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Human Rights Education

National Human Rights plans of action against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and education for all are found in the Education Act as amended in 2006. It provides that “it is the right of every citizen of the Republic of Malta to receive education and instruction without any distinction of age, sex, belief or economic means”. It advocates that the Directorate for Education Services in conjunction with Colleges and schools, is to provide the resources and other schemes related to individual educational needs. It stipulates that Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) ensures access to all persons in full respect of any diversity. It also indicates that the National Commission for Higher Education shall propose policies related to students on sustainable options, equity in access and mobility in the institutions.

The National Curriculum Strategy (1999) emphasises that all children have the right to education, despite their race, religion, political opinion and gender

Following the publication of the EU Handbook on Integration in 2011, the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education established a working group to evaluate the documentation, assess the local scenario and work on a national action plan for the Integration of Third Country Nationals within the Education System.

Human Rights Education is emphasised in the syllabi of the subjects of European Studies, Geography, History, Personal and Social Development, Religion and Social Studies and in co-curriculum projects with NGOs. It reflects the principles of the rights-based approach to education, such as peace education, citizenship and values education, multi-cultural education, global education, education for tolerance and education for sustainable development.

Various school or college-based activities are organised in order to celebrate diversity, multiculturalism, peace and solidarity. One has to mention as well the various initiatives for schools that are regularly organised by the Curriculum Management and eLearning Department (CMELD) to celebrate these, such as the celebration of particular days, such as Holocaust Day, Stop Poverty Day (October), Remembrance Day (in November) and Children’s Rights Day (November). In 2010 the CMELD worked in conjunction with CARITAS Malta on a national campaign in schools on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion. Other practices managed by the same department are the scheduled school visits for students to the Courts of Justice. This educational programme is intended for students to understand the role of the judiciary in a democratic society. It also puts emphasis on the importance of human rights. Visits to the Courts of Law are carried out on a regular basis and students are also given a presentation either by the Chief Justice himself or by one of the members of the Judiciary. In 2011 more than 600 students participated in this programme. There are other scheduled visits to the House of Representatives, where students are given a first-hand experience on their functions by members of the judiciary and the members of Parliament respectively and also to the Office of the Prime Minister.

Students are encouraged by the CMELD to participate in the Amnesty International World-wide letter-writing ‘Junior Urgent Action’ Campaign and in the world’s largest democratic

education programme for children - The World's Children's Prize for the Rights of the Child, known also as the Global Vote.

Various related inter-school projects are organised to promote awareness among students related with climate change, fair trade and sustainable development. Such initiatives include Global Action Schools, Global Education Weeks and Unity in Diversity. For example since 1999 initiatives for Global Education Week have been organised by the CMeLD in coordination with the North South Centre of the Council of Europe. Themes tackled so far include: *'Youth for Change'*, *'Youth against Conflict – Youth for Peace'*, *'Together for a World Without Poverty'*, *'Learning for all, everywhere now!'*, *'Acting together for a Just World!'*, *'6 billion – One humanity'*; *'Inter-Cultural Dialogue'*; *'Food for All'* and *'Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World'*.

The education system in Malta is currently undergoing various important reforms. One of these includes the revision of the national curriculum. The draft national curriculum framework is expected to become an official document in 2012. The new curriculum is expected to put more emphasis on citizenship education, which includes subject areas such as History, Geography, Social Studies and European Studies. New subject syllabi are being developed to reflect the changes that are presently taking place in the education system in Malta. Subjects like Social Studies and PSD promote not only knowledge related to democracy and human rights, but also the necessary skills and attitudes that encourage active citizenship.

In this new educational environment, with emphasis on student-centred pedagogy, the educational material and resources produced by the Council of Europe, North-South Centre, Oxfam, United Nations and other international organisations are becoming increasingly important and useful for teachers of particular subjects, such as Social Studies and European Studies. The new syllabus of Social Studies is divided into three Strands of Learning, one of which is entitled Rights and Responsibilities. In this Strand of Learning students learn about the values of democracy in society and how they apply them in real life situations: in the family, at school, in their own town or village, and in the wider community. Students also learn about the importance of democratic governance, respect for human rights, and how they can be active citizens.

Together with the British Council, the CMeLD is working on the Connecting Classroom 2010-2013 Project in 10 state & non-state schools with schools from Cyprus, Ukraine and Wales to develop an appreciation of and respect for the rich and diverse cultures in a global setting; to raise awareness of the pupils' own culture in their own setting/country and of other cultures in their own and partner countries; to identify similarities and differences between these cultures; to develop skills and attitudes to enable the students to become global citizens and to promote the project in the wider community.

The CMeLD continued for the eighth consecutive year to develop together with the Jesuit Refugee Service- JRS (Malta) – the School Outreach Project in both Primary and Secondary schools to combat hostility and prejudice towards refugees and asylum seekers, to foster understanding, solidarity and a culture of welcome through the organisation.

One of the themes of the Secondary Education Certificate Syllabus of Environmental Studies 2011-2012 is Human Society which includes the following topics: Education in national citizenship. Towards an education for global citizenship with special reference to particular

examples of such good practice in schools: Ekoskola, Global Education Week, Global Action Schools, Connectando Mundos, Young Reporters for the Environment and Malta's contribution to the peace process in Europe and the Mediterranean region since Independence.

The Centre for Environmental Education and Research at the University of Malta is offering a Masters in Education for Sustainable Development which aims to present students with:

- different perspectives of (i) the environment, (ii) environmental education/education for sustainable development, (iii) the interaction between the environment & society, and (iv) sustainable development;
- different perspectives of sustainable development derived from the interaction of different environmental, societal and economic concerns;
- various educational contexts within the formal, non-formal and informal sectors;
- experiences of different qualitative and quantitative research methods; and
- opportunities to manage and evaluate change.