

Advancing child rights and democratic school environments

Embracing diversity and combating hate speech

16 November 2023
Harpa, Reykjavík

About

The Ministry of Education and Children is pleased to present the conference **Advancing child rights and democratic school environments: Embracing diversity and combating hate speech**. The conference commemorates the upcoming 34th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on November 20th and is part of the Chairmanship

of Iceland in the Nordic Committee of Ministers. The event aims to bring together educators, policymakers, researchers, and experts to collectively explore strategies, initiatives, and insights related to creating child rights-based and democratic school environments while also addressing the vital issue of combating hate speech and prejudice within educational settings. In this regard, the conference asks: **What can Iceland learn from its neighbors in the North?**

Objective

- To celebrate the anniversary of the UN CRC and reaffirm our collective commitment to implementing child rights within educational contexts as defined in the National Strategy for CRC Implementation, Child-Friendly Iceland, the Icelandic Education Policy and National Curriculum.
- To discuss the state of play in Iceland concerning prejudice, hate speech, and extremism, specifically in schools and education.
- To showcase the results of Iceland's Rights Respecting School Project, emphasizing its impact on fostering child-centred and rights-respecting educational environments.
- To introduce the Council of Europe's framework for democratic school environments, focusing on its principles and practical application.
- To explore the challenges and opportunities associated with balancing freedom of speech while preventing hate speech, featuring expert insights and strategies.
- To address the issue of extremism and hate speech in the classroom as well as in relation to the community at large. Sharing strategies for fostering dialogue, critical thinking, and countering extremist influences.
- To facilitate networking and collaboration among educators, policymakers, researchers, and experts to promote inclusive school environments and combat hate speech.



Government of Iceland
Ministry of Education and Children

Nordic Council
of Ministers

Agenda

Moderator: Erna Kristín Blöndal, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education and Children

Morning session: Combating hate speech and prejudice

- 09:00 Welcome note from the conference moderator: Overview of the conference objectives and significance of the UN CRC anniversary
Erna Kristín Blöndal, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education and Children
- 09:05 Opening remarks
Katrín Jakobsdóttir, Prime Minister of Iceland
- 09:15 A quick look into the real-life experiences of an Icelandic woman with a mixed background - and how prejudice in Icelandic society shapes people's lives, self-identities and well-being
Miriam Petra Ómarsdóttir Awad, Senior Adviser at the Icelandic Center for Research and Inclusion Officer at the Icelandic National Agency for Erasmus+
- 09:25 Balancing freedom and hate speech prevention: Highlighting the importance of freedom of speech while discussing effective strategies for prevention
Stina Amankwah, Chief Strategist for INTRO DM, Member of the Minority Think Tank - MINOTENK, Author, and Entrepreneur
- 10:05 Coffee break
- 10:25 Addressing extremism in the classroom: Insights and strategies to promote dialogue and critical thinking in educational settings
Christer Mattsson, Director of the Segerstedt Institute and Senior Lecturer in Pedagogy at the University of Gothenburg
- 11:05 State of play in Iceland: A panel discussion on the current events and climate to combat hate speech and prejudice
Eygló Harðardóttir, Office of the National Police Commissioner; Jónína Hauksdóttir, Vice Chairman of the Icelandic Teachers' Union; Claudia Ashanie Wilson, Human Rights Lawyer; Dagbjört Ásbjörnsdóttir, Project Manager of Multicultural Affairs for the City of Reykjavik; Þorbjörg Þorvaldsdóttir, Project Manager at Samtökin '78; Miriam Petra Ómarsdóttir Awad, Senior Adviser at the Icelandic Centre for Research
- 11:35 Promoting inclusive school environments: Panel discussion
Christer Mattsson and Stina Amankwah
- 12:00 Networking lunch

Afternoon session: Embracing child rights and democratic school environments

- 12:45 Council of Europe Framework for Democratic School Environment: What it is and why it matters
Ólafur Páll Jónsson, Professor at the Faculty of Education and Diversity, University of Iceland
- 13:05 Dembra - A school model for democratic preparedness against hate speech and prejudice: Strengthening schools in preventing group hostility, prejudice, xenophobia, racism, and extremism
Peder Nustad, Head of Education, Centre for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities, Norway
- 13:45 Coffee break
- 14:00 UNICEF's Child Rights Schools – Supporting a whole school approach to child-centred and rights-respecting educational environment
UNICEF Iceland: Eva Bjarnadóttir, Head of Advocacy and Child Rights, and Sigyn Blöndal, Project Manager
- 14:20 Children's knowledge and understanding of democratic concepts and child rights: New data and research in Iceland
Ragný Þóra Guðjohnsen, Assistant Professor at the University of Iceland and Administrator of the Icelandic Youth Study
- 14:40 Nordic Council of Ministers and the DIS Network: A panel discussion on what the Nordic countries can learn from each other
Members of the DIS Network, representatives from ministries and institutions in the Nordic countries, and conference speakers
- 15:10 Closing remarks
Ásmundur Einar Daðason, Minister of Education and Children



Biography of keynote speakers

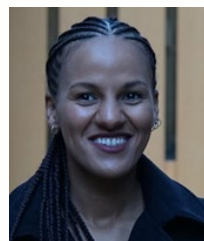
Stina Amankwah, Chief Strategist for INTRO DM, Member of the Minority Think Tank - MINOTENK, Author, and Entrepreneur

Stina Ihle Amankwah holds a Bachelor's degree in International and European Law with a focus on human rights in the private sector, obtained in the Netherlands and Spain. Additionally, she holds a Master's degree in system dynamics from the University of Bergen. Stina has undergone dialogue facilitation training at the Nansen Center and is a certified mentor in countering radicalization accredited by RVTS West.

Stina's passion lies particularly in the realm of dialogue and the role of language in conflict and radicalization. She is deeply engaged in exploring group dynamics and the construction of identity through social communities. Moreover, she advocates for democratic participation as a preventative measure against radicalization. As part of her master's project, which centers on entrepreneurship and sustainability, she is actively involved with various innovation hubs in Norway.

Since 2018, Stina has been an integral part of Minotenk, where she serves as an advisor based in Bergen. Her responsibilities include organizing panel discussions, workshops, and consultation meetings. In 2022, Stina made her debut as an author with the book *The Dilemmas of Freedom of Expression*.

Lastly, it's worth noting that Stina embodies a diverse background, being half Norwegian, half Ghanaian, and 100% Bergenser, proudly representing her hometown of Bergen.



Christer Mattsson, Director of the Segerstedt Institute and Senior Lecturer in Pedagogy at the University of Gothenburg

Christer Mattsson is an Associate Professor in pedagogy and Director of the Segerstedt Institute at the University of Gothenburg. In addition to leading the institute, Christer researches radicalization processes in individuals and groups in right-wing extremist and National Socialist circles. He is also active in studies that focus on prevention work against violent extremism in general and conducting research on education about the Holocaust and antisemitism.

Christer teaches courses at the Segerstedt Institute and supervises doctoral students. In his research, Christer Mattsson focuses on radicalization processes in people who are or have been active in white power environments. In 2018, Christer Mattsson received his doctorate in pedagogical work with the dissertation *The Extremist in the Classroom*.

Christer works nationally and internationally with issues concerning preventing violent extremism, countering racism, and teaching about the Holocaust. He is the originator of the Tolerance Project, which was started on behalf of Kungälv Municipality after the murder of John Hron in 1995. The Tolerance Project aims to prevent the recruitment of young people into Nazism and White Power groups.



Peter Nustad, Head of Education, Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities

Peder Nustad works at the Center for studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities. He leads the initiative Dembra, Democratic Preparedness against Racism and Anti-Semitism, which supports schools and teacher education in preventing prejudices and racism, undemocratic attitudes, and radicalization.

Nustad has extensive experience in teaching and developing materials for students, pupils, and teachers about the Holocaust and anti-Semitism, racism, and extremism. He advises schools and provides courses within the framework of Dembra.

Nustad was previously the Head of Education at the HL-center and has extensive experience from international collaboration, especially related to education about anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, among other things through participation in Ihra and various expert groups under the auspices of ODIHR and UNESCO.

Nustad has a background as a college lecturer in religion and ethics at the teacher's college in Hedmark and is a co-author of the textbook series "We in the World" from Cappelen Damm.



Ólafur Páll Jónsson, Professor at the Faculty of Education and Diversity, University of Iceland

Ólafur Páll Jónsson is a Professor of philosophy at the School of Education, University of Iceland. His published works deal with a variety of topics from philosophy of education, sustainability education, political philosophy, philosophy of nature, legal philosophy, to critical thinking.

Ólafur has published six books, including *Lýðræði, réttlæti og menntun* [Democracy, justice and education] and *Sannfæring og rök: Gagnrýnin hugsun, hversdagslegar skoðanir og rakalaust bull* [Conviction and argument: Critical thinking, ordinary opinions and unfounded nonsense]. He has also published one children's book, *Fjársjóðsleit í Granada* that has been translated into Spanish as *Búsqueda del tesoro en Granada*. He has been a member of the EPAN network of the Council of Europe since its initiation in 2018.



Dr. Ragný Þóra Guðjohnsen, Assistant Professor at the School of Education, University of Iceland

Dr. Ragný Þóra Guðjohnsen is an Assistant Professor at the School of Education, University of Iceland. Her journey began in Law School, where she gained valuable experience in family law. However, her passion led her to transition into an interdisciplinary path, committing to focus on the well-being of children and their families.

Her career path has been marked by active involvement in policy development and the implementation of preventive measures to enhance the lives of young individuals at the local government level. This real-world experience provided her with a unique perspective on children's ecological environment, setting the stage for her academic work.

She pursued a master's and doctoral degree in pedagogy and education, harnessing her practical insights to enrich her academic endeavors. Her teaching and research revolve around the critical examination of protective elements as well as risk factors that impact children's well-being in their daily lives. She also emphasizes their roles in the broader society and global world, being at the same time aware of injustices hindering many in being active citizens and the need to address that.

Dr. Guðjohnsen's commitment to holistic education is evident in her pioneering work, which established service-learning opportunities as an integral part of credited coursework at the University of Iceland and emphasis on the foundational role of human rights in education and children's social and ecological well-being.

Beyond her academic contributions, Dr. Guðjohnsen is an active participant in various social movements and humanitarian projects related to education and the prosperity of young people. Her recent appointment as the academic leader of The Icelandic Youth Study, highlights her dedication to bridge the gap between theory and practice by translating the findings into positive change in practice and policy for the benefit of young people's well-being.



Eva Bjarnadóttir, Advocacy and Programs Director at UNICEF Iceland

Eva Bjarnadóttir is the Director of UNICEF Iceland's domestic advocacy and programs and she leads UNICEF Iceland's research and advocacy on migration. Eva holds a master's degree in International Political Theory from the University of Edinburgh and is a sessional lecturer on global politics and migration at the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Iceland. She is particularly interested in exploring the systemic, social and behavioural changes needed to make human rights a reality.



Sigyn Blöndal, Child Rights Schools Program Manager

Sigyn Blöndal manages UNICEF Iceland's Child Rights School program. She supports pre-schools, elementary schools and after-school programs in implementing child rights and developing rights respecting educational environment. Sigyn is a dancer and holds a BA degree in Media. In her former role as television presenter for the National Broadcasting Service she produced children's television and radio programs with the active participation of children. Sigyn is particularly interested in the possibilities of children's empowerment and participation.

