

Cooperation rather than conflict



Social tensions are escalating in Ukraine.
Peace education approaches promote dialogue – and mutual understanding.

Project title:	Peace education in support of overcoming internal social polarisation in Ukraine
Commissioned by:	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Implemented by:	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
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The challenge: social cohesion under pressure

Russia's war of aggression is fuelling social tensions in Ukraine. Although solidarity among the people remains strong, polarisation is on the rise. This is no longer just about social groups – divisions are creeping into families and social networks as well.

This is because people's experiences of the war vary greatly. While many Ukrainians have stayed, others have fled. Some have relatives at the front or have been mobilised themselves, others return home as veterans. And then there are those who have lost family members. These differences leave their mark on relationships – and pose major challenges to building social cohesion. The tensions are particularly visible in communities that have taken in internally displaced persons (IDPs), as well as in schools, where individual experiences meet head on.

In spite of their obvious impact, social tensions remain a taboo issue, because they may compromise the country's image of national unity. At the same time, collective trauma is affecting more and more people – with far-reaching consequences for social interaction. Particularly alarming is the rise in domestic violence as one of the most visible social consequences of the war.

In order to promote long-term stability in Ukraine, peace education measures are needed that strengthen social cohesion, facilitate dialogue and support strategies to prevent violence.



Making experiences visible: Playback Theatre gives IDPs a chance to process their experiences on stage.



Implemented by:



Our approach: promote dialogue, reduce polarisation

'Peace education in support of overcoming internal social polarisation in Ukraine' is a project designed to promote cohesion and prevent conflict and violence. On behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), we support state and civil society actors in creating spaces for dialogue – and for the integration of IDPs in schools and in communities.

In collaboration with partner organisations and state education authorities, we are developing peace education approaches in Ukrainian schools. These are being trialled in school experiments. The approaches involve topics such as dispute resolution between peers and interdisciplinary skills such as dealing constructively with emotions. We create materials, develop online programmes and train teachers. One particular focus is on overcoming trauma and strengthening resilience.

In terms of the integration of IDPs, we support municipalities by taking into account the needs both of new arrivals and the local population. The objective is to ensure, as far as possible, a peaceful solution to the refugee crisis. Psychosocial, legal and social support services are consciously directed at both groups. In this way, we strengthen mutual understanding.

A situation that is causing fresh tensions among local residents and IDPs is the rising number of returning veterans and their families. Civilian life follows different rules to everyday life at the front. Roles within families have often shifted and need to be renegotiated. In order to counter potential conflicts at an early stage, our partner organisations provide training on domestic and gender-based violence. They work closely with local authorities and government agencies to find joint solutions.

Our results: from the classroom to legal advice

- A group of facilitators and trainers were trained in the Social, Emotional and Ethical Learning (SEEL) approach. In addition to building capacities for teaching and training, we also developed a range of materials – including handbooks, guidelines for promoting emotional intelligence in children and adults and recommendations for cooperation between teachers and parents.
- Two school experiments – the Peaceful School project and Social, Emotional and Ethical Learning – were officially recognised by the Ministry of Education following successful trials.
- Together with the children's magazine Piznyako, we developed child-appropriate [brochures](#) on topics such as internal displacement, loss, hope, self-realisation in the face of war and children's rights. These come with accompanying methodology booklets for adults, which take a closer look at the educational aspects of selected topics.
- Several partner organisations have prioritised legal counselling for people affected by war – especially veterans and their families. They have already conducted more than 200 individual consultations. The easy-to-understand roadmaps and infographics on issues such as applying for financial aid have been particularly successful and have reached over 80,000 people online.

'I'm just grateful'

Oksana Ivatyna, a participant in the ContAct2U project of our partner organisation Power of Future:



'When it was announced in March 2022 that the Donetsk region was to be evacuated, we had no choice but to leave our home. Suddenly we were internally displaced persons. Tears, sadness, despair – our lives came to a standstill. In Dnipro, we came up against new challenges, both emotionally and in everyday life. Power of the Future was a real turning point for me – meeting the team gave me strength. Without this support, the consequences of the stressful situation could have been very different. I'm just grateful to be part of this wonderful community.'



◀ Art therapy helps veterans in Kalush return to civilian life.

▶ Booklets for coping with war anxiety: in collaboration with the children's magazine Piznyako, the project created materials to help children come to terms with their experiences.



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