

Using COMPASS across Europe

What and where is Europe?

Historians will remind us that at its origin, in Ancient Greece, “Europe” probably referred to what is today the Balkans. Today, Europe is far more extensive, but it is certainly no easier to define.

Political Europe covers a land mass of over 10 million square kilometres, and extends into the territory of geographical Asia. The climate over the entire continent ranges from sub-tropical in some southern regions to polar in northern ones. Europe is the source of over 200 living languages and the home of speakers of many more. It embraces some 50 states, which contain between them a total population of nearly 800 million.

Every major religion is to be found within its borders. The continent is associated with the birth of democracy and, at the same time, with some of the worst examples of fascism and totalitarianism that the world has ever seen. Europe’s past is marked by the Holocaust, by colonialism and by slavery, and today it provides the location for enough nuclear weapons to wipe out all life on earth. Yet, it hosts the annual ceremony for the Nobel Peace Prize, and it has established a permanent court of human rights, which is acclaimed throughout the world.

The countries of Europe

Today, the states that make up Europe include some that are less than 10 years old, and others whose borders have barely changed over hundreds of years. Some continue to change even today, as conflicts threaten unstable borders. Thus, there are people in Europe leading lives that face violence and conflict on a daily basis, while many others, in one and the same continent, reside in conditions of peace, security, and often prosperity.

? What makes a country ‘European’?

There are millionaires in every European country; and millions living below the poverty line in every country. There is diversity within each country, and diversity between them. Become a teacher in one part of Europe and you may receive more in a day than colleagues in other parts receive in a month. Become a teacher in another region and you may not receive a salary at all, for months on end.

Europe is indeed a mixed place.

One Europe? Two Europes...?

Can we say there is an Eastern Europe and a Western Europe to make things simpler? A Northern and Southern Europe? What about Central Europe?

Can we divide it into a Christian Europe and a Muslim Europe?

Or a rich Europe and a poor Europe ... a peaceful and a war-torn Europe ... a democratised Europe and one damaged by totalitarianism... a left-wing and a right-wing, an Americanised and a Sovietised Europe?

? Which “part” of Europe do you belong to ? Are you “typical” of that part of Europe?

If any of these divisions seem correct, or at least helpful in identifying particular needs on different sides of the division, then consider how some of the following groups might ‘fit’ under such general categories. Would their *needs* correspond to the ‘stereotypical’ needs of the country or part of Europe in which they happen to be living?

- Businessmen in the Balkans
- Bengali communities in East London
- People suffering terrorist violence in the Basque country or Northern Ireland
- Hill farmers dependent on the climate in Spain, Italy, Romania and Georgia
- Roma populations in Hungary, Slovakia, Greece or France
- Islamophobes or anti-Semites in Germany, Russia, Lithuania, Sweden, Poland, and every other country of the continent
- Fishing communities in Scotland, Norway, Croatia or Estonia
- Immigrant workers in Belgium and Finland
- Refugees and asylum-seekers in Ukraine or Poland;
- Muslims, politicians, human rights activists, teachers, youth leaders, short people, bald men, women with children and women without.

Such examples show us that not one of the proposed divisions is clear cut or adequate to describe the multi-faceted nature of every single country, community and, indeed, individual. There are some common needs throughout the whole of Europe, but there are equally different needs within each small community in every individual state . Europe, and each single country that composes it, is a small world of cultural and social diversity.

A book for Europe?

So why create one manual for the whole of Europe? Can it be sufficient to meet the needs of all the peoples in this rich and mixed continent?

This section sets out some answers to those questions and the ways that we approached some of the difficulties that we faced. It also tries to illustrate our reasons for believing that such a task was not only realistic but even necessary. Europe, after all, not only has a very diverse culture but also many points of commonality. To find those points of commonality and thereby understand our differences can be as important as the task of preserving our very separate identities.

? Have you had contact with other youth groups in different parts of Europe? What did your groups have in common?

Human rights as a common factor

The idea of human rights lies at both the historical and the ideological foundation of the Council of Europe and is just one of those points of commonality running through the whole of Europe. It is not, of course, exclusive to Europe, but it is certainly one of the most important uniting and unifying factors, and with the increased membership of the Council of Europe, it will become ever more so.

Every country that has signed up for membership has also committed itself to observe the fundamental rights and freedoms set out in the European Convention on the Protection of

“...they first came for the communists; I did not speak because I was not a communist. Then they came for the Jews; I did not speak because I was not a Jew. Then they came to fetch the workers, members of trade unions; I was not a trade unionist. Afterward, they came for the Catholics; I did not say anything because I was a Protestant. Eventually they came for me, and there was no-one left to speak.”

Pastor Martin Niemoller

Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. This means, for the ordinary citizen of the different European states, that those rights and freedoms are, to some extent at least, *protected* by the entire community of European states.

But even with the existence of the European Court of Human Rights, protection of those human rights can only be real and substantial for every citizen when each individual helps to play an active role in their observance. Citizens need to know about the existence of those rights, they need to be able to defend them when they are violated, and they need to respect them in their everyday lives. This is the task of education, and it is a task for the whole of Europe.

Citizens of the world

Knowing how to stand up for and protect our own rights is important but it cannot be the whole story. We have taken the view in this manual that human rights are a *global* issue and that the youth of Europe, as citizens of the world, need to appreciate this if human rights are to be respected not just in our part of the world but everywhere on our common earth.

Of course every country in Europe has its own work to do on improving the protection of its citizens' rights. There is not one country that has a clean record on human rights abuses, however human rights education is crucially about not only *our* rights but also the rights of other people. Thus, while one task of this manual is to promote a greater awareness of rights issues in order that young people (in Europe) be better able to improve their own immediate rights environment, another task is to encourage them to take an interest in those issues in the wider world, and to consider the actual and possible impact of their own behaviour.

Young people across the world and particularly across Europe have always given themselves generously to the cause of human rights and human rights education. In times of fascism and totalitarianism, it was often young people and students who were at the forefront of protests and actions against repression and oppression; and youth organisations and associations have always played a crucial role in bringing young people from Europe closer together, and in standing up for their rights. The work of international non-governmental youth organisations has often involved forging links and building solidarity among young people – both in Europe and outside it. Such work rests on the ideals of solidarity, co-operation, peace and human rights.

It is time to extend these experiences and this work to other young people in Europe and to build an appreciation of human rights issues both in this continent and beyond. There needs to be a greater understanding of the way in which our actions can assist the protection of human rights for fellow human beings. That, too, is a task for the whole of Europe.

A European Dream

Of course no-one wants the different countries and cultures of Europe to lose their separate identities. However in producing this manual, we were motivated by the fact that *not one* of the cultures of Europe – or indeed, of the world – is inherently opposed to, or need be altered to its detriment by, a flourishing human rights culture. In fact, these values exist in every country already, and the cultures will only thrive if they are strengthened (so that everyone can have the opportunity to contribute to them positively).

There was another hope. We hoped that common interests and a common endeavour could contribute towards the bringing together of young people on our common continent, to help them see each other as equals, sharing a common reality and being jointly responsible for

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

Martin Luther King

“Perseverance is more prevailing than violence; and many things which cannot be overcome when they are together yield themselves up when taken little by little.”

Plutarch

the future of the continent: perhaps Siberia could link up with Portugal in protecting the rights of women; perhaps young people in Albania and Luxembourg could build a common web-site to focus the world’s attention on child labour; or perhaps schools in Malta and Denmark could plan a simultaneous street action to focus on bullying in schools in different countries.

Young people care, and they can lead the way. They can refute those who criticise their individualism and their apathy – just as other generations have for centuries, and they can prove those wrong who insist that *there is no alternative*, and put new energy into the peaceful struggle for human rights around the world. Young people are not just the target groups for this manual: they are its main hope and its main resource.

Youth work and youth representation

Although the activities in this manual are intended to be appropriate for use in formal educational settings, it was our intention to produce a publication that could be used primarily by youth workers outside the formal education system. Clearly the nature and extent of such work may differ from one country to another. However, by proposing different types of methods and exploring different themes, we aimed to address the different needs of the diverse youth groups and associations existing in every European country. For after-school clubs, Scouts groups, church youth groups, university clubs, human rights groups and exchange clubs, the range of activities covered in the pack ought to provide something of relevance and use, in addition to being applicable to people working in more formal settings.

The main focus of youth work is the personal and social development of young people, and for that reason the majority of activities in the pack perhaps pay more attention to these aspects than to the traditional educational end of increasing knowledge. It was important in putting together the activities to concentrate on attracting the interest of young people in these issues, and to use experiential learning to engender feelings of respect for human rights, particularly among those who do not necessarily respond to attempts made in this direction within the formal education system.

? Do you use experiential learning in your work?

In educational settings and institutions where teaching methods are more knowledge-based than experiential or skills-based, such an approach may be less familiar. For that reason, we have provided useful starting points and essential background information on the educational approaches of this manual (see the chapter “*How to use the Manual*”). We see this as an important part of ensuring that the manual is accessible not only to young people everywhere in Europe, but also to teachers and group facilitators or youth workers who may be less familiar with certain working methods.

In a modest way, we hope that this manual may help to bridge the methodological gaps between formal and non-formal education. In both contexts, it is essential to involve the young people whose attention is sought – all the more so, in an area such as human rights where active involvement and participation are essential factors. Because of their inclusive nature, each of the activities included within the manual is intended to provide an interesting and attractive way for young people to become more aware of general human rights issues, in any type of environment.

? How do you involve young people in your activities?

One further focus has been the attempt to enable young people to make their own positive contribution to the issues that concern them, and for that reason we have also included a section on *Taking Action*. In this respect, it is worth noting that most of the suggestions in this section are not by any means exclusive to human rights ‘activism’, in the sense that they are mostly normal youth activities that many groups will already be undertaking in fields other than that of human rights. They are the type of activities that every young person is interested in taking part in.

“Young people are not only the future ... we are the present.”

Statement of children and young people at the Europe and Central Asia consultation for the Special Session on the Rights of the Child, Budapest 2001.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child

All European countries have signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and have thereby undertaken an obligation to observe it, and to report regularly on progress being made towards fulfilling the rights completely. The Convention is relevant to this manual partly because of the age range of the target group – although the manual is also intended to appeal to people above the 18-year-old upper limit of the Convention.

However, the Convention also deserves a particular mention in terms of the methodology of the manual. At the heart of the Convention, and incorporated into several of its articles (in particular, Articles 3 and 12), is the idea that young people have the right to express their views and to have them taken into account, in all matters that affect them. This idea has reached different stages of realisation in different European countries: in some there are genuine opportunities for young people to participate in the decisions that directly affect them; in others, the process is less developed.

? Is there a copy of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in your school or in your association?

Clearly, the opportunities that already exist will determine to some extent the degree to which young people are able to influence decisions, and also the advisability of undertaking certain actions rather than others. The overall objective, however, of treating young people as *people*, worthy of genuine respect and equal in that sense to other members of the adult population remains valid for every part of Europe.

The production process

The Production Team of *COMPASS* was composed of 8 people, and had to produce the background materials and design the activities for the manual. As is often the case, the team was put to test during the production phase, which was naturally challenging - not least, because the deadlines were very tight. In order to ensure the maximum exchange of different experiences, each writer produced texts that had to be checked and approved by two other writers. Similarly, each theme or chapter was always shared between at least two people.

The Production Team represented Europe, at least in its total internal diversity. Members came from North, South, East and West (and from the centre). Our histories, traditions, languages, dress and taste in music clashed and overlapped alternately. We wanted slightly different things, or to do them in a slightly different way – because each of us knew better than the rest the needs of his or her own country.

Yet none of us knew the needs of everyone – not even in their own country, and this, after all, was why each of us was necessary, and all of us were insufficient.

One member of the Reference Group, living in one of the ex-communist states, remarked early on that *countries in Western Europe are concerned with the rights of minorities; whereas countries in our part of Europe are concerned with the rights of the majority*. Some people disagreed with that as well: they felt ‘their part’ of Europe did not fall into either stereotype. Others felt that that was one generalisation which - like many generalisations - possibly contained an element of truth. We tried to take it into account. But the point may equally well have been made by every one of us in a slightly different way: ‘*People in Southern Europe / Muslim Europe / rural areas / capital cities / war-torn Europe... are concerned with...*’

The remark reminded us, however, that despite our common aims, the differences between our cultures were no less significant than the differences between *us*, their representatives. We left the process with the same hopes and aspirations that the issues which concerned all of us could – and should – concern others as well, wherever they were living, because these were indeed issues for the whole world. But we also left the process wondering about the extent to which we had managed to cover the *whole of Europe* adequately. But that, after all, would have been an impossible task.

Using the manual across cultures and languages

There are two central problems concerned with designing a manual for such a wide audience. The first is the problem of over-generality: that activities may not be specific enough to address the particular concerns of certain groups or populations. The second, conversely, is the problem of their touching too specifically certain issues that either do not appear to be relevant to all of the target countries, or are too sensitive to raise in some of them.

The issues that we have included in the manual are certainly relevant and of direct concern to all human beings, wherever their geographical location. Nevertheless, it may still be the case that the way that some issues are presented or some activities are developed are less suitable for certain groups and facilitators. The task of the facilitators or group leaders, in such cases, is not simply to reproduce or follow blindly the instruction, but to identify where there is need for improvement, adaptation or updating to the specific context. The general guidelines given below may be of assistance in this task.

This manual should be seen as a starting point, a living educational tool that is open to ideas, adaptation and any suggestions for improvement.

Guidelines for adaptation:

- Where issues are controversial within your society, or where they are likely to provoke resistance from people in authority, consider whether it is possible to look at the issue in the framework of a different society or in a historical setting, without necessarily drawing explicit comparisons to current practices. Conversely, if an issue is controversial or divisive, you may even wish to work with that fact: encourage participants to research different points of view, and perhaps ask someone with a minority perspective for their opinion.

- If using the activities in a formal educational setting, where there are pressures on the timetable and where content is of prime importance, you will probably want to make more use of the background information or other information that you or your students may find. You may also want to break up some activities (for example, over two days).
- If there are limited opportunities for including human rights education within your educational setting, there are plenty of ways of using some of the activities within other subjects – such as Geography, History, Citizenship, Political Studies, and so on. You may want to adapt some of the activities accordingly.
- If young people seem to think that certain issues are not of prime importance, or cannot see the relevance to their immediate situation, ask them to consider this question directly, and to draw out the ways in which such an issue could affect their own lives. *All* of the issues included within this manual are in fact of direct relevance to *all* young people!
- There may be activities where you feel that there is particular information that is relevant to your group, or your society, or a particular approach that is more suitable. Be flexible about the different activities: allow participants to make suggestions, extend or limit the timing or the background information if this is appropriate, and use the follow-up suggestions if the group is particularly interested in an issue. Sometimes, you may have to complete the information provided, or adapt it to your own context.
- Use your own judgement to assess the possible drawbacks of involving young people in any form of public action – for example, in tense social or political circumstances.
- Involve the young people in any difficulties you are encountering, wherever this is possible. They will appreciate the opportunity to express their opinions, and will be more likely to understand any restrictions or limitations to which you may be subject.