

Open call: International Conference: The Role of Higher Education in Peacebuilding



February
17-21,
2025

16 PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS



4 QUALITY
EDUCATION



Conference Invitation

Aurora universities invite you to a 5-day international conference on "The Role of Higher Education in Peacebuilding," organised by Aurora Karazin University Peace Education Hub and hosted at the University of Innsbruck, from February 17–21, 2025. The conference aims to contribute to future research, theory, and practice on how higher education institutions can be drivers of conflict transformation, peacebuilding, and sustainable development. The conference features a 3 full-day programme agenda preceded by a networking day and followed by a closing day with joint working opportunities.

Conference aims

A recent UNESCO-commissioned report titled [Peace Education in the 21st Century: An Essential Strategy for Building Lasting Peace \(2024\)](#) draws attention to the alarming increase of conventional and unconventional threats to worldwide peace with an evident upsurge in global military spending (2,443 billion USD in 2023). Since 2012, there has been a proliferation of multiple – intra- and inter-state – armed conflicts involving both state and non-state actors causing atrocities and human suffering on a large scale as recently demonstrated in Ukraine, Palestine, and Sudan. Around the globe, more people are dying in fighting, being forced from their homes or in need of life-saving aid while diplomatic efforts to end fighting are scarce. Besides the armed conflicts, it is noted that unconventional threats to peace, including global warming, pandemics, forced displacement, statelessness, growing inequality, racism and poverty are further drivers of chronic violence continually threatening world peace.

Lately, higher education institutions (HEIs) around the world have been placed under pressure to engage in institutional positioning against war and violence, as well as to respond to critiques of curbing academic freedoms and adequately addressing the competing needs of students, faculty and donors. At the same time, we should not overlook that many HEIs may be directly or indirectly affected by war and violence either due to their proximity to conflict or their donor and funding relations.

Aware of critique and the rise of global threats to peace, we see a great need for creating a safe space to rethink the comprehensive peace-building approaches that consider the role of higher education institutions as drivers of peace and sustainable development.

The Aurora Universities conference on "The Role of Higher Education in Peacebuilding" will provide a platform for discussing critical questions about how higher education institutions (HEI) may respond to complex global circumstances by fostering cultures of peace through educational initiatives, activities, and policies.

The conference engages with the following key questions:

- ◆ How can the HEIs utilise their mission (teaching, research, third role) in the best way to support conflict prevention, transformation and peacebuilding?
- ◆ Which capacity-building programmes (teacher training and professional development) for the staff and students could and should be introduced to respond to different stages of the peacebuilding process?
- ◆ What can we learn from practitioners in the peace-building sector to enhance the role of HEIs in becoming agents of peace in conflict-affected societies?

The conference invites international experts — both scholars and practitioners in the peacebuilding sector and related fields — higher education policymakers, academics and students from the Aurora universities, their partners and beyond to discuss the challenges and opportunities of HEI in promoting peace.



Conference organisers and partners:

The conference is organised by the Aurora Karazin University Peace Education Hub led by Palacký University Olomouc and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, in close collaboration with V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University (School of Sociology), and University of Innsbruck (Unit for Peace and Conflict Studies and UNESCO Chair for Peace Studies), and further collaboration with Berghof Foundation, Germany, and Sociological Association of Ukraine.

This conference is based on the Aurora universities' dedicated and structural support to its associate member university, V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University (Karazin University) in Ukraine since March 2022. This effort involves close collaboration with the top leadership of Karazin University and ongoing needs assessments focusing on immediate (humanitarian), mid-term (recovery), and long-term (development) support. As part of this ongoing effort, a particular aim of this conference is to support the creation of the Karazin University Peace Education Hub to facilitate conflict transformation and promote peacebuilding in the context of long-term, post-war recovery.

Conference topics

The Conference Programme Committee is calling for abstract submissions from academics and practitioners of peacebuilding and related fields on the following thematic areas:

- Theory and practice of pedagogies of peace and peace education
- Creative and pluriversal avenues of strengthening peace education
- Current challenges to academic freedom and peace education
- Peacebuilding education practices and programmes from conflict-affected societies
- Peacebuilding education efforts across HEI and partners in Ukraine
- Experience-based learning from conflict and post-conflict perspectives
- Support and capacity-building frameworks, programming, and crisis management tools for HEI affected by armed conflicts, mass violence, and atrocities
- Ecosystems and collaboration of formal, non-formal, and informal education actors (public/private, state/NGOs) in mediation and dialogue, non-violence, and peaceful relations
- Epistemicide and ways of decolonising HEI
- Gender, diversity and intersectionality in conflict transformation
- Experiences of HEI from war zones and with post-war reconstruction, recovery, and reconciliation

We welcome papers from a wide variety of inter- and transdisciplinary, theoretical and empirical perspectives, as well as case studies from different parts of the globe with illustrative examples of impact and practical implications. We particularly welcome contributions that can offer theory, practice and learnings from conflict-affected contexts for future work in Ukraine and surrounding regions.



Conference submission formats invited:

We invite different presentation formats which should be specified when registering for the conference and submitting the thematic abstracts:

- ⇒ **Individually submitted papers** (to be organized into panels by the conference committee)
- ⇒ **Panels** (3-4 individual papers or presenters linked thematically)
- ⇒ **Art interventions** (Films, creative works, poster sessions and art presentations)
- ⇒ **Roundtables** (interactive and facilitated discussions)
- ⇒ **Workshops** (teaching and/or skills-building interactive workshops, sharing good practices)

Recognising the depth and breadth of the interdisciplinary peace scholarship and conflict resolution practices, participants are encouraged to frame their contributions to the conference by referencing ways forward in facilitating solidarity with war-affected civilian populations in Europe and across the globe.

Registration Action and Abstract Submission

- Submit your Abstract of 500 words to **AURORA-Peace-Conference@uibk.ac.at** by **October 31st**
- Corresponding authors should enter the following information for the abstract submission: Contact data (first and last name, title, affiliation, affiliation country); Paper Title (full paper title for the presentation)
- Submit your abstract by choosing from the presentation formats listed above (panel, art, roundtables, workshop).
- Your abstract will undergo review by the Programme Committee within four weeks of the submission. If accepted, you will be invited to register for the conference on the dedicated conference website
- Conference registration will be open from November 15th with an overview of the full conference programme
- No participation fees are applied for this conference
- Aurora universities staff are eligible for Aurora mobility grants to attend the conference and should contact their local offices for information on staff mobility and arrangement procedures.

Conference Proceedings

All conference abstracts will be published in the Book of Abstracts and on the conference website. Selected papers will be published in a referenced scientific journal and as an edited book volume. More information will be announced later. Aurora universities embrace open access and promote open science practices.

