HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN SITUATIONS OF CONFLICT: SURVEY REPORT

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Facilitated by Equitas – International Centre for Human Rights Education

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale for the Study

> *Rights don't stop in conflict situations. There is an increased need to ensure values of justice, rights, equality, environmental protection, which don't stop when a conflict starts. – Survey respondent*

Over the past decades, conflicts across the globe have persisted, with the highest number of state-based conflict since 1946 in the year 2023[2]. In 2023, conflicts cost the global economy $19.1 trillion — roughly equivalent to the economy of the European Union and more than the combined economies of Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and South Asia. On an individual level, that would be an estimated cost of $2,380 for every person on the planet[3]. The causes, shapes and persistence of conflicts vary and may result in cross-border migration as well as internal displacement. Yet across these various forms of conflict, the human rights of civilians are threatened, along with rule of law, humanitarian law and accountability.

International human rights law and international humanitarian law are designed to complement each other in preventing human rights violations and protecting persons affected by conflict. Human rights at risk in such situations include, but are not restricted to right to life, freedom from torture, and access to health care, among others. Internally displaced persons, in particular, may suffer from poor or inadequate health care provision or acute malnutrition—challenges that disproportionately affect women and children. What is at stake are not only human rights during the conflict phase, but also the protection and fulfillment of these rights in the post-conflict phase. The way conflicts are resolved can shape the prospects for long-term peace, security, and justice. Education about and for human rights during periods of conflict can lay the groundwork for a range of potential positive outcomes, including increased knowledge and strategies for protection of human rights during and following the conflict. Yet, during such situations of conflict and displacement, there has historically been limited

[2] Rustad, Siri Aas (2024) Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946–2023. *PRIO Paper*. Oslo: PRIO. Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946–2023 – Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)

[3] https://data.one.org/analysis/conflict-prevention-less-costly

attention given to human rights education (HRE). The lack of attention to HRE in conflict situations may be explained in different ways. It may reflect some ambivalence about the value of teaching human rights when they are being violated on a regular basis, and where there may be limited power to challenge perpetrating violence. The lack of attention may reflect less HRE programming in such settings, due to the security and logistical challenges of organizing non-formal education programming. Not surprisingly, scholarship and good practice surrounding offering HRE in conflict settings is sparse. And yet such knowledge is essential.

This study was organized to help fill the gap in the literature about the desirability and approaches to HRE in conflict setting, drawing on the views and experiences of practitioners themselves. What priorities and challenges exist? Who are the ideal learners? What might be the human rights themes addressed? How can we guarantee the effective implementation of HRE in conflict contexts? These were some of the questions explored in this research.

1.2 Key Definitions

In this section, we define 'human rights education' and 'situations of conflict.'

Human Rights Education

Article 2 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (2011) defines HRE as:
> *"…all educational, training, information, awareness-raising and learning activities aimed at promoting universal respect for and observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and thus contributing, inter alia, to the prevention of human rights violations and abuses by providing persons with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviours, to empower them to contribute to the building and promotion of a universal culture of human rights."* [4]

The Declaration goes on to highlight the importance of both the explicit mention of human rights standards and values but also a pedagogy that reflects critical thinking and motivates dispositions and capacities to promote human rights. HRE should also "use languages and methods suited to target groups, taking into account their specific needs and conditions" (UN, Article 3, 2011).

We note that HRE is intended for all learning environments, situations of conflict not precluded. However, HRE has an imperative to be sensitive and versatile in how it is carried out in relation to the learning environment. Such considerations include aims, learner groups, local human rights challenges, and strategies for change. These were some of the considerations that this study sought to explore through the experience of practitioners.

Situations of Conflict

As mentioned earlier, conflict situations vary tremendously in kind. Four types of armed violence that have been identified in the fields of conflict studies, peace and security studies, and international relations with strong overlaps in international law (especially international humanitarian law) and political science. These include: inter-state, intra-state, extra-state and sub-state violent conflicts

[4] *United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training* (2011), https://www.ohchr.org/en/resources/educators/human-rights-education-training/11-united-nations-declaration-human-rights-education-and-training-2011

(Bundeszentrale fur politische Building, n.d, <u>Definitions of war and conflict typologies | War and Peace</u>). The causes of conflict may be long-standing and systemic (e.g., economic inequality) or result from more immediate triggers (e.g., power struggles or "terrorist" attacks) (CRS Education, 2024, <u>https://csr.education/dynamics-of-development/understanding-conflict-types-causes-impact/</u>). Who is most affected and the scale and consequences of violence will also vary by context. All of these conditions might potentially influence the aims of HRE programming.

Section 2.2 of this report presents the abridged versions of these definitions incorporated within the survey, as well as comments on these definitions shared by respondents. Other answers provided to survey questions further operationalize understandings of conflict settings and implications for the design and implementation of HRE.

1.3 Research Team

The research was facilitated by Equitas – International Centre for Human Rights Education (<u>Equitas | International Centre for Human Rights Education | Equitas</u>). Equitas works with partners worldwide in supporting HRE, including those working in conflict settings. Equitas convened the researchers and provided technical support for the preparing and analysis of the online surveys (English and French), and the coordination of online researcher team meetings.

The researchers collectively represented the regions of Africa, the Caribbean, MENA and North America. Each of them has extensive experience with HRE and research, and some also have some direct experience carrying out HRE in conflict settings.

The researchers of this report (in alphabetical order):

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1.4 Methodology

Literature Review

This study first involved a literature review on HRE in conflict settings. Only a few articles were found in the scholarship, some of them focused on the general question of HRE in conflict settings and some case studies (Senegal, Sudan, Palestine[5]). There is some debate about whether HRE is beneficial in contexts of war and conflict. One article contends that HRE could result in increased safety for learners when linked with strategies for non-violent conflict resolution (Holland

[5] Holland, T. and Martin, J.P. (2014). Chapter: Human rights education in a secondary school in a conflict-torn region of Senegal, *Human Rights Education and Peacebuilding*. Routledge; Massoud, M. F. (2011). Do Victims of War Need International Law? Human Rights Education Programs in Authoritarian Sudan, *Law & Society Review*, Vol. 45, No.1, pp. 1-32; Bajaj, M., Gota, J.C., and Tow, D.A. (2024). UNWRA and the Education of Palestinian Refugees: An Interview with Ann Irfan, International Journal of Human Rights Education, 8(1).

& Martin, 2014). Another suggests that the real benefit of HRE in conflict settings comes not from the content of human rights - since there can be limited, and potentially dangerous, options for combatting authoritarianism - but from side effects of such trainings, such as supporting the general education of learners who have received little schooling in the past, as well as bringing donor funds to local NGOs (Massoud, 2011). Another article emphasized the importance of collaborating with local religious institutions when there is a religious dimension to the conflict (Zembylas, 2014). The articles collectively highlighted a number of local features to take into account when designing HRE in conflict settings, including the government's view towards human rights, the security of learners and the broader cultural context of the community and region.

The literature review assisted in developing the set of survey questions and, in some cases, closed-ended answer options.

Survey Development and Analysis

Information was collected through an online survey that was distributed in English and French between September and October 2024. The data collection instrument was a 20-question survey, prepared in both English and French. Eight of the questions were closed-ended, though they all included an option to make comments. The survey was aimed at non-formal HRE and addressed themes such as:

—   The importance and challenges of carrying out HRE in conflict settings

—   Ideal learners, learning outcomes and themes

—   Planning and implementation strategies

The survey was piloted before being finalized and disseminated globally through the online networks of Equitas and Human Rights Education Associates (HREA) and the personal networks of the researchers.

Survey analysis took place through several steps:

1.   Downloading of all results into Excel spreadsheets (English and French versions)

2.   Use of the survey platform to provide descriptive statistics (absolute numbers, percentages) of closed-ended questions, with presentation in tables and figures

3.   Researcher analysis of open-ended responses (two researchers for questions, in many cases), which was not coded but resulted in a summary of responses and notes on patterns.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations of this study. The first is that of numbers. Although we did receive responses from 28 persons, of course, a higher number would have been more desirable. This also might have resulted in greater representation of human rights educators working in regional areas of conflict that received relatively less attention in the study (e.g., East Asia) as compared with others (Africa).

We are also keenly aware that the particular circumstances of the conflict, including the role of the government and opportunities to promote human rights, will influence HRE aims and programming. Therefore additional, qualitative research that looks into these differing circumstances and human rights programming would be highly desirable, and possible both through interviewing of HRE practitioners as well as the development of case studies.

Both of these limitations might be addressed through follow-up study. We return to this at the conclusion of this report.

1.6 Organization of the Report

The main text of the report (Section 2) is constituted by the presentation of the results of each question. This presentation also includes additional analysis and comments from the researchers.

Section 3 presents recommendations for practice based on the survey results. The Annex contains the full rendering of answers to some of the open-ended questions, which may be of interest to the reader.

2.0 RESULTS

2.1 Profiles of respondents

The total number of respondents was 28, and their regions and countries are presented in Table 1. We note that these respondents are not representative of all regions and conflict situations. However, survey respondents were based throughout the world, with a relatively higher number in Africa and North America.

Table 1. Region and Countries Respondents Based (n=28)

REGION	NO.	COUNTRIES
Africa	8	Mali, Ethiopia
Caribbean	1	Haiti
Central/Eastern Europe	3	Belarus, Bulgaria, North Macedonia
East Asia	1	Japan
Latin America	1	Colombia
Middle East	2	Israel
North America	7	Canada, US
Southeast Asia	3	Myanmar, India
Western/Northern Europe	2	Netherlands, Spain

In addition to asking where respondents were based, the survey asked them to indicate where they had carried out HRE-related activities in conflict settings. Table 2 shows the regions and countries where survey respondents have worked. All regions excepting for East Asia are represented, with the highest number working in conflict situations in Africa.

Table 2. Conflict Regions and Countries Where Respondents Have Engaged in HRE (n=28)

REGION	NO.	COUNTRIES
Africa	11	Algeria, Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, South Africa
Caribbean	1	Haiti
Central/Eastern Europe	6	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Balkans, Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine
East Asia	0	
Latin America	3	Colombia, Honduras
Middle East	3	Israel, Lebanon
North America	3	US
Southeast Asia	2	Myanmar
Western/Northern Europe	6	France, Northern Ireland, Switzerland, Turkey, UK

Survey respondents were asked to describe their current position, indicating up to two affiliations from the list provided. Respondents could also add in other positions.

Table 3 shows the results, with half of those completing the questionnaire work with a human rights education NGO. Nearly 1/3 worked for a human rights NGO and/or were university educators.

Table 3. Current Position(s) of Respondents (n=28)

POSITION	NO.
Human rights education NGO	14
Human rights NGO	8
University educator	7
International development organization	2
National/sub-national humanitarian aid org	2
Community-based organization	2
School educator	2
Blogger/influencer	2
Other: National/sub-national development org	1
Other: Faith-based organization	1
Other: Journalist	1

These results demonstrate the diverse range of organizations that people carrying out HRE in conflict situations may be affiliated. In some cases, such organizational affiliations already influence potential strategies for HRE, such as a non-formal or formal learning environment, links with community development, and programming involving social media and religious institutions. These learning environments in turn may offer familiar ways of working in terms of HRE methodologies and aims.

2.2 Definitions

Human Rights Education

In the survey, a condensed definition of HRE was presented, based on the UN version, and respondents were invited to comment on this definition: "Human rights education promotes values, beliefs and attitudes that encourage all individuals to uphold their own rights and those of others. HRE is learning about, through and for human rights."

The majority of respondents (19) offered extensions and nuances on the definition and aims of HRE. Consistent with well-established aims for HRE, respondents commented that HRE should:

— Enable people to understand their own rights and the rights of others

— Incorporate skill development, critical analysis and understanding

— Encourage people to take action and to know how to claim their rights in situations when human rights have been violated

— Respect the human rights of others [as not everyone will be a defender of human rights]

Respondents also suggested incorporating the following content within HRE, once again fairly consistent with the content recommended in the HRE literature:

— The inherent nature of human rights, that you are born with them

— Values related to human dignity and common humanity

— The concepts of rights-holders and duty-bearers and their responsibilities in relation to defending human rights

— Human rights principles, theories, practices and conventions

— Rule of law

— Links with not only the discipline of law but also the humanities (e.g., philosophy) and social sciences (e.g., history)

— Some comments addressed specifically the context of carrying out HRE in a conflict setting

— Strategies and participation in efforts to combat violence in conflict situations

— Promoting compassion towards victims of conflict and those suffering from social inequality and inadequate access to healthcare

— Contributing to the fight against impunity

The aims mentioned for the conflict environment appear to reflect in part interpretations of the root causes of the conflict. Proposed themes for HRE in a conflict setting was a separate question included in the survey and are addressed in Section 2.9.

Situations of Conflict

The research team discussed how to define situations of conflict – and even how to refer to such situations – for the purposes of the study. As presented earlier in this report, conflict situations present themselves in many ways. We wanted to create a shared understanding with respondents about the kinds of situations the study was referring to, without getting into the details of the various forms, scale, conditions, causes and ramifications.

In the survey, "armed conflict and other situations of violence" was presented with the following explanation:

The expression conflict situations includes different situations including, armed conflict and other situations of violence.

Armed conflict and other situations of violence

In the context of this questionnaire, the term "armed conflicts" refers to:

— *International armed conflicts between two or more States, and*

— *Non-international armed conflicts between government forces and non-state armed groups, or between such groups.*

The term "other situations of violence" (such as sectarian, social, or tribal conflicts) broadly includes situations of violence that do not reach the threshold of armed conflicts, such as:

— *Internal tensions: significant political or social instability, which may include protests, strikes, or isolated acts of violence*

— *Internal disturbances: more serious situations of instability, such as riots, insurrections, or sporadic clashes.*

Countries indirectly affected by these situations, notably due to population movements or other consequences, are also covered.

Respondents were invited to comment on this definition with the majority (22) offering their opinion. Their responses collectively highlighted the following features of armed conflict:
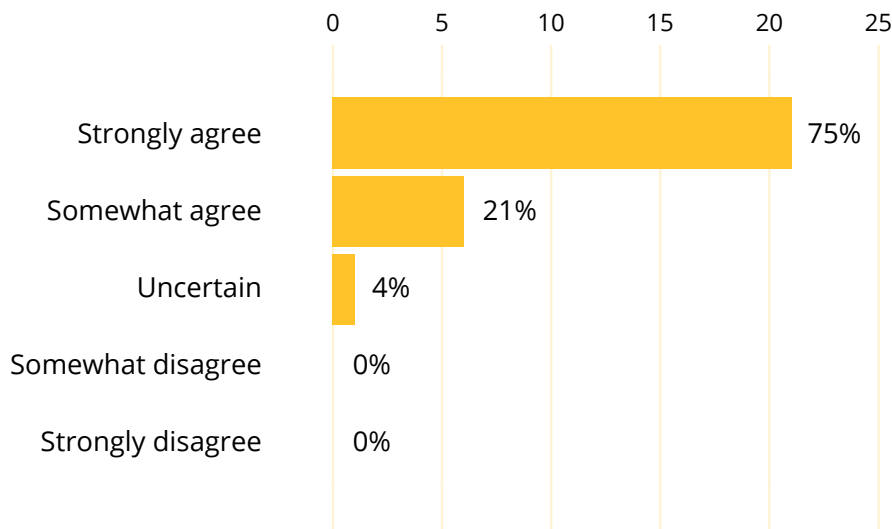
— An armed conflict is a struggle between opposing forces (military or civilian). This situation may be within the same state, hence the term non-international armed conflict or civil war. When the fighting involves several nations, the term international armed conflict is used.

— Such fighting can have an impact on people's way of life by putting them at risk as a result of violence.

— Human rights education in the context of conflict or violence must take into account situations of repression and violation of the rights of people in vulnerable situations, as well as factors linked to countries' external and internal policies.

2.3 Importance of carrying out HRE in conflict situations

Survey respondents were asked to indicate how important they thought it was to carry out HRE in situations of conflict. As Table 4 shows, almost unanimously, respondents considered that it was important to do so.

Table 4. Level of agreement with statement "I consider it important to carry out human rights education in conflict situations." (n=28)

Response	Value
Strongly agree	75%
Somewhat agree	21%
Uncertain	4%
Somewhat disagree	0%
Strongly disagree	0%

Respondents were also asked to explain their answers. A few people indicated that HRE, although important, may not be a priority in times of conflict, and that health and safety issues may be more urgent or because of the difficulty of protecting staff and participants. For this reason, some respondents felt that it may be more realistic to do HRE post-conflict. For another person, human rights are seen as an obstacle to war efforts and ridiculed as being reserved for the weak in conflict situations.

An alternative point of view was that HRE can assist in developing conflict resolution skills that will help to reduce tensions in the short and longer terms. The majority of respondents felt it is crucial to carry out HRE programs as they can contribute to conflict avoidance and conflict resolution, avoiding further conflict and planning for the post-conflict future. One person pointed out that HRE can provide the opportunity to be «change-makers» to maintain peace after war and/or create improved socio-political situations where the human rights of all are respected. In this way, HRE in conflict situations can be seen as inseparably linked with conflict resolution and sustainable peace.
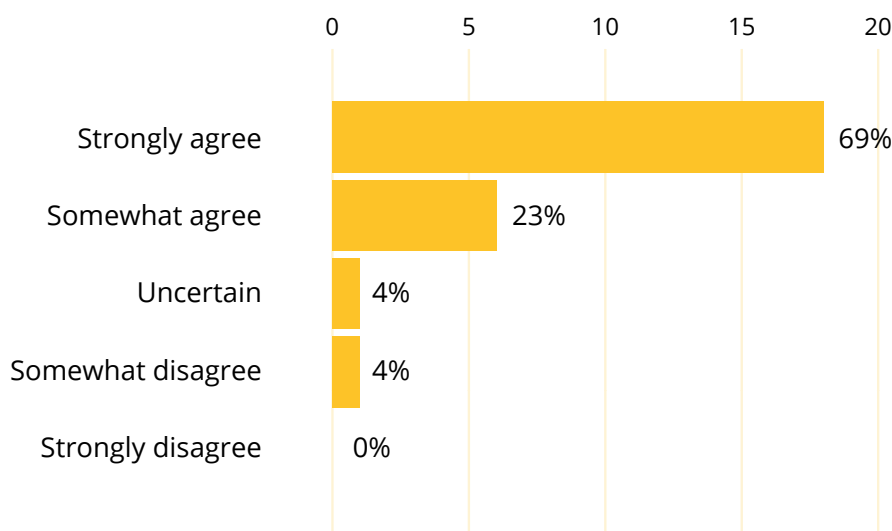
The open-ended comments also brought out several suggestions and rationales for HRE in situations of conflict:

— HRE can help guarantee the participation of marginalized people in emergency aid

— HRE can help identify norms for people living in conflict zones, especially when they are trying to create their own self-governance systems

— HRE can reference legal sanctions to conflict that violates norms of human rights and international humanitarian law as a deterrent for such activities

2.4 Challenges to carrying out HRE in conflict situations

Respondents were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement that it was challenging to carry out HRE in situations of conflict. As Table 5 illustrates, there was nearly unanimous agreement that HRE in these contexts, indeed, was challenging, with 89% of the respondents either strongly or somewhat agreeing that this was the case.

Table 5. Level of agreement with statement "I consider it to be challenging to carry out human rights education in conflict situations." (n=26)

Response	Percentage
Strongly agree	69%
Somewhat agree	23%
Uncertain	4%
Somewhat disagree	4%
Strongly disagree	0%

These findings reflect a widespread perception of the inherent challenges of HRE in conflict contexts.

Researchers further analyzed and conceptualized the results of this question, summarized in Table 6. Respondents highlighted several major challenges associated with HRE in armed conflict contexts. These challenges are grouped into four key dimensions: security and risks for actors, logistical and material constraints, sociopolitical context, and relevance and perception. These are presented in Table 6, along with illustrative challenges.

Table 6: Key Dimensions and Identified Challenges for HRE in Conflict Situations

KEY DIMENSION	SPECIFIC CHALLENGES
Security and risks for actors	Risk of educators being persecuted, dangers for participants, political or hostile perceptions
Logistical and material constraints	Lack of infrastructure, limited resources, forced displacement, restricted means
Sociopolitical context	Social and political tensions, mistrust, rejection of initiatives perceived as non-priorities
Relevance and perception	HRE seen as secondary to immediate needs, difficulty in demonstrating long-term benefits

We further discuss and reflect on the input from survey respondents, along with potential solutions.

1. Security and Risks for Actors

Respondents noted that HRE poses real dangers for educators, who risk being targeted or persecuted. In some contexts, educators may be perceived as political actors or even as traitors. Similarly, organizing events or gatherings can expose participants to retaliatory risks, especially in areas where freedom of expression and association is restricted. The collected accounts indicate that security is not merely a logistical obstacle but also a matter of political and social perception.

► **Solutions:** To address these challenges, some respondents emphasized the importance of strengthening actors' security and working closely with local partners. Furthermore, while not explicitly stated, concerns about HRE being perceived as a "political" or dangerous activity imply a need to focus on its neutrality and community acceptance to overcome these barriers.

2. Logistical and Material Constraints

The absence of safe infrastructures, the lack of basic resources (electricity, classrooms, teaching materials), and precarious conditions such as forced displacement of populations also complicate the implementation of educational activities. In some cases, educators must adapt to rudimentary means, such as teaching via mobile data in isolated or dangerous environments. For instance, one respondent described teaching sessions organized around campfires due to the lack of secure spaces.

► **Solutions:** These challenges highlight the importance of adaptive approaches that prioritize the use of available resources. Collaborating with local communities to identify minimal resources and prioritize immediate needs could make HRE feasible even in conflict settings.

3. Sociopolitical Context

Conflicts often exacerbate social and political tensions, making populations less receptive to initiatives perceived as non-priorities or inappropriate in the face of immediate survival needs. In such situations, HRE may be viewed as a luxury. Feelings of mistrust or rejection toward human rights, intensified by fear of retaliation, would also limit the impact of HRE initiatives.

► **Solutions:** These realities underscore the importance of a contextual and locally sensitive approach. Educators must navigate these environments carefully, maintaining a politically neutral stance while explaining HRE's collective benefits for preventing the resurgence of conflicts.

4. Relevance and Perception

Several responses noted that HRE is perceived as a "secondary activity" compared to fundamental needs during armed conflicts, such as security, access to water, or humanitarian aid. Convincing stakeholders of HRE's long-term advantages, such as conflict prevention or reconstruction, can be challenging.

► **Solution:** To counter this perception, it is essential to demonstrate HRE's practical utility. For example, explaining its role in reducing local tensions,

supporting reconstruction, and preventing future conflicts could help integrate HRE into a strategic vision.

The researchers feel that these results need to be further interpreted from the standpoint of local human rights education (HRE) stakeholders, who may understand and experience risks differently than international or external entities, including international organizations and donors. This consideration is crucial not only because of the potential for harm but also due to the internal divisions present in conflict zones, and the influence of mitigation and adaptation efforts on the quality and objectivity of HRE. Strengthening educators' capacities, developing innovative and culturally appropriate methodologies, and mobilizing local partnerships could be critical to overcoming some of these challenges. Such efforts could not only mitigate perceived barriers but also maximize the impact of HRE in conflict situations. These, and other, solutions are taken up in the answers to other survey questions, and summarized at the end of this report.

2.5 Planning strategies for effective HRE programming in conflict situations

The survey presented a list of planning strategies that human rights educators might undertake in developing an effective human rights education program. Respondents were invited to indicate all of the planning strategies that they considered to be relevant.

As Table 7 reports, respondents found numerous planning strategies to be relevant, with the following three most frequently indicated: diagnosing the root causes of conflict, the analysis of the treatment of 'human rights' in the national/local context and partnering with local NGOs.

Table 7. HRE Planning Strategies in Conflict Situations (n=26)

PLANNING STRATEGY	%	NO.
Diagnosis of root causes of conflict	54	14
Partnership with local NGOs	50	13
Analysis of the treatment of 'human rights' in the national/local context	46	12
Inclusive planning by local actors	38	10
Analysis of opportunities for human rights defenders to engage with the government	38	10
Partnership with religious leaders/cultural leaders	31	8
Inclusive planning, led by women and youth	27	7
Partnership with international NGOs	27	7
Partnership with government officials	23	6
Flexible planning and delivery	8	2
Other: Inclusive planning centered in marginalized groups	4	1
Other: Risk management	4	1
Other: Depends on the context	4	1

Respondents were given the option to explain their responses. A few respondents commented on their decision not to recommend involving government partners, with one explaining that "such engagements are unlikely, unrealistic and may even prove detrimental to peaceful negotiations to end the warfare." Another respondent mentioned that they had tried to do so in the past, but it was unsuccessful and currently "completely hopeless" and, further, would be unwise to do as it would call the government's attention to their HRE efforts. One respondent pointed out that "It would make more sense to train civilians to be the future duty-bearers/government officials, so they can run for office in times of peace and execute what they have been training to do during the war."

The slight exception to this scepticism of working with governments came from one respondent who felt that "partnerships with the government oftentimes come with protection, some level of support and permission to operate." One person also thought that collaboration with educators based at government-run universities could be "narrowly" helpful in carrying out an HRE program.

Some of the respondents emphasized the importance of strongly localizing HRE programs, through the use of local experts, local cases and local material adaptation. One person wrote:

> The local actors already have experience and know most of the do's and don'ts no need to reinvent the wheel, for the human rights education to be effective, it is important to understand how the community value human rights to help inform the approach, means and resources needed.

One respondent pointed out the importance of flexible planning. As the situation can change rapidly in conflict situations, HRE programming needs to remain relevant and strategic and evolve in line with security issues and ideal partnerships.

Additional analysis resulted in the grouping of recommendations along the line of two categories: recommendations that are transversal to any type of education program being carried out in situations of conflict, and recommendations that concern capacity building for human rights.

Table 8. Recommendations for HRE Planning Strategies in Conflict Situations

STRATEGIC PLANNING CATEGORIES	SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS
Transversal to any education program in situations of conflict	Take Do No Harm into account. Do not associate with gangs, for example.
	Analyze safety aspects for participants and practitioners.
	Take into account the reality of people living in dangerous neighborhoods. This can mean choosing safe locations, starting later and finishing earlier. Or confirming whether an accommodation is safe or not.
	Try different approaches, talk to people who have developed other programs
	Integrating different learning styles
	Be realistic about the context and the possibilities for effective action
	Take socio-cultural realities and gender into account
	Include program participants in the entire process in order to take into account their specific needs and develop an adapted, tailor-made program.
	Design continuous rather than one-off programs
	Base programs on experience and observation.
	Regaining a sense of urgency for everyone in the world
	Prioritizing local players
Capacity building for human rights	Plan capacity-building activities in physical, digital and emotional security for the organizations and people involved.
	Understanding root causes
	Avoid additional conflicts (land rights, international criminal court)
	Based on the experiences of people who are actually in conflict zones, who teach human rights.
	Have a good reading list, good moving but informative movies/songs that show the cost of war and how it finally ends and no one understands why it took so long.
	If people witness human rights violations, where do they report them? Focus on responsibilities towards internally displaced people. If people want to leave the country, what are their rights?

One person shared a list of recommendations, emphasizing the rights of children, women and displaced persons. These recommendations include joining HRE with humanitarian aid, developing context-specific materials, using flexible delivery methods, building on practical skills, and promoting collaboration, monitoring and evaluation.

2.6 Implementation strategies HRE programming in conflict situations

Survey respondents were presented with a list of implementation strategies that human rights educators might undertake in developing an effective HRE program. They were invited to indicate three (3) of the planning strategies that they considered to be relevant and to offer additional suggestions.

As Table 9 shows, respondents found numerous implementation strategies to be relevant, with the following three most frequently indicated: participatory methods, use of local trainers and a victim-centered approach.

Table 9. HRE Implementation Strategies in Conflict Situations (n=27)

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY	%	NO.
Participatory methods	63	17
Use of local trainers	48	13
Victim-centered approach	41	11
Local community-oriented projects	37	10
Peer training	30	8
Set of workshops, multi-week course	26	7
Social emotional learning	22	6
Project-based learning	15	4
Part-day workshop (half day or less)	15	4
Videos/podcasts	15	4
Online course	11	3
Intensive workshop (1 day or more)	7	2
Movies, art, litterature from international similar cases	4	1
Trauma-informed victim advocacy	4	1

Respondents were given the option to explain their responses. A few respondents commented on the importance of focusing on in-person, local training with local trainers.

> *Personal and offline communication establishes strong connections, develop motivation and aspiration in a row of like-minded people.*

> *Toutes ces idées sont intéressantes, mais je recommande de prioriser des initiatives d'EDH dans les camps de personnes déplacées ou dans les communautés ou les personnes déplacées et communautés locales co-habitent.* Translation by authors: *All these ideas are interesting, but I recommend prioritizing HRE initiatives in internally displaced person camps or in communities where internally displaced persons and local communities cohabit.*

Contextualiser la stratégie de mise en œuvre en tenant compte des réalités socioculturelles est un facteur de réussite. Pour ce faire, il faudrait recourir aux acteurs locaux et centrer l'approche au cas par cas selon les vœux des victimes. Translation by authors: *Contextualising the implementation strategy, taking account of socio-cultural realities, is a factor for success. To achieve this, it is necessary to make use of local players and focus the approach on a case-by-case basis according to the wishes of the victims.*

As mentioned, most responses focused on local, in-person trainings as effective implementation strategies. However, a few respondents highlighted the potential usefulness of technology in this context.

I think that videos and webinars who are emotionally close to the people or the victims of human rights violation can be more useful.

The people I teach prefer learning over mobile data, since it is difficult for them to get to safe spaces.

Some respondents emphasized the importance of adopting a participatory approach that recognizes and prioritizes emotional needs while maintaining a victim-centred focus.

I believe that gaining the cooperation of local partners who have a deep understanding of the stakeholders, history, causes of the conflict, and the region's culture and customs is essential for designing effective programs. Since the economic and social circumstances may vary from one community to another, an approach tailored to the specific characteristics of each community is necessary. Additionally, it is important to adopt a participatory approach that listens to the urgent needs and experiences of those who have been physically and emotionally scarred by the conflict.

Peer learning works well in situations where people are faced with real life challenges. Bringing peers as facilitators who have done work in other conflict situations is likely to work better, than to bring in facilitators who don't have this experience themselves. We noticed that many teachers in conflict situations, found that they needed social emotional support, both for themselves and for supporting their students. Working with local communities is necessary to have an impact on the ground.

2.7 Ideal learners for HRE programming in conflict situations

The survey contained a question that listed potential types of learners, and asked respondents to indicate the three learner groups that they considered to be a priority for receiving HRE. The data presented in Table 10 shows that individuals experiencing marginalization due to their identity constitute the highest percentage, indicated by 81% of the respondents. This group is followed by youth and women, with 65% and 58%, respectively. In the intermediate range, teachers, children, NGO staff, municipal authorities, and ordinary citizens are positioned with percentages of 42%, 38%, 35%, 31%, and 24%. The categories with the lowest representation include decision-makers, civil society members, political leaders, media professionals, and other professionals, each at 4%.

Table 10. Ideal Learners for an HRE Program in Situations of Conflict (n=26)

LEARNER TYPE	%	NO.
People living in situations of marginalization related to identity	81	21
Youth	65	17
Women	58	15
Teachers	42	11
Children	38	10
NGO staff	35	9
Municipal authorities	31	8
Regular citizens	23	6
Decision-makers	4	1
Civil society and political leaders	4	1
Media people	4	1
Professionals (physicians, nurses, lawyers)	4	1

These results indicate the urgent necessity of HRE being offered for victim protection, especially those coming from vulnerable groups. Protection in the conflict context encompasses addressing both the empowerment of rights holders and the responsibility of duty bearers. On one hand, HRE in conflict situations involves empowering victims and vulnerable populations; it also entails educating duty bearers and others about their responsibility to assist in safeguarding those who are at risk of or already experiencing human rights violations.

Some respondents in open comments highlighted the significance of protecting individuals and preventing violations. For example, one respondent wrote that it was a priority to deliver training so that people learn "how to protect themselves from violations and to refrain from the killing of civilians."

Another comment further highlighted the importance of developing the capacity of vulnerable learners to advocate for their rights and duty bearers to know their responsibilities:

> *En situation de conflits, l'EDH peut et doit être utilisée pour protéger les droits des groupes les plus vulnérables. D'une part, en impliquant ces groupes eux-mêmes (femmes, jeunes, personnes LGBTQI+, handicapées, etc.) pour qu'ils revendiquent leurs droits et d'autre part, en impliquant les structures qui leur offre des services de première ligne pour qu'ils reconnaissent leurs responsabilités à l'égard de ces groupes (ONG et institutions publiques).*
> Author translation: *In conflict situations, HRE can and should be used to protect the rights of the most vulnerable groups. On the one hand, by involving these groups themselves (women, young people, LGBTQI+ people, people with disabilities, etc.) so that they claim their rights and on the other hand, by involving the structures that offer them front-line services so that they recognize their responsibilities towards these groups (NGOs and public institutions).*

The results indicate that women and children, who have received some degree of attention, are vulnerable to violations during times of conflict. Another respondent highlighted the necessity of ensuring that children have access to essential education, including HRE, and other initiatives that uphold the right to play and inspire children to imagine better futures.

The category of youth learners received the most support from respondents, after marginalized groups. However, HRE aims for youth were presented somewhat differently than those for women, children and vulnerable groups. The emphasis on youth comes from their potential for immediate action and building a better future. A respondent also pointed out that "young people are more opened to new competencies, as well as persons in need and in situations of marginalization". The emphasis on younger generations extends beyond periods of conflict, aiming to secure a more promising future. As one respondent wrote:

> *Ces personnes sont les plus vulnérables au sein de la communauté, aussi les enfants et les jeunes sont les futurs adultes de demain, donc des potentiels auteurs, s'ils sont informés et sensibilisés, ils pourront contribuer aux efforts de consolidation de la paix.* Author translation: *These people are the most vulnerable in the community, so children and young people are the future adults of tomorrow, so potential perpetrators, if they have informed and raised awareness, they will be able to contribute to peacebuilding efforts.*

Unsurprisingly, many respondents felt that it would be important to carry out HRE with teachers, which was the fourth most popular learner group. This might be explained by their professional affiliation, as well as their involvement with youth. This perspective is evident in this response: "Teachers have a multiplying effect. In theory, they reach all young people (including children). Young people are an important target group as the rebuilding of the affected countries, largely depends on them". Teachers can influence other learners as well; a respondent who is an educator wrote "My teaching is for people who are trying to implement self-government in areas of Myanmar that have been liberated from the military junta".

Another category of learner receiving substantial support were municipal authorities. One respondent noted that it was important for them to understand their responsibilities from a human rights approach. The same rationale was used to support HRE for other professionals, such as health workers, who already have a professional ethos but might benefit from information, discussion and personal support. It was also recognized that the involvement of professionals in HRE

In general, decision-makers, civil and political leaders, and media-persons were not prioritized as learners for HRE programming. It is an open question how much this has to do with a disposition of HRE programmers to prioritize victims and rights holders in conflict situations. It may also be that duty bearers are not trusted and seen as potentially biased against human rights in such settings.

The analyses and responses raise new questions about not only the prioritization of certain learner groups, but the risks they may experience in participating in HRE, and how to mitigate these. It might also be interesting to explore learner group preferences according to the implementing HRE organization, their access to civic space and learner groups already affiliated with their mandate (e.g., Doctors Without Borders and their work with health professionals).

2.8 Learning outcomes appropriate for HRE programming in conflict situations

Respondents were invited in an open-ended question to share learning outcomes for HRE in conflict situations, at least one for each of the domains of knowledge, values, and skills.

Knowledge outcomes listed included learning human rights law, humanitarian law, and harmful practices. Values outcomes highlighted respect, equality, justice, and non-discrimination, and the promotion of empathy and solidarity with individuals affected by human rights abuses. In terms of skills, the emphasis was on empowering individuals to advocate for their rights while adhering to the "do no harm" principle.

Those who addressed the concerns of professionals pointed out that HRE would need to relate to practice. For example, for physicians, it would be important to raise awareness about the medical code of ethics that mandates physicians to uphold the rights of prisoners against torture. One participant noted the importance of appreciating cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, as well as demonstrating a commitment to peaceful coexistence and understanding the significance of human rights in fostering peace. Additionally, one respondent mentioned the use of mediation techniques to resolve conflicts non-violently, to advocate for victims of human rights violations, and to engage in peacebuilding initiatives.

2.9 Key human rights themes appropriate for HRE in conflict situations

Respondents were presented with a list of possible HRE themes and priorities, and asked to indicate all those that they considered appropriate for situation of conflict. The full results are presented in Table 11.

Table 11. Themes/Key Priorities for HRE in Conflict Situations (n=27)

HUMAN RIGHTS THEME	%	NO.
Rights of displaced persons	63	17
Conflict resolution and coexistence	52	14
General introduction to human rights and UDHR	48	13
Women's rights	44	12
Children's rights	44	12
Sexual violence in war	37	10
Human rights monitoring	33	9
International humanitarian law	26	7
Human rights advocacy	26	7
Migrant rights	22	6
Crimes of war	19	5
Right to land or housing	11	3
International Criminal Court	11	3
It depends on the conflict	11	3
Human rights values and principles	4	1
Ethics in science and technology	4	1

The results highlight clear preferences for which HRE themes to address in conflict settings. The rights of displaced persons emerge as the top priority (n=17), reflecting a strong recognition of the challenges faced by internally displaced persons and refugees, often deprived of security, basic resources, and adequate legal protection. This choice underscores the need to include specific educational modules to enhance awareness of these populations' rights.

Themes related to conflict resolution and coexistence (n=14) highlight the importance of equipping individuals with tools to reduce tensions and foster reconciliation. In conflict situations, education for peace is vital not only to prevent escalations but also to support social and community rebuilding. These initiatives align with a proactive approach that uses HRE as a lever to build resilience collectively.

The importance of a general introduction to human rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (n=13) is equally notable. This priority emphasizes the need for foundational knowledge of universal rights as a prerequisite for any action. In conflict contexts, where these rights are often violated, such knowledge becomes a fundamental tool to empower affected populations.

The rights of women and children (n=12 each) remain critical priorities. These groups are often the most vulnerable during conflicts, facing heightened discrimination, sexual violence, and loss of access to education and healthcare. Addressing these issues specifically reflects a commitment to reducing inequalities and meeting urgent protection and support needs.

Finally, sexual violence in war (n=10) emerges as a crucial theme, highlighting the urgency of raising awareness of this issue. The use of sexual violence as a weapon of war has profound and lasting impacts on individuals and communities, justifying its inclusion in HRE programs.

The lower-ranked themes, such as international humanitarian law (7) or human rights advocacy (7), remain relevant but appear to be perceived as less immediate priorities by respondents. Similarly, themes like right to land or housing, crimes of war, and the International Criminal Court (3 each) are considered less pressing, possibly due to their indirect link to urgent needs or a belief that these areas fall primarily under the responsibility of human rights professionals.

These findings underscore the importance of combining pragmatic and holistic approaches for HRE in conflict settings. By prioritizing vulnerable groups, strengthening foundational awareness, and integrating tools for conflict resolution, educational programs can maximize their impact. These priorities reflect an acknowledgment of local realities and urgent needs while aligning with long-term objectives, such as preventing future conflicts and promoting sustainable peace.

2.10 Recommendations for developing an effective HRE program in situations of conflict

Respondents were asked in an open-ended question to present their recommendations for developing an effective human rights education program. Some main recommendations for developing an effective HRE program include:

— **Do no harm.** Taking into account the safety/security aspects of programs: beginning and ending hours of programs, physical safety in the field, emotional, and digital safety.

— **Plan carefully.** Knowing the context in which you implement an HRE program (doing a needs assessment, reviewing the literature, knowing the root causes of the conflict).

— **Offer practical solutions.** Being as concrete, realistic and as useful as possible (for example, if someone is a victim of human rights abuses, where can they report, if they want to leave the country, what are the possible solutions, etc.).

— **Contextualize.** Tailoring the program to the context of the country of the participant (based on real experiences).

— **Be inclusive.** Involving participants and those teaching in the conflict zones in the design of the program.

— **Integrate gender sensitivity.** Taking into account social-cultural realities and gender equality.

One respondent answered in detail that developing an effective human rights education (HRE) program in conflict situations requires careful planning and strategic implementation and offered a list of 10 recommendations. This comprehensive and useful list is presented here in its entirety.

> *1. **Conduct a Needs Assessment**: Begin with a thorough assessment of the specific needs and challenges faced by the affected population. This helps in tailoring the HRE program to address the most pressing issues.*
>
> *2. **Engage Local Communities**: Involve local communities in the planning and implementation process. This ensures that the program is culturally relevant and has local buy-in, which is crucial for its success and sustainability.*
>
> *3. **Integrate HRE with Humanitarian Aid**: Combine HRE with other humanitarian aid efforts, such as food distribution, healthcare, and shelter. This integrated approach ensures that human rights education is part of the broader relief efforts.*
>
> *4. **Develop Context-Specific Materials**: Create educational materials that are relevant to the local context and accessible to the target audience. This may include translating materials into local languages and using culturally appropriate examples.*
>
> *5. **Train Local Educators**: Invest in training local educators, community leaders, and volunteers to deliver HRE. This builds local capacity and ensures that the program can continue even if external support is reduced.*
>
> *6. **Use Flexible Delivery Methods**: Employ a variety of delivery methods to reach different segments of the population. This could include formal classroom settings, community workshops, radio broadcasts, and mobile learning platforms.*
>
> *7. **Focus on Practical Skills**: Emphasize practical skills that individuals can use to protect their rights and the rights of others. This includes skills in advocacy, conflict resolution, and accessing legal and social services.*
>
> *8. **Monitor and Evaluate**: Establish mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation to assess the impact of the HRE program. Use this feedback to make necessary adjustments and improvements.*
>
> *9. **Promote Collaboration**: Foster partnerships with local and international organizations, government agencies, and other stakeholders. Collaboration can enhance the reach and effectiveness of the HRE program.*
>
> *10. **Ensure Safety and Security**: Prioritize the safety and security of both educators and learners. This includes choosing safe locations for educational activities and being mindful of the risks associated with conflict zones.*

These and other practical insights for designing and implementing HRE in conflict settings are presented in Section 3.

3.0 SUMMARY OF LESSONS FOR PRACTICE

The results of the individual survey questions offer rich insights into considerations coming from the field for designing and implementing HRE in conflict settings. There is no simple formula. However, looking across these inputs, we highlight five key lessons that might be most useful for practitioners, as well as inspire more discussion and further research.

Lesson 1. Many aspects of the conflict situation and implementing HRE organization will influence HRE programming.

There are many considerations influencing the content and delivery of HRE in conflict settings. Knowing the context in which you implement an HRE program is essential for designing an effective program. This might involve doing a needs assessment (even an informal one, by speaking with those affected by the conflict), identifying root causes of the conflict, and reviewing good practices for HRE, especially in conflict settings.

Conflicts often exacerbate social and political tensions, making populations less receptive to initiatives perceived as non-priorities or inappropriate in the face of immediate survival needs. Safety is a recurring concern. While not explicitly stated, concerns about HRE being perceived as a 'political' or dangerous activity imply a need to focus on its neutrality and community acceptance to overcome these barriers. A decision will need to be taken about whether or not to cooperate with government authorities. Feelings of mistrust or rejection toward human rights, intensified by fear of retaliation, would also limit the impact of HRE initiatives. These realities underscore the importance of a contextual and locally sensitive approach. Educators must navigate these environments carefully, maintaining a politically neutral stance while explaining HRE's collective benefits for preventing the resurgence of conflicts.

The implementing agency will already frame the HRE approach, at least in part, for example, whether it takes place in non-formal or formal education settings, is linked with community development or a specific target group, or carried out through social media or religious institutions. In addition, it will be important to recognize how the organizational structure and capabilities of local HRE actors significantly impact the HRE landscape during conflicts, particularly in regions with fragile institutions and limited civic spaces.

Lesson 2. Emphasize the relevance of HRE

Several responses noted that HRE is perceived as a "secondary activity" compared to fundamental needs during armed conflicts, such as security, access to water, or humanitarian aid. Convincing stakeholders of HRE's long-term advantages, such as conflict prevention or reconstruction, can be challenging. To counter this perception, it is essential to demonstrate HRE's practical utility. For example, explaining its role in reducing local tensions, supporting reconstruction, and preventing future conflicts could help integrate HRE into a strategic vision. There

are also immediate benefits, as HRE activities can offer communities a chance to gather in a «neutral» and «structured» space, break isolation, document the situation, identify those most at risk and potential allies, build solidarity, maintain hope, and more. Human rights educators should be as concrete, realistic and as useful as possible (for example, if someone is a victim of human rights abuses, where can they report, if they want to leave the country, what are the possible solutions, etc.).

Keep in mind that HRE programming in conflict setting needs to have the long-term view, building towards long-term peace and stability, through human rights.

Lesson 3. The safety of learners and educators needs to be prioritized and HRE programming take into account logistical and material constraints

It is an imperative to prioritize the safety of educators and learners, and all possible efforts and resources must be mobilized to ensure it. Considerations include safe locations for educational activities, the beginning and ending hours of programs, physical safety in the field, and emotional and digital safety. Adaptive approaches prioritize the use of available resources. Creative solutions might include teaching via mobile data in isolated or dangerous environments or organizing learning 'around campfires' if there is a lack of secure space.

Collaborating with local communities and partners can help make HRE feasible in conflict settings. HRE might even be integrated within other humanitarian aid efforts, such as food distribution, healthcare and shelter. This integrated approach ensures that HRE is part of broader relief efforts and their safety protocols.

Carrying out HRE activities always involves a certain level of risk, even when all possible measures are taken to prioritize the safety of those involved. However, it is also important to recognize that HRE activities can actually enhance the safety of at-risk individuals and communities. These spaces can be used to ensure that people at risk are aware of their rights and have access to a support network, to share critical information, and to exchange good practices in terms of safety, among other things.

Lesson 4. Design of HRE programming should be inclusive, locally oriented and reflect a rights-based approach

The human rights-based approach highlights the values of participation, empowerment and accountability, with a priority on addressing the needs of the most vulnerable. These principles are readily applicable to the design and implementation of HRE in conflict situations.

Participants and educators in the conflict zones should be involved in HRE program design. This helps to ensure that HRE addresses the most pressing local issues and that the program is culturally relevant and has local buy-in, which is crucial for its success and sustainability.

HRE aims and methodologies in conflict settings should promote the capacity development of learners in terms of claiming and upholding human rights, including rights holders as well as duty bearers. In this context, protection encompasses both empowerment and responsibility. On one side, HRE in conflict settings involves empowering victims and vulnerable populations, while on the

other, it entails the duty of other groups to assist in safeguarding those who are at risk of violations.

Even with such principles in place, the rapidly changing situation during periods of conflict may require flexibility and adaptability. HRE programming needs to remain relevant and strategic and evolve in line with security issues and ideal partnerships.

Lesson 5. Design of HRE programming should draw on good practices for HRE in other settings but also incorporate conflict-sensitive aims and approaches

Many established good practices for HRE remain relevant for HRE programming in conflict situations. These include addressing themes such as human rights principles, protections and practices as they apply in everyday life; facilitating the capacity development of people to take action and to know how to claim their rights; the incorporation of skill development, critical analysis and understanding; the use of participatory methods and other innovative and cultural appropriate teaching methods; flexible delivery methods (e.g., formal classrooms, community workshops, radio broadcast and online learning platforms); the integration of different learning styles; and the localization of HRE programs through use of local experts, cases and material adaptation. These and other good practices are well documented in the HRE literature.

However, HRE in conflict settings has additional considerations. Care should also be taken to ensure the wellbeing and health of learners and trainers, who may be affected by hearing of the trauma of others in an HRE learning context. It should include practical information about how to combat violence in conflict situations, while being realistic about the context and the possibilities for effective action. HRE in conflict settings should include information about how to gain access to emergency aid, how to report human rights violations, and rights associated with internal displacement or wanting to leave the country. Capacity development should address physical, digital and emotional security. HRE can help identify norms for people living in conflict zones, especially when they are trying to create self-governance systems.

Looking ahead, HRE in conflict settings should include a focus on conflict resolution and planning for a post-conflict future. This future includes the fight against impunity including use of legal sanctions against actors violating human rights and international humanitarian law.

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