

# Acknowledgements

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**Competences  
for  
Democratic  
Culture**

# Introduction

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## Who is the teacher reflection tool for?

No matter whether you are already experienced or are hearing about the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC)<sup>1</sup> for the first time, this tool can become a companion for your professional life.

You can use it:

- ▶ in order to get familiar with reflection;
- ▶ from time to time as a stimulus for reflection;
- ▶ in a structured way in your daily work;
- ▶ as a “course” in your teacher training;
- ▶ for team reflection.

## If you are already familiar with the RFCDC

- ▶ You can start with personal reflections from Part II – “Warming up”, or directly choose a thematic module that interests you.

## If you are just discovering the RFCDC

- ▶ Depending on your preferred learning and working style, you can choose one of the options described below (but you can also build a path through the tool in your own way).
  - If you prefer to have the concepts clear first, start with reading the RFCDC and then move to the other sections.
  - If you prefer to do something, explore something practical and get conceptual clarifications only when and if needed, then select any thematic module and, when you identify the need, go to Part I on the RFCDC in brief and clarify the relevant concepts.
  - If you prefer to reflect first on yourself and then think about concepts and/or practice, start with Part II – the warming-up section.

## How to use this tool

The purpose of this tool is to accompany teachers and other educators in this process and in their work with the Council of Europe’s RFCDC.

- ▶ It can be used as a starter to get acquainted with the RFCDC.
- ▶ It can also be seen as a very general companion to self-reflection on teaching and democratic competences.<sup>2</sup>

This tool can guide you and structure your journey of exploring and developing your role and practice as a teacher, while allowing you to decide how much time and effort you wish to spend on it.

The teacher reflection tool addresses all teachers at all levels (in-service and pre-service; acquainted or not acquainted with RFCDC) and can be used on an individual basis, or for group or peer reflection.

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1. You can download the three RFCDC volumes from the relevant website (Council of Europe 2018). For the purpose of the self-reflection tool, Volume 1, “Context, concepts and model”, and Volume 3, “Guidance for implementation” (curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, teacher education, whole-school approach, building resilience to radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism), are especially important.

2. As well as this printable version, an online tool with the same content is available, allowing users to store reflections in a confidential individual account: [www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture/-reflection-tool-for-teachers](http://www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture/-reflection-tool-for-teachers).

Education for democracy and inclusive education need both reflective practitioners and a reflective school culture. This tool aims to inspire teachers to self-reflect, which in turn forms the basis for a reflective school culture.

A school culture based on self-reflection can use many methods and tools, including observation, peer feedback, group reflection in a team of teachers, communities of practice, and similar. This tool can be combined with all of these methods and can easily be integrated in wider school development processes.

This material is published as one of the tools that support implementation of the RFCDC in schools. It also supports the Council of Europe's efforts to build a European network of democratic schools. By focusing on the teachers' competences and on their professional ethos, it acknowledges the importance of teachers for the whole-school system.



In order to enable the best possible synergies between the different Council of Europe initiatives, the tool was aligned with the six major themes of the Council of Europe's Free to Speak, Safe to Learn – Democratic Schools for All project. These themes represent central preconditions for democratic culture in education as well as challenges which need to be solved in democratic ways. You can select the topics which seem to be closest to your own interest or most relevant in your own context, or you can discover new aspects of democratic education while working through all the modules.

### Reasons for an RFCDC teacher reflection tool

- ▶ Do you experience challenges related to bullying, prejudice and discrimination in your school?
- ▶ Would you like to see your students co-operating more and competing less?
- ▶ Do you feel that you are not always reaching out to your students in classroom interaction?

If these questions sound familiar to you, this self-reflection tool might be the right companion for you.

- ▶ Are you interested in what democracy in school is actually about and what this has to do with yourself and with your professional teacher ethos?

We invite you to follow us on a journey to help the development of your own competences relating to democratic culture and to encourage self-reflection on them. Each encounter with students, colleagues or parents brings new opportunities for interaction, co-operation and learning, as well as new challenges and possible conflict.

The qualities we need that contribute to a democratic school culture are not something we learn once, but something which constantly needs to be developed, maintained and adjusted in new situations and contexts. It is demanding for a teacher to realise the potentials for learning, co-operation and personal growth and to solve the challenges in constructive and respectful ways. Often the way ahead is through trial and error, and failure is therefore a part of that process, a part of becoming and being a “good teacher” (Biesta 2015; Larivee 2000). And it is a part of what we call a democratic teacher ethos.



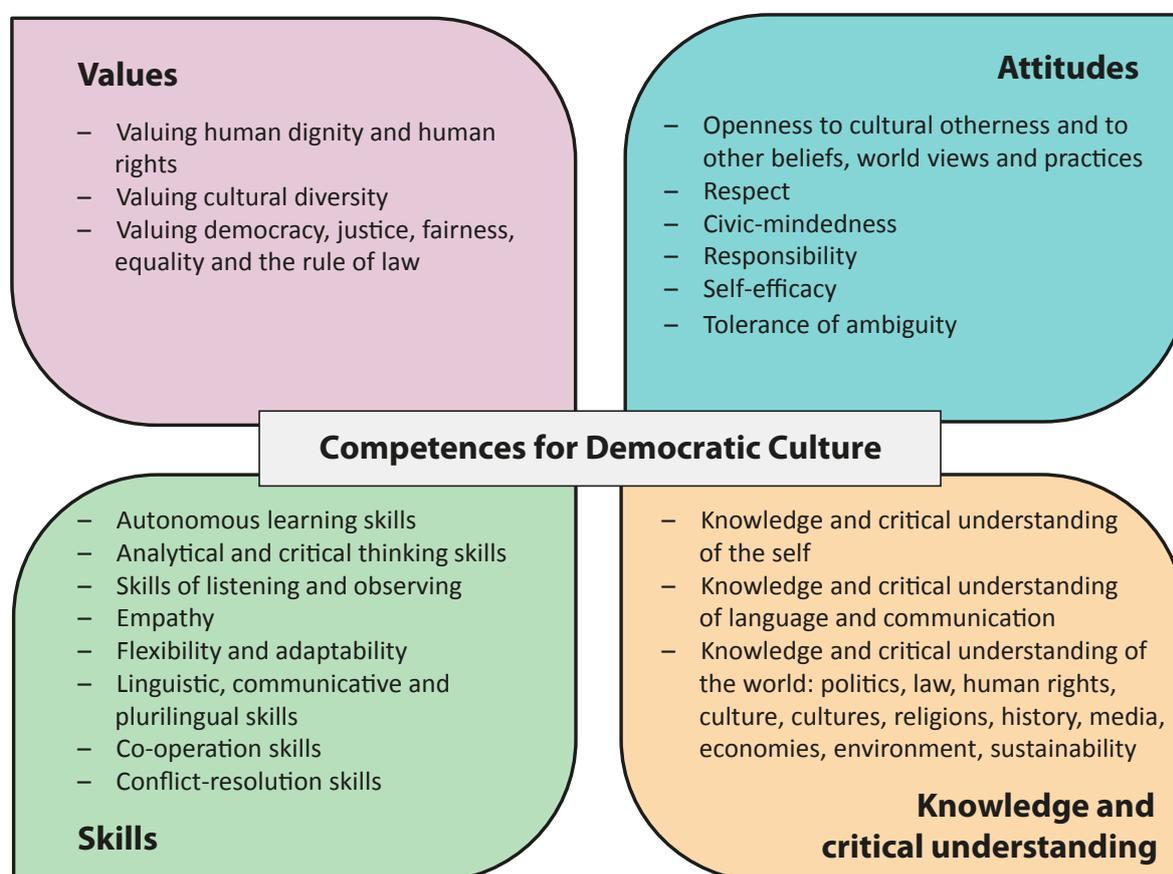
Democratic and intercultural knowledge, attitudes, skills and values as outlined in the model of the Council of Europe's RFCDC play an essential role in the development of a professional teacher ethos which builds on the values of democracy, human rights and intercultural dialogue. In order to be credible and sustainable, education for democracy, human rights and intercultural dialogue needs teaching environments based on democratic principles, including a democratic attitude of teachers, participation of the learners in the learning process and, not least, the ability to critically reflect on and adapt your own teaching activities.

Therefore, this tool is for you if you would like to develop your democratic professional ethos and competences on a continual basis, under conditions that are not always favourable.

It will help you structure your work according to democratic competences, using the reflective circle of planning, doing, reflecting, adapting. While this slows you down during the reflection phase, it ultimately increases your capacity to improve your teaching activities and your pedagogical practice in general.

### The 20 elements in the Competences for Democratic Culture model

Competences for Democratic Culture (CDC) are not only relevant for the education sector, but also democratic culture in general. The 20 competence elements in the CDC model and the related descriptors can help us to reflect on how we do things, how we interact with people, how we co-operate and how we solve conflict. Developing CDC is a personal development.



However, CDC are most relevant in the context of education. Teachers and other educators have a massive impact on learners as significant others, role models and facilitators of learning processes and are far more than transmitters of knowledge. Educators can support learners in becoming independent thinkers, good co-operators, and self-confident participants in dialogue, discussion and decision making. They can support learners in becoming active citizens.

As a “democratic teacher” you are required to be much more than just “good” in your subject. It requires a lot of what CDC are about: the ability to listen to learners, colleagues and parents; openness to the cultural affiliations and practices they bring into the educational process; empathy and a sense of responsibility for the well-being and empowerment of all learners, to name but a few competences.

A teacher's way of teaching and interacting has an important impact on the classroom climate and the individual learner's well-being and achievements. These aspects of professional practice can be learned and systematically developed.

Pedagogical professionalism is a matter of constant development and, thus, depends on the ability and willingness for self-observation and self-reflection (Bailey, Curtis and Nunan 2001; Schoen 1983). This is even more evident when it comes to the development of democratic and inclusive learning environments. Carr and Kemmis (Carr and Kemmis 1986) underline that democratic change can only be reached through continuous and collaborative reflection on practice. In this context, the teacher's professional development is at the same time a personal development. A democratic teacher wants to examine their own democratic attitudes; they want to question their own methods and learn from their interactions with the learners. The mental step back and the changing of perspectives enables us to analyse and change our own strengths and weaknesses and to further develop our professional democratic competences.

From this perspective, self-reflection can be understood as the intensive examination of one's own learning and teaching processes with regard to CDC. This directly links to the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, which states that "teaching and learning practices and activities should follow and promote democratic and human rights values and principles" (Council of Europe 2010: 9; see also Council of Europe 2018: 17).

## **A guide to the parts of the teacher reflection tool**

Part I enables you to discover the model of competences for democratic culture and provides you with an introduction to the RFCDC.

For readers who are not yet familiar with the RFCDC we strongly recommend you begin with this section and then proceed to Part II, in order to familiarise yourself with observation and self-observation under the CDC.

Part I deals with each thematic element separately so that readers are able to directly choose issues that interest them or deepen their knowledge according to their level of familiarity with the RFCDC.

Part II is a warming up section which familiarises you with the exercise of observation and self-observation and how the CDC descriptors can support your personal and professional development. The section starts with exploring everyday situations in which you may use your competences for democratic culture. It continues with reflection on your strengths as a democratic teacher and how to develop them as an ongoing process. In a last step, the section turns to the "hot moments" in a teacher's life – situations you find challenging and in which you do not feel that you live up to your own standards as a pedagogue and person. With the help of CDC and the descriptors, the section will guide you through a reflection on how to solve such "hot moments" in more appropriate ways.

Before beginning the modules in Part III, we recommend you try one or all of the steps in Part II to familiarise yourself with observation and self-observation, but these activities can be done at any point.

Part III provides you with five reflective modules following the focus themes of the Council of Europe's project Free to Speak, Safe to Learn – Democratic Schools for All. The modules can be done in any order. Each module is a separate, independent unit.

1. Making children's and students' voices heard
2. Addressing controversial issues
3. Preventing violence and bullying
4. Dealing with propaganda, misinformation and fake news
5. Tackling discrimination.

Each module follows the same structure which allows you to get familiar with the specific topic and come to conclusions as to how to improve your respective competences.

A brief introductory section to each topic shows the relevance of the issue in the school context, links to the field of CDC and starts with some guiding questions for reflection. A ready-made scenario that allows for analysis and comparison with your own teaching practices can be used as a warm-up and for becoming acquainted with the specific topic. In the next step, you will be guided through a reflection process on your own teaching activities and projects.

The tool can be used on an individual or peer-to-peer basis. It also enables collective reflection processes of the entire staff of a school. It can support and empower you under any conditions regardless of your experience or of how far you have come on your journey to create a democratic school.

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# PART I



# The Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture in brief

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**E**ducation plays an essential role in building the future and reflects the type of world we want to prepare for the generations to come. Education should prepare learners to participate effectively in a culture of democracy and to live together with others in culturally diverse democratic societies.

The RFCDC offers a systematic approach to designing the teaching, learning and assessment of CDC, and introducing them into education systems in ways which are coherent, comprehensive and transparent for all concerned.

The RFCDC is intended for use in all sectors of education systems from pre-school through primary and secondary schooling to higher education, including adult and vocational education. The heart of the RFCDC is its model of the competences that need to be acquired by learners if they are to participate effectively in a culture of democracy and live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse democratic societies. The RFCDC also contains descriptors for all the competences in the model and offers guidance on how the RFCDC can be implemented in education systems.

This document is a summary but readers are encouraged to consult the full RFCDC (three volumes). Its primary aim is to help teachers and other education professionals get acquainted with the RFCDC. It emphasises three key aspects related to its use by teachers: pedagogy, assessment and a whole-school approach to promote the development of competences for democratic culture.

## Background to the RFCDC

The Council of Europe views education as fulfilling four major purposes:<sup>3</sup>

- ▶ preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies;
- ▶ personal development;
- ▶ the development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base;
- ▶ preparation for the labour market.

The four purposes are complementary and of equal value. The Council of Europe sees education as a process enabling individuals to make independent choices for their own lives, to recognise others as equals and to interact with them in meaningful ways. This view of education is linked to the ideals of democracy and human rights. Learning requires processes which engage the whole person: intellect, emotions and experiences. Experience-based and active learning complement learning based on theory for the competences that are needed for active democratic participation.

## The conceptual foundations of the RFCDC

This kind of education is explicitly linked to the ideals of democracy and reflects the principles of human rights. These principles are of special importance with regard to the development of competences for active participation in democracy. This means that the focus should not only be on the transmission of knowledge.

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3. Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)13 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on ensuring quality education.

The focus should also be on creating meaningful conditions in which learners can develop their full potential, in ways and at a pace suitable for and influenced by themselves. Moreover, learning is not only a matter of cognitive processes. Learning requires processes which engage the learner's whole person: intellect, emotions and experiences.

### **Attitudes and behaviours needed for a culture of democracy**

A culture of democracy implies that, besides democratic institutions, laws and procedures (such as elections) genuine democracy relies on a set of attitudes and behaviours that are needed for these institutions, laws and procedures to function democratically in practice. These include:

- ▶ a commitment to public deliberation;
- ▶ a commitment to basing deliberations on facts and to avoiding irrelevant information, as far as possible;
- ▶ a willingness to express one's own opinions and to listen to the opinions of others;
- ▶ a conviction that differences of opinion and conflicts must be resolved peacefully;
- ▶ a commitment to decisions being made by those who have received the greatest share of the votes or seats in an election, with due regard to the protection of minorities and their rights;
- ▶ a commitment to the rule of law.

### **Intercultural dialogue: an open exchange**

A culture of democracy requires the will and ability to conduct intercultural dialogue, understood as an open exchange of views, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect, between individuals or groups who perceive themselves as having different cultural affiliations. It fosters constructive engagement across these perceived cultural differences with a view to reducing intolerance, prejudice and stereotyping, enhancing the cohesion of democratic societies and helping to resolve conflicts. In culturally diverse societies, intercultural dialogue is crucial for ensuring that all citizens are equally able to participate in public discussion and decision making.

### **The concepts of "identity" and "cultural groups"**

In the context of intercultural dialogue, the concept of identity denotes a person's sense of who they are and the self-descriptions to which they attribute significance and value. Cultural groups of any size can have their own distinctive cultures. For this reason, all people belong simultaneously to and identify with many different groups and their associated cultures.

#### **Identity**

- ▶ Personal identities are based on personal attributes (for example caring, tolerant, extroverted), interpersonal relationships and roles (for example mother, friend, colleague) and autobiographical narratives (for example born to working-class parents, educated at a state school).
- ▶ Social identities are based on memberships of social groups (for example a nation, an ethnic group, a religious group, a gender group, an age or generational group, an occupational group, an educational institution, a hobby club, a sports team, a virtual social media group).
- ▶ Cultural identities (that is, the identities that people construct on the basis of their membership of cultural groups) are a particular type of social identity and are central to the concerns of the RFCDC.

#### **Cultural groups**

- ▶ Cultural groups are always internally heterogeneous. This means that there is diversity within each cultural group and members of the group do not all share the exact same characteristics, norms and practices.
- ▶ They often have fuzzy boundaries. Sometimes it may not be clear and obvious who is part of the group and who is not.

- ▶ They are dynamic and change over time as a result of political, economic and historical events and developments, and as a result of interactions with and influences from the cultures of other groups. They also change over time because of their members' internal contestation of the meanings, norms, values and practices of the group. Cultural affiliations are also fluid and dynamic, with different affiliations – or different clusters of intersecting affiliations – being highlighted depending on the social context or in relation to the shifts in people's interests, needs, goals and expectations.

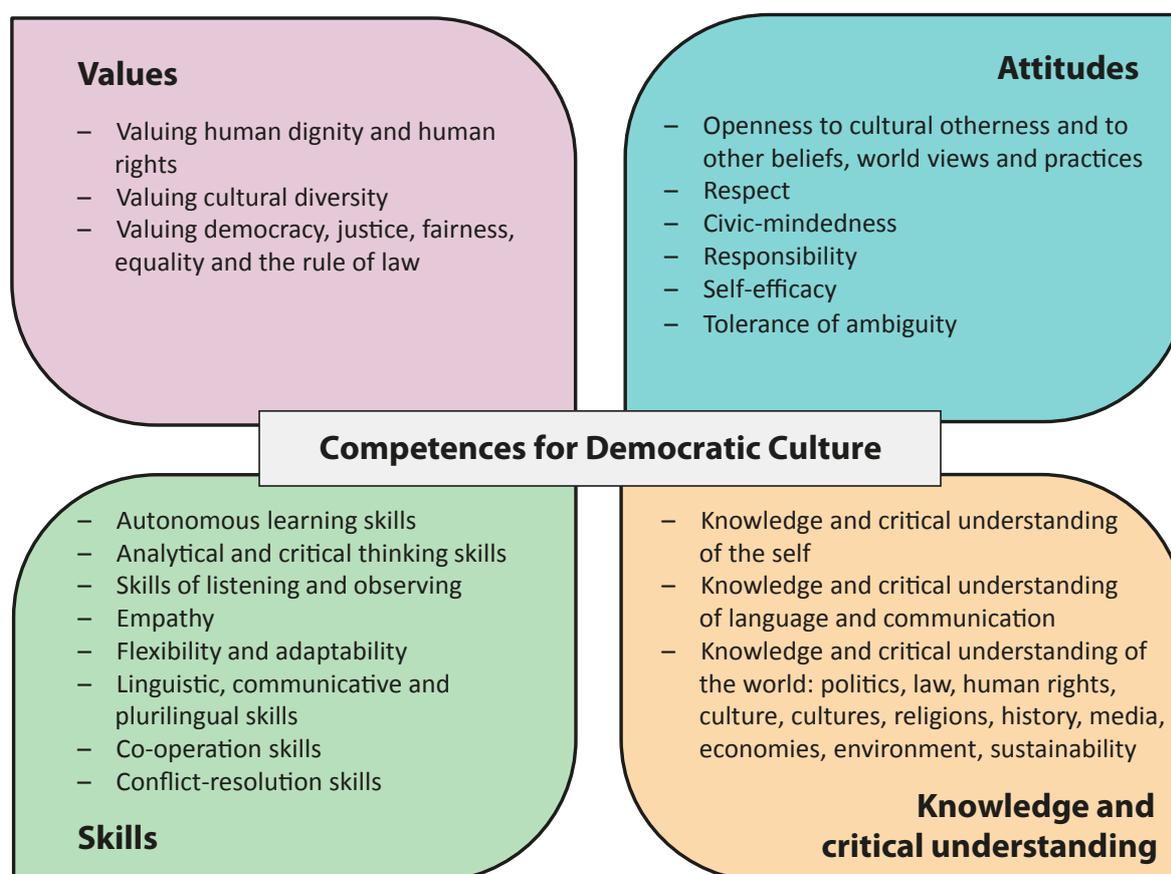
### The two meanings of “competence”

The term “competence” has two meanings in the RFCDC: a global holistic meaning and a much more specific meaning. In its global meaning, competence is the ability to mobilise and deploy relevant values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and/or understanding in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities that are presented by a given type of context.

In addition to this global use of the term “competence” (in the singular), the term “competences” (in the plural) is used to refer to the specific values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding that are mobilised and deployed in the production of competent behaviour. Hence, according to the RFCDC, competence consists of the mobilisation and deployment of specific competences to meet the demands and challenges of concrete situations.

### The model of competences for democratic culture

Building on these background concepts, the RFCDC offers a comprehensive conceptual model of the competences that individuals require in order to function as democratically and interculturally competent citizens. These are therefore the competences that need to be targeted by educators in order to empower learners to act as competent and effective democratic citizens.



**Figure 1: The model of competences for democratic culture**

The model, summarised in Figure 1, includes 20 competences, grouped into values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding.

## Values

Values are general beliefs that individuals hold about the desirable goals that should be striven for in life. They motivate action and they also serve as guiding principles for deciding how to act. Values transcend specific actions and contexts, and they have a normative prescriptive quality about what ought to be done or thought across many different situations. Without a specification of the values that are important for a democratic and intercultural society, the other competence elements within the model could be used in the service of many other kinds of political order, including anti-democratic orders. For example, one could be a responsible and politically well-informed citizen, possessing good communication skills, within a totalitarian dictatorship, if a different set of values were to be employed as the foundation for one's judgments, decisions and actions. Thus, the values which the RFCDC model contains lie at the very heart of democratic competence and are essential for the characterisation of that competence.

### Valuing human dignity and human rights

This first set of values is based on the general belief that every individual human being is of equal worth, has equal dignity, is entitled to equal respect, and is entitled to the same set of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and ought to be treated accordingly. This belief assumes that human rights are universal, inalienable and indivisible and apply to everyone without distinction. Human rights provide a minimum set of protections that are essential for human beings to live a life of dignity and provide an essential foundation for freedom, equality, justice and peace in the world.

### Valuing cultural diversity

This set of values is based on the general belief that other cultural affiliations, cultural variability and diversity and pluralism of perspectives, views and practices ought to be positively regarded, appreciated and cherished. This belief assumes that cultural diversity is an asset for society, that people can learn and benefit from other people's diverse perspectives and that cultural diversity should be promoted and protected. People should be encouraged to interact with one another irrespective of their perceived cultural differences and intercultural dialogue should be used to enable them to live together as equals in society. There is a potential tension between valuing human rights and valuing cultural diversity: in a society which has adopted human rights as its primary value foundation, valuing cultural diversity will have certain limits, set by the need to promote, respect and protect the human rights and freedoms of other people. Hence, the different cultural beliefs and practices should always be valued unless they undermine the human rights and freedoms of others.

### Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law

The third set of values is based on a cluster of beliefs about how societies ought to operate and be governed. All citizens ought to be able to participate equally (either directly or indirectly through elected representatives) in the procedures through which the laws that are used to regulate society are formulated and established, and engage actively with the democratic procedures which operate within their society (this also includes not engaging on occasions for reasons of conscience or circumstance). Decisions ought to be made by majorities, while the just and fair treatment of minorities of all kinds ought to be ensured. Social justice, fairness and equality ought to operate at all levels of society. The rule of law implies that everyone in society is treated justly, fairly, impartially and equally in accordance with laws that are shared by all.

## Attitudes

Attitudes are overall mental orientation which an individual adopts towards someone or something (for example a person, a group, an institution, an issue, an event, a symbol). Attitudes usually consist of four components: a belief or opinion about the object of the attitude, an emotion or feeling towards the object, an evaluation (either positive or negative) of the object and a tendency to behave in a particular way towards that object.

### Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices

Openness is an attitude towards either people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself or towards world views, beliefs, values and practices that differ from one's own. Openness involves sensitivity towards cultural diversity, curiosity about, and interest in discovering and learning about other cultural orientations and affiliations and other world views, beliefs, values and practices, as well as willingness to suspend judgment and disbelief of what is different and analyse one's own beliefs, values and practices.