

“Freedom of religion or belief and school education”

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- The school constitutes the most important formal institution for the realization of the right to education.
- Besides providing students with the necessary knowledge and information in different disciplines, school education can facilitate a daily exchange between people from different ethnic, economic, social, cultural and religious backgrounds.
- Freedom of religion or belief and school education, however, require very careful handling since the school is also a place in which authority is exercised and some persons, including members of religious or belief minorities, may find themselves in situations of vulnerability.
- Given this ambivalence of the school situation, safeguards are necessary to protect the right to freedom of religion or belief, both of the students and their parents or legal guardians.
- International legal framework on freedom of religion or belief and right to education:
 - Articles 18 and 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
 - Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
 - Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
 - Articles 14 and 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
 - 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.
 - 2001 Final Document of the International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation with Freedom of Religion or Belief, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination (“Madrid Final Document”).
 - 2007 Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools (prepared by the OSCE/ODIHR Advisory Council of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief).
- Fundamental questions of school education related to issues of religion or belief – including the definition of educational principles, the compilation of the topics of the school curriculum, basic institutional and organisational arrangements, etc. – require a high degree of sensitivity.
- Educational policies should aim to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights, eradicating prejudices and conceptions incompatible with freedom of religion or belief, and ensuring respect for and acceptance of pluralism and diversity in the field of religion or belief as well as the right not to receive religious instruction inconsistent with one’s conviction (see *Madrid Final Document*, paragraph 4).
- Efforts should be made to establish advisory bodies at different levels that take an inclusive approach to involving different stakeholders in the preparation and implementation of school curricula related to issues of religion or belief and in the training of teachers (see *Toledo Guiding Principles*, page 16).