

# HANDLING CONTROVERSY IN SCHOOLS THROUGH HUMAN RIGHTS AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

## PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE AND COMMUNICATION, CONFLICT RESOLUTION, SOCIAL MOBILISATION



An Educational Toolkit for Teachers.  
Developed under the project "Sharing  
Knowledge, Handling Controversy in Schools  
of Greece, North Macedonia and Bulgaria".

**Antigone**

INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTATION CENTRE  
on Racism, Ecology, Peace and Non-Violence



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# HANDLING CONTROVERSY IN SCHOOLS THROUGH HUMAN RIGHTS AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Peaceful Coexistence and Communication,  
Conflict Resolution, Social Mobilisation

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# Introduction

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In 2021, three non-profit organisations, all active and experienced in the field of human rights education, namely “ANTIGONE – Information and Documentation Centre on Racism, Ecology, Peace and Non-Violence” from Greece, “Journalists for Human Rights” from North Macedonia and “Amalipe - Center for Inter-ethnic Dialogue and Tolerance” from Bulgaria, collaborated in the development and the implementation of the project titled “Sharing Knowledge and Handling Controversy in schools in Greece, North Macedonia and Bulgaria (SKHC)”. The project included a set of activities addressing the local teaching communities with the aim of building a peaceful and inclusive school environment in the three countries. The project was implemented in the framework of the Joint Programme between the European Union and the Council of Europe “Democratic and Inclusive School Culture in Operation (DISCO)”.

This educational toolkit is a part of the SKHC project and has been designed with the aim of motivating and facilitating school teachers, school directors and educational administrators in their efforts and initiatives for an inclusive human rights education. This is seen as a means to address controversial issues that exist within school communities, often leading to prejudice-based bullying<sup>1</sup>, in-school violence, social stigmatisation and mutual hatred. This toolkit can help establish a school environment of mutual respect, equal participation, and inclusion as well as lead to the gradual development of a new school culture based on the principles of human rights, democracy, and peace among all school members.

The toolkit is useful both for upper primary and secondary school teachers who have participated in the SKHC project’s training sessions on handling controversy as well as for every other member of the teaching community who seeks to support, build, and promote school programmes on handling controversy through human rights education. The kit has been inspired by “Teaching controversial issues through education for democratic citizenship and human rights” professional development pack and “Managing Controversy. Developing a strategy for handling controversy and teaching controversial issues in schools” tool set, developed in the framework of other projects run under Council of Europe and European Union joint programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> Prejudice-based bullying is a bullying behavior that is motivated by prejudice based on an individual’s identity, actual or perceived. It includes discriminatory language or behavior that attacks characteristics of someone’s identity as for example age, disability, race, origin, gender, sexual orientation, religion or belief, etc.

## PART 1:

# Controversial Issues in Schools

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### **1.1: Definition**

What are controversial issues?

The definition of controversial issues differs slightly from place to place. One definition for controversial issues is that they are significant academic, social, political, and ideological matters involving opposing viewpoints and/or multiple perspectives.<sup>2</sup> A controversial issue is also defined as one which results in dispute and disagreement due to a difference of opinion.<sup>3</sup>

According to another definition, issues typically become controversial when the parties involved have competing values and interests; when they strongly disagree about statements, assertions, or actions; when the subject touches on some particular sensitivity (e.g. political or religious); or when they arouse an emotional reaction. These topics may relate to events in the past, to a current situation or to some future desired outcome.<sup>4</sup>

In European educational practices **controversial issues** are defined as **“issues that evoke strong emotions and are related to our values and ideals and can divide a community and society”<sup>5</sup>. They generate strong emotions, conflicting explanations and solutions based on alternative beliefs and values, competing interests that lead to the division of society.**

### **1.2: Types of controversial issues**

Controversial issues range from local to global and vary from place to place. For example, religious and sexual orientation issues are relatively uncontroversial in some countries and very controversial in other countries. Some controversial issues have a long and enduring history, like divisions and conflicts among different groups within countries, while others, such as cyberbullying and the threat of youth radicalisation, have emerged only recently. In that sense, what is controversial in one school or even one class may not be a concern in another.

Potentially controversial issues in a school curriculum:

- ▶ History-related issues, including different narratives and perspectives; and sensitive topics such as past conflicts, the origins of nationalism, fascism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.
- ▶ Questions related to contemporary issues e.g., social, political, economic, religious, moral, philosophical, etc. (covered in several classes, such as history, religious education, health education, civic and social education, literature, science and more).

Some school subjects are more likely to cause controversy than others:

- ▶ Literature - social issues, such as racism and equality, and changes in attitudes towards issues over time.
- ▶ Language - insight into other countries and cultures, cultural ties.
- ▶ History and history-related issues, as before.
- ▶ Science - evolution, climate changes, animal experiments, stem-cell research, genetically modified food.
- ▶ Religious education - religious diversity and use of religious symbols such as the crucifix and the hijab may be concerned.
- ▶ Health and sex education - sexual orientation, abortion, drug use.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://policy.hcpss.org/8000/8050/>, accessed on 10 August 2021.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/socstud/frame\\_found\\_sr2/tns/tn-34.pdf](https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/socstud/frame_found_sr2/tns/tn-34.pdf), accessed on 10 August 2021.

<sup>4</sup> <https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/teaching/ideas-teaching/teaching-controversial-topics>, accessed on 10 August 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Teaching Controversial Issues Through Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights, Council of Europe, September 2015, p. 8.



- ▶ Mathematics - different number and measurement systems, use and misuse of statistics, such as those related to crime and immigration rates.
- ▶ Civic and social education - political systems, political parties, policies, and ideologies.
- ▶ Physical education - cultural attitudes towards sports, gender patterns in sports and doping.
- ▶ Art - cultural attitudes towards art, art as propaganda and protest, use of art to raise awareness.
- ▶ Information and communication technology - radicalisation of young people through social media, pornography, Internet privacy, democracy, and online campaigns.
- ▶ Geography – including local issues, pollution control, planning and segregation, and global issues, such as fair trade, migration, climate change and ethical tourism.
- ▶ Music - cultural attitudes towards music, music as a means for propaganda or protest, racist and sexist lyrics in music.

While not every issue is suitable for discussion for every age group and keeping in mind that there are no “quick fixes”, controversial issues should not be avoided in schools and classrooms. Moreover, these issues, cannot be confined to classrooms: they spill out into other areas of the school, corridors, cafeterias, playgrounds and staff rooms<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, students are exposed to controversial issues more than ever through mass media, and, therefore, they need to have a safe space to discuss and demystify them. Discussing current controversial issues can be a good way of helping young people learn how to engage in democratic dialogue.

### **1.3: Teaching approaches**

How can teachers use controversy constructively?

Teaching should be seen as rational but creative endeavour rather than an exercise of mechanically applied formulated techniques. Part of the rational act of engaging students in discussing controversial issues is judging what approaches to take in a classroom and at what moment during a lesson. Teachers have to manage moments of tension among their students daily as it is an unavoidable part of a school environment. For this reason, they need to appropriately select and use conflict resolution techniques effectively in order to handle “taboo” topics that were not dealt with in the past.

An effective response to controversial issues that emerge during class can gradually lead to the development of an inspiring school culture of acceptance, understanding and inclusion. Handling controversy democratically can lead to a deeper understanding and learning process, facilitating the students’ cognitive, social, and emotional development, and rendering students capable of coping with controversy peacefully, both at school and in other social environments. In order to achieve the desired dynamics in discussions and analytical thinking, it is important that teachers are well-informed and trained in the various techniques and strategies for handling controversy. This sometimes means combining approaches, depending on the students’ profile, cultural and social context, and other related factors, so as to make them more effective.

Some possible approaches teachers may take in addressing controversial issues in class include the following:

- ▶ Neutral (the teacher does not express personal views, only facilitates the discussion).
- ▶ Balanced (the teacher presents a wide range of alternative views).
- ▶ The Devil’s advocate (the teacher intentionally takes the opposite position from the majority opinion).
- ▶ Declared commitment (the teacher openly expresses his / her position).
- ▶ Ally (the teacher supports “marginalized”, “ignored” social groups).
- ▶ Official line (the teacher echoes the dominant views or takes the side of public authorities).<sup>7</sup>

Teaching controversial topics besides being an opportunity for students to have an opinion and debate about important political, social, ethical, and moral issues, may also improve their self-esteem, as they become more confident in expressing views or formulating ideas.

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<sup>6</sup> Teaching Controversial Issues, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Huddleston T. & Kerr D., Managing Controversy. Developing a strategy for handling controversy and teaching controversial issues in schools. Council of Europe, January 2017, p. 17.

Teaching and learning about controversial issues may support enquiry and analytical thinking, and improve students' awareness of current debates, helping them to better understand real life situations. It also helps students in evaluating media messages that they are exposed to outside school, which are sometimes confusing.

### **1.4: Strategies for handling controversies in schools**

When handling controversial issues teachers, students as well as school managers and leaders need to have a strategic approach and some necessary skills.

When preparing to address controversial issues, teachers need to plan class discussions by considering whether they should:

- ▶ Identify a clear purpose.
- ▶ Establish ground rules.
- ▶ Provide a common basis for understanding.
- ▶ Create a framework for the discussion that maintains focus and flow.
- ▶ Include everyone.
- ▶ Be an active facilitator.
- ▶ Summarise discussion and gathering student feedback.
- ▶ Address issues related to the teacher's identity.
- ▶ Utilize school resources, involve experts, use available materials, equipment, and school facilities, take advantage of funding and training opportunities, etc.

In determining their strategy in terms of managing controversial issues, teachers may use different techniques and approaches, depending on the situation, while always keeping in mind the following important points:

- ▶ Self-reflection and awareness of the teacher about own beliefs and values.
- ▶ Understanding the composition of the group of students in the classroom, school, neighbourhood.
- ▶ Training for the use of different teaching techniques and their selection from case to case as well as critical thinking on the part of the teacher.
- ▶ Information on the nature of controversial school issues and their consequences.
- ▶ Creating a climate of trust and security in the classroom and school.
- ▶ Training in the use of peaceful and democratic methods of communication in the classroom and at the school.
- ▶ Training for recognising and responding to biased behaviour through democratic means.
- ▶ Training for democratic dialogue and decision-making in the classroom and in their school group.
- ▶ Ensuring a school that is open to society: the contribution of specialists, representatives of social groups, etc.

In their planning for addressing controversial issues, teachers may:

- ▶ Prepare for inclusive teaching by finding out ahead of the class and in as much details as possible, the students' cultural and educational backgrounds; anticipate material that is likely to cause controversy and actively plan to manage it; include assessment tasks for students to reflect on their own skills for managing controversy or show that they can critically analyse and argue about an issue.
- ▶ Create a positive classroom climate of trust by "*getting to know you*" activities, focusing on similarities rather than differences in order to enhance students' ability to communicate and enhance participation; promote self-disclosure on matters relevant to the topic but remind students of the importance of confidentiality; help students to evaluate the costs and benefits of self-disclosure; promote tolerance and respectful behaviour; respond neutrally to statements which teachers find controversial by listening, paraphrasing, asking for evidence, analysing underlying assumptions and asking for other points of view.
- ▶ Challenge the ideas expressed by someone without offending or discouraging that person and emphasising the conditional nature of knowledge - explaining how knowledge is developed; encourage students to explore what they don't know and set new learning goals.

- ▶ Ensure inclusive discussions by establishing classroom norms with students at the beginning of the year by using discussion strategies which encourage students to listen carefully to each other, for example the next speaker needs to paraphrase the views of the previous speaker; require students to reflect upon the quality of evidence underlying claims expressed in theory, research, experience, media, family folklore; ask students to interview a person with a different perspective and report their views verbally or in writing; respectfully use student diversity in the classroom when it is helpful to understand different cultural perspectives of the student body.
- ▶ Encourage critical thinking through the use of debates, for example students may take one position one week and the opposing position the next week and write briefly about their current position, using evidence; or have students defend a position they disagree with in a debate; use critical observation activities allowing students to distinguish between observation and interpretation; use media items to encourage critical thinking, differences in reporting by different sources, analysis of sources of information and misinformation; invite credible guest lecturers to discuss different perspectives and opposing views; avoid assessment tasks which accept only one answer as true, such as true or false questions and multiple choice questions.
- ▶ Manage emotions by anticipating strong emotions such as anger; anticipate student cynicism or demoralisation if they start feeling powerless in terms of making changes; manage your own emotions as a teacher and share experiences with other staff.
- ▶ Anticipate and overcome resistance by planning to return to some issues on several occasions; offer interpretations of resistance gradually; manage students' emotions, as well as your own and afterwards ask students to analyse their resistance; instead of personalising resistance focus on strategies to challenge ideas.
- ▶ Use experiential activities to reduce the sense of 'us' and 'them', for example role plays, simulations and field work.

In addition, teachers may also have the option to set family as an item to the agenda of a school staff meeting in order to develop a strategy tailored to the school and its wider community, and they can also consult national/regional policy to ensure that guidelines are followed. In their communications with families, teachers can also mention that their approach is designed to encourage students to read and to consider sources that have multiple perspectives, and to practice critical thinking and follow democratic methods. By being positive and proactive, teachers can help build a bridge to important partners in their students' lives. It is helpful to gather and to take into consideration student feedback about the value of discussions, when communicating with administrators and parents.

A whole-school approach to handling controversies needs to be active, responsive, and proactive, and school leaders and leadership teams might take a range of actions when developing a strategy for handling controversy that include:

- ▶ Reviewing guidance and policies.
- ▶ Reviewing current policy and practice.
- ▶ Policy development.
- ▶ Action planning.
- ▶ Monitoring and evaluation.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Managing Controversy, p. 49-52.

## **1.5: Challenges**

Teachers may hesitate to bring up controversial issues in a classroom for a variety of reasons which may relate to the students, the teacher, the system, the parents, or the school administration.

When addressing controversial issues in schools, some challenges that may need to be taken into account are the following:

- ▶ Protecting students' emotions and sensitivities (for instance, when extreme views are expressed).
- ▶ Ensuring a peaceful climate in the classroom and fostering constructive dialogue.
- ▶ Lack of knowledge about an issue.
- ▶ Lack of time especially when the material to be covered is too extensive.
- ▶ Lack of experience and confidence in teaching controversial issues.
- ▶ The majority opinion on the issue may conflict with the teacher's views, values, and beliefs.

The teachers' attitudes can also make teaching controversial issues challenging because of barriers like the following:

- ▶ Denial – when the teacher does not acknowledge an issue as being controversial and does not adjust his/her teaching style accordingly but teaches it in the usual way, looking for 'right' and 'wrong' answers.
- ▶ Privilege – when the teacher assumes own views as 'right' and tries to influence the pupils so that they end up adopting them.
- ▶ Avoidance – when the teacher avoids a topic, feeling unable or unwilling to teach it.
- ▶ Academic views – when the teacher has an academic viewpoint on the issue, which does not reflect the real situation.

What is also becoming increasingly challenging for teachers is to facilitate discussions, create a supportive learning environment and keep the students engaged in virtual or hybrid classroom settings.

## **1.6: Overall principles and key issues in handling of controversies in schools effectively**

What needs to be in place for effective handling of controversies is to have a clear understanding of how controversial issues are being addressed in the school which means assessing the skills and attitudes of teaching staff, their levels of self-confidence and their ability to deal with conflicting opinions.

Some teacher attitudes which can enable successful handling of controversial issues include:

- ▶ Acceptance: the teacher acknowledges an issue as being controversial, is aware of its complexity and opposing viewpoints.
- ▶ Remaining open-minded: the teacher acknowledges own views as just one perspective on the matter, recognises that other views are valid, and researches the issue further, formulating views based on multiple perspectives and a wide range of evidence.
- ▶ Pragmatism: the teacher understands the academic perspectives on an issue but relates them to a real-world context, in a way that pupils can easily understand.
- ▶ Being prepared: the teacher develops experience of teaching controversial issues, from training and researching issues and teaching methodologies to developing confidence and competency and is better prepared to successfully teach controversial issues.

Dealing with controversy needs to be acknowledged as a whole-school issue. Controversies arising in the classroom are related to what happens in the school as a whole as well as the community outside the school and need to be understood in this wider context.

Some important ways for understanding and effectively handling controversies in schools are:

- ▶ Controversy should not be seen as a problem, but as a natural part of life in a democracy.
- ▶ Controversial issues should not be avoided but should be openly discussed according to the principles of democratic education.

- ▶ Discussions on controversial issues are an essential part of democratic education.
- ▶ Controversial questions can arise anywhere in the school at any time.
- ▶ All school staff should be willing and able to contribute to the handling of controversial issues.
- ▶ All members of the school community (students, teachers, parents, and other school staff, in addition to teachers) should participate in addressing controversial issues.
- ▶ Training for their management is directly related to training for active citizenship.

Everyone has the potential to influence in one way or another how school controversies are resolved.

Some conditions also need to be met for effective handling of controversies:

- ▶ Consent in terms of managing controversy at school.
- ▶ Existence of a democratic atmosphere at school.
- ▶ Formal programme that enables and encourages teachers to take initiatives to implement more democratic teaching methods.
- ▶ Emphasis on the free expression of all members of the school community in a democratic way.
- ▶ Guiding and supporting members of the school community.
- ▶ Consent and active participation of parents.
- ▶ Education and training.
- ▶ Assessment and “risk management”.

How important each one of the above is may differ from school to school, depends on the situation on the ground but also on how the school administration perceives the task of managing controversial issues. Staff development and training will always be important.

What remains crucial, is to encourage teachers to create safe spaces where students have the opportunity to explore and discuss controversial issues within the framework of education for democratic citizenship, human rights, and inclusive education.

## PART 2

# Handling Controversy in Schools through Human Rights and Citizenship Education

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### **2.1: The 8-hour training curriculum addressing the teaching community of Greece, North Macedonia and Bulgaria**

The curriculum of the 8-hour training given below has been jointly developed by the educational experts of all SKHC partners and run in 24 different 8-hour online trainings sessions with the participation of primary and secondary education officials, school directors and teachers in Greece, North Macedonia, and Bulgaria (eight 8-hour training sessions per country). The design and coordination of the 8-hour online training sessions were based on the methodology and principles of participatory and interactive education described in more detail in Part 2.3 of this Toolkit.

#### **TRAINING DAY 1 | Total duration: 4 hours**

##### **Welcoming, introduction to the project | 10 minutes**

Presentation of the content of the project overall (activities, objectives) as well as of the 8-hour training's program.

##### **Team building activities | 20 minutes**

##### ***Activity 1: The 3 objects (10 minutes)***

Every participant is requested to turn off her/his camera for 2 minutes and to come back to the group with 3 objects which s/he will use to present herself/himself and her/his everyday life to the group.

##### ***Activity 2: Our group's principles (5 minutes)***

Every participant is requested to write in the group chat of the platform one principle that is important to be respected by everyone in the group during the training.

##### ***Activity 3: The expectations' bowl (10 minutes)***

The facilitator screen shares with the group an image of a bowl, a jar etc. The participants are requested to write something on the image, adding short phrases with their expectations from the training that will follow. Following the facilitator, each group of participants lists its expectations per category (e.g. related to personal development, solving an existing issue within the school community etc.) and presents the categories to the whole group. This image is saved by the facilitator and is used as an evaluation tool for the whole training session on the second training day. Description is given below in "Day 2" section.

**Activity 4, Part I: The meaning of controversial issues in school (25 minutes)**

Before any definition of controversy and its aspects is given by the facilitators, participants are requested to work in groups of 3-4 people for 10 minutes and to give examples of controversial issues on which they feel keen to express and exchange views and feelings. One representative of every group is responsible for collecting and presenting all the statements of her/his group.

It is possible that some of the examples presented by participants do not correspond to the definition of controversy given in this Toolkit. It is advisable that the coordinators of the workshop do not make this an issue in this initial phase of the workshop and allow group members to assimilate the Toolkit's definition during the presentation that follows.

*Presentation on controversy and managing controversy in schools (30 minutes)*

At that point, facilitators present slides to the group. The presentation takes place in an interactive way, questions are encouraged at any time so as to preserve its participatory character.

**Activity 4, Part II: The meaning of controversial issues in school (20 minutes)**

At that point, controversial cases previously developed by the sub-groups are presented in a plenary session and the group, with the guidance of the facilitators, categorises those statements according to whether they consider them controversies or not, using the definition of the term "controversy" that has been given to the group.

**Activity 5: Teacher positions on controversial issues (50 minutes)**

Facilitators share with the participants a variety of student comments that can be expressed at school which reveal existing controversies. Examples of such comments are taken from the "Teaching controversial issues" CoE development pack, page 68 <https://rm.coe.int/1680a12735>.

Facilitators also share with participants a list of teaching styles that can be used in handling these controversies. Facilitators only share a list of the teaching approaches, without giving extra information.

Participants work in groups of 3-4 people. They are requested to pick two comments that are most likely to be expressed by students in their schools and select one teaching style to handle the controversies these comments reflect. They are also asked to note the strong and the weak points of the method they selected. Time given is 25 minutes.

**Controversial comments expressed by students that can motivate teachers to address controversial issues.**

- ▶ "I hate foreigners – there are too many of them and they're taking our jobs"
- ▶ "You always favour the girls in the class, don't you?"
- ▶ "What's so bad about being a racist? My dad says he is one."
- ▶ "It's no use asking the fat kids about healthy eating."
- ▶ "How about we have a Nationalist speaker talk to our class for a change?"
- ▶ "Are you gay? You must be, you are always talking about them."
- ▶ "It's ok to be sexist – just look at what's in the media and on the internet."
- ▶ "The headteacher talks about democracy in this school but spends most of the time acting as a tyrant and you teachers do nothing about it."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Teaching Controversial Issues, p. 68.

*Which approach would you select as teachers? Please also think of potential strengths and weaknesses.*

- ▶ Always make your own views known.
- ▶ Adopt the role of a neutral chairperson – never let anyone know your own views.
- ▶ Make sure students are presented with a wide range of different views on every issue.
- ▶ Challenge students' views by arguing the opposite of what students believe.
- ▶ Try to support particular students or groups of students by arguing on their behalf.
- ▶ Always promote the 'official' view on an issue - what the authorities expect you to say.

### **Break | 15 minutes**

#### **Activity 6: Teachers' positions on controversial issues (continuation)**

Afterwards sub-groups present their answers in the plenary session and discuss the criteria with which student comments and teaching styles were selected, realising similarities and differences in the rationale followed by every group. At the end of the exercise, facilitators present the strong and weak points of every teaching method, as given in the "Teaching controversial issues" pack, pages 52-54. Facilitators introduce participants to other methods that schools can decide to use to handle controversial issues by introducing "Managing controversy – Developing a strategy for handling controversy and teaching controversial issues in schools" CoE tool. Total time proposed is 20 minutes.

#### **Activity 7, Part I: Case study development (40 minutes)**

Facilitators present two controversial cases that are commonly found in schools in Greece, North Macedonia and Bulgaria and one that has been considered as too "progressive" for the teaching community of the partner countries. The first case was developed by the partners' educational experts while the rest two were selected from the "Managing controversy" CoE tool (pages 30 and 42) during the SKHC educational experts' meeting. Facilitators present only the cases, without the solutions proposed, and avoid offering any guidance to the teachers' group during this phase.

Participants work in groups of 3-4 people, each developing similar case studies that have occurred in their schools. Groups develop only the "problematic situations", without proposing solutions at this time. Time given is 20 minutes.

Cases are presented in plenary and the group discusses them for about 10 minutes.

Facilitators explain to the group that the activity will continue the next day.



*Indicative cases studies that are presented to the group. The last two cases are cited in the “Managing Controversy” CoE Tool, pages 30 and 42.*

- ▶ In a rural area, at a lyceum (high school with students aged 15-18), some students decide to go to the graduation prom in pairs accompanied by same sex peers. They also request to practice and dance a waltz (which is the main event of the prom) in same sex pairs. Some students and teachers oppose this decision, using anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric. A group of students raises the issue with the school principal.
- ▶ In an urban city there is a mixed secondary school with a culturally rich intake of students aged 11 to 16, representing over 40 nationalities, including a significant number of children of Somali origin. Thirteen men from the Somali community were convicted of child exploitation offences with white girls, following a police investigation. The head teacher was informed of developments just before the news broke in the local and national media.<sup>10</sup>
- ▶ Lark Rise Academy is a primary school with pupils aged 3 to 9. Through a system of focus groups, the school discovered that pupils were dissatisfied with the way the school council worked. They felt that it was not genuinely representing all pupils. Responsibility fell to only a few pupils, whereas more wanted to be involved. Also, there was a criticism that only well-behaved pupils could serve.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Evaluation | 10 minutes**

Participants briefly share with the group their comments, feelings etc. from the educational process they were involved in that training day 1.

#### **“Homework” description | 5 minutes**

As “homework”, facilitators encourage participants to “note” controversies they see or hear in the news, at work, in discussions they come across on TV or other media, and in their daily lives, and present them on the following day of the training.

### **TRAINING DAY 2 | Total duration: 4 hours**

#### **Welcoming activity | 5 minutes**

Every participant shares with the group feelings/ideas right before the SKHC training day kicks off.

#### **Presentation of previous day’s “homework” | 10 minutes**

Participants share the various controversies they noticed the previous day as presented in the media, workplace or any other social environment they find themselves in.

#### **Activity 7, Part II | 60 minutes**

Sub-groups that worked together on the development of the case studies on the previous day, now exchange cases in the way indicated by the facilitator. They work on these case studies brainstorming and coming up with ideas that could contribute towards the handling of controversial issues that each case study expresses. Sub-groups are also encouraged to inform their peers about related good practices that their schools successfully implement or have implemented. Proposed time: 30 minutes  
Following, sub-groups present and discuss in plenary session. Time: 25 minutes

<sup>10</sup> Managing Controversy, p.42.

<sup>11</sup> Managing Controversy, p. 30.

### Presentation of SKHC strategy to handle controversy through non-formal human rights education | 20 minutes

Facilitators present an educational program to be implemented with the participation of students for the empowerment of the school members to effectively handle conflict and controversial issues that can come up at schools. The program consists of different activities that address primary and secondary education students. Its activities are divided into three different sub-sections:

1. Team building – Emotions – Cooperation
2. Peaceful coexistence and communication – Peaceful conflict resolution
3. Social mobilisation

### Break | 15 minutes

#### **Activity 8: Peaceful communication activities, “My and our flower” | 30 minutes**

Each participant is requested to take 5 minutes and think about their values, noting them down next to a flower they drew themselves. In sub-groups of 3-4 participants each, they are then requested to exchange their answers thus creating a common flower with attributes and values they found out they share.

Sub-groups present their flowers in a plenary session and the discussion opens on how a group identity can / could be developed into a diverse school, based on values and relations that connect the school community members under the umbrella of human rights and democracy.

#### **Activity 9: Peaceful conflict resolution activity “Can we all win?” | 40 minutes**

This is an introductory activity to peer mediation that can be proposed to participant teachers as part of a human rights-based approach to peaceful conflict resolution and management within the school. However, the activity can run independently as a way of realising that in most cases in everyday life viewing a conflict situation as a “win-lose” situation is the dominant one. However, this activity is a chance to realise that there are other perspectives and is an opportunity to discuss ways to educate school members in alternative, peaceful options for handling a dispute or disagreement.

Participants work in pairs of two. When all pairs stand facing each other, the facilitators give them the following instruction:

“Each one of you has 3 minutes to win over your partner to your side. If you succeed, the prize is 100 euros.”

This instruction is the same for all participants. Every pair has 3 minutes to negotiate, then the group returns to the plenary.

With the guidance of the facilitators, each pair presents what took place in their rooms and whether pairs came up with any solutions. During the discussion in the plenary session participants can discuss how they felt, whether their reactions would be similar if they had to do something similar in real life, whether attributes of their personalities came out in the way they competed for the prize during the game, which solutions bring positive results when in a conflict situation and finally, the strengths and weaknesses of each way of handling conflict etc.

In most cases, the results can be the following:

- ▶ No one wins, since the pairs did not reach a common solution. (I lose, you lose)
- ▶ One wins and takes the prize. (I win, you lose)
- ▶ Pairs agree for one to win “on paper” but agree to share the prize afterwards. (50-50)

**The ideal solution, though rarely seen, is to exchange sides (exchange place, exchange positions). In that case, both parts win, one prize each!**

The majority of the participants interpreted the instructions to mean there should be only one winner, although this was not mentioned by the facilitator reading the instructions.

**Activity 10: Democratic decision-making activity “Simulation activity for collective decision making” | 50 minutes**

Participants are introduced to a collective process of democratic decision making through consent. A facilitator coordinates the process, informing the group how to proceed.

Participants are informed that they should collectively decide on which of the following issues is the most important and needs to be addressed directly during the teachers meeting.

1. Students demand to have special meals in the school canteen for their peers who have particular nutritional needs based on their religion or lifestyle.
2. Students demand to run a human rights campaign while the school’s principal and teachers have already announced a campaign based on history and tradition.
3. Students refuse to join school parade rehearsals and do not participate in the parade.

The process below follows the main principles of consent decision-making based on Sociocracy and can facilitate the work of any group with a fixed number of members. It can be used by teachers as a participatory and inclusive model of decision making at school.

**Basic steps:**

**PHASE 1**

- ▶ For every issue there is one representative who presents it to the group.
- ▶ Questions are asked in order to ensure that all participants understood the issue in the same way.

**PHASE 2**

- ▶ Circle of views.
- ▶ Questions.
- ▶ Second circle of views.

**PHASE 3**

- ▶ The facilitator processes the feedback in order to develop a new proposal, based on the views that have been expressed by the participants. S/he explains to the group the way in which s/he synthesized these views into a new proposal by trying to make it acceptable to all group members.
- ▶ The consent of the group is necessary.

**Evaluation of the training | 10 minutes**

**Evaluation activity: The expectations’ bowl**

Participants share their evaluations interactively by writing down their notes on the image of the expectations’ bowl created on the first day of the training. They can express there whether their expectations were met or not, if more were added or realised as well as any other comments they want to add.

If time permits, they can also share their impressions and feelings at the plenary session.

**2.2: The evaluation of the 8-hour training sessions by the participating teachers, school principals and school officials**

Overall, 447 educational stakeholders from Greece, North Macedonia and Bulgaria participated in SKHC project’s training sessions on handling controversy in schools. Participants expressed great interest in learning how to manage controversial issues and actively participated in the training sharing experiences, views, giving suggestions and comments on how managing controversial issues in schools can contribute to problem solving in their school communities. Participants were interested in making their schools more inclusive and democratic as well as adopting a human rights education methodology and tools into their everyday school practice.

The participants had very positive, encouraging, and constructive comments and most of them felt that the programme was very useful, run by an experienced team with a very good educational methodology and equipped them with professional skills useful for resolving conflict and managing controversial issues in their school environment. What was also very important for the participants was that the training was a chance for them to express and share with their colleagues deeper thoughts and concerns about their role as teachers. The training also inspired and motivated them to work more actively towards the development of more democratic schools.

According to the participants, these training tools can guide them towards professional growth but also personal development, especially in terms of recognising controversies in the school environment

and choosing the appropriate approach. The participants felt that the most useful aspect of the training methodology was its grounding in reality and not just theory. The participants would gladly recommend the programme to their colleagues for its clarity, dynamism, spontaneity, practical value, freedom of expression, and for gaining new experiences and the chance to debate and improve their interaction with students through active participation and well-thought out activities that inspire critical thinking and discussion.

According to the participants, the most common controversies among school members often arise concerning issues of culture and religion, homosexuality, gender roles, disability, and origin. Despite the fact that teachers recognise the importance of handling controversies at school, the vast majority of them declares itself unable to intervene in productive ways. The teachers face challenges in creating a safe space in order to de-construct the current dominant discourse that reproduces controversial issues and circulates in the media and among families. The internet is also a space which presents risks and concerns in terms of dealing with controversial issues especially in a period when online education is expanding.

The training sessions empowered participating teachers in their handling of controversies in their school environment using appropriate human rights education tools. The teachers supported the idea of promoting participatory processes in school governance and decision making, incorporating it in their teaching practices, adopting it as a broader attitude, and involving parents in more school decision making processes.

The participants stated that handling controversial issues contributes to the aim of creating a democratic classroom environment, but also helps educate students to think critically and to be active citizens. It also increase their knowledge and analytical thinking skills, teaches them to respect different ideas and helps change their behaviour. The teachers expressed the view that human rights values and principles should be integrated into every aspect of school life such as norms and regulations and be high on the agenda of the wider teaching community.

The conclusion reached based on the priorities set by participants during the SKHC training sessions in all three partner counties, was that peaceful communication and conflict resolution should be incorporated into school programmes addressing controversy. Only after that step, did participants believe that other school members would be prepared to participate in activities targeted to democratically broach and handle controversial issues as those covered in the training session for teachers. Based on the feedback and ideas collected, partner organisations went on with the development of the proposed school programs mentioned below.

### **Part 2.3: Educational workshops for primary and secondary school students**

The workshop plans included in the educational programmes proposed below have been developed after the completion of SKHC 8-hour training sessions for the teaching community of Greece, North Macedonia and Bulgaria and are based on the participants' feedback and ideas. The programme includes two-hour participatory workshops for upper primary as well as lower and upper secondary education, with different activities per age group. The proposed activities contribute to improving relationships between all school members as they facilitate participants' ability to cultivate skills for effective communication and positive conflict management in school and other social environments. More specifically, the activities help participants of all ages develop active listening and empathy skills, thus achieving peaceful coexistence and cooperation between them in a healthy environment of mutual respect and acceptance of diversity, far from any form of violence. For secondary school students, activities also aim at the democratic and social mobilisation of students by bringing them together in collective actions for democratic social changes.

The overall aim of the programme is to promote democracy, peace and human rights through education. The proposed activities are expected to prepare the members of a school community to become more active in their school life, and, more broadly, in their social life, and help bring about a society based on justice, acceptance and peaceful coexistence. The activities proposed do not aim to handle controversy per se but to prepare the ground for the managing any type of school conflict democratically.

**Education level:** upper level primary school, lower and upper level secondary school

**Category of educational activities:** experiential, participatory educational workshops

**Keywords:** cooperation, respect, human rights, positive climate, reduction of aggressive behaviour, conflict management, coexistence, understanding, acceptance, social mobilisation

**Purpose:** promoting democratic education, supporting schools to operate peacefully, in accordance with human rights values, strengthening the social role of schools

**Objectives:**

- ▶ Knowing myself and others, self-empowerment.
- ▶ Promoting respect for the rights and the feelings of others.
- ▶ Creating a positive and creative climate in the classroom.
- ▶ Reducing aggression and all forms of violence in school.
- ▶ Effective management and reduction of conflicts in the school environment.
- ▶ Promoting cooperation to achieve common social objectives.
- ▶ Cultivating a culture of democratic dialogue and cooperation at school.

**Implementation:**

Each educational workshop of the programme is 2 school hours long and can be carried out independently with the participation of 10-25 students (usually per school class). For each school class a different workshop can be created with activities that meet the needs and interests of the students. The structure is similar for all workshops. After the experiential, participatory activities, each workshop is followed by a discussion in the round (plenary session). At the end of each workshop there is a circle of evaluation by the participating students in the way described in this toolkit.

**Methodology:**

The programme has been designed according to the principles of non-formal education. It is based on the active participation of students who, through the interactive activities of the programme, get to know themselves and others better, listen, perceive, empathise with the members of the group and learn how to express themselves and communicate in mutual terms of acceptance and respect. They are trained to be active, democratic citizens, think critically, to be aware of social issues and willing to improve society. The programme is based on a student-centred and collaborative process that fosters empathy and communication skills of participants, mainly through group and individual activities of non-verbal communication, active listening and re-wording, role-playing and activities that practice collective decision-making in the group. Through experiential and group activities students are also given the opportunity to cultivate their imagination, creativity and critical awareness in order to see themselves as active members of a social group where they interact with respect and equality.

The activities require the trainer to create a safe, friendly and pleasant environment so that all group members feel comfortable expressing themselves, can take positions, agree and disagree peacefully. The trainer is there to moderate the conversation, facilitate the conversation, ask questions, and motivate participants to freely express themselves. This obviously means avoiding insults and any kind of verbal violence. When necessary, the trainer can sum up and offer more information and experiences that can help participants develop cognitively, socially, and emotionally.

The trainers are encouraged to select and adapt the tools of non-formal education according to learning objectives as well as the needs and any special background of the group involved. In any case, the educational process flows differently each time since it is shaped by the participating group, which is the living core of the educational process. The activities proposed can take place at the school context as well as in other frameworks as for example under planned visits to civil society and local actors, in school festivals, world days etc. If possible, it is suggested that each workshop is coordinated by two teachers instead of one, so that their cooperation breaks the traditional, teacher-centred model of education.

### **2.3.1: Activities for upper primary school students**

#### **Getting to know each other – Team building activities**

##### ***Getting to know each other questions (25')***

**Age Group:** 9+

**Objective(s):** to strengthen team bonds, to cultivate communication skills among the group members

**Materials:** papers, pencils

**Description:** "When you first meet someone, what do you want to know about him/her?"

For example: When a new child comes to your class what would you like to know about him/her? The facilitator writes down the statements on cards and posts them on a flipchart. The answers can then be categorised by the group under sections such as origin, culture, hobbies, dreams etc. The class discussion can address the issue of whether there are similarities between the answers and why we need to have this information. This activity can be used to define individual and social identity and serves as an introduction to other activities regarding the integration of diversity.

##### ***Meeting on the train (25')***

**Age Group:** 9+

**Objective(s):** to develop bonds of trust among team members by exploring differences and similarities between them

**Materials:** cards, pencils

**Description:** The facilitator gives one empty card to each participant. Participants are asked to imagine that they arrive at a train station and that they will soon meet someone who doesn't know them. We encourage them to write a description of themselves on their cards. The cards are collected in a box. A participant randomly picks a card and reads it to the group and the group then tries to guess who is described. Whoever guesses right, draws the next card. The process is repeated until the last card is drawn. The discussion can address the following questions: What do the descriptions have in common? What are the most common characteristics pointed out in the descriptions? What information is not included? Did anything from this exercise surprise you? What do you think is the purpose of this exercise?

##### ***Something positive (10')***

**Age Group:** 7+

**Objective(s):** to develop self-confidence, to develop positive communication among the group members

**Materials:** tambourine

**Description:** The facilitator rhythmically beats a tambourine and instructs participants to freely walk around the round as long as the tambourine beats. As soon as the tambourine stops beating, each child introduces himself/herself to the one he/she happens to meet in front of him/her saying something positive about each other. The process is repeated until almost everyone speaks with each other. Following participants return to the circle. Each one expresses how he or she felt with a short phrase or a sketch and writes it down on a card. All cards are placed in the middle of the circle. A discussion based on the following questions can follow: How important positive feelings are for us? How can positive feelings be activated in a group? What other positive feelings have not been mentioned during this activity? What conditions / circumstances can generate those positive feelings for you? Do relations in our class / school are such that they can generate positive feelings for all its members? What changes could be made in order to create an environment of positive feelings in our class / school? This activity can be used as an introduction to further activities on the indication, the expression / communication, and the management of feelings within the group.

## Emotions

### ***Smiling box (20')***

**Age Group:** 9+

**Objective(s):** to express emotions, to practice communication and cooperation in the group

**Materials:** box, cards with words

**Description:** The facilitator has placed in a box pairs of cards with words that correspond to positive feelings and conditions (e.g. 2 cards with the word joy, 2 with the word optimism, 2 with the word cooperation, 2 with the word friendship, 2 with the word communication, etc.). Each participant selects a card at random. When every participant has selected a card, the facilitator asks participants to wander around the classroom and find their "match", i.e., the person that has selected the same word as them. Each pair comprises of person A and person B. Member A tries to express with his / her body the feeling expressed in the card. Member B tries to follow the movements and expressions of member A pretending to be his / her mirror. The activity is a silent one while it is helpful to have some soft, relaxing music playing in the background.

### ***Emotions in the group (20')***

**Age Group:** 10+

**Objective(s):** to understand one's feelings, to develop empathy

**Materials:** -

**Description:** Two participants leave the room. In their absence, the other participants choose to act out an emotion, such as happiness, anger, frustration, excitement, boredom, loneliness, etc. The two participants return, and the others act out the emotion they had chosen in a mutually agreed way. The two participants try to guess the emotion expressed. The process is repeated as many times as necessary. The discussion can be based on the following questions: To participants who had left the group: Was it easy to guess the emotions? To the whole group: How easy was it to express an emotion? To all: Why it is important to know how people around us feel? Afterwards, group members can share experiences that had provoked them positive feelings. Through the examples, we focus on the importance of peaceful communication and interaction between any group and in any social environment we interact (family, friends, school, work, etc.).

### ***The Onion of Similarity (25')***

**Age Group:** 10+

**Objective(s):** to strengthen team bonds, to develop skills of acceptance and communication

**Materials:** -

**Description:** The facilitator asks participants to form an inner and an outer circle (the layers of the onion) and stand facing each other. Each pair that faces each other is requested to quickly find something in common between the two (habit, opinion, background, behaviour, habits, desires, interests, etc.), and a way to express it. The facilitator can mention some examples of potential similarities, such as favourite food, things we don't like at school, cultural habits of our families, music we like, first thing we do when we wake up in the morning, etc. Depending on the group, expressing these commonalities can take any form chosen by the participants or the facilitator can suggest specific ways of expression, asking participants "to say it with a song", "to do a little imitation", "to create a little poem", "to show it with noises", "to show it with a symbol", etc. Once this is done, the outer circle of the onion is moved one position to the right and each new pair must again find a new similarity and express it. They continue moving to the right until the circle reaches the end.

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### ***The onion of difference (30 min)***

**Description:** The previous activity is repeated, but this time the participants focus on differences as opposed to similarities. The topics may be the same as above or they may cover other fields like sports, school subjects, movies, eating habits or attributes of one's identity as for example religion, origin, culture, gender, etc. The participants discover their differences and what these may represent in society. In each answer the facilitator stops to stress a dimension that is common and unites participants no matter of what differences may exist. For example, commonalities may exist between in the essence and messages of official religions. Though quite different, people of different cultures may share similar lifestyles.

At the end of both phases of the "onion" activity the group can discuss the following questions: What similarities/differences surprised us? What are the similarities and differences that we noticed? How complementary can our differences be? Why is it important not to limit with any form of violence (e.g. insults, social exclusion, physical violence) both the expression of individual identity and the free choice of our peers? This can include, for example, the language one speaks, gender, physical and other characteristics, but also the choice of activities, clothing, food choices, etc.?

### ***The living mirror (15')***

**Age Group:** 10+

**Objective(s):** to identify feelings, to develop empathy

**Materials:** -

**Description:** One participant represents the "face" and the other the "mirror image". The "face" thinks strongly about a particular emotional experience, showing his/her feeling with facial and body expression. The "mirror" child reproduces like the mirror the facial and body expressions of the first child. It recognises the emotional state of the "face" child and tries to guess where it came from. We allow the "mirror" child five guesses. After each attempt we give a helping clue, such as: "Yes, it has to do with family" or "No, it has to do with school." We make sure that we have explained to the children that they can only share personal experiences, feelings, and thoughts without revealing the experiences of other participants who may want to keep private their own experiences.



## Cooperation

### ***Robot and engineer (10')***

**Age Group:** 8+

**Objective(s):** to practice cooperation

**Materials:** -

**Description:** The participants form groups of three. One is the engineer and the other two are the robots. The robots stand back-to-back. When the engineer touches their heads, they start to move but only go forward. Even if they hit an obstacle they can't turn. The engineer's goal is to bring the two robots face to face. S/he can make them turn right at a ninety-degree angle by touching them on their right shoulder and similarly turn left at a ninety-degree angle by touching them on their left shoulder.

### ***Who changed? (15')***

**Age Group:** 8+

**Objective(s):** to practice memory and cooperative skills

**Materials:** -

**Description:** One participant enters the circle, kneels, closes his / her eyes. Next, two other children change places with each other. The child in the centre stands up and tries to guess who switched places. The process is repeated with other participants. It can also be that two participants stay in the centre of the circle, thus reinforcing the element of cooperation among them.

### ***Complete the painting (15')***

**Age Group:** 10+

**Objective(s):** to practice cooperative skills

**Materials:** paper, markers, computer or sound system for playing music

**Description:** The facilitator places sheets of blank papers in various places in the room. As long as music is playing, the children freely wander around the room. Whenever the music stops, the children have to choose a piece of paper and make a short drawing. The facilitator explains that each time the music stops the participants have to choose a different piece of paper and complete the drawing that has already been started. There can be a specific theme, for example: "a day at school".

### ***Back to Back (10')***

**Age Group:** 10+

**Objective(s):** to practice cooperative skills

**Materials:** papers, markers

**Description:** Two students stand back-to-back. The facilitator gives one of them a piece of a paper with an irregular shape on it. Without looking at each other, one student tries to explain to the other how to draw the shape on the paper they received by the facilitator. The other student tries to draw on a piece of paper the shape according to the description. Some questions to be discussed: Was it easy or hard to collaborate? What do you think facilitated or complicated your communication? Are there cases in your everyday school life when you feel you are not understood by others? What are the preconditions for communicating effectively with others? This activity can be used to introduce further activities related to active listening and peaceful communication.

### ***From destruction to creation (30')***

**Age Group:** 10+

**Objective(s):** to empower participants on personal and on a collective level, to cultivate a spirit of cooperation, to develop their imagination and creativity

**Materials:** papers, markers, glues

**Description:** Each participant is requested to draw individually "their most beautiful painting" on a piece of paper, using any colours and shapes they wish. When they finish, the facilitator asks them to tear their own drawings into pieces. This is usually painful, but participants are requested to do so and keep all the pieces. Participants then form pairs and add their own torn pieces to those of their partner. Now, with the new set of pieces that they have, they are requested to make a new composition - collage - on a new piece of paper. They can paint extra things, give new meanings, make it three dimensional, and, in general, they are free to create any composition they wish in agreement with their partner. During the discussion we ask the participants to share their feelings about the activity. Which painting did they find more interesting in the end -- the one they made themselves, on their own, or the one that they created in pairs? In the discussion we can stress the importance of collaboration and mutual support, especially in cases where someone feels that something important for his / her life has just been destroyed.

### **Peaceful coexistence and communication**

#### ***Expectations (30')***

**Age Group:** 11+

**Objective(s):** to enhance communication, cooperation, critical thinking

**Materials:** large sheets of paper, markers

**Description:** Participants are divided into groups of 3-5 and discuss what peaceful coexistence at school means for each of them. Following this, what has been discussed in each group is presented in a plenary session. The facilitator makes clear that all views should be heard and that there is no right and wrong 'answers' since everyone brings and shares something with the group. The facilitator writes down all the views heard in the plenary session on a large piece of cardboard. From this activity, a class "contract" can then emerge, with a commitment by all members of the class to communicate in the peaceful terms they have thought of. This activity can form the introduction to other activities related to the prevention and the confrontation of school violence and / or bullying as well as to further activities on effective and positive communication among group members.

### ***Attention - danger! (30')***

**Age Group:** 10+

**Objective(s):** to enhance self-expression, to improve communication skills

**Materials:** sheets of papers, markers

**Description:** The facilitator explains to children that one way to reduce conflict and aggression in our daily lives is to strengthen our ability to recognise the rising tension in some situations. The participants are encouraged to think of such situations that can lead to tension, and, in some cases, violence. If the group members are hesitant and do not enter the discussion, the facilitator can start with a personal example and then the list can be expanded with the examples the participants come up with. After the completion of this part of the activity, we can proceed to a group discussion asking participants to complete the sentence:

"We can expect trouble when..."

Possible answers could be:

"When we are stressed about an event that is about to happen, when we have not prepared for something that is happening, when our personal space is invaded or violated, when someone we love is in trouble" and so on.

Following this, participants choose a problematic situation from the list created and try to imagine with more details how the person involved reacted.

The questions guiding our discussion are:

What signs can tell us if a person is angry? What do our bodies do when we are angry?

- ▶ Non-verbal examples: red face, dry lips, tight jaw, trembling, shaking hands, stiff eyes, etc.
- ▶ Verbal examples: harsh words, abusive language, etc.
- ▶ Signs produced by the body: fast pulse, tight stomach, dizziness etc.

If we notice some of these signs in ourselves or the other(s) early on, is there anything we can do to avoid the escalation of the situation? If so, what could that be?

Participants, if they so wish, can also draw the signs of anger or physically represent them.

### ***The flower of solutions (15')***

**Age Group:** 10+

**Objective(s):** to enhance self-expression, to improve communication skills

**Materials:** large pieces of paper, markers, post-it notes

**Description:** The facilitator draws a flower on a flip chart. Each participant writes or draws on a post-it note a way to control anger (e.g. deep breathing, closing eyes and counting to ten, leaving for a while etc.). Afterwards, they place the post-it notes on the petals of the flower. The participants stand in front of the flip chart and silently read all ideas written on the post-it notes. After that, they select and present in the group three of the ideas that best suit them in terms of controlling their anger.

***Theatre game: (60 minutes)***

**Age Group:** 10+

**Objective(s):** to enhance cooperation, to improve communication skills and critical thinking, to enhance collective decision making

**Materials:** -

**Description:** The participants are divided into four groups and each group is given the following script (same for all groups):

Script: Some kids (A+B) are having fun at school, chasing each other, and throwing a hat around – because of this you accidentally drop your food (C). They keep laughing, making various jokes.

A: Throw the hat over here! Over their heads!

B: Catch it!

A tries to grab the hat, hits the table, and drops child C's food, but without paying any attention, continues to shout to B: This way!

C: Hey! That was my food!

A: What did you say? he says to C who complains. And immediately, again, ignoring his complaints, he turns to B: Hey, throw it away! Don't let D catch it!

C: Do you guys know that it is your fault that I dropped my food? (Voice raised)

A: I had to grab the hat! (ironically)

Participants are given some time so that they can divide the roles, enrich the script as they wish and come up with a solution to the problem before the situation gets out of control. Then, each group performs its own 'script' and a discussion follows about the solutions proposed by each group and for further peaceful ways of resolving differences.

***The school of peace (30')***

**Age Group:** 10+

**Objective(s):** to enhance cooperation, communication, creativity, and imagination

**Materials:** pieces of papers, markers, magazines, glues, scissors

**Description:** The participants are divided into subgroups of 4-6 members. They are given a piece of paper (1 x 1 m) and asked to visualise an imaginary place, in which there is a school, where everything is pleasant and peaceful. The participants discuss this and draw the school of peace on their paper. They draw the environment, the rules, the curriculum, the activities, the relations between the school members, the facilities and anything else they wish. They are allowed to use different materials and techniques such as painting, collage, text etc. They are also asked to find a title for their work. Groups present their work in a plenary session. The discussion can address the following questions: Was it difficult to agree? What inspired you to come up with your ideas? Of the ideas that you presented, which one do you think is realistic and can be implemented and would only depend on you on the effort to create a school of peace? What are the possible ways to communicate your wish to live in a school of peace to the people who can bring about change, such as teachers, school directors, parents, school officials, local actors, and others? The posters can be hung on the class wall.

## Evaluation

### *I express my impressions in texts or drawings (10')*

**Age Group:** 8+

**Objective(s):** to express the participants' impressions of the educational programme, to suggest ways to improve, to share positive and negative experiences and feelings from the process, to evaluate themselves and the group.

**Materials:** sheets of paper, pencils

**Description:** The facilitator gives the participants a piece of paper and encourages them to write or draw their impressions and feelings about the educational programme. After this, whoever wants can share their work with the group. In a plenary session, each person can share their impressions, discuss what they learned and gained from the activity.

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### *Flower bouquet (5')*

**Materials:** -

**Description:** The participants bend over and pick imaginary flowers and then they sit in a circle. They give the bouquet to the person sitting next to them by saying something positive about him or her (smiling, gentle, patient, supportive, good listener, confident etc.).

## 2.3.2: Activities for lower and upper secondary school students

### Getting to know each other – Team building

#### *I introduce myself presenting 3 objects (15')*

**Age Group:** 13+

**Objective(s):** to get to know each other, to strengthen relationships in the group

**Materials:** any objects chosen by the participants for the purpose of introducing themselves to the group

**Description:** The participants present themselves to the group through three objects that they bring to the circle. These objects can describe their daily life, their feelings at that very moment, their favourite activities, or whatever else they decide to share as a way of introduction to the group.

### Peaceful coexistence and communication

#### *Are we really listening? (40')*

**Age Group:** 13+

**Objective(s):** to cultivate active listening skills, to enhance the ability to distinguish between violent and non-violent communication, to promote non-violent communication between group members

**Materials:** instruction sheets, paper, pencil

**Description:** The facilitator divides the participants into two groups. The members of the first group are requested to think about the most important issues facing humanity today that require immediate resolution. They sit next to each other, and they all have an empty chair facing them.

Each member of the second group gets a different instruction sheet. Possible instructions are:

- ▶ Make eye contact with the speaker every 5 seconds. At the same time, whistle continuously while s/he speaks.
- ▶ Look at the speaker in the eyes every 5 seconds. Every now and then, yawn.
- ▶ Never look the speaker in the eyes. Keep your gaze fixed on a corner of the room.
- ▶ Slouch in your chair, look mostly at the floor and look very little at the speaker. Close your eyes often, as if you are falling asleep.
- ▶ Every few seconds that the speaker speaks, shout loudly “No way! What are you talking about?” or “What is this nonsense?” etc.
- ▶ Look and listen attentively to the speaker. When you agree with something the speaker claims, smile and nod your head. Maintain a polite expression on your face, no matter what you hear. Make a note of points you would like to comment on once the speaker has finished.

Ask members of the first group to make their case in 1-2 minutes, with members of the second group listening and reacting in the way indicated in their instructions. After the members of the first group have finished, members of the second group reveal what instruction they had.

The discussion can address the following questions: Which reactions indicated that the listeners were listening? What might have been the feelings of listeners and speakers in each case? In real life, when do we feel that someone is listening to us and how do we feel when he / she doesn't? What are usually our reactions when we are not listened to? Why is it important to listen to our interlocutors? In our daily lives, do we really listen? Under what conditions are we more effective in terms of our communications? What results does this bring? What are the elements and the preconditions for ensuring an effective communication?

***The same, or else... (40')***

**Age Group:** 13+

**Objective(s):** to practice non-violent expression and communication, to improve communication skills in the group

**Materials:** Paper, markers, paper tape

**Description:** Participants are requested to write the following sentences on a piece of paper, one next to the other:

WHAT I NOTICE, WHAT I FEEL, WHAT I NEED, WHAT I ASK FOR

Then, on another piece of paper, the facilitator writes the following two sentences.

*"My sister's a litterbug. She throws her dirty clothes all over the place, in the room that we share."*

The members of the group discuss whether such an approach to the way we communicate can bring a change in someone's behaviour. What is usually the outcome when communication is based on insults and attacks by the two parties? What kinds of behaviour lead to conflict? What kinds of behaviour lead to conflict resolution? Is there a common way we respond each time? What does this depend upon? Under what circumstances and conditions can we communicate effectively with others?

Following this discussion, the participants are requested to rephrase the sentences above, using the model of non-violent communication in which we express what we observe, how we feel about it, what changes we would like to see, and what exactly we are asking interlocutor.

For example, a new way of communicating our position could be rephrased as follows:

*"You're constantly leaving your clothes everywhere in the room. This annoys me and I get very angry every time it happens. I need to live in a clean space where I feel respected. I am asking you to put your clothes in order and not just leave them anywhere, especially when they are dirty. Do not leave them my desk or on my bed."*

The participants then work individually and create their own conflict cases.

They first express themselves as they would express themselves in their everyday life about the issue that bothers them and then rephrase it, following the model: WHAT I NOTICE, WHAT I FEEL, WHAT I NEED, WHAT I ASK

Indicative list of needs: acceptance, appreciation, love, love, trust, respect, tenderness, companionship, calmness, completeness, security, air, water, food, a clean environment, personal space and time etc.

Indicative questions for discussion: In our interpersonal conflicts, which of the two ways do we usually choose to communicate? What does our reaction depend on? What are the results that we can expect in each case? Does it seem likely that we will all develop ways of communicating that do not involve insults, attacks, etc.? What does this depend on? Could we, would we want to try another way of conflict management in our own group?

We explain to the group that such a way of conflict management may seem strange to us at first, since we are not used to communicating in this way, but it can help us realise what bothers us and may bring us into conflict, to define our feelings and needs specifically and to propose a solution to the issue that concerns us, which is unlikely to happen when we choose aggressive ways of communicating.

Gradually, and if all team members are trained in such a way, communication can become positive and effective, even when we disagree. At the same time, if we understand our rights and duties, we can shape the classroom, and more broadly our school, our neighbourhood, our city, into peaceful and friendly places for all.

## Social mobilisation

### **My social tree (45')**

**Age Group:** 13+

**Objective(s):** to express emotions, raise awareness and give information on social issues, and to promote personal and social responsibility

**Materials:** pencil, paper

**Description:** The facilitator asks each participant to draw on a piece of paper a tree with 5 branches. On each branch, the participants note their answers to the following questions:

- ▶ What is something that I admire in people around me (family, friends etc.)?
- ▶ What is something that people around me (family, friends etc.) do that annoys me?
- ▶ What is the most pressing and difficult social problem in my neighbourhood or in the municipality where I live?
- ▶ Is there something that people are doing to solve this social problem?
- ▶ Is there something that I can do to help address this issue?

Whoever wishes to do so, may present their answers to the circle. Some of the questions that could form part of the discussion are the following: Did our own or our peers' answers provoke any feelings in us? Can we describe those feelings and where they come from? Are any of the issues that were mentioned as a common concern? Could we work together and take action to solve or help with the social problems mentioned by the group? Do the existing initiatives bring social change, and in what ways? Do we know any other peaceful ways that can bring social change? Thoughts and ideas are shared in the group.

### **Case study (60')**

**Age Group:** 13+

**Objective(s):** to identify ways to handle conflicts at school, to come up with common solutions to prevent violent conflicts

**Materials:** pencil, paper

**Description:** In groups of 3-4 people, the participants describe a case of a real or an imaginary school conflict. In every case, the participants need to explain the reasons behind the conflict and its consequences. The following questions are given to facilitate the groups:

- ▶ What is going on?
- ▶ Who is involved in this conflict and who is affected?
- ▶ What are the reasons behind this conflict?
- ▶ What are the consequences?

If groups find it difficult to develop their cases the facilitator can give the following example:

*"In our school, there are incidents of violence almost every day. Boys and girls, fans of rival teams, are in constant conflict with each other at school, and often arrange to "fight" after school. This situation has not changed for years. This is because... As a consequence..."*

The teams return to the circle and present their cases. The discussion focuses on the issues that arise from a conflict when it is expressed in violent ways of any kind. What are the feelings of the groups involved in the conflict as well as of the observers? What is the environment developed in the school? Can we say that in such an environment the human rights of all are respected? Who can act to change this situation?

After the discussion, participants return to their small groups and discuss solutions. Solutions that can be achieved individually or collectively, at the level of the school community, but also by local authorities, civil society organisations, the media etc. The solutions are presented in a plenary session by the groups.

The facilitator can then bring to the group examples of effective ways of conflict resolution based on democratic and collective actions that are designed and implemented at the school level with the active contribution of students. These may include participatory sports and educational programmes, student campaigns, intercultural festivals of music, food, etc., activities involving parents, guardians, teachers and students, and other actions that provide peaceful solutions and promote human rights and inclusion.



## Evaluation

**Age Group:** 13+

**Objective(s):** The objective is for participants to give feedback on the educational programme they participated in, suggest changes and improvements, share positive and negative experiences and feelings that they had during the process, evaluate themselves and the group.

**Materials:** evaluation sheets, one for each participant

**Description:** The participants are given five minutes to complete the evaluation sheet. The questions on the evaluation sheet can vary, depending on the activities selected, the group's needs, time constraints, etc. It is up to the facilitators to select which questions to include or to add more questions that they think are relevant. After the participants fill out the questionnaires, the group reconvenes as a whole and the participants discuss their experiences and their feelings, make suggestions for improvements, proposes ideas of new educational programmes that the group would be interested in, etc.<sup>12</sup>

### **QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE EVALUATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME:**

The part of the training programme I enjoyed most was...

because...

What could be changed to make the programme better?

.....

I was very pleased with myself when ...

.....

As a member of a team

I like...

I am good at ...

I undertake to...

.....

The program for me - with a sketch:

The program for me - in a word:

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.youthpass.eu/downloads/13-62-389/ValuedByYouValuedByOthers-chap4.pdf> accessed on 10 August 2021.

**What have been my most unpleasant moments in the programme?**

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**What have I gained so far from my participation?**

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**What remains to be learned and experienced?**

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**Is there anything I've done in the program that I've never done before? If so, what?  
What are my thoughts and feelings about it?**

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**How would I describe the programme in one sentence:**

**To my grandparent:**

**To my primary school teacher:**

**To the grocer in my neighbourhood:**

**To my three-year-old nephew / niece:**

**In response to a question at an educational TV show:**

# Conclusion

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**T**he SKHC project with all its activities -including this toolkit- will contribute to the empowerment of teaching communities in Greece, North Macedonia and Bulgaria and help effect the social changes required for the establishment of a sustainable and democratic school culture. Through the project, school teachers, school directors and school officials are given the opportunity to understand their significant role and responsibility not just as bearers of knowledge but also as carriers of a human process. This toolkit strengthens the teaching community's lifelong training, adding to its knowledge of formal, non-formal and informal educational methodologies and tools, which foster free expression, participation, and respect among all the members of a school community. Its aim is to train people who learn together and collaborate to reinforce democracy and human rights.

The SKHC project motivated teachers and helped them to revisit existing mainstream beliefs about the role of education and highlighted the importance of active participation and collaboration among all members of a school community, students, teachers, directors, parents/guardians, non-educational school staff, educational policy makers and other school officials, civil society organisations, local actors etc. This toolkit makes concrete suggestions for human rights school programmes and educational practices concerning the handling of controversy. It makes an important contribution towards redefining the philosophy of education by emphasizing democratic and human rights values and principles.

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# Annex 1: The project “Sharing Knowledge and Handling Controversy in schools in Greece, North Macedonia and Bulgaria”

## 1.1: The Joint EU / CoE DISCO Programme

The Joint Programme provides funding to enable cooperation in at least three states within the framework of the European Cultural Convention in the fields of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education (EDC/HRE). At least one of the participating states should be a member of the European Union.

Each project must make available information on current democratic citizenship and help improve human rights education practices in the participating countries.

In addition, the Programme intends to:

- ▶ Encourage discussions and the sharing of best practices for addressing EDC/HRE issues.
- ▶ Raise awareness and increase visibility of the role of EDC/HRE at all levels of society.
- ▶ Promote cooperation between national, regional and local authorities and civil society organisations.
- ▶ Contribute to the promotion and continued development of citizenship and human rights education in Europe.<sup>13</sup>



## 1.2: The SKHC project

The Sharing Knowledge and Handling Controversy Project (SKHC), which was held in schools in Greece, North Macedonia and Bulgaria, is part of the Multilateral Co-operation Projects of the 6th Cycle of the DISCO Programme. The overall aim of the project is to respond to the common controversial issues that appear in the three neighbouring countries and to build a peaceful and inclusive school environment through jointly developing and applying appropriate educational practices and tools within school communities in the three countries. To succeed in this, the three partner countries build on the EU/CoE handling controversy training tool, “Managing controversy. Developing a strategy for handling controversy and teaching controversial issues in schools”.

<sup>13</sup> <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/charter-edc-hre-pilot-projects/the-programme/objectives>, accessed on 30 August 2021.

Based on previous CoE publications on handling controversies, partner countries train the local teaching community and come up with new educational material appropriate to facilitate upper primary and secondary school teachers which incorporate human rights and citizenship education in their everyday school practice.

Furthermore, through the project's activities, school administrators, officials for educational planning and other regional or national educational stakeholders are motivated and supported in promoting democratic education using human rights education participatory methodology and techniques. The main aim of the project is to build a peaceful and democratic school environment, which is inclusive and participatory for all members of the school community.

Specifically, the project will impact educational policies and practices through:

- ▶ The introduction of non-formal education methodology and practices to the teaching community, with ensured participation and direct results.
- ▶ The involvement of official educational bodies run by the Ministry of Education in the three partner countries to ensure the promotion of a democratic and human rights-oriented school culture.
- ▶ The empowerment of schools in adopting a community-based operating model including school teachers, directors, students as well as non-teaching school staff and parents, educational officials, CSOs related to education etc.
- ▶ The sustainability of the project through related educational programmes and activities run by school teachers with the support of the partner NGOs.
- ▶ The sensitisation of the wider community concerning the importance of democratic education.

### **1.3: The partnership**

#### **ANTIGONE – Information and Documentation Centre on Racism, Ecology, Peace and Non-Violence (leading partner)**

ANTIGONE is an independent, social, non-profit organisation based in Thessaloniki, Greece. Since its launch in 1993 the organisation has been active in the struggle against racism and discrimination and has promoted social ecology, peace and non-violent conflict resolution.

The main aim of ANTIGONE is to contribute to the development of a democratic, open society, capable of ensuring that everyone has access to decent living standards and quality of life.

The objectives of the organisation are the following:

- ▶ Assurance of equal opportunities and equal treatment for all people without discrimination in terms of gender, race, origin, social, economic, and educational level, disability, age, religion, sexual orientation etc.
- ▶ Information and awareness raising on issues related to human rights, social ecology, and non-violence as well as actions against racism, xenophobia, and any type of negative discrimination.
- ▶ Improvement of the institutional, political, and social framework towards the integration and equal participation of all.
- ▶ Active participation of people, collectives, and social groups in activities for the promotion of solidarity and respect for diversity.

In pursuit of these objectives, ANTIGONE designs, develops, and implements various national and international projects and organises a wide range of voluntary activities. The organisation collaborates with organisations and actors that share a common vision, philosophy, and goals at a local, national, and international level. With the decisive participation of many board and staff members, volunteers and supporters ANTIGONE has been instrumental in developing activities inspired by a collective and holistic vision for people, society, and the planet as a whole.

As part of this mission, ANTIGONE implements projects including the vocational training of migrants and refugees, capacity building programmes for Roma youth, programmes for the professional and social empowerment of artists with disabilities and the psychosocial support of imprisoned women, among others. In collaboration with school communities all over Greece, the organisation implements various experiential educational programmes for teachers, students and parents / legal guardians. Furthermore, it runs various non-formal educational initiatives that take place not only at school but also under other frameworks such

as European youth exchanges and volunteer training. It designs and implements participatory, interactive programmes of adult education in the fields of social ecology, degrowth, social entrepreneurship, etc. ANTIGONE participates in local and international networks where it jointly organises and participates in conferences, festivals, and other events. The Centre also organises the “Round Table Against Discrimination” that is held yearly in Athens, offering information on social integration, human rights, hate speech, and racism. The organisation has its own “ANTIGONE Editions” as well as an extensive electronic library, which is updated regularly. In Greece, ANTIGONE is the official Focal Point of the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA).

More information about ANTIGONE is available here: [www.antigone.gr/en](http://www.antigone.gr/en).

### **JHR - Journalists for Human Rights (implementing partner)**

JHR is a non-governmental, non-partisan and non-profit organisation based in Skopje, North Macedonia. It was formed in 1996 as a non-formal group and registered in 1999 and is actively working to achieve greater transparency and objectivity in reporting. It also promotes children’s rights and gender equality, the greater understanding of women’s rights as human rights and aims at the elimination of discrimination against women in society and within their families, as well as striving to uphold the right to a clean environment.

Its aim is to bring together the citizens of Northern Macedonia with the aim of sharing information and fostering dialogue, while respecting traditional and moral values in the country, regardless of religion, language, sex.

JHR is active in eight sectors: Media; Sustainable Development and Environment; Gender equality; Social Entrepreneurship; Health; Youth and Employment; Rights of children; Tourism.

- ▶ The mission of JHR is to help the public to learn more about and to respect human rights.
- ▶ It envisions a strong civil society which fosters participatory respect of all community stakeholders and is achievable only through the information, communication, education.
- ▶ It promotes values such as peace and reconciliation, respect of human rights, respect for the dignity of every individual, reduction of poverty, equal opportunities, participation and promotion of socially responsible behaviour, professionalism and transparency.

As part of its mission, JHR implements national and international projects that cover a wide range of social problems. The most important resource of the JHR is the large number of volunteers who are involved in its initiatives, and who, through all the activities that they participate in encourage citizens to reach out to each other. JHR activities bring together local people and the business community. Young people are one of the core target groups of JHR – projects promoting peace and non-violence are addressed to them. These are core values of the North Macedonian society and an important goal of JHR is the growth of peace education through its incorporation into the formal educational system or through non-formal educational programmes.

JHR reaches large audiences, as it also works with journalists, educating them by offering trainings on women’s and children’s rights, as well as seminars on the protection of the environment, health issues and peace journalism courses. The most important stakeholders of JHR are its users. Through direct help and addressing their basic needs, education, advocacy, participation, and other types of support, JHR aims to encourage its beneficiaries and motivate them to continue working on reducing poverty, strengthening the development of civil society, fighting for respect of human rights, against all forms of prejudice, marginalization, and discrimination.

JHR forms part of many international coalitions, and collaborates frequently with WECF (Women in Europe for a Common Future), CMC (Cluster Munition Coalition), ICAN (International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons), IANSA (International Action Network on Small Arms), IFEJ - (International Federation of Environmental Journalism), GREEN ACCORD (International Association of Journalists for Sustainable Development).

JHR is part of the expert team of UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) office on the protocol on water and health, the UNECE group of the Aarhus convention for access to information, public participation and access to justice on environmental matters, the UNECE office for transport, as well as the UNCCD for the protection of forests, an equal member of UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) and actively involved in the ECPAT International Network for Child Protection.

More information about JHR is available here: [www.jhrmk.org](http://www.jhrmk.org).

### **AMALIPE Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance (implementing partner)**

Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance is a leading Roma organisation working for the equal integration of Roma people in Bulgarian society. The organisation plays a central role in organising the Roma civic movement and advocates integration with state institutions. Amalipe Center is a member of the Public Council of the Ministry of Education and Science, the National Patient Organisation, the European Women's Lobby and others. The chairman of the organisation, Deyan Kolev, was elected as a representative of Roma NGOs in the Monitoring Committee of the Operational Program "Science and Education for Smart Growth", 2014 – 2020.

#### **Vision:**

Amalipe Center believes in the equal integration of Roma people in society, based on the preservation of Roma identity and the modernisation of the Roma community. The community's knowledge of its own history and culture is an important factor in raising its self-esteem. The introduction of civic values and the development of civic leadership in the Roma community will help to overcome social exclusion and marginalisation. Roma organisations working at the local and at the national level are a catalyst for the modernisation of the community as a whole – they express its needs and could actively participate in changing the existing policies, attitudes and prejudices towards the Roma community, which are embedded in institutions and society as a whole.

#### **Mission:**

The mission of the Amalipe Center is to promote the active participation of Roma people in the social life of Bulgaria, the empowerment of the Roma community, and the achievement of equal access to:

- ▶ Access to quality education and other resources.
- ▶ Quality healthcare and social services.

#### **Approach:**

To achieve these goals, Amalipe Center uses:

- ▶ Innovative methods and practices at the local level.
- ▶ Regular monitoring, feedback, and advocacy to achieve changes in existing policies related to the social inclusion of Roma people.
- ▶ Systematisation of the practical results of various organisations and their inclusion in the national policies for achieving effective results in the integration of the Roma community.
- ▶ Mobilisation and organisation of the civic capacity of the Roma community in order to implement joint actions for successful integration.
- ▶ Advocacy activities for the formation of a sustainable model for Roma integration, through the implementation of a policy of good practices tested at the local level.

#### **Activity:**

Amalipe Center is currently working on over 20 projects in the field of education, healthcare, provision of social services and support, funded by the European Commission, Operational Programmes, Trust for Social Achievement, UNICEF and others. Amalipe Center works with a network of over 250 schools across the country to reduce dropout rates, introduce intercultural education, promote lifelong learning in the Roma community and improve the educational status of Roma. An essential part of this activity is to encourage Roma parents to take an active part in school life, making the school a community centre. The organisation has established 14 Community Development Centres which promote the self-organisation of the Roma community in the six regions of Bulgaria. Each one of these centres works with a network of local community groups and has educational mediators, who are employed by the organisation or the respective schools and municipalities. Currently, nearly 30 educational mediators work at the Amalipe Center. In parallel, the Amalipe Center supports the work of over 250 educational mediators appointed by the schools in the "Every student will be a winner" Network.

In addition, the Amalipe Center cooperates with many Roma and non-Roma organisations from all over the country jointly organising activities with them in various fields such as education, health care, social services, doing advocacy campaigns for Roma integration, etc.

More information about AMALIPE is available here: <http://www.amalipe.bg>.



## 1.4: The issue

The three bordering countries face similar problems of in terms overcoming negative stereotypes, intolerance and discrimination. A lot of good practices could be implemented to promote non-formal education for democratic citizenship and human rights education as a solution. Developing democratic competences is a key element to creating an inclusive and supportive environment in the schools of the Balkan countries of Greece, North Macedonia and Bulgaria, where high levels of intolerance and discrimination is still a crucial issue at the national level.

The partnership was built to develop a joint targeted intervention for the prevention and the handling of violent conflicts due to on controversy within the school community, with an emphasis – but not solely – on the hatred reproduced among Greece, North Macedonia and Bulgaria. Based on long-term experience working with schools the conclusion is that there is still a high level of school violence due to prejudice. Managing controversy can be activated as a part of human rights and citizenship education appropriate for making school communities safe and inclusive spaces of self-expression, communication and collaboration.

Stereotypes and prejudice in many cases are expressed by teachers (mainly in terms of gender, sexual orientation, nationality, race etc.) and keep on being reproduced without being addressed. In their vast majority, school community members are aware of cases of school violence but select not to act since they believe “someone else should”. Also, students who attack their peers used to be targets themselves previously in their school life (vicious circle of violence). Bullying and school violence due to prejudice is a reality in every school environment and needs to be prevented and solved through peaceful communication and in democratic ways.

Given the situation, which is common in all three partner countries, the SKHC project is an opportunity to educate teachers on how to recognise controversial issues within their school environment and educate their students using human rights education as an opportunity to bring school members closer together. The project is relevant, especially nowadays, in a period when mutual hatred seems to be on the rise. It is necessary to deepen the student-parent-teacher model in order to increase everyone’s commitment to the educational process. The project will support the inclusion of students in local schools and also encourage parents and teachers to work together in preventing exclusion. The project’s activities will contribute to the development of an inclusive school environment free of of violent conflicts where students, teachers, families, and local community will be able to peacefully resolve conflicts democratically and with respect to human rights. Negative stereotypes poisoning the relationships between students, principals, and students form part of a serious problem that needs to be overcome.

The three NGOs of this project, have a strong presence in the school networks of the three bordering countries and therefore have a significant advocacy role for integrating educational policies and non-formal education in the public educational service. Non-formal education is one of the most efficient educational methods for including all children, youth and adults in the educational process on an equal basis, can help bring changes in their behavioural patterns, their motivation, communication and ideas. The three NGOs will keep in contact with the participant schools, re-evaluate the situation on a regular basis and communicate with schools and relevant stakeholders periodically, in order to check and follow up results, changes and improvement.

Through the experiences gained in this project, the participating NGOs promote the principles of human rights and citizenship education as an effective means to handle controversy. Educational stakeholders in different fields and regions will form networks and jointly design and implement democratic citizenship and human rights activities. The results from the school workshops will be presented at a final conference and conclusions will be drawn as to what are best practices and so inspire the audience consisting of educators to apply these practices in their own schools.

## **1.5: Objectives**

- ▶ NGOs of Greece, North Macedonia and Bulgaria develop a common participatory methodology and educational tools for human rights education and addressing controversy for local school communities.
- ▶ Local teaching communities and national administrators, school principals, and teachers, in the three countries are empowered in their efforts to address controversy in schools and to put into practice non-formal education on human rights.
- ▶ Local school communities become aware of the relevance of human rights in managing controversial issues.
- ▶ Non-formal education for human rights becomes mainstream teaching practice in the three countries.

## **1.6: Target groups**

The main target groups of the project are primary and secondary education teachers and school principals in Greece, North Macedonia, and Bulgaria. The project also addresses decision-makers in educational planning, school administrators, pedagogical advisors, school psychologists, educational mediators, educational experts, and any other interested educational stakeholders in each country.

## **1.7: Duration**

The project started in March of 2021 and will be completed in November 2021.

## **1.8: Main activities**

- ▶ The “Managing Controversy” training tool has been written in Greek and is being translated into Macedonian and Bulgarian. It is printed and widely disseminated in educational communities in Greece, North Macedonia and Bulgaria.
- ▶ An eight-hour training curriculum based on “Managing Controversy” toolkit is jointly developed by the partner organisations’ educational experts during a 4-day meeting. This common curriculum is designed by taking into consideration the three countries’ local contexts, policies, controversies, existing good practices, expectations and needs.
- ▶ Twenty-four eight-hour online training workshops for the teaching community are organised in various geographical regions of the three partner countries (8 in Greece, 8 in NM, 8 in Bulgaria).
- ▶ The present educational toolkit is produced in four languages (English, Greek, Macedonian, Bulgarian).
- ▶ Three Electronic Tools (one per partner country) including information on handling controversy as well as pedagogical material related to human rights education are being developed for each country.
- ▶ Information on the project activities and the content is disseminated on the partners’ websites and social media accounts, as well as via articles, interviews etc.
- ▶ One Final Event for networking and dissemination of results among the three partner countries takes place.

## **1.9: The expected results**

It is expected that with its completion the project will have made a positive impact towards the development of a more democratic, participatory, and inclusive school that is run according to the principles of human rights and peace.

- ▶ Teachers in various regions of Greece, North Macedonia and Bulgaria are trained to handle controversy through human rights education activities and initiatives.
- ▶ Participant teachers in the SKHC project activities offer human rights related programs in their schools in an effort to prepare the ground for handling controversy in democratic and inclusive ways.
- ▶ Children and adolescent students learn how to communicate their feelings and thoughts democratically and peacefully among their peer groups, gradually becoming active democratic citizens.
- ▶ Educational officials, administrators and other educational stakeholders related to educational planning are given a chance to understand the importance of human rights education and press for its introduction into the official school systems of Greece, North Macedonia, and Bulgaria.
- ▶ Local school communities actively participate and become more open to collaboration with local CSOs, local actors, community actors, etc.





This educational toolkit has been designed to motivate and facilitate primary and secondary school teachers, school directors and educational administrators in their efforts to promote initiatives for inclusive human rights education and as a means to address controversial issues present in school communities. It is a tool that can contribute to the establishment of a school environment of mutual respect, equal participation and inclusion as well as to the gradual development of a new school culture based on the principles of human rights, democracy and peace among all school members.



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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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The member states of the European Union have decided to link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance, and individual freedoms.

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