

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN SOCIAL WORK DEGREE PROGRAMMES

The following is an English summary of a more extended baseline study from Denmark (87 pages). The study examines the **extent** and **quality** of human rights education in the Danish educations of social workers and social advisors.

The study is conducted by The Danish Institute for Human Rights in 2016.



You can find the Danish version here: <https://menneskeret.dk/udgivelser/undervisning-menneskerettigheder-paa-socialraadgiveruddannelsen>

ENGLISH SUMMARY

Social workers and social advisors work with socially vulnerable citizens and nearly all of them act on behalf of a public authority. This means that they must secure and ensure compliance with human rights in their day-to-day work. The Danish Institute for Human Rights has examined the extent to which human rights, including non-discrimination and equal treatment, are a part of the official curriculum and teaching of social work degree programmes.

Our baseline study shows that the curricula of social work degree programmes contain requirements to teach human rights obligations, but they do not specifically stipulate non-discrimination and equal treatment. Human rights obligations are included to various degrees in teaching. Obligations in the area of equal treatment are rarely mentioned. Therefore, future social advisers are often not equipped to handle Denmark's human rights obligations with regard to equal treatment and non-discrimination when exercising their authority.

Human rights are a fundamental part of the definition of social work, both within international and Danish professional organisations. Teachers who participated in the study describe human rights as a defining aspect of the fundamental values of social work. Human rights are therefore an integral part of teaching, which covers subjects such as culture, citizenship and ethics. Human rights are often closely entwined with the knowledge dimension when taught as part of modules on the law. This means that students are often introduced to principles and rights, but the subject area is often absent when teaching concerns strengthening skills and competences.

The study also shows that several teachers would like more knowledge and teaching materials which translate Denmark's human rights obligations into

social work practice, and which would therefore be relevant to the students' future professional careers.

If the profession's knowledge and competences to secure and ensure compliance with human rights are to be enhanced through education programmes, then teaching must focus more on human rights obligations, including equal treatment. This also requires strengthening the core competences of teachers with regard to teaching human rights from a professional perspective.

Our study consists of a review of the international framework for human rights education, a analysis on the presence of human rights in the curricula for degree programmes and in selected lessons plans, and group interviews with teachers from five out of the six Danish educational institutions that offer professional bachelor education programmes in social work.

OBJECTIVE

The objectives of the baseline study are to provide new knowledge on human rights teaching within social work degree programmes. This is done in order to identify the extent to which the programmes focus on developing the competences of future social advisers to work in accordance with human rights obligations in practice. The objectives of the study are therefore;

- to examine if and how human rights are incorporated into the curricula for the programmes, i.e. into Danish legislation, executive orders and curricula for the programmes.
- to examine if and how human rights are incorporated into teaching practices on the programmes, including how teachers interpret the official curriculum and how they incorporate human rights into their teaching.

DATA

The data basis of the study consists of document analysis and interviews. The first two sections of the study present a review of the international framework for human rights education and an analysis of the Danish framework for social work degree programmes. The final section of the study consists of an analysis of selected lesson plans and group interviews with several teachers from Danish social work degree programmes.

The choice of study method makes it possible to identify to what extent and how human rights and equal treatment are part of the curricula for social work degree programmes and thereby part of the education of social advisers. It is also possible to provide descriptions of how teachers interpret curricula in their teaching practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study presents five recommendations on how to strengthen the teaching of human rights in social work degree programmes.

RECOMMENDATION NO.1: EQUAL TREATMENT AND NON-DISCRIMINATION WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE PROGRAMMES

The Institute recommends that the Ministry and the programme directors at educational institutions:

- incorporate human-rights-based principles on equal treatment and non-discrimination into future executive orders on education and training and into local curricula.

Background: The review of curricula showed that equal treatment and non-discrimination are absent from the executive order on the programmes, and that they are only thinly represented within elective modules at three out of the six educational institutions that offer these programmes in Denmark. Furthermore, equal treatment and non-discrimination are not present in any of the lesson plans that were analysed and the interviewed teachers stated that they do not teach human-rights-based obligations with regard to equal treatment and non-discrimination, e.g. Danish equal treatment legislation.

RECOMMENDATION NO.2: HUMAN-RIGHTS-BASED KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND COMPETENCES

The Institute recommends that the Ministry and the programme directors at educational institutions:

- ensure that throughout their education, students acquire knowledge, skills and competences to act professionally within social work practice in accordance with Denmark's human-rights-based obligations.

Background: The term 'human rights' is not mentioned in the curricula, however, students must be familiar with international conventions. The four times that conventions were mentioned with regard to learning outcomes (in two national modules and two local curricula, respectively) were with regard to factual knowledge. This means that students should have 'knowledge of' conventions. The programmes focus on the knowledge dimension rather than the skills and competences to manage human-rights-based obligations in connection with practice for social advisers. Furthermore, a review of lesson plan examples from the two national modules reveals teaching which mainly focuses on introducing and providing knowledge on rights and conventions.

RECOMMENDATION NO.3: HUMAN RIGHTS ACROSS DISCIPLINES

The Institute recommends that the Ministry and the programme directors at educational institutions:

- ensure that the teaching of human rights is treated systematically and with a cross-disciplinary approach within the relevant academic areas. This includes linking teaching in the legal obligations and professional ethics in social work to human-rights-based principles and values.

Background: The teachers interviewed describe how the framework for cross-disciplinary cooperation between teachers makes it difficult to ensure that teaching in ethics and the law mutually support and qualify each other. Furthermore, several teachers experience that the ethics and value-based discussions included in teaching could be qualified by strengthening focus on human-rights-based principles and values as they are reflected in social and administrative legislation and in Denmark's human-rights-based obligations in general.

RECOMMENDATIONS NO.4 AND NO.5: TEACHING SKILLS AND MATERIALS

The Institute recommends that the Ministry and the programme directors at educational institutions:

- support and enhance teachers' work on, and competences in, carrying out teaching on human rights, with a particular focus on equal treatment and non-discrimination as well as the public authority role.
- in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, develop knowledge and material specifically targeted at social work degree students regarding human rights within social work practices.

Background: The study shows that several of the teachers interviewed find it difficult to translate human rights into a social work practice that is relevant for the student's future professional activities. Teachers would like more knowledge and tools, including teaching materials, on the subject. Human rights are included in teaching, but often at a more abstract level, and are rarely addressed from a vocational perspective. Overall, teachers are able to introduce the conventions and relevant articles, but do not feel that they have the necessary knowledge or time required to further examine human-rights-based principles and decisions and connect human rights to social work obligations e.g. within the context of Danish administrative practice.