

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  
to the attention of  
the Methodology, Education and Training Section

Subject:

NIHR's contribution for the midterm progress report on the implementation of the third phase of the World Programme for HRE

27 July 2017

Dear madam/sir,

The Netherlands Institute for Human Rights (NIHR) presents you with its contribution to the midterm progress report on the implementation of the third phase (2015-2019) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education.

The NIHR is the national human rights institution of the Netherlands which has been accredited with an A Status since May 2014. The NIHR protects, monitors, explains, and promotes human rights in the Netherlands through research, policy advice and awareness raising. Its mandate also covers urging the government to ratify, implement and observe human rights treaties.

The present contribution describes relevant initiatives on HRE taken in the Netherlands in 2015 and 2016. Although the National Human Rights Action Plan (NAP) of 2013 includes a minor paragraph on education, the Dutch government has yet to implement the World Programme on HRE in a coherent manner. In particular, it has not developed any policy plan on human rights education for primary and secondary school or the professionals mentioned in the World Programme.

### 1. Primary and secondary education

#### *HRE in the primary and secondary school system*

The Dutch government has become increasingly aware of the importance of incorporating human and children's rights as well as citizenship education in the national curricula. Findings of the Education Inspectorate reveal that at present the quality of citizenship education varies very much, with little coherence or continuous learning.<sup>1</sup> In response the government discussed with parliament that the requirements for citizenship education will be amended so that they are more precise and that schools have more guidance as to what children should learn in school. The political debate in the Netherlands centres around understanding fundamental Dutch values within the wider integration discourse. The NIHR believes that human rights provide a touchstone and framework to give guidance to this discussion on clashing values. The NIHR urges the State party to strengthen HRE at primary and secondary school while recognising the institutional freedom of schools and the rights of parents. The national curriculum is currently under review. The NIHR advises the government to use this opportunity to introduce HRE in the new curriculum.<sup>2</sup> An advisory commission to the government on education had also advised earlier that human and children's rights be part of citizenship education and as such be a core component of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Education Inspectorate, *Burgerschap op school (Citizenship at school)*, December 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Netherlands Institute for Human Rights, [Mensenrechten op School \(Human Rights at School\)](#), July 2015.

new national curriculum. As part of the review process, the core components will be further discussed with teachers in 2017-2018.

In the meantime the NIHR believes that schools and teachers should be equipped to make human rights a reality in practice. Thus, it has been organising learning circles with teachers, heads of schools and students to share good practices and seek to incorporate a whole school approach to human rights. In addition the NIHR is currently developing a Toolbox Human Rights at School, in cooperation with human rights and educational organisations. The Toolbox will be ready in September 2017 and will then be disseminated.

## 2. Secondary vocational education and training (VET)

### *Starting from 2016 VET colleges must give attention to HRE*

In 2014 and 2015 the NIHR conducted a survey on HRE in secondary vocational schools (VET colleges) in the Netherlands. On 3 February 2016 it submitted the research results in an advisory report<sup>3</sup> to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science. The report shows that although the schools involved in the survey believe that human rights are important, their programmes still lack a structural focus on HRE. In 2016 the survey led to the adaptation of the Exam and Qualification Requirements Decree on Vocational Education. The Decree stipulates that schools should pay attention in their lessons on citizenship to 'the basic values of our society, such as human rights'.<sup>4</sup> In the explanatory memorandum of the Decree the minister refers to the recommendation of the NIHR to explicitly mention HRE in the curriculum, including, for example, the right of inclusion («the right to belong») and the principle of equality. The minister also endorsed the NIHR's consideration that "the student who recognizes his human rights and learns to talk about these rights, thereby also learns to recognize and discuss violations of another person's human rights."

Starting from August 2016 secondary vocational schools must comply with these new requirements in their lessons about citizenship. The Decree however does not state to what extent schools should fulfil the new requirements. It therefore remains important to monitor the new obligation to ensure that in the next few years it actually leads to an adequate implementation of HRE in secondary vocational schools .

## 3. Higher education

On 26 May 2016 a group of social work professionals launched a manifesto to put human rights at the centre of social work (Manifest: Stel Mensenrechten Centraal in Sociaal Werk). This initiative has since resulted in a collaboration between Dutch and Flemish universities to engage in a discussion on making human rights education part of the social work curricula. This manifesto was presented at a symposium during the European Association of Schools of Social Work (EASSW) Conference in Paris in June 2017. Preceding this conference, on 17 March 2017 several social work teachers, researchers and human rights professionals came together at a work conference to start the development of a plan of action on human rights-related social work research and education. A network has been established to share good practices and actively lobby at various universities for a human-rights based approach to social work.

---

<sup>3</sup> Netherlands Institute for Human Rights, [Mensenrechten in het mbo, een verkenning](#) (*Human Rights in secondary vocational education, a survey*), February 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Appendix 1, 2.1. as referred to in article 17a, paragraph 3 Exam and Qualification Requirements Decree on Vocational Education (Examen- en Kwalificatiebesluit Beroepsopleidingen, EKB).

#### 4. Professionals at the local level

Large-scale reforms in the social domain are having severe consequences for the individual citizen, in particular to those in a vulnerable situation. Municipal authorities have been given important responsibilities in supporting citizens and helping them to participate in society. At the same time each citizen is expected to bear his/her own responsibility through self-reliance and using one's own social network. Increased opportunities to remain in one's home and familiar environment, and having a greater say in the support received, can increase autonomy and human dignity. However, worrisome signals have been received regarding undue pressure on the individual or their next of kin to remain at home and regarding difficulties accessing support services. Municipal authorities have to implement measures and develop procedures to make sure that they know which persons are in a vulnerable situation, what the causes are of this vulnerability and what is needed to help them. Municipal authorities have to provide accessible information. This requires more awareness of and expertise on human rights among municipal authorities.

Therefore the NIHR developed a brochure for professionals working in the social domain on the protection of human rights at the local level. The brochure explains how to apply the 'AAAQ framework' (availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality) to assess whether human rights are protected. The framework was well received. In 2015 and 2016, at various occasions, the NIHR gave workshops for professionals on its application, for instance at municipalities (for - among others- municipal officials), for the monitoring body of youth care and the social domain, at a university, at a conference for lawyers and at a conference of the Ministry of the Interior and the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities. An article about the AAAQ framework has also been published in a journal for professionals in the social domain.

#### 5. Other professionals

- In 2015 and 2016 the Dutch Police Academy did not have specific modules on HRE and HR training. However the educational programmes for police officers-in-training often did address human rights related subjects (such as victim support in the context of human trafficking - articles 4 and 8 ECHR- and human rights of crime suspects or illegal aliens).
- In 2015 and 2016, the Anne Frank Foundation provided courses for police officers and municipal officials (about equal treatment).

I hope this information is useful. In case you have any questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me by email:

[m.belserang@mensenrechten.nl](mailto:m.belserang@mensenrechten.nl)

With kind regards,

Maggy Belserang

Policy adviser

Netherlands Institute for Human Rights

T +31 (0) 6 27 01 4136

F +31 (0) 30 888 38 83

M [m.belserang@mensenrechten.nl](mailto:m.belserang@mensenrechten.nl)

W [www.humanrightsinstitute.nl](http://www.humanrightsinstitute.nl)

NETHERLANDS  
INSTITUTE FOR  

---

HUMAN RIGHTS