



unesco



Strengthening genocide prevention through education in Africa

Policy brief

UNESCO – a global leader in education

Education is UNESCO's top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation for peace and sustainable development. UNESCO is the United Nations' specialized agency for education, providing global and regional leadership to drive progress, strengthening the resilience and capacity of national systems to serve all learners. UNESCO also leads efforts to respond to contemporary global challenges through transformative learning, with special focus on gender equality and Africa across all actions.



The Global Education 2030 Agenda

UNESCO, as the United Nations' specialized agency for education, is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, which is part of a global movement to eradicate poverty through 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Education, essential to achieve all of these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to **“ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”** The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides guidance for the implementation of this ambitious goal and commitments.



This paper was commissioned by UNESCO and is part of the organizations work on Global Citizenship and Peace Education. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and should not be attributed to UNESCO.

This paper can be cited with the following reference: Denise Benvotato, 2023, *Strengthening genocide prevention through education in Africa*.

Paper commissioned for the UNESCO Section of Global Citizenship and Peace Education.

© UNESCO 2023



This work is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 IGO licence (CC BY-SA 3.0 IGO; <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/igo>).

Cover design: Luck Team Studio/Shutterstock.com
Graphic design & layout: Shanshan Xu

Printed by UNESCO

Printed in Paris

1. Introduction

African countries, like many regions of the world, are affected by the legacy of atrocity crimes. Genocide, the transatlantic slave trade and slavery, colonialism and post-independence violence committed during dictatorships, not to mention civil war and violent extremism, have severely violated human rights and left devastating marks on societies across the continent. The way in which societies deal with violent pasts has profound implications for the present and the future, as well as their chances of building sustainable peace.

Strengthening education about atrocity crimes, including genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, is an essential part of addressing violent pasts and preventing future atrocity crimes. Echoing a series of United Nations resolutions on the importance of educational measures for genocide prevention,¹ in 2013, the Secretary-General's annual report *Responsibility to protect: State responsibility and prevention* included the recommendation: "Education curriculums should include instruction on past violations and on the causes, dynamics and consequences of atrocity crimes" as an important means to promote societal resilience to atrocity crimes.²

This recognition is in line with the Education 2030 Agenda and, more specifically, target 4.7 of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on Education. This target calls on countries to promote education that fosters sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, a culture of peace, global citizenship and an appreciation of cultural diversity.³

Defining atrocity crimes

The term "atrocity crimes" refers to three legally defined international crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.⁴ Definitions were developed in response to cases of violations of human rights and currently constitute the bedrock of international understanding on these complex phenomena.⁵

Genocide

The term "genocide" derives from the ancient Greek word *genos* (kin, tribe) and the Latin *cide* (killing). "Genocide" was codified as an international crime in 1948, with the adoption of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Article II defines it as "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."⁶

1 See United Nations Resolution 60/7 (2005); UNESCO General Conference 34 C/Resolution 61 (2007) on "Holocaust remembrance"; United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2150 (2014) on "Recommitment to fight against genocide" and Human Rights Council (HRC) Resolution A/HRC/28/L.25 on "The prevention of genocide" (2015). The latter "Emphasizes the important role that education, including human rights education, can play in genocide prevention, and further encourages Governments to promote, as appropriate, educational programmes and projects that contribute to the prevention of genocide".

2 United Nations (2013), *Responsibility to protect: State responsibility and prevention*. Report of the Secretary-General (A/67/929-S/2013/399): [http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/SG%20report%202013\(1\).pdf](http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/SG%20report%202013(1).pdf).

3 Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>

4 The definitions of these crimes can be found in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and their Protocols (1977), and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998), among other treaties.

5 United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, *When to refer to a situation as "genocide"*, <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/publications-and-resources/GuidanceNote-When%20to%20refer%20to%20a%20situation%20as%20genocide.pdf>

6 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf

Crimes against humanity

The concept of “crimes against humanity” is legally defined, in its most comprehensive terms, in the Rome Statute, which established the International Criminal Court in 1998. Article 7 defines crimes against humanity as acts that are “part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack”. Such acts include murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, among others.⁷

War crimes

The term “war crimes” refers to crimes committed against a diversity of victims, either combatants or noncombatants, during armed conflict. In international armed conflicts, victims include those specifically protected by the four Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, i.e., (i) the wounded and sick in armed forces in the field; (ii) the wounded, sick and shipwrecked members of armed forces at sea; (iii) prisoners of war; and (iv) civilian persons in times of war. In contrast to genocide and crimes against humanity, war crimes can be committed against a diversity of victims, either combatants or noncombatants.

This policy brief is intended for African policymakers. It introduces a rationale and strategies for strengthening educational approaches to prevent future atrocity crimes. It formulates concrete recommendations that identify opportunities and possible actions for developing and supporting the implementation of policies that could harness the power of education, and especially teachers, to address the root causes of violence and conflict and strengthen resilience in learners. This policy brief accompanies a guide for educators that was jointly developed by UNESCO and the United Nations to support teaching and learning about atrocity crimes in African contexts.⁸

This brief is informed by a curriculum review and needs assessment, conducted in six African countries in 2021. It involved over 100 teachers and teacher educators from Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan and Zimbabwe.

7 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998), <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/RS-Eng.pdf>

8 UNESCO and United Nations Department of Global Communications (2023), *Teaching to prevent atrocity crimes: a guide for teachers in Africa*, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000386136>

2. How can education support the prevention of atrocity crimes?

Many African countries continue to be at risk of atrocity crimes. Such crimes are avoidable. In addition to important security commitments, as stipulated by the globally shared **Responsibility to Protect**, education provides a powerful opportunity to address the root causes of atrocity crimes and strengthen learners' awareness and ability to identify and oppose warning signs of genocide and other atrocity crimes early on.

.....

Dealing with violent pasts and their legacies

Unaddressed legacies of violent pasts continue to fracture social cohesion, fuel tensions and polarize societies, putting countries at a higher risk of violence.

Education can reverse these trends and help societies to address violent pasts and their legacies in all their complexity. Teaching about violent pasts strengthens historical literacy, which enables learners to identify authentic sources and understand the wider historical context of past injustice and atrocities. This can help them to navigate and critically view contemporary narratives, identify the effects of intergenerational trauma and explore the continued effects of violent pasts on their societies and themselves. Such education can help to inform conflict transformation processes, support transitional justice and reconciliation efforts and contribute to a sense of active, responsible citizenship, as a foundation for more peaceful societies.

.....

Promoting human rights and global citizenship

Respect for human rights and active citizenship are important components of societies that are resilient to violence and conflict. Education, and in particular global citizenship education (GCED), can help and motivate learners to develop an appreciation for human rights, embrace diversity, support equality and become actively engaged citizens.

Studying past atrocity crimes, more specifically, can help learners understand how and why these crimes occur. This understanding can reveal the great danger of abandoning human rights and lead to critical thinking about the roles and responsibilities of individuals and institutions in relation to human rights, both in the past and today.

.....

Understanding warning signs

Atrocity crimes do not occur in a vacuum. Learners can be trained to identify possible warning signs early on and reject exclusionary and hateful narratives that can be possible precursors of violence. When young people can identify the societal risks posed by prejudice, hate speech, systematic discrimination and the exclusion of minoritized groups, they are better prepared to recognize and act against dangerous trends. Through reflection on their own biases, as well as through critical analysis and opposition to propaganda, hate speech and violent extremist ideologies, learners have the opportunity to be more resilient and better prepared to confront violence at its source. At the same time, learners can draw upon historical strategies of resistance and collective action to bring about positive change in their societies.

3. Possibilities and recommended strategies for introducing education about atrocity crimes and their prevention

A UNESCO-commissioned review of current school curricula in African countries conducted in support of this policy brief revealed multiple opportunities for educating younger generations about atrocity crimes and their prevention without necessarily overburdening existing programmes of study. Education systems across Africa allow for a number of possibilities and entry points for integrating a study of atrocity crimes in support of the overall curricular aims and objectives adopted at the national level.

.....

Subject-specific and multi- and interdisciplinary approaches

A study of atrocity crimes can be embedded in national curricula through and across specific school subjects. History provides a natural entry point for learning about atrocity crimes, as do subjects such as social sciences, civics education and life skills. Subjects in the arts and humanities such as languages, literature, geography, media literacy and music, as well as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), may also be channels for a study of atrocity crimes, whether through critically examining propaganda, learning about diverse peoples and cultures or studying literature and memoirs about violent pasts. Multi- and interdisciplinary approaches that integrate a study of atrocity crimes through and across different school subjects are particularly enriching and have the potential to maximize learning.

i. Citizenship, human rights and peace education as entry points

Many African countries have adopted global education frameworks such as global citizenship education (GCED), peace education and human rights education. These frameworks recognize the importance of teaching about atrocity crimes in schools and fostering a culture of prevention.

Global citizenship education (GCED) aims to empower learners to be “informed and critically literate; socially connected and respectful of diversity; ethically responsible and engaged”. UNESCO’s framework for GCED shows how education can develop the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes learners need to secure a world that is more just, peaceful, inclusive and sustainable. GCED has three conceptual dimensions. The cognitive dimension concerns learners’ acquisition of knowledge, understanding and critical thinking. The socioemotional dimension relates to learners’ sense of belonging to a common humanity, sharing values and responsibilities, empathy, solidarity and respect for differences and diversity. The behavioural dimension instructs learners how to act responsibly at local, national and global levels for a more peaceful and sustainable world. (UNESCO. 2015. *Global Citizenship Education -Topics and Learning Objectives.*)

Peace education promotes a culture of peace, which, according to General Assembly Resolution A/RES/52/13 (1998) consists of “values, attitudes and behaviours that reflect and inspire social interaction and sharing based on the principles of freedom, justice and democracy, all human rights, tolerance and solidarity, that reject violence and endeavour to prevent conflicts by tackling their root

causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation and that guarantee the full exercise of all rights and the means to participate fully in the development process of their society”.

Human rights education comprises “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”. (General Assembly Resolution on human rights education and training A/Res/66/137, 2011.)

There are ample opportunities to frame a study of atrocity crimes within crosscutting issues and competencies such as citizenship, life skills, peace education, education for human rights and democracy, as well as contemporary and emerging issues. These are often mainstreamed into African curricula and explicitly built into units of study, as well as into non-formal, co-curricular programmes. Atrocity crimes can be addressed in connection with themes related to democracy, human rights, international cooperation and international organizations, and peace and conflict resolution.

In South Sudan, the citizenship syllabus addresses topics relevant to a study of atrocity crimes, which include (i) (human) rights, their violation and protection, e.g., through United Nations conventions, and related responsibilities; (ii) conflict resolution theories and practices; (iii) international organizations (United Nations, African Union - AU) and their peace-related charters; and (iv) debates on topical and controversial issues, including war crimes.

In Zimbabwe, the history syllabus presents a number of possible entry points beyond the historical topics of imperialism, nationalism, socialism, communism and fascism. The syllabus mainstreams the cross-cutting themes of human rights and conflict and crisis management. Topics relevant to a study of atrocity crimes include (i) regional and international cooperation, and human rights protection; (ii) the Constitution, democracy and human rights, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and (iii) global issues, including man-made disasters. Further entry points can be found in the subject of heritage studies, with its attention to the Unhu/Ubuntu/Vumunhu philosophy, including respect, tolerance and multiculturalism, and the out-of-school Life Skills Orientation Programme, which covers issues of rights and responsibilities, and conflict management.

In Kenya, a study of atrocity crimes would be in line with the national vision of basic education as a way to encourage learners “to value diversity in all people, and to demonstrate respect, empathy and compassion for all people”,⁹ as well as to “Demonstrate active local and global citizenship for harmonious co-existence”.¹⁰ The curriculum mainstreams “pertinent and contemporary issues”, through which the relevant topic of violent extremism is addressed, as well as peace education, offering important opportunities to address atrocity crimes. Peace education is mainstreamed into school subjects, as well as co-curricular activities such as drama, poetry, art, music, games, sports and clubs and societies, notably peace clubs and debate clubs, and community service learning. It is also mainstreamed into teacher training. The country’s Education Sector Policy on Peace Education promotes “knowledge about human rights and the mechanisms to protect them” through “participatory, interactive, experiential and transformative teaching approaches”.¹¹

9 Kenya Institute for Curriculum Development (2019), *Basic Education Curriculum Framework*, p. 15, <https://kicd.ac.ke/curriculum-reform/basic-education-curriculum-framework/>

10 *Op. cit.*, p. 59.

11 The Ministry of Education of Kenya, *Science and Technology’s Education Sector Policy on Peace Education*, 2014, p. 16, 10.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Consider education as part of broader conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts and involve education experts and civil society in related policy consultations.

Quality education about atrocity crimes is best guaranteed when it is underpinned by broad consultations with and the committed involvement of multiple stakeholders. Governments should consult and foster close collaboration with and between schools, teachers, civil society, academia and the wider community in developing, delivering and evaluating formal and nonformal educational and training programmes and materials about atrocity crimes and histories of violence. Experienced professionals, and especially teachers themselves, are best positioned to identify context-specific challenges, needs and opportunities.

Utilize existing education policies and frameworks such as human rights education, global citizenship education and peace education to introduce education about atrocity crimes into national curricula.

Consider a range of existing subject-specific, cross-curricular and extracurricular approaches to teach about atrocity crimes when reviewing school curricula.

Beyond formal education, encourage and support whole-school and community-oriented approaches to educating about atrocity crimes. Wholeschool approaches that engage the entire school community are more impactful than stand-alone programmes.¹² Governments could support the establishment of representative advisory committees within school communities to identify opportunities for embedding education about atrocity crimes in the school values, ethos and routine, and in planning and organizing related consultations and school activities. Such activities may include regular school-wide commemorations, awareness and prevention campaigns, group projects, exhibitions, artistic performances and inter-school projects. Similarly, schools and teachers should be supported in engaging and closely working with community members and community organizations, for example through involving communities in schoolbased activities.

ii. Historical topics as entry points

History classes are particularly suitable channels for a study of atrocity crimes and their prevention in formal educational settings. Commonly taught historical topics such as slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, Africa's colonial and post-independence history and the Second World War and Cold War are relevant entry points for a study of atrocity crimes.¹³ History education can strengthen historical literacy, contextualize historical events and processes and enable learners to better understand historically grown contemporary challenges.

Examples of direct curricular links via historical topics

History curricula in Namibia, Rwanda and South Africa offer examples of direct curricular links to addressing atrocity crimes. These curricula present explicit references to local, regional and/or international instances of atrocity crimes and offer opportunities to promote a culture of peace, human rights and responsible citizenship.

¹² European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Cefai, C., Caravita, S. and Simões, C. (2021). A systemic, whole-school approach to mental health and well-being in schools in the EU: *NESET report*, Executive Summary. Luxembourg, European Union, p. 11. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/bc0d1b05-227b-11ec-bd8e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

¹³ Cases that can be addressed in such lessons may include the Herero and Nama genocides in the former German colony of South-West Africa (the territory of present-day Namibia), the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, the Holocaust — the genocide of the Jewish people — and other atrocity crimes committed by the Nazis in Europe, and the genocide carried out in Cambodia by the communist Khmer Rouge regime.

✎ **In Namibia**, the history syllabi¹⁴ cover local cases of atrocity crimes, i.e., the Herero and Nama genocides and apartheid, both at junior (compulsory) and senior (noncompulsory) levels. At the senior level, local, regional (primarily apartheid in South Africa) and international cases (Nazi rule in Germany and Stalin's purge trials) are addressed and examined on a rolling basis.

✎ **In Rwanda**, genocide studies are mainstreamed into several school subjects and taught sequentially across the six years of secondary education.¹⁵ The history syllabus, compulsory in the first three years of secondary education, explicitly includes the teaching of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. At upper secondary level, it requires a study of similarities and differences between the Holocaust and the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. The syllabus pays special attention to the

concept and key features of genocide, genocide denial and ideology, and its prevention.

✎ **In South Africa**, the compulsory social sciences curriculum includes a study of Nazi atrocity crimes, including the Holocaust, in the last year of basic education.¹⁶ At upper secondary level, where history is an optional subject, the curriculum addresses "Ideas of Race in the late 19th and 20th century (*sic*)" and encourages a reflection of "their use to justify colonialism, discrimination and genocide [...] in many parts of the world". The curriculum requires the study of "Australia and the indigenous Australians" and "Nazi Germany and the holocaust (*sic*)" as two examples of atrocity crimes.¹⁷ Both the social sciences and history curricula include the study of apartheid history as an internationally recognized crime against humanity.

RECOMMENDATIONS



💡 **Incorporate local, regional and international perspectives on atrocity crimes into history curricula.** Learning about past atrocity crimes — locally or internationally — can help to contextualize history and create a better understanding of the legacies of violent pasts. A focus on African experiences of atrocity crimes ensures contextual relevance by encouraging learners' understanding of local and regional specificities. This approach has the potential to contribute to a decolonization of curricula as well as greater empowerment and positive societal change on the continent. Studying atrocity crimes beyond one's own immediate context is equally desirable, particularly when local experiences may be too sensitive to engage with directly. Such an approach can help learners develop a greater global perspective and challenge misconceptions that such phenomena are peculiar to certain societies.

14 National Institute of Education Development of Namibia, *Syllabuses and learning materials*, <http://www.nied.edu.na/documents/syllabuses/>

15 Rwanda Basic Education Board, <https://www.reb.gov.rw/curriculum-teaching-learning-resources-department>

16 Department of Basic Education of the Republic of South Africa, *Social Sciences Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement*, <https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/CD/National%20Curriculum%20Statements%20and%20Vocational/CAPS%20SP%20%20SOCIAL%20SCIENCE%20GR%207-9%20%20.pdf?ver=2015-01-27-160206-107>

17 Department of Basic Education of the Republic of South Africa, *History Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement*, <https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/CD/National%20Curriculum%20Statements%20and%20Vocational/CAPS%20FET%20%20HISTORY%20GR%2010-12%20%20WeB.pdf?ver=2015-01-27-154219-397>

iii. Commemorative days as entry points

African countries observe several local and international commemorative days that address atrocity crimes. Some of them are recognized as public and school holidays, and are regularly or occasionally observed at institutions of learning. These days can serve as powerful entry points to provide important context to learners and support inquiry around these events.

Examples of international days of commemoration and days to counter prejudice and discrimination¹⁸

27 January	International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust
21 March	International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
24 March	International Day for the Right to the Truth Concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims
25 March	International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade
7 April	International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda
16 May	International Day of Living Together in Peace
18 June	International Day for Countering Hate Speech
18 July	Nelson Mandela International Day
31 August	International Day for People of African Descent
21 September	International Day of Peace
21 October	Africa Human Rights Day
9 December	International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime
10 December	Human Rights Day

RECOMMENDATIONS



Officially endorse national, regional and international days of remembrance of atrocity crimes and encourage and support schools' participation in related ceremonies and activities. Commemoration days can serve as opportune teachable moments for a study of atrocity crimes. Governments may support their implementation by providing schools with guidelines and resources enabling them to participate in activities such as film screenings, exhibitions, meetings with witnesses, talks and debates, research projects, visits to historical sites, museums and memorials, theatre performances and writing and art competitions.

18 United Nations, *International Days and Weeks*, <https://www.un.org/en/observances/international-days-and-weeks>

4. Possibilities and recommended strategies for supporting teachers in the implementation of education about atrocity crimes and their prevention

The educators' needs assessment that informed this brief revealed the great importance that teachers in Africa attach to the study of atrocity crimes. Over 80% of respondents considered teaching about atrocity crimes in their country as very important for the purposes of prevention and broader positive societal change.

Still, 40% of teachers and teacher educators rated their students' level of knowledge and information on atrocity crimes as only fair, and approximately 20% as poor or very poor. They believed social media to be young people's most influential sources of information in this regard. They called for a more prominent role of educational institutions in countering the simplification, generalization and politization to which young people could be exposed and which could reinforce negative stereotypes.

While many educators agreed that teaching about atrocity crimes was relevant, they did not feel adequately equipped to do so or were afraid that addressing atrocity crimes could have an adverse effect and cause division in the classroom. Over 80% considered it somewhat or very difficult for educators to teach about issues related to atrocity crimes in contexts in which the violent past was sensitive and contested¹⁹ and its legacy was still felt. They lamented a lack of targeted training, guidance and support in addressing such difficult but significant topics.

Professional development of formal and non-formal educators

Teaching lessons on atrocity crimes implies educating about extremely complex historical processes. It requires navigating related sensitivities, political debates, conflicting narratives and misconceptions that learners may bring to the classroom. Likewise, it requires educators to be alert to their own biases. Moreover, educators should be guided if the history they are teaching is lived experience. While teachers and teacher educators across the continent may have some experience teaching about atrocity crimes,²⁰ many feel unprepared to do so. About 75% acknowledged training needs in this area; 36% rated such needs as high or very high.

Educators in Africa are rarely trained to teach about atrocity crimes and to engage in related conversations with learners, as confirmed by 79% of the teachers and 56% of the teacher educators we surveyed. Educators in Africa are often self-taught when it comes to these issues. On the one hand, atrocity crimes are seldom a topic of study in formal teacher education programmes. This is a missed opportunity for building teachers' skills and the confidence necessary to address violent pasts in the classroom and lead related discussions. On the other, there is a wide lack of awareness of training programmes provided to teachers and teacher educators across the continent,²¹ and when educators are aware of professional development opportunities, they often lack the time and resources to access them.

¹⁹ 42% of teachers and 51% of teacher educators characterized their country's own violent past and/or violent present as very contested.

²⁰ 82% of teachers had some experience teaching about issues related to atrocity crimes; 32% taught regularly about such subjects. 44% of teacher educators had never taught about such issues; 39% taught about them occasionally.

²¹ 80% was unaware of any such training programmes in their country.

RECOMMENDATIONS



- 💡 Invest in capacity-building opportunities for in-service and pre-service teachers.** Investing in teachers and educators is crucial for a sensitive and meaningful implementation of a study of atrocity crimes. Governments should ensure that educators are adequately prepared to engage with this complex and often challenging topic and provide support. They should ensure that teachers have the time and resources to access capacity-building opportunities. Professional development courses should support:

 - Accurate knowledge of the subject matter for teachers. Teachers should learn to critically engage with reliable sources of information and contextualized case studies. They should understand key concepts and the chronology, causes and consequences of these phenomena and their manifestations before teaching about them.
 - Appropriate teaching skills and pedagogies to deal with these difficult topics in the classroom. It is crucial for teachers to learn how to create a safe, engaging and inclusive space where learners can critically analyze and reflect on the complex issues surrounding atrocity crimes, and can express, process and understand their views and feelings — and those of others — as they confront such issues. Educators should learn how to meaningfully facilitate difficult conversations, while being sensitive to learners' social and emotional needs, as well as their intellectual needs.
 - Teachers' self-awareness and the detection of their personal biases. Meaningful courses should allow dedicated time for teachers to systematically reflect on their personal views, emotions and biases in relation to these histories. Teachers should be guided to consider how their identity, background and experiences may influence how they teach, how they expect learners to respond and how, combined, this may influence how learners experience the lesson.
 - Specifically, guide teachers to help young people understand the complexities of atrocity crimes. Teachers' facilitation of conceptual and contextual understanding and nuance has the potential to counter misconceptions and stereotyping that appear to be rife among young people.
 - Specifically, guide teachers to help young people draw connections between historical and contemporary issues. Learners should be offered the opportunity to connect histories of atrocity crimes with relevant contemporary issues such as hate speech and discrimination and be prepared to identify and reject such practices. Such opportunities have the potential to counter young people's misconceptions that such crimes happen only elsewhere.
- 💡 Explore opportunities for integrating a study of atrocity crimes into formal pre-service teacher education and both formal and non-formal in-service teacher education.** Opportunities may be offered through official professional development programmes run by universities and institutions engaged in teacher education. Teaching methodology courses for history, life skills and citizenship, as well as broader education-related modules, could include dedicated time to prepare teachers to engage with such topics. Opportunities can also consist in school-run activities, involving non-formal education organizations such as museums.
- 💡 Encourage and support partnerships between formal and non-formal providers of teacher professional development.** Pre-service teachers enrolled in formal teacher education programmes should be encouraged and supported to attend teacher workshops organized by memorial sites, museums and civil society organizations. Governments should ensure the provision of resources and training for such organizations to educate about atrocity crimes. They should also provide schools and academic institutions with resources and training on how to work with such organizations to strengthen opportunities for extracurricular learning about atrocity crimes.


.....

A supportive teaching and learning environment

Access to teaching materials, guidance and online resources provides important support for teachers when teaching about atrocity crimes. This may involve robust infrastructure that allows for a reliable Internet connection in schools or the adaption of teaching materials to specifically African contexts. This also includes support for schools to visit museums and memorial sites that address atrocity crimes.

RECOMMENDATIONS




 **Support the development, dissemination and use of accessible and adequate teaching tools and educational materials.** This includes efforts to support and sponsor the adaption, dissemination and translation of existing resources and ensuring that educators can access them. Expert guidance should be provided to produce and adopt material and sources for classroom use that draw on reputable sources²² and that discourage inappropriate approaches that risk desensitizing or traumatizing learners.

Educators across the continent experience different pressures in their teaching, which affects their ability to teach about atrocity crimes.

Educators often face the challenge of time pressure when they cover bulky, examinable syllabi. In these circumstances, they face related difficulties in addressing atrocity crimes in the classroom when these issues are not explicitly emphasized in official school curricula.

RECOMMENDATIONS



 **Consider introducing dedicated curricular time for a (possibly sequenced) study of atrocity crimes.** Ideally, curricula and official policies would include explicit mentions of atrocity crimes as a required or suggested topic of study. Given the sensitivity and emotivity of the subject matter, it is important for curricula to allow time during lessons for learners to reflect on their views and feelings and process what they are learning. Also, sequencing their study over several years would allow for their understanding to deepen gradually as learners encounter the subject matter at different educational levels.

Educators across the continent also experience varying levels of openness, support and trust in their teaching practices. External pressures and interference with the lessons taught in schools and the materials used by teachers can limit possibilities for truly open dialogue on the sensitive issues that could be raised by a study of atrocity crimes. In certain contexts, teachers fear punishment or social ostracization for addressing “taboos” relating to atrocity crimes. Only 54% of teachers and 38% of teacher educators considered the teaching and learning environment to be open enough to address such topics in their respective contexts.

.....

22 A list of reputable organizations and resource providers has been included in the guide for educators accompanying this policy brief.

RECOMMENDATIONS



- 💡 **Guarantee freedom of expression and access to information.** This is critical for the effective implementation of pedagogies required for a meaningful study of atrocity crimes.
- 💡 **Encourage and support the establishment of teacher support systems.** Support systems may be useful as safe spaces for teachers to express feelings that may be provoked when teaching about atrocity crimes. They can also be used as forums to discuss and develop lessons and teaching materials cooperatively and create channels to receive feedback and assistance. Support systems can take the form of schoolbased support groups or community and online networks. More or less formalized teacher communities of practice, particularly, could serve as a useful platform for regular peer support and collaboration, and the sharing of knowledge, experiences, ideas and best practices among teachers involved or willing to be involved in furthering education on atrocity crimes. This can be sponsored by schools, teacher training institutions and other educational organizations.

Conclusion

Education can build a powerful foundation for conflict prevention and long-lasting peace. It can help to mitigate the risks that emerge from unaddressed violent pasts and their legacies, and strengthen competencies that foster active citizenship and resilience to prejudice and hate speech in learners.

This paper and the accompanying guide for educators on “Teaching to Prevent Atrocity Crimes” provide a basis for African approaches so as to strengthen education that acts as both a preventive and an enabling measure, addressing the root causes of conflict and violence and contributing to more peaceful societies.

Concrete steps can be taken in this direction in the context of ongoing or planned curricular and textbook reforms or broader peacebuilding and peacekeeping strategies, and implemented through concrete training for teachers and the development, adaptation or translation of educational materials, guided by the recommendations laid out in this policy brief.



unesco

United Nations
Educational, Scientific
and Cultural Organization

Strengthening genocide prevention through education in Africa

Policy brief

This policy brief provides African policymakers with a rational and strategies for strengthening educational approaches for the prevention of atrocity crimes. It formulates concrete recommendations for developing and supporting the implementation of policies that could harness the power of education to address the root causes of violence and conflict and strengthen resilience in learners.

Stay in touch



<https://www.unesco.org/en/teaching-holocaust-genocide>

Follow @UNESCO on social media



Sustainable
Development
Goals