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# Citizenship & The role of youth In Peace Building



A curriculum titled *Towards a Culture of Peace* is an initiative designed under the EU supported STRIVE GLOBAL programme. The project is being implemented by the Centre of Training and Consultancy in partnership with Civic Education Teachers Forum.

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A goal of the project is to ensure an early detection of nascent signs of conflicts in Georgian education establishments. These conflicts may stem from violent and discriminatory grounds and further fuel up radicalization and intolerance among students.

The present material has been developed with the EU's support. The responsibility for the content lies with the organization implementing *Towards a Culture of Peace* project and under no circumstances shall it express views of the EU.

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## Citizenship and the role of youth in peace building

**Whatever you do may seem insignificant to you, but it is most important that you do it.”**

**Mahatma Gandhi**

Civil participation has been seen as of utmost importance throughout the world for its role in fostering democratic processes and peace building at all levels. The latest trends observed within the world's leading democracies suggest that civil associations volunteer to take responsibilities for the development and implementation of state policies. In addition, they are actively involved in all those initiatives which influence social, political, economic and cultural policies. A level of democratization of nation states is largely shaped by the degree of civil participation of individuals as well as a society. Society consists of people sharing values and pursuing a shared goal while maintaining functional integrity. A unity without shared values and goals, or without functional integrity, is simply a population rather than a society. Societal values are of moral, legal, social, cultural and national significance. These are those ideals and goals that the society aspires to achieve. For instance, the concept of human rights is based on two values: human dignity and equality. These two values lay the foundation for other values the presence of which makes it easier to determine as to how individuals, societies and state structures should coexist in democracies.

The principles of human dignity and quality suggest that:

- If an individual enjoys resources and opportunities existing in the society for his or her own benefit, then s/he is to abide by rules for cohabitation enshrined in the society
- If an individual ignores rights of others, then s/he is expected to waive his or her own rights
- If an individual exercises his/her rights, then s/he must enable others to do the same. Otherwise, others shall have the right to curb the former's rights.

These principles and conclusions are relevant to both authorities as well as individuals. For instance, Founding Fathers of the U.S. believed that the major goal of the state is to ensure the protection of human rights and foster wellbeing for all. The foundation of welfare is aspiration of citizens to put public interest before personal or narrow group (clan, institute, agency). Citizens should encourage such individuals to ascend to power by means of elections or otherwise. Moreover, not only should an individual share societal rules, but s/he take all possible measures to contribute to the development of the society so that s/he remains morally faithful to those citizens who create and serve the public good. This is the road that an individual should take in order to become a true citizen and a full member of the society who is able to freely enjoy material or spiritual wealth created by his/her fellow citizens.

**The concept of citizenship embraces three following aspects:** civil, political and social. Based on these aspects, the active citizen is the one who engaged in civil, political and social activities. One of the core rights of the citizen is the right to participate in public management.

**- Implementation of political activities.** Participation in political life may take various forms including:

1. Voting – participation in elections, nominating a candidate for an elected office (those who argue that voting is a must for civil society also support the idea that voting is not just a right but a civil duty. For instance, in Australia individuals who refuse to vote have to sign a special form. Making free elections 'compulsory' and requiring those who refuse to vote to sign a document may not qualify as entirely a democratic approach. However, the degree of non-voting may be an alarm signal for growing disproportion of democratic processes. The citizen refusing to vote may think that a single vote is not going to change anything while there is an abundance of examples proving the contrary: During the elections in Germany held in 1949 Konrad Adenauer won with just a single vote which had changed the course of the German politics and status of the country in the post-war Europe. A single vote decided the victory of Wojciech Jaruzelski in Poland's National Assembly elections of 1989 as a result of which Jaruzelski was elected a president. These cases illustrate that even a single vote may play a decisive role in elections and a country's future development. In most democracies including Georgia, voting is voluntary. However, unified voters list must enlist all citizens of full age).
2. Participation in political debates;

3. Submitting and signing of petitions;
4. Donating money to a candidate or a party;
5. Running election campaigns;
6. Serving in public agencies;
7. Disobeying law or taking responsibility for disobedience in order to prove that certain laws or policies are unfair (civil resistance).

If laws or actions of authorities contradict citizens' beliefs as to what is appropriate, the latter have to face a difficult choice: should they obey laws and governmental decisions? Some argue that since there are no perfect authorities, obedience also has its limits: if a law or a decision does not feel right, then citizens are not obliged to abide by such laws or decisions. Some choose to resort to a rebellion and revolution, others decide on less violent forms of protest. There are various forms of non-violent protest ranging from publishing open letters addressing officials to participating in boycotts. When such forms of protest appear futile, what other choices do citizens have to confront authorities?

Civil resistance is one of the forms of non-violent protest. It includes but is not limited to refusal to pay taxes, burning passports, sit-ins etc. Decisions to resort to these kinds of action often induce serious consequences and citizens who employ such forms of protest must be ready for such consequences. For instance, the American philosopher Henry David Thoreau chose to go to prison instead of paying taxes in support to American-Mexican war. Thoreau justified his decision in his essay on Civil Disobedience. He argued that 'disobedience is the foundation of freedom'. In the 1950s and 1960s Martin Luther King Jr and others were imprisoned for protesting against racial segregation. In his Letter from Birmingham Jail King wrote: 'I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law'. His position had historical roots in the works of Socrates, Thomas Aquinas, Jean Calvin and Mahatma Gandhi (Leo Tolstoy and his concept of non-participation in violence deserves an honourable mention).

Mahatma Gandhi proved that nonviolent resistance is capable of changing politics and tyranny provided that such resistance is faithful and excludes any kind of cooperation with the evil. In order to prevent civil resistance from developing into anarchy and chaos, Gandhi proposed that only those citizens who have positive characteristics should participate in civil resistance. At the same time, this type of resistance should be the last resort when the state becomes 'evil'. Both Gandhi and King argued that the major goal of the resistance is not to defeat the rival but to restore justice and transform the society. This cannot be achieved by resorting to evil means since cruelty and violence lead to the degradation of human nature. King wrote that "the ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy, instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that'. It was by using ethical and adequate means (honest persuasion, actively demanding the due, protecting interests in a consistent way) that King achieved success in his battle for securing rights for black population.

Active citizenship can be realized not only by undertaking political activities, but also by means of active participation in the country's public life, in other words by **undertaking civil activities**. Individuals may:

- Take certain responsibilities for benefit of their communities. They can, for instance, become peer educators or teachers;
- Contribute to decision making by, for instance, developing and implementing anti-discrimination and anti-extortion policies and practices;
- Meet and talk to community members, religious leaders, police, local authorities and volunteer groups in order to discuss social and ethical dilemmas including prejudices and discrimination;
- Collect information and recommendations through information services, hotlines and other means;
- Rethink changes taking place within the society and plan adaptation strategies.

Their contribution to public activities may include:

- Building friendship with peers
- Participating in various advisory bodies who are responsible before the society
- Publishing community journal or newspaper
- Contributing to public safety
- Implementing and participating in anti-vandalism projects

An active citizen should also implement **social activities** including but not limited to:

- Collecting money for charity
- Arranging and promoting a territory that is of importance for the local community
- Helping persons with disabilities etc

Individuals can develop skills for participation and active citizenship by organizing and leading on events dedicated to national holidays, community events etc.

In order for individuals to be able to independently undertake aforementioned events, it is recommended that they be engaged in the following activities:

1. Generation of ideas – where does the idea of a particular event come from? Individuals or community? Who to consult if the event is to take place?
2. Setting goals – what is this event/activity for? What goal can be achieved as a result of implementing this event/activity? Who is the target group? Is it for authorities? Local community?
3. Covering expenses – Does the event/activity require financial resources? If yes, how these financial means can be collected? Should the money be raised through donations? Grants?
4. Program planning - what activities will be implemented, where and when? How realistic is the plan? Who to expect help from? How is likely to help: local organizations and/or invited guests?
5. Program implementation – Do we need food? Parking lot? Who should contact other organizations – leadership or staff?
6. Publicity and promotion – how to release information about the event – webpage? Invitations? What is the role for local media?
7. Feedback – how successful the event was? What are the sources of feedback? What was the feedback from participants? What needs to be done differently?
8. Sharing lessons learnt - how to share lessons learnt with others – through a presentation to the board? By delivering booklets?

Finally, in order to adopt active citizenship mindset, an individual should try to acquire active stance by:

1. Being informed on events taking place in their surroundings, country and internationally
2. Drawing the attention of the public to problems – voice concerns over certain issues, relay information and engage with media outlets
3. Networking – reach out to non-governmental organizations, offer his/her services as a volunteer to undertaking certain assignments, join these organizations, raise funds for supporting the organization
4. Achieving tangible outcomes - take steps towards the resolution of specific issues in a consistent manner

### **Only peace between equals can last.**

Woodrow Wilson

Participation of every individual in peacebuilding is of utmost importance. Young people in the capacity of peace ambassadors are active players and therefore their role in peace processes is immense. EU's strategy for youth for 2010-2018 is based on the recognition that the future of the EU is in hands of young people. The strategy has two broader goals:

- **Invest in youth**, in particular by ensuring equal access to youth in the field of education and labor market
- **Empower youth** by fostering their active engagement in public life.

**Investment in youth** envisages measures to help youth improve a level of education and acquire a diverse set of skills, as well as increase their chances for employment and develop their entrepreneurship capacity, which in turn, will lead to the development of human capital. At the same time, a stronger emphasis needs to be put on health and overall wellbeing of youth. Considering the fact that the youth were particularly affected by the financial crisis of 2008 – as of today unemployment rates suggest that 1 in 4 youth is unemployed (in Greece

which suffers the highest level of youth unemployment half of the young population is unemployed). In April 2013 the European Commission adopted the Youth Guarantee program to ensure that young people receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

With respect to **youth empowerment** the strategy recognizes that youth remain distanced from social institutions and calls on politicians and policy makers for paying close attention to this problem through

- Encouraging youth dialogue and participation in public policy making at a national and the EU level;
- Supporting youth organizations as well as youth national and local councils;
- Supporting those groups who are traditionally underrepresented;
- Supporting the *Learning Participation* initiative from an early age;
- Developing online instruments for democratic participation in order to ensure nexus with less organized representative of youth

Even though the extent of effectiveness of activities stipulated by the strategy is yet to be assessed, it is nevertheless recommended that Georgian politicians and policy makers use it. Social and political passiveness in Georgia is tied to lack of information and opportunities for undertaking actions. In addition, mistrust to major political institutes also accounts for this passiveness.

Findings of surveys undertaken by CRRC Georgia within a MYPLACE supported project suggest that most of the surveyed youth are doubtful about civil activeness and often demonstrate cynical attitude. They believe that there are some hidden agenda behind people's participation disguised in public good.

The following recommendations for greater civil engagement of youth in Georgia have been developed based on the findings:

- *Introduce courses for volunteerism and civil activism in curricula for general and higher education establishments.* High quality civil education is expected to increase the number of those who will be familiar with the concept of civil activeness with full recognition of its potential outcomes. Moreover, young people themselves recognize an important role that education plays with respect to greater social and political engagement: respondents of the MYPLACE survey often refer to schools in Western Europe as one of the major contributors to well-developed culture of volunteerism and civil engagement.
- *Depoliticize youth organizations.* Georgian society remains an extremely politicized society. According to the MYPLACE survey even the most widespread form of youth participation – voting in elections, is strongly tied to politics. Moreover, there are cases when political parties push some of youth organizations, for instance, self-government bodies at universities, to engage in political activities. Results of the survey suggest that politization hampers many activities as many young people have no desire to get associated with 'dirty business' as they often refer to politics. Therefore, they prefer to refrain from participating in such activities. Subsequently, complete dissociation of non-political youth organizations from political interests will intensify youth activities in Georgia, which in turn, will lead to engaging non-politicized youth in public processes.
- Establish a joint forum by youth organizations in order to promote and support best cases of youth engagement. Even though there are many such cases, they tend to remain unnoticed by state institutes. For instance, Eurasian Partnership Foundation in Georgia has been implementing a Youth Integration program to support youth volunteerism and civil engagement to address targeted communities' needs and take responsibility over processes taking place in their respective communities through providing small grants and trainings concerning community (self)-mobilization. The experience of the Eurasian Partnership Foundation suggests that this mechanism is effective. It is recommended that the State take all possible measures to support the extrapolation of similar activities to other communities, especially in those regions whereby the level of economic deprivation is high. State institutions should make such programs accessible to wider circles of youth.

There are many international organizations focusing on youth civil engagement. These organizations have developed evidence-based recommendations to strengthen the contribution that youth can make in peace building.

### **Six ways to successfully engage youth in peace building**



1. In the globalized world youth have greater access to information through modern technologies which can support young people to share their experience with their peers. Educated youth equipped with information can have tangible impact on peace processes. State structures, parents, teachers, political or religious leaders should invest in transforming youth into educated, informed and active citizens so that they can mobilize around an idea or value system, develop their visions on pressing issues, and strike a consensus through a peaceful dialogue. There should be a space whereby young people can reach out to wider public and connect to decisionmakers. Today, more than 1.5 billion people live in countries affected by fragility and conflict — a majority of which is under the age of 30. Some of them are either perpetrators or victims. Youth groups can play a positive role in peace building. By using help from international peacebuilding organizations and through communication technologies they can consolidate wider public for disarmament and peaceful resolution of violent conflicts.
2. In order to engage youth in peace building measures need to be taken to enhance their education and skills necessary for peace building activities. Although most young peace builders create positive impact with minimal resources, it's important to provide them with the tools they need to become more effective change-makers such as access to educational programs which would teach them the role of active citizens. Sadly, not every young people have access to quality education. Therefore, school teachers and/or informal education facilitators should develop curricula to inspire young people to engage in peace building and demonstrate their potential in peace processes. Such educational programs may include role plays, participation in international youth networks for peace and/or engagement in ongoing peace initiatives. This will help youth to acquire leadership skills and experience of resolving conflicts in a peaceful manner.
3. Build trust between youths and government. Young people are not only the future, but they are also the present. They have values, needs, desires and ideas. Youth engagement in public processes means that not only do they learn active citizenship but are active participants in a decision-making process. Deeper partnership with state structures and greater trust will contribute to enhanced role of youth in peace processes. The Georgian legislation allows youth to engage in political processes:

#### **Georgian constitution**

**Article 28 -1.** Every citizen of Georgia who has attained the age of 18 shall have the right to participate in referendums and elections of the bodies of the state, autonomous republics and local self-governments. The free expression of the will of a voter shall be guaranteed.

**Article 49 –** A citizen, who has attained the age of 25, having the right to vote, may be elected a member of the parliament.

#### **Organic Law of Georgia – Election Code of Georgia**

**Article 134 – 1.** Any citizen of Georgia who has attained the age of 25 by polling day and has permanently resided in Georgia for at least five years, including at least two years up to and including the day of calling the elections, may be elected a Sakrebulo member.

**Article 134- 2.** Any citizen of Georgia having the right to vote and who has attained the age of 25 by polling day and has permanently resided in Georgia for at least five years, including at least the last two years up to and including the day of calling the elections, may be elected as a Mayor/Gamgebeli of a self-governing city/community.

Young volunteers and young representatives of authorities should engage in taking measures for the prevention of conflicts around important public issues (such as raising awareness on decisions made by public agencies through personal communication). Governments must trust and support young people in undertaking peaceful initiatives and provide the latter with a space and venue for voicing their opinions and reaching out to wider public as mediators between the state and the population. It is important that youth be supported by means of facilitating their participation in national and regional peace processes. As an example, dozens of local youth councils were established in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab Spring revolution in Tunisia — an initiative that has fostered newfound confidence between youths and local politicians. After a couple of years, the youth councils have gained the trust of local government authorities, to the point that when it's time to decide on the local budgets, these youth councils are being consulted to see if the budget make sense. This case is a vivid example of positive experience with respect to greater trust between authorities and young people.



4. Rather than working with youths in isolation, peace-building projects seeking the engagement of youths should also include parents and elders. Youths are deeply influenced by the attitudes of their entourage. Yet adults might perceive youth-led initiatives as a threat to their own power and position. This points to the need for youth peace-building projects to be accompanied by dialogue and cooperation between young people, their relatives and community elders.
5. While efficiencies can always be found, monitoring and evaluation activities need to be undertaken, improved and made routine across all peace-building initiatives capitalizing on youth engagement. Suffering from a chronic lack of financial support, youth peace-building activities often have very limited ability to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of their work — a situation that seriously impedes the visibility and sustainability of their initiatives. But beyond increased financial support, innovative approaches to evaluate the impact of youth engagement in conflict resolution must be used — particularly those that build on qualitative evidence and participative approaches.
6. Finally, it is important to incentivize youth with even the simplest rewards, such as certificates, prizes and scholarships. These types of awards are likely to motivate not only recipients of these rewards (by generating greater peace building efforts), but also other young people. Providing awards may encourage their peers to become more active and engaged in peace building.

In the Georgian context, the role of youth in peace building has been recognized as having great importance for the following directions:

- Implementation of preventive measures for creating peaceful environment – youth initiatives for environmental protection
- Youth initiatives for peaceful coexistence with minorities
- Youth initiatives for peaceful neighbourhood policies
- Youth initiatives for rule of law

Assessment and analysis of situation must take place prior to determining youth participation prospects in these four directions of peace building in Georgia.

Findings of the body of research undertaken for the purpose of assessing perceptions and attitudes of youth in Georgia towards peaceful coexistence with minorities are of particular importance to acquire in-depth understanding of this issue. Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI) carried out the research among university students in six Georgian cities (Telavi, Gori, Akhaltsikhe, Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Batumi) to study attitudes of youth towards ethnic, religious, sexual minorities and foreign citizens. The research was carried out in the period from November 2016 to April 2017.

#### **Key findings of the research:**

- Religious identity dominates other types of identities.

#### **Acceptance:**

- Tolerance of a familiar 'other', only because they are familiar and not because their existence is acceptable ('my gay friend', 'my Jehovah's Witness relative').
- Acceptance of others as a Georgian tradition ('hospitality is traditional in Georgia', 'Georgian people have always been tolerant towards foreigners').
- Acceptance of others as a European/modern approach and an attribute of civilization ('it's like that in Europe', 'if we want to be part of the European Union, then...').
- Public space as a boundary to tolerance ('let them be but there are limits to everything').

#### **Lack of acceptance:**

- Lack of acceptance of others based on lack of knowledge ('I don't know, I haven't heard anything about that').
- Lack of acceptance of others based on lack of familiarity ('I have nothing to do with them').
- Lack of acceptance of others as protection from a collective threat ('the Georgian nation will die out if it goes on like this...').

- Lack of acceptance of others as fidelity to tradition ('that is not acceptable in Georgian traditions...').
- Five most widespread positions could be observed from the group discussions with the interviewees:
- **Demographic threat** - This implies the scarcity of Georgians and also Orthodox Christians, and specifically, the tendency of these groups to decrease more rapidly compared to followers of other religions
  - **The fear/threat of turning into a minority (from the majority's position)** - minorities and their social activity is perceived as threatening for Georgian, Orthodox Christian, heterosexual people
  - **"They can be by themselves, within boundaries"** - clear desire was exhibited to isolate minorities, put them within "boundaries", which draws imaginary borders in the environment and society, where the main space still belongs to the majority, the so-called dominant groups.
  - **Familiarity** - a tendency of being accepting of non-Orthodox, non-Georgian or non-heterosexual persons (not groups) as far as these were their friends and acquaintances.
  - **Love thy enemy, as a form of tolerance** - interviewees explained tolerance towards different religious minorities by the Christian dogma „love thy enemy” and the tradition of hospitality. This is a good indicator of their dominance and access to power, which allows them to put others in their place and decide how they should live.

Findings of the research clearly demonstrate the importance of and need for peace and civil education for youth in order to ensure effective peace building processes.

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