

MINORITY NETWORK / 2017

Minority rights in conflict-ridden societies

The Minority Network is a network of researchers and practitioners addressing conditions for human rights-based protection of persons with different religious and ethnic identities in conflict-ridden societies. The network is coordinated at HL-senteret in Oslo, Norway. The main activities of the network are workshops and seminars facilitating academic dialogue on minority protection, conflict and stability.

Particular emphasis is placed on current developments in the Middle East and North Africa/MENA region (e.g. Iraq, Syria, Lebanon) and South-East Asia (e.g. Myanmar, Malaysia and Indonesia), with a comparative approach including models and experiences from other regions (e.g. the Balkans).

The workshops and seminars held over the first two years since 2015 took place in Oslo. In 2017 the network received funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a three-year period to run various projects dealing with minority protection issues.

Network projects 2017–2019:

- **International workshops** with local partners in target countries and regions
- **Online course and training manual** on human rights of minorities in context
- **International conference** on minority protection in conflict-ridden societies
- **Research** on reasons for flight and hope and fear for the future among religious and ethnic groups from Iraq and Syria

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOPS:

Minority protection in the MENA region, Southeast Asia and the Balkans

The network is now developing academic dialogue and cooperation with scholars in our target countries, with a particular focus on junior researchers. The aim is to encourage research and dissemination of research on conditions for minority protection in the target countries, and to facilitate research-based dialogue on these issues with experts from national and international NGOs working in the field of minority protection, not least by introducing a comparative perspective.

Workshops are developed in close cooperation with local partners. One workshop was held in Yangon in March 2017, and the next two will be held in Myanmar and Lebanon in 2018. Core questions discussed at the workshops include:

- What are the obstacles to and measures for implementing human rights for persons with different religious and ethnic identities, including the equal rights of minorities to citizenship and political participation?
- Are citizenship rights based on ethnicity or religious identity a tool for or an obstacle to promoting inclusion of minorities and national cohesion?
- Can regional self-governance based on ethnicity provide basic rights and inclusion of the minorities within this region - the "minority within the minority"?

RESEARCH:

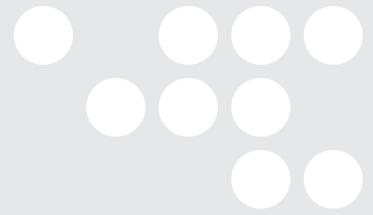
Impact of religious and ethnic identity on flight and on fear and hope for the future for Syrian and Iraqi refugees

Several countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are experiencing conflicts that run at least partially along ethnic and religious divides. These conflicts are often complex and multi-faceted. A crucial question is the importance of ethnic and religious identity for refugees who flee from countries such as Iraq and Syria and for refugees considering returning to these countries. A related question is whether or how the position as a minority in a certain context influences on these conditions.

Building upon findings from previous research on the experiences and considerations of refugees from Iraq and Syria living in neighboring countries, in particular in Lebanon, the empirical scope of this project is refugees from these countries currently based in Norway.

- To what extent and in what way was their minority position and their ethnic and/or religious identity a reason for their flight?
- How do position and identity influence considerations of return, e.g. in terms of reflections on political and social conditions for security and inclusion?
- What rights-based protection, institutional systems or other measures do they believe are necessary to ensure such conditions for safety and inclusion?

Minority rights in context



The online course and training manual will include general information about the human rights of persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, including their rights to effective participation and protection against discrimination. The online course material will also address conditions for different religious and ethnic groups in selected countries in Southeast Asia, the Balkans and the Middle East/North Africa, and the challenges to implementing their human rights. It will address some of the root causes of violations of the human rights of persons in minority positions as well as institutional and other arrangements that may contribute to protecting their rights, both at national and international level.

The manual and online course will consist of modules addressing different topics within this overall framework. The modules may also be applied separately to more specific topics, such as the right to freedom of religion or

belief or the rights of religious minorities. Video lectures will make up a central component in all modules.

Local partners in these regions and countries will be invited to give input to develop the teaching material in order to adapt it to their own teaching activities for key target groups. Some modules will mainly target the academic context, while others will be developed mainly for use by civil society organizations. The material can also be used by politicians and other decision-makers.

The teaching material and courses will be based on UN approaches to human rights but will also reflect specific challenges, conceptions and contexts in the country or region of the local partners. The online material will be developed in close cooperation with some organizations affiliated with the network, and will refer to their online resources on related issues.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 18-19 JUNE 2018:

Human rights and inclusive citizenship: Conditions for co-existence in conflict-ridden societies

Several countries are experiencing conflicts along ethnic and religious divides, making people belonging to such minorities particularly vulnerable, sometimes with internal displacement or migration as a consequence. This international conference will address the complex relationship between citizenship, power-sharing and minority rights in conflict-ridden societies. The UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Fernand de Varennes, will be one of the keynote speakers. The main aim of the conference is to address what legal and institutional measures may effectively protect the rights of vulnerable religious and ethnic groups in conflict-ridden societies, asking in particular:

- **What models of citizenship and power-sharing might ensure the rights of persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities?**
- **What can we learn from the experiences of persons belonging to such groups in conflict-ridden societies, about conditions for protecting minority rights post conflict?**

The overall aims of all activities in these projects are:

- To strengthen respect for equal human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to religious and ethnic groups who constitute the minority or who otherwise are in a vulnerable situation.
- To prevent and combat discrimination based on ethnicity and/or religion.

In particular they aim to promote conditions for the personal safety and inclusion of persons belonging to such minorities living in or returning to conflict-ridden societies and fragile states in the MENA region and South-East Asia.

Who are “minorities”?

Not all persons in a minority situation want the term “minority” to be applied to them or to the religious or ethnic group(s) with which they are affiliated. Some perceive the term to assign a status of being less equal as citizens. This is a consideration that will be reflected on and explored in the network projects. When the term “minority” is used here, it is used with reference to the international human rights framework, under which it is intended to ensure equal recognition of the basic rights of all individuals, including their rights to citizenship and non-discrimination.

The term “minority” is a contextual concept. Persons with a certain religious or ethnic identity may be in a numerical minority position in one country or region and in a majority in another. Indeed, in some countries the numerical minority is in a dominant political position. In most situations, however, being

in the numerical minority makes individuals more vulnerable to discrimination, exclusion and – in some countries and periods – to persecution based on their religious or ethnic identity or group affiliation. Democratic systems do not always ensure the rights and inclusion of all inhabitants regardless of religious and ethnic affiliation, and sometimes majority rule may even pose a threat to them.

This is the reason why international human rights treaties particularly underline the equal rights of “persons belonging to religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities”, such as in the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 27. This recognition of the particular duty of states to ensure the rights and participation of persons belonging to such numerical minorities, supplements the human rights they enjoy like all other human beings, including the right to citizenship.

Contacts

Any questions regarding the Minority Network and the projects presented here may be addressed to Ingvill Plesner, project initiator and coordinator:

i.t.plesner@hlsenteret.no

www.hlsenteret.no/english/about/medarbeidere/forskning/ingvill-thorson-plesner/index.html

In addition to the projects related to the work of the Minority Network presented in this leaflet, the funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA) includes support for a research project on minority protection and prevention of mass atrocities, including early warning mechanisms. All projects are part of a framework agreement between the NMFA and HL senteret, and are coordinated by researcher Ellen Stensrud at the center. To read more about these projects, see:

www.hlsenteret.no/english/research/Minorities/minority-protection-and-mass-atrocity-prevention/



CENTER FOR STUDIES OF THE HOLOCAUST AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

The Center for the Study of Holocaust and Religious Minorities (www.hlsenteret.no/english) is a research, education and documentation center located in Oslo, Norway, specializing in the fields of national and international minority studies, comparative genocide studies and studies of the Norwegian Holocaust.