

Where do you stand?

Are social and economic rights luxuries, only for citizens of rich countries?

Themes	General human rights, Citizenship, Poverty
Complexity	Level 2
Group size	Any
Time	50 minutes
Overview	This is a discussion activity that addresses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The basic essentials necessary for human dignity ▪ The relative importance of civil and political rights and social and economic rights ▪ Governments' obligations concerning social and economic rights
Related rights	All
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To gain an understanding of the difference between civil and political rights and social and economic rights ▪ To think about some of the complex issues associated with protecting rights ▪ To use and develop skills of discussion and argumentation
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One copy of the sheet of statements ▪ Large sheets of paper or flipchart paper, pens ▪ String or chalk (optional) ▪ copies of the simplified UDHR on page 402 (optional)
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prepare 2 posters – one saying, “I agree” and the other saying, “I disagree” – and stick them at opposite ends of the room, so that people can form a straight line between them. (You may want to draw a chalk line between them, or use a piece of string)

Instructions

1. Start with a very brief introduction to the differences between civil and political rights, and social and economic rights.
2. Spend 5 minutes brainstorming the different rights that would fall under each category. List the rights on the flipchart under the headings, civil and political rights, and social and economic rights.
3. Explain that you are now going to read out a series of statements with which people may agree to a greater or lesser extent.
4. Point out the two extreme positions – the posters stating “I Agree” and “I Disagree”. Explain that people may occupy any point along the (imaginary) line, but that they should try to position themselves, as far as possible, next to people whose views almost coincide with their own. Brief discussion is permitted while people are finding their places!

THEMES



GEN. HUMAN RIGHTS



CITIZENSHIP



POVERTY

COMPLEXITY



LEVEL 2

GROUP SIZE



ANY

TIME



50 MINUTES

5. Read out the statements in turn. Vary the rhythm: some statements should be read out in quick succession, while for others you may want to take a little time between statements to allow for discussion.
6. Stimulate reflection and discussion. Ask those at the end-points to explain why they have occupied these extreme positions. Ask someone near the centre whether their position indicates the lack of a strong opinion or lack of knowledge .
7. Allow people to move position as they listen to each others' comments.
8. When you have gone through the statements, bring the group back together for the debriefing.

Debriefing and evaluation

Begin with reviewing the activity itself and then go on to discuss what people learnt.

- Were there any questions that people found impossible to answer – either because it was difficult to make up their own mind, or because the question was badly phrased?
- Why did people change position during the discussions?
- Were people surprised by the extent of disagreement on the issues?
- Does it matter if we disagree about human rights?
- Do you think there are “right” and “wrong” answers to the different statements, or is it just a matter of personal opinion?
- Might it ever be possible for everyone to reach agreement about human rights?
- Is there a fundamental difference between the (first) two “generations” of human rights: civil and political rights and social and economic rights? Is it possible to say which of these are more important?
- Do we need any more rights? Could there be a third generation of rights?

Tips for facilitators

This activity embraces all human rights, but social and economic rights in particular; for example, the rights to work and leisure, to health care, and to a basic standard of living. (Articles 16, 22-29 of the UDHR)

The statements given below are designed to address some of the debates that take place concerning the difference between civil and political rights on the one hand, and social and economic rights on the other. There is no need to go into a great deal of detail at the beginning of the activity, since many of the points should emerge in the course of discussion.

However, two points are perhaps worth drawing out by way of an introduction. First, the simple distinction that civil and political rights are those moral demands that we make on governments concerning civil and political issues, such as the right to a fair trial, to vote, to express one's opinion, etc; and social and economic rights are those demands that are connected with social and economic issues – such as homelessness, inadequate health care, poverty, etc. The first type of rights are also referred to as *first generation* rights, and the second type as *second generation* rights, because of the historical order in which they came to be recognised by people as universal human rights.

The second point is that some people have drawn a fundamental distinction between the different types of rights. Social and economic rights have been claimed by many to be either less important, and/or more difficult to guarantee than civil and political rights. Others dispute this. You can find more information about the debate in chapter 4.

Key date

5 December

International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development

During the brainstorming, you may want to give people copies of the simplified UDHR to jog their memories; or you yourself could read out some of the articles and ask people to put them into the correct category. Articles 16 and 22-29 are generally regarded as referring to social-economic rights.

You may want to run the lining-up part of the activity relatively quickly, without giving much time for discussion between the various points, and then to select two or three of the statements and discuss them in more detail with the whole group. But it is worth stopping the activity at certain points in order to give people the opportunity to reflect both on some of the points and on their position relative to that of others.

Variations

Compose other statements, or ask members of the group to make up their own.

Suggestions for follow-up

Organise a formal debate on one of the issues, asking people to prepare their arguments in advance, and then take a vote at the end of the debate. You could invite other young people or members of the public to attend.

Knowing about human rights is important, but being an active citizen is also essential if rights are to be safeguarded. You may like to try the activity “Electioneering”, on page 127. This looks at the question of persuading others over to your opinion.

Ideas for action

Get in touch with a local organisation that works for human rights or social welfare and find out how you can contribute.

Further information

Chapter 4 of the manual contains background information on the different generations of rights, including an introduction to “third generation” rights.

HANDOUTS

Sheet of statements

- It's more important to have a roof over your head than to be able to say what you like.
- People have a duty to work, but not a right.
- The most basic responsibility of any government is to make sure that all citizens have enough to eat.
- The right to “rest and leisure” is a luxury that only rich countries can afford.
- It's not the government's job to make sure that people don't starve – but the people's!
- The way we choose to treat our citizens is no business of the international community.
- Poor countries should concentrate on a basic standard of living for all before worrying about the civil and political rights of citizens.
- Extreme economic inequality is an infringement of basic rights.
- Social and economic rights express an ideal for the future, but the world is not ready to guarantee them today.
- If rights can't be guaranteed, there is no point in having them.