these principles respected in your group?

You will find a barometer next to each principle on the next pages to help you answer this question.

Make a cross in each of the barometers according to your impression on **how much you can see these elements in your reality** (in your class, in your group or organisation, etc.).



# Value diversity

We can find many cultures, religions and ways of experiencing and understanding life where we live. It is important that we respect everybody, no matter what our differences are because we all have equal rights.

People are often discriminated against, that is, not respected just because they are different. Sometimes, this happens because others have certain ideas about these people that are not true. The ideas are formed either from things they have heard or they are very simplified ideas. Very often the media repeat and reinforce these negative images. It is important to think twice before accepting things as the truth when talking about other human beings and groups.

In your country, what image does the media give of people who are different from the majority?

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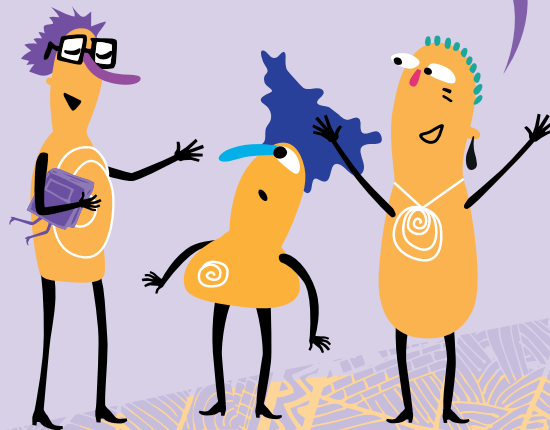
What image do you think the media should give?

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A "Living Library" works like a normal library where readers come and borrow a "book" for a limited period of time and, after reading it, they return the book to the library. There is only one difference: the books in the Living Library are human beings! They belong to groups who are often discriminated against.

Books and readers speak to each other, so readers have the chance to get to know a real person and change the negative ideas they may have had before about a particular group of people.





Everybody is important. We should not miss the chance to exchange ideas with different people and learn from each other. **Diversity makes our society richer.**

I was once one of the "books" in a library in Czech Republic. It is well-known that people have many prejudices against the Roma community, which is why I was a bit afraid when accepting the request. But those who borrowed me, showed real interest in our culture, in our habits, as well as in my life.

Imagine what it would be like if we were all identical to each other. Wouldn't it be boring?

Value diversity

Very present

Not present at all

- Suggest organising your own "Living Library" to your school.
- Read about how to do it in <http://www.eycb.coe.int/eycbwwwroot/hre/> > "Don't judge a book by its cover! The Living Library Organiser's Guide".

## Include everybody

Have you ever felt left out of a group?

I once felt really excluded. I wanted to play football during breaks in the school, but since all the players were boys, they didn't want me to join. Both girls and boys made fun of me because they said girls are not supposed to play football. That didn't feel good at all.

I know what you mean. Once I could not join a school trip because it was too expensive for my family to pay for it. I felt sad, and after the trip, I could not take part in the stories my classmates were sharing.

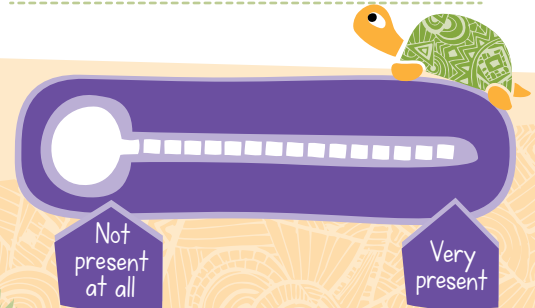
We need to make sure that nobody in our society is discriminated against because there is not a single reason why somebody should be excluded from our society: **we are all human beings!**

Are there people in your class or group who may be feeling excluded? Why?

Are there people in your community who are considered not to be part of that community?

What should change in your community to make it possible for everybody to be involved?

Are boys and girls in your school or organisation treated differently?



# Give everybody equal chances

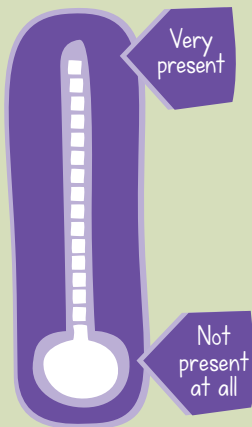
Since we are all human, we should make sure that we are all treated as equals and that we get the same chances to take part in the community we live in! Despite the differences in families, beliefs, what and who we like, whether we are boys or girls, or what our abilities are, **we are all equal in rights.**

At our local youth organisation, in the United Kingdom, there is a boy called William. He has cerebral palsy which affects the mobility of all four of his limbs and he cannot speak.

Since he joined we are more careful when planning the activities. It was not easy at the beginning but now it comes naturally to adapt traditional activities for him to be able to join.

For example, when the group wanted to attempt an obstacle course, it was organised and the group divided into two teams. William's team was challenged to get him through the obstacle course using a blanket while the other team nominated one of their members to be carried on another blanket.

Luckily, William is fearless and his team only had to stop occasionally when they and William were laughing so much.



## □ Explore your neighbourhood

In a map, mark your favourite places. Go there and check if people with disabilities (mobility, sight, hearing, etc.) could get there easily and enjoy themselves. Think about whether these people could live, work or play with comfort and safety in your neighbourhood.

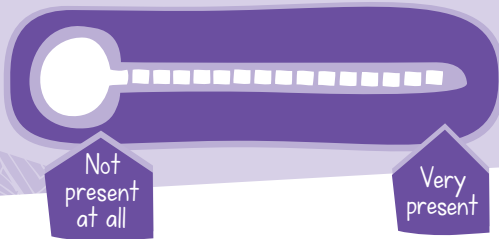
For more information:  
[www.ifm-sei.org](http://www.ifm-sei.org) > "All Together" campaign.



# Respect human dignity

**What unites us despite all differences is human dignity.** We all need to be valued as human beings, no more, no less. Nobody should treat other people with cruelty or violence or address others in an offensive way.

When people do not feel safe in their school or group because someone is frightening them, persecuting them or treating them badly – bullying them – their rights as human beings are not respected.



Does everybody feel safe in your school or group?



We realised that in our school, in Portugal, some older students were bullying younger ones. We prepared a theatre play to show why this happened and how much that was against the rights of the younger students.

We performed the play in front of most of the classes, for both students and teachers, and everybody could see how we could all help to prevent that from happening again.



- Check whether there is a local hotline/helpline where people who are under 18 who are being bullied can call.
- HELPLINE / HOTLINE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

# Live in peace

If we all apply the principles of human rights and democracy, a fairer and more peaceful world will be possible. However, living together is not always easy, and there will always be reasons for misunderstanding and conflicts.

It is important to solve conflicts **in a peaceful way**. Dialogue is the most effective way, as it helps to find solutions that are acceptable for everyone.

How do you deal with conflict among the members of your group or class?

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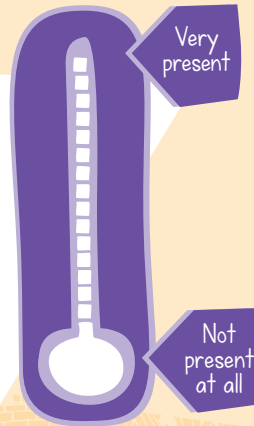
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In my school, like in several other secondary schools in Spain, there is a system for conflict mediation among students: a neutral student supports the two students in conflict to find a positive solution for both sides in a non-violent way, by talking to each other. With this system there are better relationships between students, there is no need for an adult, and punishments are avoided. All of us who were interested in becoming a conflict mediator wrote our names on a list and, after several selection procedures, those who were chosen got training by professional mediators.

# 6 Who is involved in EDC/HRE?

What comes first into your mind with the word EDUCATION?

Many times the answer is **school**. But is it really the only place where people can learn?

Where can people learn? Complete the list: at school, in a library, at home,

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Our **governments** and **teachers** should make sure that EDC/HRE is included in what we learn from pre-primary school to secondary education, and in university or other forms of higher education.

Does all that mean that EDC/HRE is not just for children and young people?

Exactly! EDC/HRE is for everybody, no matter what age they are, because learning should last our whole life long!

EDC/HRE are for everybody and throughout our lives.



**Youth organisations** and **non-governmental organisations** (NGOs) play an important role in EDC/HRE for many reasons:


- ▶ they contribute to a better life in the communities they work in;
- ▶ very often they provide a space where you can practice human rights and democracy.



It is important for EDC/HRE that our governments recognise the value that youth organisations and NGOs play in education, and support them when necessary.

We also learn from **daily experience**, from **our environment**, from the media, and from **the people we live with**: neighbours, friends and family.

When working with EDC/HRE it is important to involve those people, places or institutions that have an influence on us.




Could parents be involved?

Of course!

I have heard that *Parents' and Carers' associations* exist all over Europe. What do they do?

These groups of mothers, fathers and carers try to improve the collaboration between schools and families, especially regarding students' learning.



Interesting! But don't forget that sometimes it's young people themselves who take the initiative to work on EDC/HRE.

- Go back to the list on page 20 on places and people you can learn things from and complete it with new ideas that appeared in this chapter.

Have you ever thought of yourself as an educator of your group or schoolmates? How could this help to improve your own life as well as other people's lives?

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Did you find any inspiring examples in previous chapters where young people work on EDC/HRE with their friends?

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Many different places and people are involved in education; EDC/HRE concerns all of them. So recommendations mentioned in the Charter should be taken into account by everybody.



# 7 Do schools and organizations respect human rights and democracy?



It is not possible to learn democracy and human rights in an environment that itself does not respect them.

The Charter emphasises that institutions working with EDC/HRE, especially **schools** and **youth organisations**, should respect the principles and values of human rights and be organised in a democratic way.

How can we see if schools and youth organisations apply the values of human rights and democracy?



Values are related to attitudes and actions; actions can respect and promote these values, or do exactly the opposite. For example, are the conditions to become a student in your school the same for everyone? In your youth organisation is the principle of including everybody respected?



Would you say that you are experiencing the values and principles of EDC/HRE in your environment (in your school, in your organisation, in your sports club)? Looking back at the marks in the barometers in Chapter 5 may help you to answer:

- always
- often
- rarely
- never

Can you think of specific actions that your school or youth organisation is taking or should take to promote the principles of human rights and democracy?

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Schools and youth organisations offer great opportunities to **put theory into practice!** Through them we can learn by experiencing human rights and democracy.



Are your opinions taken into consideration regarding activities in your school/youth organisation?

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How are decisions made in your group or class?

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Could there be improvements? How?

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Democracy is effective when **everybody takes part**, and so is EDC/HRE.

Who should have a say on what you learn?

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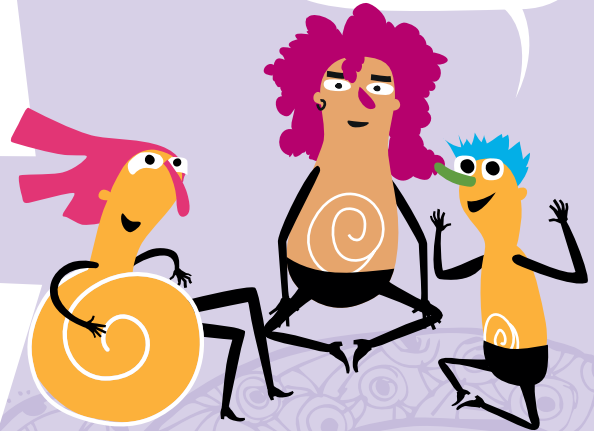
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Many people should be involved regarding what and how you learn in your school and youth organisation!

Your teachers and youth leaders, your families, other people involved in education - such as those making the laws on education...

But above all, you, as a student or as a member of a group or an organisation.



One of the possible ways to be involved with your learning is through the student council (or union). That's an association for students only, which is used by students to have their opinions and worries regarding school heard. In some schools, student councils are able not only to express their opinions, but can also vote in the school board, which is the main decision-making body in the school.

- Check if there is a student council in your school or similar structures in your organisation:  YES  NO

If the answer is YES:

- Check what its main task is

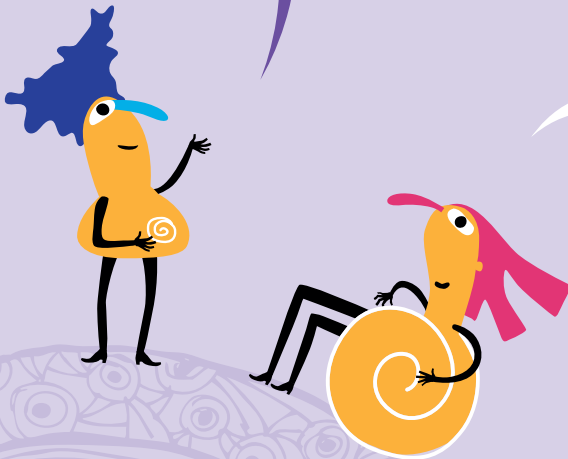
If the answer is NO:

- Contact your national student council to help you create one (find the information in [www.edufle.info](http://www.edufle.info))

But participation does not come alone! Everybody has **responsibilities** too.

When there is a discussion in class, we should speak our minds. But we'll also need to make sure we're giving everybody else the chance to do it as well, and respect their views if they're different from ours.

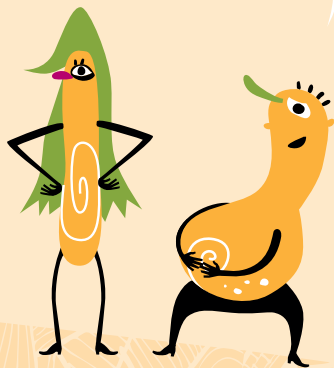
Let's not forget the government! Our governments also need to be involved both in the decisions about education and in taking responsibility for them.



## 8 What can we do to promote EDC/HRE?

You can already find some ideas in this booklet.

In the Charter there are some more!



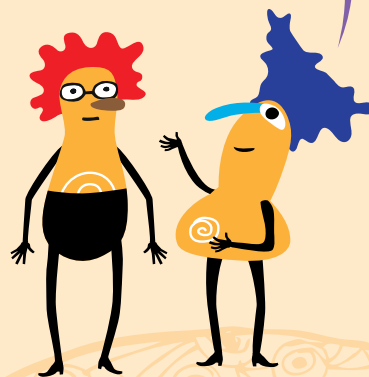
### Co-operation

- ▶ All people and institutions should support each other in promoting EDC/HRE.
- ▶ Co-operation at different levels is very enriching: EDC/HRE activities can start next door and grow bigger and bigger, even reaching the whole world!
- ▶ Governments should work closely with other people and institutions in the country, as well as with governments in other countries.



This Charter is great proof that co-operation can work.

Indeed, it is the result of international co-operation between the 47 countries of the Council of Europe!



## Training teachers and youth leaders

- ▶ It is important for educators to be prepared to work on EDC/HRE, so they should receive regular training.
- ▶ Governments should make sure that there are training plans for educators, and both money and people to make this possible.

- Ask your educators how they learnt about EDC/HRE. Ask them when the last time was that they received training on the topic.
- Together with your **teachers**, have a look at training opportunities for them within Council of Europe's Pestalozzi Programme for the Training of Education Professionals: [www.coe.int/pestalozzi/](http://www.coe.int/pestalozzi/)
- Together with your **youth leaders**, have a look for training opportunities for them on the Youth Sector page: [www.coe.int/youth](http://www.coe.int/youth)

## Evaluation

- ▶ It is important to reflect upon how an activity has worked in order to improve it for the future.
- ▶ Those who have taken part in EDC/HRE activities should be asked for their opinion.



Do you usually get the chance to express your opinion after an activity or lesson you have taken part in?

How can your opinion be taken into account?

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## Research

- ▶ Information regarding EDC/HRE needs to be collected; for example, experiences, methods or knowing which topics are important for learners.
- ▶ This information can be used to measure how well EDC/HRE is developing in a place.
- ▶ Results can also give us ideas on how to improve EDC/HRE.

## Sharing experiences

Sharing experiences and examples on EDC/HRE can only be positive:

- ▶ it can avoid repetition of experiences that did not work;
- ▶ it can inspire other people to try new things and repeat experiences that worked well in new places.

A research process was organised by the union of secondary school students of Serbia (UNSS). They were looking for a better working model for student councils in the country. One of the tools in the research was a questionnaire, which was filled in by 8 500 students and 2 000 teachers. They were asked what was good and what was bad in student councils and what should be done in order to improve the situation. One of the questions was whether students should vote in the school board. More than 85% of students and more than 50% of teachers answered YES. These results of the research helped greatly in convincing the government to include this change in the Serbian law on education.

- If your school or organisation has a newsletter or a web page, use it to write about experiences with EDC/HRE that you have in your class or group.

Which of all the positive examples you read in this document was the most interesting for you? Why?

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# Informing everybody

The more people know about the Charter, the more chances there are for EDC/HRE to improve. There are many possible ways to inform people. This booklet is one of them.

"Light on the Rights" was a campaign aimed at promoting the "Declaration of School Students' Rights", which was organised by OBESSU and ESU together.

A "bus tour" was organised: a van with the image of the campaign and members of the organising associations travelled across Europe stopping in different countries. They were received with celebrations. It was a great opportunity for all secondary school student unions in Europe to present themselves and to promote students' rights in their countries.

Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions: [www.obessu.org](http://www.obessu.org)

European Students Union: [www.esu-online.org](http://www.esu-online.org)

To find out more about the campaign: <http://lightontherights.wetpaint.com/>



What different ways can you think of to inform others about the Charter?

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Democracy and human rights start with us. We can all do something to make them possible!

Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education are good tools for that! So we can also contribute to make EDC/HRE more present among us.



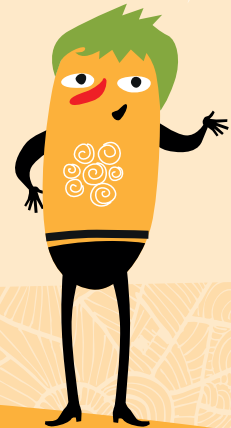





Now that you know a bit more about EDC/HRE, what ideas would you like to share about it with your friends?



We will be happy to read about these ideas, and also about your own views and experiences. Send them to [edchre@coe.int!](mailto:edchre@coe.int)





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The Council of Europe, created in 1949, brings together 47 countries which share the values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education was developed in order to promote these values in and through education. The present version of the Charter ("Charter for All") is intended for everybody, especially young people, who would like to learn what this international legal document is about and how it can be used to promote democracy and human rights in the classroom, in the youth organisation and in society at large.

▶ [www.coe.int/edchre](http://www.coe.int/edchre) ◀

Mail: [edchre@coe.int](mailto:edchre@coe.int)