



A G20 2024 Interfaith Forum Policy Brief Social Cohesion Challenges: Focusing on Religious Literacy July 28, 2024

Call to Action

“Promoting cross-cultural religious literacy ... plays an instrumental role in creating an environment that denounces all forms of religious intolerance and prejudice.” Indonesian Deputy Permanent Representative Ambassador Achsanul Habib, Geneva, March 2024

“To strengthen social cohesion and heighten respect – I strongly recommend effective societal initiatives”,ⁱ UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk

With flagging of trust across institutions and rising levels of hate speech and incitement to violence, there is urgent need for remedial action by leaders across different sectors – locally and globally. Strong international leadership by the G20 can support efforts to expand and learn from promising programs and models that address these issues in effective ways. Now, more than ever, there is a pressing need to draw upon the dynamism of religious communities to further develop solid foundations of understanding and positive civic values. A central area amenable to action is enhancing forms of religious literacy that can contribute to building more inclusive and peaceful societies.

Social peace and harmony rely on social cohesion. Social cohesion is generally regarded as a core objective of (and imperative to) national education systems. To achieve this objective, each country must develop well adapted approaches to curricula that reflect both historical legacies and present social, economic, and political dynamics. Given particular sensitivities around integration of religious teaching within school curricula in many countries, positive models can provide helpful insights for educators. The G20 Interfaith Forum has focused on two especially promising educational models that promote purposeful dialogue in order to help address violent extremism and social tensions. [Indonesia’s Cross Cultural Religious Literacy Program](#) and [Arigatou International’s Ethics Education](#) are both models that demonstrate how education reforms focused on early interventions and on religious literacy can help foster social harmony through strategic religious engagement.

The problems are dynamic and need urgent and concerted action. Fast-paced technological change (including AI) has accentuated and accelerated polarization and the spread of misinformation. The G20 Interfaith Forum advocates for continuing dialogue focused on the challenges of cultivating religious literacy within society, including at international gatherings that exchange experiences regarding effective programs. To support G20 efforts to address siloed approaches to the related issues of social fragmentation, polarization among communities, and violent extremist movements, the G20 Interfaith Forum proposes to convene, with G20 support, a series of events that explore different approaches and experiences with promising models, reporting to the G20 in 2025.

Promising models: Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy

The Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy (CCRL) program in Indonesia is an example of a societal initiative that promotes a well integrated and articulated program addressing religious literacy through defined competencies. CCRL is a training program for teachers in primary and secondary madrasas and schools, both state run and private. The program aims to foster mutual respect and collaboration between people of different religions and beliefs by developing competencies that relate to personal awareness, comparative capacity, and collaborative skills. Since it was launched in 2021 by the Leimena Institute (a private non-profit organization) in partnership with over 30 education and religious institutions, CCRL has reached around 10,000 educators nationwide. Beginning with teachers from Muslim and Christian backgrounds, by the end of 2024 the program will include teachers from Buddhist, Confucianist, and Hindu backgrounds. Indonesia's Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Law and Human Rights support the program as an important element of the national strategy supporting social peace and harmony, under the overarching national principles of Pancasila (Indonesia's state ideology which include belief in one God, unity, just and civilized humanity, democracy, and social justice)..

The CCRL program starts with a one-week online introductory course for educators, combining synchronous and asynchronous learning about different religions to understand the CCRL competencies. Those who have graduated from this introductory course are eligible to register for more advanced ("upgrading") online and hybrid courses. In the hybrid upgrading workshops, the teachers learn how to integrate CCRL principles in their lesson plans and teach their students. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Law and Human Rights are Leimena Institute's partners in the CCRL program. In the Interfaith Dialogue between the Netherlands and Indonesia on in May, 2024, Indonesian Foreign Ministry's Director-General for Information and Public Diplomacy Ambassador Siti Nugraha Mauludiah commented that: "Therefore, we do need faith literacy. We do need to build cross-cultural religious literacy and multi-faith collaborations based on inclusivity." A [July 2024 international conference](#) opened by the Minister of Foreign Affairs highlighted the central goals of cultural and religious literacy and the potential applicability of the program in ASEAN and other states.

Arigatou International's Ethics Education, Learning to Live Together

Arigatou International has promoted an ethics-based education framework and approach in more than 30 countries for over 15 years. Their program begins at early childhood, giving children the ability to learn to live in solidarity with people of different religions, cultures, and ethnicities. The program nurtures ethical values that strengthen their identities, critical thinking, empathy and capacity to work together across differences through experiential pedagogies. "Learning to Live Together" is the central aim and theme. The ethics-based education approach is an innovative model with proven results to develop safe learning environments, improve children's sense of meaning and purpose, and strengthen children's relationships across religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds -- ultimately equipping them to develop mutual understanding and respect -- building trust, and enhancing social cohesion to address polarization, division and fear of "the other" in communities.

The Ethics Education framework and approach of Arigatou International fosters in children awareness of self and others, appreciation of differences and similarities with others, sense of interconnectedness, affirmation of human dignity, and capacity to engage in dialogue and take action together with people of diverse backgrounds -- through a proven transformative pedagogy approach that is child-centered. This model can be readily integrated in teacher training programs and curricula from pre-school to secondary education, offering a solution to the current rise in bullying, discrimination and increased violence based on religion, ethnicity and beliefs that affect children's well-being and their ability to succeed in schools. In 2022, Arigatou International -- together with the Guerrand-Hermes Foundation for Peace, the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity, KAICIID International Dialogue Center and UNESCO -- launched an

Ethics Education Fellowship program in collaboration with the Ministries of Education of Bangladesh, Indonesia, Kenya, Nepal, Mauritius and Seychelles and the support of the National Commissions for UNESCO. The program aimed to strengthen the sustainable delivery of ethics education programs for children in formal education settings, in order to advance global citizenship and build more peaceful and inclusive societies. The program reached 8.034 children in its first phase in 2023, with excellent documented results for teachers and learners. In 2024, Ministries of Education from six countries (Indonesia, Nepal, Bangladesh, Kenya, Seychelles, and Mauritius) made formal commitments to expand the program at the national level and further integrate it in curricula and national teacher training programs as part of their global commitments to transform education systems to respond to the needs of their societies and children.

ⁱ Panel discussion on countering religious hatred at the 55th session of UN Human Rights Council, 8 March 2024,