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PEACEEDU
CURRICULUM REFORM TO PROMOTE EDUCATION FOR PEACE IN UKRAINE, GEORGIA AND MOLDOVA

Peace Education Concept Frame

PeaceEdu

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Preamble

Threats to peace have multiplied at an alarming rate in recent years, spreading to many parts of the globe. The proliferation of major theaters of war, such as the so-called Russo-Ukrainian War (2014-), the Israel-Hamas War (2023-), the Sudanese Civil War (2023-), or the Syrian Civil War (2011-), are the most obvious signs of how pervasive and devastating armed conflicts are today. This trend is reflected in the dramatic increase in battle-related deaths in 2022 and 2023 to levels unprecedented since 1994, the massive displacement of entire populations, the devastation of urban and rural landscapes, and the rise in global military spending to \$2,443 trillion by 2023. Add to this the intersection of numerous other crises - pandemics, climate change, biodiversity loss, migration and asylum, democratic backsliding, racial and gender-based violence and discrimination - and it is indeed reasonable to assume that the world is in an extremely fragile state and that the risks of a worsening situation are high.

Over the past decade and a half, the post-Soviet space has been one of the hotspots of organized violence, including the Russo-Georgian War (2008), the Russo-Ukrainian war (2014-) and the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War (2020), contributing to massive forced mobility of millions of people, instability and insecurity at all levels, and contested forms of democracy. But at the same time, national and local communities have shown extraordinary resilience and adaptability in responding to the veins of organized violence. The main objective of the *PeaceEdu* project is to support and strengthen this local capacity and knowledge in Ukraine (UA), Georgia (GE), and Moldova (MD).

Context

According to the objectives of the Erasmus+ project *PeaceEdu*, this document is intended to serve as a conceptual framework for all project members: Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova as country beneficiaries and the EU institutional partners. It is based on and responds to the National Needs Assessments submitted by the three Eastern



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Partnership (EaP) countries, as well as on the presentations, discussions, and workshops held during the study visit organized by the Unit for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Innsbruck (UIBK) on June 26-28, 2024.

Recalling Art. 4 of the UN General Assembly's "Declaration on a Culture of Peace" (A/RES/53/243 A), which states that "education at all levels is one of the principal means to build a culture of peace," the following Peace Education Concept:Frame builds on the idea and is motivated by the hope that PE can enhance the potential for peaceful conflict transformation, for unlearning violence, for supporting peaceful coexistence, and for promoting social trust. These basic goals of PE are also relevant and valid in the time of the ongoing war in Ukraine, as they support society's ability to cope with war and ongoing violence, while building social trust. As a specific Concept:Frame, it is an integral part of the *PeaceEdu* project and its overall goal of promoting sustainable peace practices in Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova by strengthening the capacity and capability of higher education institutions in these countries to invest in the development of multidisciplinary PE and peace studies.

While this Concept:Frame focuses primarily on higher education institutions (HEIs) and curriculum development in these three EaP partner countries, it does so with a comparatively broad perspective and in the light of fundamental human rights, European values and EU standards of good governance: By emphasizing collaboration between HEI and civil society organizations, the framework can be expanded to include more grassroots and community-led initiatives, making PE accessible to those outside the formal education system. This will extend the PE framework beyond academic institutions by creating community-based PE programs. This could include working with local leaders, religious organizations, and other trusted community figures to ensure broader reach. By recognizing the importance of PE initiatives and strategies beyond HEIs, we assume that our findings and implementations in teaching and learning have



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the potential to transcend national and local circumstances and conditions and be relevant to other formal and informal actors in Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova.

Key Principles and Core Values

Peace education is a transformational, transformative, and polylogical learning process *about* and *for* peace:

- a. It is *transformational* in the sense that PE is intended to transform modes of violent confrontation and promote cultures of peace (conflict orientation).
- b. It is *transformative* in the sense that PE is meant to educate in peaceful ways and thus can transform those involved in the process itself (peer orientation).
- c. It is *polylogical* in the sense that PE is meant to enhance dialogic participatory skills and virtues for conflict prevention and transformation (participatory engagement).

As such, PE is not a single discipline or issue. Rather, it reflects a comprehensive effort to promote the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to foster peaceful relations and reduce violence through educational and capacity-building processes that are simultaneously: *Multidisciplinary, transversal, intersectional, relational, and cross-cultural*. PE is an integral part of the UN's *Agenda for Peace* (1992) strategy to promote peaceful relations in a multidimensional way through preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and post-conflict peacebuilding. In a related sense, PE aims at preventing conflicts from becoming violent, but also at *preserving* (peacekeeping), *restoring* (peacemaking), and *nurturing* (peacebuilding) peaceful relations, taking into account internal and external relations as well as community, global, and ecological dimensions.

It is an approach to education that is particularly *critical* of those educational institutions and settings that have themselves propagated, legitimized, and institutionalized violence through theories and practices of stereotyping, othering, bullying, segregation,



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denigration, marginalization, and stigmatization. PE thus also means *unlearning* and *disrupting conventional modes* of learning when they are either implicated in or complicit with systems of violence. For PE to become peaceful, it must itself cultivate *critical pedagogies of peace* while *developing and adopting age-appropriate didactics, reconfiguring educational environments, and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion* (DEI).

PE is *imaginative* and *inquisitive, experimental* and *experiential*, but neither instrumental nor impersonal. It uses methods such as: role-playing, case studies, structured group discussions and debates on controversial issues related to peace and conflict, conflict mediation workshops, problem-based learning, cross-border educational exchanges and joint peace projects between students and institutions from Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, digital peacebuilding tools, storytelling, art, media and creative expression, and service learning. While it is primarily concerned with the meaning of peace in a variety of interrelated contexts, such as *reconciliation, mediation, or resilience*, it also emphasizes the relevance of conflict and reflects on the logic of violence. PE is related to and implies similar-minded educational and capacity-building processes such as Civic/Democratic Education, Human Rights Education, Digital Literacy, Global Citizenship Education, Diversity Education, Sex and Gender Education, Trauma-Informed Education, and Environmental Education. Furthermore, it is also closely linked to processes of (trauma) healing, transitional and restorative justice, and (post-war) reconstruction. PE is related to but also separate from *Peace Research*, which promotes critical and analytical academic research on peace practices and causes of conflict, but also dedicated to research for peace. PE offers a more general pedagogical approach to learning than peace research, focusing on critical methodological perspectives.

Given the historical dominance of Eurocentric (Western/Northern) discourses and narratives across the educational spectrum, PE must continually *interrogate its own*



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epistemological standards and agendas, given that epistemicide (referring to the destruction of knowledge systems) is a key element of epistemic injustice and is linked to genocide. It must do so by *recognizing vernacular, indigenous, de- and post-colonial alternatives*, and by valuing *local turns* so that a more inclusive global world becomes possible.

Common Threads and Shared Themes

In light of the above, the following part of the Peace Education Concept:Frame summarizes the common threads and characterizes the common themes based on the National Needs Assessments for Peace education submitted by the three EaP partner countries. While Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova all face unique challenges and have very specific needs when it comes to PE through curriculum development, all three EaP partner countries are also connected in many ways and experience similar situations. Among the common threads and themes that run through the national needs assessments, the following emerge repeatedly:

- a. All three EaP partner countries perceive and understand themselves as very *diverse, multicultural and multiethnic countries*. This diversity, multiculturalism and multiethnicity occurs on several levels (religion, language, customs, etc.), is repeatedly associated with fragmentation and polarization, ethno-social conflicts, and the importance of strengthening social cohesion;
- b. at the same time, all three EaP partner countries describe themselves as *post-Soviet countries* undergoing a difficult transition, including coping with various forms of Russian colonial legacy, various forms of Russian (military, economic, cultural) aggression, intervention and occupation, internal tendencies towards regional separatism, as well as crises of national identity;
- c. in addition, national needs assessments report on *major population displacements*, whether in the form of internally displaced persons (IDPs),



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- refugees and migrants who have relocated abroad, or an influx of foreigners (typically Russian citizens);
- d. while the *educational system has changed* considerably over the past two to three decades, PE is only partially or minimally integrated into current curricula and usually receives very limited institutional attention (resources);
 - e. in this context, there seem to be varying *gaps between civil society and HEIs*. This means that the cooperation between NGOs working in the field of PE and universities is rather incoherent, despite a variety and plurality of initiatives on both sides;
 - f. *inter-generational conflicts* (including the ongoing war in Ukraine) fundamentally affect the physical and mental frameworks of teaching and learning, and each country's needs will require repeated exposure and adaptation to interstate war, aggression, or conflict;
 - g. finally, another recurring thread and common theme is that all three EaP partner countries are *EU candidate countries* and that their education systems are being harmonized to EU standards, which also has an impact on conflict dynamics, be they internal or external (international).

Needs Assessment for Peace Education

Based on the three EaP needs assessments on PE, it is clear that (a) conflict transformation and (b) social cohesion are the two main identified needs. Other needs are related to issues such as human rights and democracy, international recognition, youth engagement, cultural diversity, tolerance and inclusiveness, civic engagement and cultural sensitivity. The country needs assessments highlight how PE can contribute to cultures of peace by supporting capacity building, awareness raising, knowledge creation, community building and conflict sensitivity within the three beneficiary countries generally and higher education institutions specifically.



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Ukraine

The Ukraine needs assessment identifies the following key needs for consideration:

- a. *Conflict Resolution*: PE helps in teaching basic skills to transform conflicts and restore situated peace within classrooms and local communities, starting from children to educators;
- b. *Social Cohesion*: PE strengthens social cohesion and promotes peaceful interpersonal conflict resolution and psychological rehabilitation during and after the war;
- c. *Human Rights and Democracy*: PE forms active citizens who understand the importance of human rights, democracy, and tolerance;
- d. *International Recognition*: PE supports recognition of Ukraine's integration into global institutions by adhering to international standards and fostering cooperation with other countries.

Moldova

The Moldova needs assessment emphasizes the following needs that PE can potentially address:

- a. *Conflict Resolution*: PE equips individuals with skills for peaceful conflict management and constructive dialogue, essential for addressing ongoing regional tensions within Moldova;
- b. *Social Cohesion*: PE aims to bridge social divides, foster mutual understanding, and promote national unity, especially in regions with historical conflicts like Transnistria and Gagauzia;
- c. *Youth Engagement*: PE involves young people in PE which is crucial for social innovation and transformation, and empowers them with leadership and civic participation skills;



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- d. *Cultural Diversity*: PE emphasizes respect for diversity and inter-ethnic dialogue helps build bridges between different communities, contributing to social cohesion and stability.

Georgia

The Georgia needs assessment highlights the following needs to be addressed through PE:

- a. *Conflict Resolution*: PE promotes non-violent conflict resolution, helping individuals develop skills to manage and resolve interpersonal conflicts peacefully;
- b. *Tolerance and Inclusivity*: PE fosters tolerance, empathy, and inclusivity, addressing issues like xenophobia, homophobia, and ethnic and religious conflicts.
- c. *Civic Engagement*: PE encourages active citizenship, helping individuals understand their roles in promoting democratic values, justice, and social cohesion.
- d. *Cultural Sensitivity*: PE emphasizes the importance of cultural diversity and the need for mutual respect and understanding among different ethnic and religious groups.

Implementation

The Peace Education Concept:Frame provides an overview of possible areas of implementation. However, the EaP countries need to identify how to adapt, further develop and tailor it to the regional and local contexts (UA, GE, MD). This will include the development and piloting of the pre-service courses/syllabi and all relevant instructional resources based on the concept of Peace Education (PE) and local/national needs. The Development and conducting of the training modules for the academic staff



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of beneficiary HEIs, for in-service general education society and other relevant stakeholders will be based on the Peace Education Concept:Frame.

Based on the needs assessments, various recurring themes and processes related to implementation have been identified below. In particular, training for educators appears as a key implementation theme for all beneficiary countries. Training materials could include reflections on how to develop age-appropriate, context-specific and creative methodologies and pedagogies on PE that are tailored to the needs of the country beneficiaries. Some examples of peace pedagogies to explore and develop could include: role-playing exercises, case studies, structured group discussions and debates on controversial issues related to peace and conflict, conflict mediation workshops, problem-based learning, collaborative projects, digital peace-building tools, storytelling, art, media and creative expression, and service learning.

Specific topics that EaP have identified as being relevant to their implementation of PE include: conflict and displacement, curriculum integration, resource availability, public awareness and support, integration of PE, community engagement, collaboration with civil society, advocate for policy integration and promote collaboration. These implementation goals demonstrate the need to implement PE specifically in universities through courses, curricula and training of educators, and more broadly in communities with other actors and civil society organizations to contribute to cultures of peace.

Ukraine

Based on the Ukraine needs assessment, implementation of the PE concept note needs to consider five main challenges and opportunities:

- a. Conflict and Displacement: The ongoing war in Ukraine (Russia's invasion of Ukraine) has created significant challenges for PE such as the displacement of people, the destruction of higher education institutions and remote learning due



- to human security threats. There is a pressing need to address the trauma and division through educational initiatives that promote healing and trauma work;
- b. Training for Educators: Provide comprehensive training for educators on interpersonal and community level conflict resolution and peacebuilding, ensuring widespread participation and ongoing support.
 - c. Curriculum integration: Incorporate PE into existing curricula through careful planning and collaboration amongst educational authorities, higher education institutions (HEIs) and civil society organizations.
 - d. Resource Availability: Secure adequate resources, including trained educators, relevant materials, and financial support. International cooperation and funding can play a crucial role.
 - e. Public Awareness and Support: Raise awareness about the importance of PE among the general public, policymakers, and educational leaders through advocacy and outreach efforts.

Moldova

Based on the Moldova needs assessment, the following four strategies for educators need to be considered to implement the Peace Education Concept:Frame :

- a. Integration of PE: Introduce PE and peace research courses that are: i) Created as a specialized discipline within existing curriculums/study programs in Social Sciences and the Humanities; ii) Offered as an elective course for all faculties, and; iii) as modules across all educational levels to ensure comprehensive coverage and promote European values on human rights, communication, tolerance and civic engagement.
- b. Training for Educators: Provide continuous training and workshops for teachers on PE and peace research to equip them with necessary tools and methodologies.



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- c. Community Engagement: Encourage community-led projects and volunteer activities that promote cohesion and community resilience outside formal education systems, with a particular need in different regions of Moldova including Transnistria, ATO Gagauzia and other vulnerable regions.
- d. Collaboration with civil society: Universities need to work closely with civil society actors such as NGOs, local community leaders, grassroots and religious organizations to provide cross-sectional spaces for learning, youth engagement, and empowerment, fostering cultures of peace.

Georgia

Based on the Georgia needs assessment, four key strategies are necessary to put forward to further develop the Peace Education Concept:Frame :

- a. Integration of PE: Establish a comprehensive definition of PE tailored to Georgia's context. Integrate it into the national curriculum at all levels to ensure it is fundamental, not optional.
- b. Training for Educators: Offer training and workshops to current and prospective teachers on effective PE strategies and methodologies. This includes raising awareness and strengthening competencies.
- c. Advocate for Policy Integration: Engage in advocacy to integrate PE into national education policies and curricula. Institutional support is crucial for sustainability and scalability.
- d. Promote Collaboration: Encourage joint activities such as student clubs, conflict resolution workshops, and intercultural programs. Foster cooperation between schools, universities, and communities.



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Conclusions

This concept note provides a summary of overarching themes, topics, methodologies and approaches that country beneficiaries can consider for the implementation of PE. However, it is imperative that the EaP country beneficiaries identify the relevant and specific adaptation, tailoring and implementation of PE to their country needs and contexts. This may include reflections on how to identify methodologies, objectives and indicators to assess and report on progress and process as well as who could be relevant and reliable partners design and implement PE curricula, courses and programs. Overall, the project aims to foster mutual understanding and practice of PE through cross-border exchange of knowledge, experiences and ideas between Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia and contribute to broader regional peacebuilding efforts.