

Rural youth promoting Human Rights in Europe

A position paper addressing politicians, men, women, children and all the population to rethink, act and promote the Human Rights in rural Europe.

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The preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that the «Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.»¹

Human Rights refer to various fields of our life and there is no single agreed definition for this concept. However a basic set of rights is defined in the UDHR, adopted by the United Nations in 1948. This declaration is universal and it includes rights that are applicable to any person. Unfortunately, these rights are not fully respected by everyone and everywhere. Nevertheless, we, as young people from rural areas all across Europe, believe that a world without discrimination is achievable. We believe that all people are equal, have the same rights and promoting Human Rights is a solution to achieve equality.

Therefore, within this paper we would like to express the voice of the European Rural Youth with regard to the issue of Human rights and especially to show our position on various key topics strongly related to Human Rights, namely: *Minorities and Cultural Inequality, Gender equality, Democratic Citizenship and Non-formal Education on Human Rights*. Following our working methodology of “See – Judge – Act”, we will present the outcomes of our reflection: the main problems identified for each topic (See), the demands for changes coming from the rural youth (Judge) and, finally, our commitment proposals, as Human Rights promoters (Act).

¹ United Nations, 1948 (<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>)

I. Minorities² and Cultural inequality

What did we notice?

Europe is in crisis! With the globalization in Europe, the number of minority groups is growing (160 nations in the 27-member states in 2004)³. Nevertheless, a wider gap between these groups and the societies in general is appearing. We can see signs of discrimination everywhere: Looking into the behaviour of the people on the streets, going through the data on employment and even exploring the nature of the advertisements on the media. It could be clearly noticed that in most of the cases the majority groups do not have information about the minorities. This lack of knowledge could be indeed seen as a reason for miscommunication and acts of discrimination by the majorities. In most of the cases the differences between the two groups in question are better explained and explored than similarities, which contributes for the increasing gap in between.

Additionally, the acts viewed negatively by the society in general, done by members of minority groups are contributing for the negative image of this minority as a group, whereas these acts done by members of majority groups are taken as individual actions and are not considered for the image of the whole group.

These various points clearly give an overview of how difficult it is for individuals to integrate themselves in the society when they come from minority groups. The fact that their opinion is not fully considered and viewed as invaluable source for the development of the communities makes the life of these people hard. Therefore, we the European rural youth believe that actions against the discrimination of minorities are required.

² "Minority can be defined as a distinct group that coexists with but is subordinated to a more dominant group" – *Encyclopaedia Britannica* – www.britannica.com [retrieved the 1st of April 2012]

³ Pan and Pfeil, *National Minorities in Europe* (2004)

What do we demand?

- Equal opportunities of expression, allowing every single person to have the possibility to express him/herself;
- Breaking stereotypes and prejudices, ensuring the good relation and cooperation between people without any acts of discrimination;
- Creation of laws aiming at and ensuring the inclusion of marginal groups in the communities;
- Better education ensuring a better understanding of what the minorities are and how important they are for the successful development of the communities;
- Better communication and understanding between the majorities and marginal groups, aiming at overcoming the differences and ensuring breaking stereotypes and prejudices;
- Better support for minorities to be included in the society

II. Gender equality

What did we notice?

Equality between men and women is one of the fundamental values of the European Union, shared by its member states and one of the values on which the Council of Europe is founded. Despite the progress in ensuring equal opportunities for men and women that cannot be denied, gender inequalities remain a reality that affects children, young people and adults all over Europe and all over the world, both in urban and rural areas.

Inequalities occur at all levels, social, economic or political and in most cases women are those who suffer from these inequalities. There are more job opportunities for men, they are paid more compared to women who perform the same job and there are fewer women that have been named Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of the top companies in Europe. This is also valid for the public and non-governmental sector. The unequal distribution of labour opportunities is even more visible in rural areas, especially in Eastern Europe where the majority of women is unemployed and are expected to be housewives.

In what concerns family life, there is still a gender hierarchy which structures unequally the power between women and men, resulting in the uneven distribution of knowledge, income, responsibilities and rights. One third of single mothers live in poverty⁴ (80-90% of the single parents are women). Inside the family, gender roles assign the productive sphere of life to men, while women are assigned the reproductive sphere. Gender violence is a consequence of these pre-fabricated gender roles and it is a phenomenon that can affect both women and men.⁵ The most common form of gender violence is domestic violence. In France, one woman is killed every three days by her partner or ex-partner⁶. In Russia, one woman dies each hour killed by a relative, partner or ex-partner⁷, while in Romania a person dies each hour because of domestic violence⁸. In Poland, domestic violence is more common than street violence. Nevertheless, many of the cases of domestic violence are left unreported because this form of violence is still regarded as a private issue. Furthermore, the psychological form of violence is not recognized as a serious crime, therefore not-punishable.

Culture often promotes gender stereotypes that no longer correspond to the social reality. The media plays an important role in creating gender stereotypes through the images that it promotes and the role models presented. The most worrying aspect in the influence of the media on gender roles is the fact that it reaches a large audience and in many cases it reaches children. It has been proved that children as young as age 2 are aware of their gender identity and children between 3 and 4 years old already use gender stereotypes.

Taking all these into account, we require the following actions to be taken:

⁴ From Beijing to Brussels – an unfinished journey. The European Women’s Lobby Beijing+15 Report on the activities of the European Union, Brussels, February 2010

⁵ A manifestation of this phenomenon is also violence against people with different sexual orientations (LGBT)

⁶ Mission Égalité des Femmes et des Hommes, 2009

⁷ NPR Report, 2008

⁸ Romanian National Agency for Family Protection, 2009

What do we demand?

- Equal opportunities for men and women at all levels, either economic, political or social;
- Encouraging the access of women into decision making positions, so as to have equal representation in political structures and private and public companies;
- Ensuring the education of women and young girls so that they know their rights, are able to exercise them, to promote them and to defend themselves against any violation;
- Educating men, women and children to stand for their rights, but also to raise awareness to the people valuating those rights
- Promoting a less stereotyped image of men and women in the media, challenging traditional gender roles, attitudes and behaviours.
- Creation of support networks for victims of gender based violence (including psychological violence) and stronger laws to punish aggressors.

III. Democratic Citizenship

What did we notice?

Even though in most countries in Europe, people live in democratic societies as citizens of a particular country and as European citizens, the concept of “democratic citizenship” puzzles many of them, with just a few being able to explain what democratic citizenship really means. People who are legal citizens of one or another state are entitled to certain privileges or rights. However, being a citizen also entails certain duties or obligations.

Young people from rural areas are also democratic citizens and they need to know their rights in order to be able to fully exercise them, but also they need to be aware of the duties that they should perform. Many believe that democratic citizenship is just about voting, having the right to vote and exercising their right. While it is true that voting is part both of our rights and our duties as democratic citizens there is much more included in this concept than just voting. Democratic citizenship is about participation, getting involved in the life of your community as a member of it.

As The Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life defines it: *“Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engaging in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society.”*⁹

Even though democratic citizenship is a priority at European level, there is a series of reasons why democratic citizenship is such an unclear concept. First of all, the initiatives aimed at promoting democratic citizenship are not numerous enough and the political documents are not promoted by local or national authorities in rural areas. Moreover, the publications on democratic citizenship, such as The Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life are available in just a few languages, thus remaining inaccessible to people who do not know a foreign language.

There is an effort from certain NGOs and institutions for promoting democratic citizenship and making people aware of their rights and duties as democratic citizens. In order for their initiatives to have a real impact it is necessary that all the major actors involved in participation: people in general and especially young people, public authorities and NGOs to work together and develop a genuine dialogue. People need to learn about democratic citizenship both in formal and non-formal settings. Under the given circumstance, we, the European rural youth, believe that major steps have to be made in order for all the people to be aware of their rights and duties as democratic citizens and to actively participate.

What do we demand?

- Young people to take responsibility and to participate in the democratic life of their communities, including the church in order for them to be able to express their voice and influence the decisions that concern them and the life of their community;

⁹ Congress of regional and local authorities of the Council of Europe, May 2003.

- Authorities to make sure that the needs and opinions of young people are reflected in their decisions and their initiatives, through consultations, cooperation and co-management;
- NGOs to support and to facilitate the dialogue between young people and public authorities by creating communication channels, sharing platforms and open discussion spaces;
- Development of campaigns and projects aimed at promoting democratic citizenship and informing people about their rights and duties as democratic citizens;
- Availability of political documents and publications on democratic citizenship in all languages (e.g. translated by young people/ youth NGOs through volunteer work)
- The introduction of democratic citizenship in schools curricula and its integration at all school levels.
- Support to youth organisations where the young people can learn about democratic citizenship

IV. Non formal Education of human rights

What did we notice?

There are several educational settings that could be divided into three major categories: informal education, formal education and non-formal Education.

Nowadays not everybody is aware of the different ways of learning. Non-formal education is a dynamic method to learn, that inspires more young people, but unfortunately it is not fully recognized by government institutions and the educational system.

Non formal education could be used more often in formal environments, because it is a thoughtful and stimulating method accessible to everyone. On top of that non formal education, formal education and informal education complete each other and contribute to the lifelong learning process.

We noticed that there is a lack of awareness of Human Rights. Human Rights Education is the key to prevent human rights violations, to combat discrimination, to promote equality and to develop an understanding of everyone's common responsibility to make human rights a reality.

Human Rights education could increase the awareness on Human Rights and enhance the population's participation in democratic decision making processes.

Human Rights could be taught through non-formal education but many NGOs do not possess sufficient financial means to promote and train people. . That might be one of the reasons why NFE is not available to everyone, especially in rural area.

Ensuring access to training on non-formal education could contribute to educating people as multipliers and active actors in the society and in their communities. Teaching Human Rights through NFE, could prepare young people to be more active in their citizenship, to be aware of their rights, to promote equalities and fight against discrimination.

We, as the European Rural Youth believe that non-formal education is one of the key means available for the population to become involved actors in the society. That is why some actions need to be taken:

What do we demand?

- Creating opportunities for young people to be active actors in the society by training them to practice NFE and act as multipliers in the field of Human Rights.
- NFE to be recognized by the society and the educational system.
- NGOs to provide seminars and training sessions on Human Rights with the financial support of the government and other organizations.
- Training sessions to be accessible to all the population, including young people with fewer opportunities in every area.
- Introduce a NFE module on Human Rights in the formal training of teachers in universities and high schools.

V. Our commitments:

We, youngsters from rural areas all over Europe, commit ourselves to these proposals. In order to achieve our goals we initiate lobby work on national and international level. We sensitize young people, politicians and civil society through campaigns and call for changes in formal and non-formal education.

Lobby Work:

- Promotion of youth and women participation in the official authorities on local, national and international level;
- Promotion of more inclusive policies, which aim at including minorities in the life of the societies;
- Promotion of the freedom of movement;
- Usage of activist actions in order to raise awareness about the current situation concerning the violation of human rights;
- Lobby for the inclusion of the topic of human rights in the agenda of formal education;
- Lobby for the recognition of psychological violence as serious and real crime;
- Support NGOs in identifying the youth leaders in local communities and involving them in their activities based on the principles of representative democracy;

Campaigns:

Organize campaigns that sensitize and inform politicians at all levels, which reach all social classes and particularly young rural people with fewer opportunities.

- Cooperation between NGOs and governments to promote gender equality;
- Raise their awareness about the role of media in causing and overcoming human rights violations;
- Promote the elimination of stereotypes in general and on media in particular;
- Information campaigns targeting minorities and explaining them about their rights as well as responsibilities;
- Designing and implementing information campaigns to make people aware of their rights and duties as citizens of a democratic society;

Non-formal Education:

- Encourage NGOs to involve members of minority groups in their work in order to facilitate their integration;
- Promote structured interpersonal dialogue;
- Focus on the local communities when raising awareness about the importance of human rights;
- Organize seminars for men as to teach them about the concept of women rights;
- Educate the members of the local communities on how to react when their human rights have been violated;
- Involve more people in the work of NGOs and train them on the topic of human rights;
- Act as multipliers when receiving information about topics related to human rights in trainings/seminars;
- Organizing meetings, seminars, training courses and using non-formal tools to teach young people about democratic citizenship;
- Encourage NGOs to promote gender mainstreaming and identify role models that do not fit the stereotypical gender roles;