UNESCO
STUDY GUIDE

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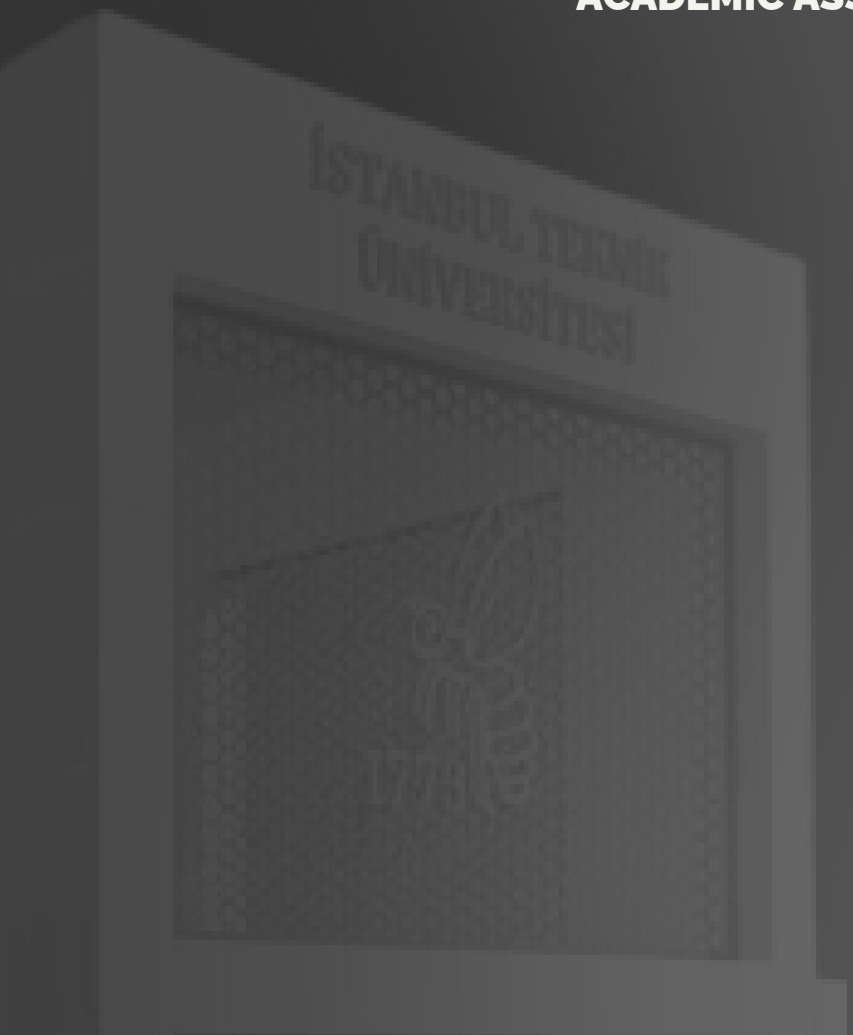

ITU MUN

LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL

Dear Delegates,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to ITUMUN 2026.

By choosing to take part in this conference, you have already done something meaningful: you have chosen dialogue over indifference, understanding over assumption, and engagement over silence. In a world increasingly shaped by division, conflict, and uncertainty, such choices matter.

Today's international landscape is marked by ongoing conflicts, humanitarian crises, and profound global challenges that demand more than rhetoric. They demand informed, open-minded, and principled individuals, particularly from the younger generation, who are willing to listen, to question, and to act responsibly. MUNs offers precisely this space: one where ideas are tested, diplomacy is practised, and perspectives are broadened.

As delegates, you are not merely representing states or institutions; you are actually engaging in the art of negotiation, the discipline of research, and the responsibility of decision-making. Approach this experience with curiosity, respect, and intellectual courage. Learn not only from debate, but from one another.

On behalf of the Secretariat, I sincerely hope that ITUMUN 2026 will challenge you, inspire you, and leave you better equipped to contribute to a more peaceful and cooperative world.

I wish you a rewarding conference and every success in your deliberations.

Yours sincerely,
Abdullah Kikati
Secretary-General

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2. Letter from the Board Members

Dear Delegates,

It is our great pleasure to welcome you all to ITUMUN'26, we are excited and delighted to serve as your chairboard for the committee of UNESCO. As the delegates you are presented with challenges faced by millions around the world, arising questions to be addressed. We believe in your diplomatic, empathetic and knowledgeable responses as the next generation of leaders and thinkers. We look forward to your thoughtful engagement, well-researched contributions, and collaborative spirit throughout the committee sessions. This study guide is created to draw a guideline for debates and research, we encourage you all to read the material thoroughly and do further readings on the agenda items given.

We would like to thank the dear Secretariat of ITUMUN'26 for inviting us to create this wonderful committee, and wish everyone a fruitful and memorable conference.

Can not wait to welcome you to our sessions soon,

Board Members

Doğa Arıkan, Senrat Şira Çavluer

and Academic Assistant Şevval Ersivri

3.Introduction to UNESCO (*United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)*

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was established on the 16th of November 1945, just after the end of the Second World War. TheConstitution of UNESCO was signed by 37 countries that understood the need for international collaboration in order to avoid future conflicts. UNESCO came into existence in1946. It is headquartered in Paris, the capital of France.

Promoting universal respect for justice, the rule of law, human rights, and fundamental freedoms without regard to race, gender, language, or religion is the main goal of UNESCO's mandate. UNESCO aims to promote intercultural communication, safeguard cultural and natural heritage, promote universal access to high-quality education, promote scientific cooperation, and guarantee the free exchange of ideas and information through its programs and conventions.

The formation of UNESCO rested on the realization that peace could never be guaranteed through political and economic treaties. On the contrary, peace has to be fostered through education, collaboration in science, understanding through culture, as well as the free flow of ideas.

During the formative years after the end of WWII, UNESCO dealt largely with repairing war-broken educational infrastructures and promoting literacy and cultural institution-building. Later on, its role widened and came to include the protection of cultural and natural heritage sites, promotion of scientific research and innovation, promotion of freedom of expression and information, and protection and promotion of cultural diversity.

From the adoption of the World Heritage Convention in 1972, which instituted the World Heritage List for the protection of sites of outstanding universal value, to UNESCO's leading role in Education for All, the promotion and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, and the integration of culture and science into the SDGs, the list goes on and on.

UNESCO today has 194 Member States and still to be taking up the challenges of digital divide, climate change, threat to cultural heritage, misinformation, and uneven access to education. Its work in multilateral co-operation, dialogue, and sustainable development makes it a suitable diplomatic forum within the United Nations system.

4. Introduction to the Agenda Item I : *"Appropriation of Indigenous People's Cultural Heritage by Occupying Powers"*

Cultural appropriation refers to adopting or abducting customs, practices, ideas, or other elements of a particular people, community, or society inappropriately or without proper acknowledgment. The appropriation of Indigenous Peoples' cultural heritage by occupying powers constitutes a significant challenge to the preservation of cultural diversity, human dignity, and historical integrity. Cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, forms the foundation of Indigenous identity, worldviews, and intergenerational continuity. In contexts of occupation, this heritage is particularly vulnerable to exploitation, misrepresentation, and erasure.

Indigenous culture includes and represents each aspect of native life, materialistic or immaterialistic. This may include sacred sites, archaeological remains, artifacts, oral traditions, languages, artistic expressions, and traditional knowledge systems. When occupying powers exert control over Indigenous territories, these elements are often removed, reinterpreted, or commodified without the free, prior, and informed consent of the affected communities. Such actions not only violate Indigenous rights but also undermine international efforts to protect cultural heritage as a shared legacy of humanity.

UNESCO, as the United Nations specialized agency responsible for education, science, and culture, plays a central role in addressing this issue. Through its conventions, declarations, and monitoring mechanisms, UNESCO seeks to safeguard cultural heritage, promote cultural diversity, and ensure respect for Indigenous knowledge systems.

4.1 Key Terms and Definitions

Indigenous Peoples: Non-dominant people groups descended from the original inhabitants of their territories, especially territories that have been colonized.

Tangible Cultural Heritage: Physical objects and sites of cultural significance such as sacred sites, archaeological remains, manuscripts, artworks, and ceremonial objects.

Intangible Cultural Heritage: Non-material cultural expressions including language, music, traditional knowledge, spiritual practices, rituals, and customary law, as defined in the 2003 UNESCO Convention.

Restitution : The legal process of restoring cultural property to its rightful owners or custodians following unlawful appropriation.

Repatriation: The return of cultural heritage, human remains, or artifacts to their country or community of origin, particularly Indigenous communities.

Historical Revisionism: The reinterpretation or manipulation of historical narratives to legitimize political control or deny Indigenous presence.

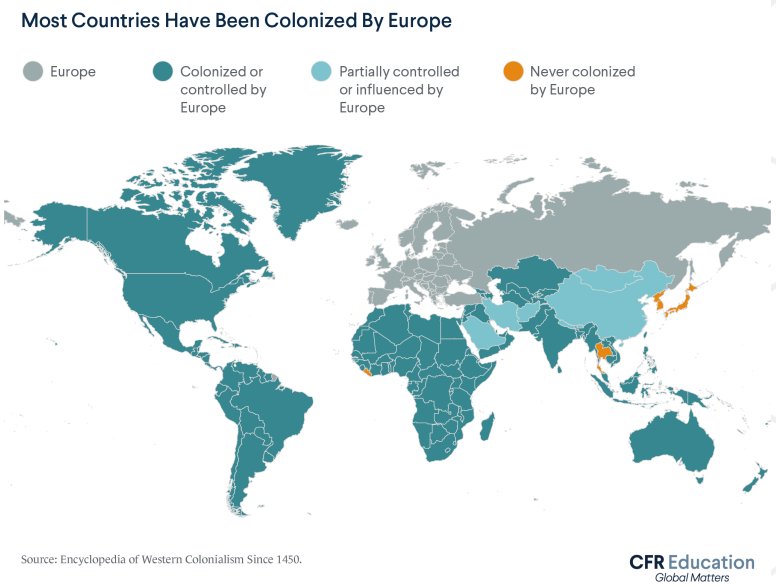
Digital Heritage: Cultural materials preserved or represented in digital form, including archives, databases, and virtual reconstructions.

5. Historical Background

It is extremely difficult to pinpoint the start of colonialism, occupation or cultural appropriation, so it could be considered that these phenomena have existed since the early stages of civilization, accelerating through the expansion and globalisation of the nations.

Throughout history, colonialism and military occupation have been closely linked to the systematic erosion and suppression of Indigenous cultures. Colonial powers frequently sought to assert political and territorial control by undermining Indigenous identities, traditions, and systems of knowledge, viewing them as obstacles to governance and assimilation. Cultural erasure occurred through the destruction or appropriation of sacred sites, the removal of cultural artifacts, the suppression of Indigenous languages, and the imposition of foreign historical narratives. In many cases, occupying authorities renamed places, reinterpreted archaeological evidence, and promoted education systems that marginalized or delegitimized Indigenous worldviews. These practices not only facilitated long-term control over territory but also disrupted intergenerational cultural transmission, resulting in lasting social, spiritual, and psychological harm to Indigenous communities. The

legacy of these processes continues to shape contemporary disputes over cultural heritage, particularly in occupied territories where Indigenous Peoples remain vulnerable to appropriation and misrepresentation of their cultural identity.



5.1 Colonialism, Occupation, and Cultural Erasure

Colonialism is the practice of controlling another country or area and exploiting its people and resources. Scholars can trace colonialism to antiquity, when it was practiced by empires, including Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome, Ancient Egypt, and Phoenicia. These civilizations expanded their borders into nearby areas starting around 1550 B.C. They set up colonies that used the resources and people they conquered to gain more political power. Colonialism is closely related to imperialism. Imperialism is the policy or ethos of using power and influence to control another nation or people. Settler colonialism is defined as a system that seeks to replace Indigenous populations with that of the colonizing power.

In settler colonies, emigrants, often whole families, moved abroad in large numbers. They established permanent homes in the modern-day United States as well as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and other countries throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Settlers constructed their own farms, schools, and churches in those

lands while often maintaining economic and political ties with their mother country. But in creating those communities, settlers killed and displaced indigenous people. In what became the United States, the indigenous population fell by 57 percent between 1700 and 1820.

In extractive colonies however , empires would care less about building settlements and more about transferring as much wealth as possible to the homeland. In certain instances, extractive colonies emerged through foreign conquest; other times, they came about through negotiation and alliances with local leaders. Slavery was common in many of these colonies. Britain, France, Portugal, Spain, and others used enslaved labor in the Western Hemisphere to grow coffee and sugar and mine gold and silver beginning in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. Extractive colonies became even more prevalent in the nineteenth century as Europe colonized new parts of the world. In colonial Mozambique, for example, the Portuguese developed a network of railways in the late 1800s to transport vast quantities of coal and other minerals from inland mines to coastal ports.

Military occupation, also called belligerent occupation or simply occupation, is temporary hostile control exerted by a ruling power's military apparatus over a sovereign territory that is outside the legal boundaries of that ruling power's own sovereign territory.Occupation's intended temporary nature distinguishes it from annexation and colonialism.The occupant often establishes military rule to facilitate administration of the occupied territory, though this is not a necessary characteristic of occupation.

The rules of occupation are delineated in various international agreements, primarily the Hague Convention of 1907, the Geneva Conventions, and also by long-established state practice. The relevant international conventions, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and various treaties by military scholars provide guidelines on topics concerning the rights and duties of the occupying power, the protection of civilians, the treatment of prisoners of war, the coordination of relief efforts, the issuance of travel documents, the property rights of the populace, the handling of cultural and art objects, the management of refugees, and other concerns that are highest in importance both before and after the cessation of hostilities during an armed conflict. A country that engages in a military occupation and violates internationally agreed-upon norms runs the risk of censure, criticism, or condemnation. In the contemporary era, the laws of occupation have largely become a part of customary international law, and form a part of the law of war.

Cultural erasure refers to the systematic removal or suppression of a culture's practices, beliefs, and identity, often as a result of colonization or assimilation policies. This process can lead to the loss of languages, traditions, and historical narratives, fundamentally altering the cultural landscape of affected communities. The phenomenon is especially relevant during periods of exploration and conquest, where dominant powers often impose their own cultures upon indigenous populations.

5.1.1 The Concept of Cultural Genocide

The notion of 'cultural genocide' was acknowledged as early as 1944, when lawyer Raphael Lemkin distinguished a cultural component of genocide. Cultural genocide or culturicide involves the eradication and destruction of cultural artifacts, such as books, artworks, and structures. Cultural genocide may also involve forced assimilation, as well as the suppression of a language or cultural activities that do not conform to the destroyer's notion of what is appropriate. Among many other potential reasons, cultural genocide may be committed for religious motives (e.g., iconoclasm which is based on aniconism); as part of a campaign of ethnic cleansing in an attempt to remove the evidence of a people from a specific locale or history; as part of an effort to implement a Year zero, in which the past and its associated culture is deleted and history is "reset". The concept was originally included in drafts of the 1948 Genocide Convention. Genocide was defined as the destruction of a group's language, religion, or culture through one of several methods. This definition of genocide was rejected by the drafting committee by a vote of 25 to 16, with 4 abstentions.

5.2 Impact on Indigenous Identity and Sovereignty

For Indigenous Peoples, identity is deeply rooted in ancestral land, cultural heritage, language, spirituality, and collective memory. When colonial or occupying powers impose external authority over Indigenous territories, these interconnected elements are deliberately targeted to weaken Indigenous resistance and legitimize foreign dominance
One of the most significant impacts of colonialism and occupation is the disruption of Indigenous cultural identity through policies of assimilation and cultural suppression. Indigenous languages, which serve as carriers of history, worldview, and traditional

knowledge, have often been restricted or banned within formal education systems imposed by colonial authorities. Across multiple regions, colonial administrations imposed formal education systems that prioritized the colonizer's language while actively discouraging or punishing the use of Indigenous languages.Children were educated exclusively in colonial or national languages, leading to generational language loss. Indigenous languages were often labeled as "primitive" or "unfit for modern society," reinforcing stigma.
As a result, fluency declined rapidly, and many languages today are critically endangered or extinct. These cause language erosion, weakened oral traditions, disrupted the transmission of historical memory, and diminished Indigenous epistemologies, which are often inseparable from language itself.

Religious and spiritual practices were similarly marginalized or criminalized, particularly those tied to sacred lands or ceremonial objects. Ceremonies, rituals, and spiritual gatherings were restricted through laws regulating assembly or religious expression. Indigenous religious leaders were marginalized, imprisoned, or replaced by externally imposed religious authorities. Sacred objects were confiscated or displayed in museums without regard for spiritual significance. Occupation and colonization often involved renaming Indigenous sacred sites and landscapes. Place names tied to spiritual narratives were replaced with names reflecting colonial figures or national myths. Religious landscapes were reclassified as archaeological, tourist, or military sites. Indigenous spiritual relationships to land were reduced to aesthetic or historical value. Sacred sites, ancestral burial grounds, and ceremonial spaces are not only cultural landmarks but also symbols of Indigenous nationhood. Their appropriation or destruction disrupts communal cohesion and weakens Indigenous claims to land and autonomy.
Historically in areas of colonisation many indigenous minorities faced forced conversion and assimilation, missionary activities are often closely linked to colonial governance. Forced conversion diminished Indigenous spiritual autonomy and reframed Indigenous identities through foreign religious frameworks, leading to long-term erosion of traditional belief systems.

Indigenous daily life is often closely tied to land-based practices such as farming, hunting, fishing, herding, and seasonal migration. Colonial land seizure and occupation restrict access to ancestral territories.

Over time, these policies led to cultural fragmentation, loss of traditional knowledge, and identity dislocation, especially among younger generations raised under colonial or occupying administrations. And this cultural dispossession often accompanies physical displacement, economic marginalization, and restricted access to resources, reinforcing dependency on occupying structures and further limiting self-governance.

6. Key Issues and Challenges

6.1 Cultural Heritage Looting and Exploitation

Cultural heritage looting and exploitation refer to the illegal removal, misuse, or commercialization of cultural property and cultural expressions belonging to Indigenous Peoples, particularly in contexts of conflict, occupation, and colonial domination. These practices affect both tangible heritage, such as artifacts, sacred objects, and archaeological materials, and intangible heritage, including traditional knowledge, symbols, and cultural expressions. Looting and exploitation tend to occur most frequently where legal protections are weak, power imbalances are pronounced, and Indigenous communities lack the authority to control access to their heritage.

Looting typically involves the unauthorized excavation, seizure, or transfer of cultural objects from Indigenous lands. During periods of occupation or instability, cultural sites such as sacred grounds, burial sites, and historical settlements become highly vulnerable. Artifacts may be removed under the justification of “protection,” “scientific research,” or “preservation,” yet are often relocated to museums, private collections, or foreign institutions without Indigenous consent. This physical displacement strips cultural objects of their spiritual, historical, and communal context, undermining their cultural meaning and severing connections between Indigenous Peoples and their ancestral heritage.

The consequences of cultural heritage looting and exploitation are long-lasting. The loss of artifacts and the commodification of cultural expressions weaken intergenerational knowledge transmission and disrupt community cohesion. Indigenous Peoples may lose control over how their history and identity are represented to the wider world, while efforts to recover stolen cultural property face significant legal and political barriers. International frameworks, including UNESCO conventions, seek to prevent these practices, but

enforcement remains limited, particularly in occupied territories where access and accountability are restricted.

Ultimately, cultural heritage looting and exploitation represent not only violations of cultural property rights but also attacks on Indigenous dignity, identity, and self-determination. Addressing these practices requires stronger international cooperation, meaningful Indigenous participation, and recognition that cultural heritage is a living, collective legacy rather than a resource to be extracted or monetized.

6.2 Physical Artifacts and Archaeological Trafficking

The illicit trafficking in and removal of physical artifacts and archaeological materials remains a contributing factor to the destruction of cultural heritage, especially in areas that are under occupation and conflict. Archaeological sites in these areas often find themselves without protection, especially where there is compromise in governance, lack of resources, and limitations in access, thus making them vulnerable to theft and excavation. Such practices irreparably damage archaeological heritage, with loss of historical context.

The items removed over occupational or tumultuous periods end up being relocated across borders and in turn feature in the global art market, collectives, and other art galleries with inadequate documentation. This disrupts the original cultural and spiritual significance of these items within their cultural groups, backgrounds, and heritages. The loss experienced not

only includes material loss but also an intangible aspect with continuous disruption of archaeological knowledge.

The 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property has created a mechanism of cooperation and restitution of archaeological material, but it has had problems of uneven application and a lack of enforcement at customs controls. Moreover, the restitution process itself has not been facilitated due to a lack of records and questions of ownership.

This discourse in policy circles emphasizes the importance of preventive measures such as increased protection of the site, development of cultural property lists, and increased global collaboration in tracking down trafficked cultural artifacts. There is an increasing recognition of the importance of recognizing the ownership and custodianship of Indigenous peoples, in keeping with the tenets of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in this connection.

6.3 Ownership of Cultural Assets in the Modern Age

The issue regarding ownership of cultural properties has become increasingly complex in the modern international system. Cultural properties include material objects, artwork, manuscripts, digital cultural heritage, and other cultural expressions that are considered to possess novel significance through history and cultural expression. Many cases regarding ownership arise due to the manner in which cultural properties were acquired through history.

In modern-day practice, cultural properties are typically owned by institutions and/or other private bodies separate from their original communities. Cultural institutions, such as museums and galleries, as well as collectors, can validly claim rights of ownership under myriad regimes of domestic laws, while the importance of cultural custody, moral rights of ownership, and identity is foregrounded by the source community. The gap between the two continues to be the major issue in the international governance of cultural properties.

However, international law can only provide partial direction on the issue of ownership. Conventions such as the 1970 UNESCO Convention establish the return and ethical principle of acquisition, but many of these objects had already been removed prior to the convention.

Thus, the return or co-management of the objects must fall back on cooperation rather than international obligation.

Currently, policy debates increasingly consider alternative forms of ownership, such as long-term loans, joint custody agreements, and community management. There has also been an increasing recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples in general, as expressed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), emphasizing the significance of consent-based management practices. It is essential to maintain the delicate balance between legal certainty, historical accountability, and cultural justice in this process led by UNESCO and the international community in the modern world in relation to the issue of ownership of cultural properties.

7. Case Studies

7.1 Sudan

Sudan, in addition to the political and humanitarian crisis that has shaken the country for years, is now facing a worrying degradation of its cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, particularly in areas where the fighting is most intense. Cultural heritage has become another victim of this war: the destruction of archaeological sites and the looting of museums fuel the illicit trafficking of cultural property and contribute to regional instability.

The war has set the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), commanded by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, against the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti. The SAF hold territory in the north and east, including the crucial port of Port Sudan, while the RSF control Darfur and parts of Kordofan. Amid this conflict, cultural heritage has grown increasingly vulnerable to damage and theft, as museums, libraries, and historic sites are looted or destroyed by fighting parties that view them less as symbols of national history and more as sources of financial gain. In Khartoum, the Rapid Support Forces occupied the National Museum as early as June 2023. Its holdings, spanning Sudanese history from the Paleolithic era through the Christian kingdoms and the Nubian civilizations of Kerma, Napata, and Meroe, were subsequently lost. With its exceptional artifacts and artworks, the museum had offered a unique record of the Nile Valley’s past. UNESCO reports

that this devastation extended to other major institutions as well: the Ethnographic Museum, the Natural History Museum, and the Presidential Palace Museum were all looted.

Faced with these destructions, UNESCO reacted as early as 2023 by condemning the looting. The organization carried out the inventory and photographic documentation of more than 1,700 objects, trained police and customs officers to recognize stolen antiquities, and appealed to international museums and collectors to refuse illegal acquisitions[8]. Despite these efforts, the mobilization remains limited.

7.2 Canada

Indigenous peoples in Canada (also known as Aboriginals) are the Indigenous peoples within the boundaries of Canada. They comprise the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis,representing roughly 5.0% of the total Canadian population. There are over 600 recognized First Nations governments or bands with distinctive cultures, languages, art, and music.
From the late eighteenth century onward, European Canadian settlers and later the Canadian government promoted policies aimed at assimilating Indigenous Peoples into what was defined as “Canadian culture.” These efforts intensified during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when a range of initiatives were introduced with the explicit goal of fully absorbing Indigenous communities and diminishing their distinct identities. Enabled by legislative measures such as the Gradual Civilization Act and the Indian Act, these policies sought to restructure Indigenous societies according to European norms. Emphasis was placed on Christianity, permanent settlement, agricultural livelihoods, and Western-style education, resulting in the systematic suppression of Indigenous cultural practices, social systems, and ways of life.

Currently the state of Indigenous Peoples is various and complex in Canada, Some communities are prosperous, others much poorer than the Canadian average. Many suffer from critical social issues, including homelessness, crime, domestic violence, substance abuse and suicide. Many don’t have the basic services that we take for granted such as access to clean water. There are other major issues to address regarding treaty negotiations, housing, property rights on reserves, residential schools, etc.

7.3 United States of America

Today in the United States, there are more than five hundred federally recognized Indigenous nations comprising nearly three million people, descendants of the fifteen million Native people who once inhabited this land. There are 574 federally recognized tribal governments and 326 Indian reservations in the US. These tribes possess the right to form their own governments, enforce laws (civil and criminal) within their lands, tax, establish requirements for membership, license and regulate activities, zone, and exclude persons from tribal territories. The history of Native Indigenous Peoples in the United States is profoundly shaped by colonization and expansionist policies that resulted in widespread cultural erosion alongside territorial dispossession. The history of Native Indigenous Peoples in the United States is marked by colonization and expansionist policies that caused extensive cultural erosion alongside land dispossession. European settlement and U.S. territorial expansion disrupted Indigenous connections to ancestral lands, which are central to cultural identity, spirituality, and social organization. Assimilation policies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most notably the boarding school system, played a decisive role in suppressing Indigenous languages, religions, and traditional knowledge by forcibly separating children from their communities and imposing Euro-American cultural norms. Legal structures such as the reservation and allotment systems further weakened Indigenous governance and fractured communal life, limiting the transmission of cultural practices across generations. Despite this history, Indigenous Peoples in the United States continue to resist cultural erasure through language revitalization, protection of sacred sites, and repatriation of cultural heritage, while exercising recognized forms of self-governance. However, challenges to cultural preservation remain, reflecting the lasting impact of colonization on Indigenous identity and heritage.

7.4 Russian Federation

During the Imperial and Soviet periods, Russia's territorial expansion into Siberia and the Arctic led to the internal colonization of numerous Indigenous Peoples, including the Nenets, Evenki, Chukchi, and Sámi. There are over 100 identified ethnic groups in Russia. Of them, 41 are legally recognized as Indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East. The Indigenous peoples of Russia are so varied and diverse that it would be a disservice to try and provide a cultural overview. They do have some characteristics in common: many are nomadic or seminomadic, practice animism, and have lifestyles based on hunting, gathering, fishing, and reindeer herding. In many of these groups, an adherence to traditional lifestyle has become even more important since the collapse of the Soviet economy. Indigenous peoples in Russia continue to face significant challenges to the survival of their traditional cultures. Today, only about 10 percent of Indigenous communities in Siberia maintain a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life, a sharp decline from roughly 70 percent three decades ago. Since 2002, population numbers have fallen for 24 Indigenous groups, while only 10 have experienced growth, largely because many individuals no longer

identify with their Indigenous group and instead assimilate into the wider Russian society. Over the past two centuries, around 90 percent of Northern Russia's population has migrated from elsewhere, intensifying cultural displacement. State-driven emphasis on the Russian language and culture—through public and boarding schools as well as mass media such as newspapers, television, and radio—has further marginalized Indigenous traditions and languages. As a result, 148 Indigenous languages in Russia are now classified as endangered.

8. Previous and Current International Responses

8.1 Declarations and Conventions

8.1.1 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is a non-binding resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly on September 13, 2007. It sets out both the individual and collective rights of Indigenous peoples, addressing areas such as land and resource ownership, cultural and ceremonial practices, identity, language, employment, health, and education. The Declaration also affirms Indigenous peoples' rights to protect and control their intellectual property and traditional knowledge. The declaration is structured as a United Nations resolution, with 23 preambular clauses and 46 articles. Most articles include an aspiration for how the State should promote and protect the rights of indigenous people. Major themes of the articles include:

- Rights of self-determination of indigenous individuals and peoples (articles 1–8; 33–34)
- The difference is between the individual and people's group
- Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture.
- Rights of indigenous individuals and people to protect their culture through practices, languages, education, media, and religion, including control of their intellectual property (articles 9–15, 16, 25, and 31)
- Asserts the indigenous peoples' right to own type of governance and to economic development (articles 17–21, 35–37)
- Health rights (articles 23–24)

- Protection of subgroups ex. elderly, women, and children (article 22)
- Land rights from ownership (including reparation, or return of land i.e. article 10) to environmental issues (articles 26–30, and 32)
- Dictates how this document should be understood in future reference (articles 38–46).

8.1.2 The UNESCO 1970 Convention

The 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property is an international treaty designed to address and prevent the trade in cultural heritage. Adopted on 14 November 1970, it entered into force on 24 April 1972. As of March 2025, the convention has been ratified by 147 states. Under the 1970 Convention, cultural property, defined in Article I as items of scientific, historical, artistic, or religious importance, is protected, though each state may determine what qualifies as cultural property within these categories. The convention is built around three core pillars: preventive measures, restitution, and international cooperation. Signatory states are encouraged to safeguard cultural heritage through actions such as maintaining inventories, regulating exports, monitoring trade, and applying legal penalties. They are also expected to assist one another in the return of stolen or illegally exported cultural property and to strengthen cooperation through international support and collaboration. The convention further allows states to request assistance from other parties to recover unlawfully transferred cultural property, provided the treaty is in force in both countries, while making clear that illegal import or export is never legitimized under its provisions.

8.1.3 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)

The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage is a UNESCO treaty adopted by the UNESCO General Conference on 17 October 2003. It came into effect in 2006 after thirty UNESCO member states ratified it, with Romania becoming the 30th country to do so on 20 January 2006. By October 2022, the convention had been ratified, approved, or accepted by 180 states. The convention operates at both national and

international levels. At the national level, states parties are required to take appropriate steps to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage within their territories, including identifying such heritage, developing relevant policies, and promoting education. In implementing these measures, states are also expected to ensure the broadest possible involvement of the communities, groups, and, where relevant, individuals who create, preserve, and transmit this heritage, actively engaging them in its management.

8.2 International Initiations, Programs and NGOs

8.2.1 Unite4Heritage Campaign

Unite4Heritage is a campaign launched on 28 March 2015 by UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova to foster a global movement dedicated to protecting cultural heritage in areas threatened by extremist violence. The initiative emerged in response to the systematic destruction of cultural heritage in Iraq and Syria by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) beginning in 2014, particularly following the release of videos showing the looting of the Mosul Museum and the destruction of the ancient city of Nimrud and the UNESCO World Heritage site of Hatra. Bokova described the damage in Mosul as a breach of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2199 and condemned the destruction of Nimrud as a war crime.

8.2.2 Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)

Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is a framework designed to ensure meaningful, bottom-up participation by Indigenous peoples before any development begins on their ancestral lands or involves the use of resources within their territories. Indigenous communities maintain deep cultural, spiritual, and economic connections to their lands and resources, and they inhabit approximately one fifth of the Earth's surface areas that are often rich in both renewable and non-renewable resources. The collective land-ownership systems practiced by many Indigenous peoples frequently clash with the demands of the global market and its ongoing need for land and raw materials. In response, international human rights law has established standards and procedures to protect Indigenous rights, promote self-determination, and ensure their involvement in decisions that affect their ways of life. FPIC is one such mechanism. However, critics note that many international agreements

emphasize consultation rather than actual consent, a much lower standard that does not allow Indigenous communities to refuse projects imposed on them. By requiring consent, FPIC strengthens Indigenous peoples' ability to exercise self-governance and participate fully in local and national decision-making over developments that impact their lands, resources, cultures, and futures.

8.2.3 The International Council of Museums (ICOM)

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) is a non-governmental organization focused on museums and museum professionals. Established in 1946, it maintains formal relations with UNESCO and holds consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. ICOM collaborates with organizations such as the World Intellectual Property Organization, Interpol, and the World Customs Organization to advance its global public service goals, which include combating the illicit trafficking of cultural property and strengthening risk management and emergency preparedness for the protection of cultural heritage from natural and human-made disasters.

8.2.4 UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), also known as PFII, serves as the UN's main coordinating body on issues affecting the rights and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples worldwide. The forum was established in 2000, building on efforts initiated during the UN's International Year of the World's Indigenous People in 1993 and the first International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (1995–2004). It functions as an advisory body within the United Nations system and reports directly to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The mandate of the Forum is to discuss indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights.

9. Questions to be Adresses

1. How can UNESCO maintain protection over Indigenous cultures during occupations and emergencies worldwide?

2. Can UNESCO play a part in restoring cultural unity of Indigenous Peoples ?
3. How can Indigenous Peoples be meaningfully included in decisions regarding the protection, management, and representation of their cultural heritage?
4. What measures can be taken to prevent the looting, illicit trafficking, and commercialization of Indigenous cultural property? How can international monitoring and enforcement be strengthened?
5. How can repatriation and restitution of Indigenous cultural artifacts be facilitated in a fair, transparent, and culturally respectful manner?
6. In what ways does the digitization of cultural heritage create new risks or opportunities for the protection of Indigenous cultures?
7. How can cultural heritage protection contribute to Indigenous identity, sovereignty, and long-term peacebuilding?

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11. Introduction to Agenda Item II: *"Reconstruction and Reform of Post-War Education Systems"*

Armed conflict profoundly disrupts education systems, destroying infrastructure, displacing students and teachers, eroding institutional capacity, and deepening pre-existing social inequalities. According to UNESCO, countries affected by conflict account for a disproportionate share of out-of-school children worldwide, and post-war contexts often experience long-term educational decline if reconstruction is delayed or poorly designed. As such, education is increasingly recognized not only as a victim of war, but as a critical instrument for peacebuilding, reconciliation, and sustainable development.

Post-war education reconstruction refers to the rebuilding, reform, and transformation of education systems following armed conflict, encompassing physical infrastructure, governance structures, curricula, teacher training, access policies, and financing mechanisms.

Unlike emergency education responses, which focus on immediate access and safety, post-war reconstruction requires long-term planning aimed at restoring state capacity, fostering social cohesion, and preventing the recurrence of violence.

Armed conflict affects education through multiple, interrelated dimensions:

- **Physical destruction** of schools, universities, libraries, and learning materials
- **Loss of human capital**, including displacement or targeting of teachers and academics
- **Interrupted schooling**, leading to high dropout rates and "lost generations"
- **Psychosocial trauma** affecting students' ability to learn
- **Politicization or militarization of curricula**, often reinforcing ethnic, religious, or ideological divisions

In many post-conflict societies, education systems inherit legacies of exclusion, discrimination, and propaganda that may have contributed to the conflict itself. Failure to address these structural issues risks reproducing grievances and undermining peace processes.

Contemporary research emphasizes education's role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Post-war education reform is increasingly framed around the concept of *education for peace*.

Curriculum reform—particularly in subjects such as history, civics, and language plays a decisive role. In divided societies, how the past is taught can either heal wounds or entrench hostility. Consequently, international organizations often support curriculum review processes that involve historians, educators, civil society, and affected communities.

Conflict disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, including girls, refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), ethnic minorities, and children with disabilities. Effective reconstruction must therefore prioritize equitable access to education.

Key challenges include:

- Reintegrating former child soldiers into formal education
- Ensuring girls' access in post-conflict societies where gender norms may have hardened
- Providing education for displaced and refugee populations
- Addressing regional disparities between urban and rural areas

Post-war reforms increasingly emphasize inclusive education policies that target marginalized groups, recognizing education as both a right and a stabilizing force in fragile societies.

11.1 Key Terms and Definitions

Post-War Education Reconstruction

The process of rebuilding and restoring education systems following armed conflict, including the rehabilitation of infrastructure, re-establishment of governance mechanisms, and restoration of access to education services.

Education System Reform

Structural and policy-based changes aimed at improving the quality, equity, relevance, and governance of education systems, often involving curriculum revision, teacher training, and institutional restructuring.

Education in Emergencies (EiE)

The provision of safe, inclusive, and quality education during and immediately after crises such as armed conflict, natural disasters, or displacement, serving as a bridge between humanitarian response and long-term development.

Social Cohesion

The degree of trust, inclusion, and solidarity among different groups within a society, often strengthened through inclusive and equitable education policies in post-war contexts.

Transitional Justice

Judicial and non-judicial measures implemented to address past human rights violations, which may be reflected in education systems through curriculum reform and historical accountability.

Humanitarian–Development Nexus

An approach that links short-term emergency education responses with long-term education system development and reform.

Fragile and Conflict-Affected States (FCAS)

Countries characterized by weak institutions, ongoing or recent conflict, and heightened vulnerability, often requiring sustained international support for education reconstruction.

12. Historical Background

12.1 Education Systems in Post-War and Post-Conflict States

Education systems in post-war and post-conflict states operate under conditions of institutional fragility, social division, and economic disruption. Armed conflict damages education not only through the destruction of infrastructure, but also by weakening governance capacity, displacing students and teachers, politicizing curricula, and intensifying pre-existing inequalities. As a result, post-conflict education systems must address the dual task of restoring basic functionality while undertaking structural reform.

Research highlights that education reconstruction is not a purely technical process but a deeply political one. Education systems are embedded within broader social and political structures, and in many cases, pre-conflict education policies contributed to exclusion or

polarization. Consequently, reform is often necessary to support reconciliation and long-term stability rather than merely rebuilding existing systems.

Historical post-war experiences following the Second World War demonstrate the transformative role of education in societal recovery. In Germany and Japan, education reform was integrated into broader reconstruction and democratization efforts, focusing on curriculum revision, teacher re-education, and governance restructuring to remove authoritarian and militaristic influences. These cases illustrate how education systems are often intentionally redesigned to support new political and social orders.

In contemporary post-conflict contexts, access and equity remain major challenges. Conflict disproportionately affects marginalized groups, including girls, displaced populations, and rural communities. Unequal access to education in post-war settings risks reinforcing grievances and undermining peace processes. Accordingly, inclusive education policies are widely recognized as central to sustainable reconstruction.

Governance capacity and teacher availability are persistent concerns. Post-conflict ministries of education frequently operate with limited resources and weakened institutional structures, while teacher shortages and psychosocial needs hinder system recovery. International organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank support education reconstruction through funding, technical assistance, and policy guidance, though research stresses the importance of aligning external support with national ownership.

German children walk to school amid post-World War II reconstruction in Aachen (June 1945), illustrating the reopening and rebuilding of education systems after conflict.

12.2 Role of Education in Peacebuilding and Reconciliation

Education plays a pivotal role in peacebuilding and reconciliation by shaping social relations, collective memory, and future civic identities in post-conflict societies. Beyond restoring access to schooling, education can either reinforce existing divisions or actively contribute to long-term peace, depending on how it is designed and implemented.

Equitable access to education can help reduce grievances linked to marginalization and inequality, which are often underlying drivers of conflict. Inclusive curricula, particularly in subjects such as history and civics, can promote mutual understanding, critical reflection, and respect for diversity. When education systems acknowledge past injustices and encourage dialogue rather than silence or denial, they create space for reconciliation and social healing.

Education also contributes to peacebuilding by strengthening trust between citizens and state institutions. The provision of fair, inclusive, and conflict-sensitive education services can enhance state legitimacy and support social cohesion in fragile post-conflict environments. As highlighted in UNICEF's *Education and Peacebuilding Programme Synthesis Report (December 2011)*, education should not be viewed as a neutral service, but as a transformative mechanism that can either mitigate or exacerbate social tensions depending on how inequalities and grievances are addressed.

Ultimately, education contributes to peacebuilding not through isolated or short-term interventions, but through sustained, long-term processes that foster resilience, inclusive governance, and shared social values. When aligned with broader reconciliation and development strategies, education systems can support durable peace and prevent the recurrence of conflict.

13. . Key Issues and Challenges

Rebuilding and/or transforming an education system that has been affected by war or conflict not only entails rebuilding but also has complex issues that are different from rebuilding education systems. A war will affect an education system by creating failure in an institution that was previously functional or creating more disparities in an already disadvantaged society.

One of the main issues contributing to the constraint of access to learning environments by these children is the extensive damage to learning infrastructure. Learning environments are often damaged, occupied, and/or made unusable by these children. The main groups of children who are largely affected by this issue include displaced children and girls.

Another fundamental challenge is the lack of competent teaching staff and the institutional capacity for staff development. Displacement or loss of teaching staff is a common outcome of conflict, and where there is a lack of stability, it is harder to build capacity for staff development. Teaching staff in a post-war situation are expected to handle educational needs as well as other needs related to trauma and reintegration.

Curriculum change is another area that poses a great challenge to the rebuilding efforts in some nations. Histories in the pre-war curricula may lack objectivity and may trigger conflict. Curriculum change will sometimes be politically charged but is necessary in order to facilitate reconciliation, critical thinking, and the appreciation of differences.

Finally, the absence or underrepresentation of Indigenous people and other minority groups in the aftermath of a conflict also poses a great challenge in the education sector. Marginalization and the absence of the language in which they understand best may limit the impact of education on reconciliation.

13.1 Infrastructure Destruction and Access to Education

Conflict has the potential to impact and compromise the infrastructure of education, including institutions of ~~learning~~ like schools and universities. Additionally, conflicts can pose threats through libraries and transport networks. The presence of unexploded ordnance and/or their use in the conflict can pose health and access risks to education.

The affected populations include displaced children and refugees, girls, and students with disabilities. Overcrowding in the classroom, the physical distance of schools, and dangerous environments contribute to the risk of pupil dropout. A massive reconstruction of the education sector is required to improve resilience in preparation for disasters.

Impact of Infrastructure Destruction on Access to Education in Post-Conflict Countries

Country	***Damage on Education***	***Impact on Access to Education***
Syria	*Schools damaged and/or destroyed; facilities used for military purposes*	*Reliance on informal learning*

Ukraine	*Damage to schools and universities; displacement*	*Disrupted in-person education; increased remote learning*
Liberia	*Lack of functional schools, especially in rural areas*	*Limited access*
Yemen	*Schools damaged or occupied*	*Unsafe learning environments*

13.2 Teacher Shortages and Capacity Building

Often, the education systems after the war experience shortages of teachers. This may be due to the displacement of teachers, death, and the closure of teacher training institutions. In other cases, the teachers may be inadequately trained to deliver the enhanced curriculum. This may include training to address the trauma experienced by the learners.

Thus, capacity building becomes a major imperative requiring the recruitment of new teaching staff, apart from the capacity-building of the existing staff. For the post-conflict setting, the role of the teacher becomes not only limited to the delivery of the educational program but also the promotion of social cohesion, apart from the provision of psychosocial support. Without the required capacity, the quality of education becomes threatened.

Teacher Shortages and Capacity-Building Challenges in Post-War Education Systems

Country / Region	***Damage on Educators***	***Impact on Education Quality***
Rwanda	*Loss and displacement of educators*	*Emergency recruitment and retraining needed*

Afghanistan	*Shortage of trained and female teachers*	*Uneven education quality*
South Sudan	*Reliance on untrained volunteer teachers*	*Low learning outcomes*

13.3 Curriculum Reform and Historical Narratives

Curriculum changes rank amongst the most politically charged issues in modern education systems. In many cases, past education curricula promoted an inflammatory and unjust history that contributed to social division and/or violence. However, preserving this content could contribute to maintaining grievances rather than working towards a reconciliation path.

Curriculum change means textbook revision, new learning outcomes, or retraining teachers to teach critical thinking, a balanced view of history, and respect for diversity. Despite this, there is often disagreement concerning national identity, memory, and history to be encountered during curriculum change to bring about balanced learning to avoid conflicts.

Curriculum Reform and the Management of Historical Narratives in Post-Conflict Societies

Country / Region	***Curriculum Issue***	***Reform Approach***
Bosnia and Herzegovina	*Disagreement on historical perspectives*	*Attempts at shared standards*
Germany	*Radical ideas centered around military power*	*Denazification of curricula*
Japan	*Militaristic narratives*	*Promotion of democratic and peaceful values*
South Africa	*Racially biased narratives*	*Inclusive curriculum reform*

13.4 Inclusion of Indigenous and Marginalized Voices

The issue in educational reforms after the war is that Indigenous people, minorities, displaced persons, and other marginalized social groupings are inadequately included. These social groupings are normally faced with difficulties such as language marginalization, discriminative processes, and non-inclusion in educational governance.

Inclusive education can only be achieved through the recognition and appreciation of cultural, linguistic, and historical differences that exist in the education systems. This can only be achieved through the integration of Indigenous knowledge systems and local languages into the education systems. Inclusive education helps to increase the legitimacy of education reforms.

Inclusion of Indigenous and Marginalized Voices in Post-War Education Reform

Country / Region	***Marginalized Group***	***Inclusion's Challenge***
Colombia	*Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities*	*Limited representation in curricula*
Myanmar	*Ethnic minorities*	*Limited mother-tongue education*
Canada	*Indigenous peoples*	*Historical exclusion from education*
Australia	*Aboriginal communities*	*Limited incorporation of Indigenous knowledge*

14. Case Studies

14.1 Post WWII Europe

The devastation of Europe following the Second World War represents one of the most significant post-conflict reconstruction efforts in modern history. Between 1939 and 1945, the continent experienced unprecedented levels of violence, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 60 million people worldwide, widespread destruction of cities and infrastructure, and the near collapse of social and political institutions. Education systems were among the sectors most severely affected, as schools, universities, and libraries were destroyed, teachers were killed or displaced, and entire generations experienced prolonged interruptions in schooling.

Beyond physical destruction, post-war Europe confronted profound moral and humanitarian crises. The Holocaust revealed the systematic genocide of six million Jews, alongside the persecution and mass murder of Roma communities, people with disabilities, political dissidents, and other marginalized groups. Forced labor, mass displacement, and the trauma of total war left deep psychological scars across societies. In the immediate aftermath of the war, millions of children were orphaned, displaced, or living in refugee camps, with limited or no access to formal education.

Education systems in many European states had also been actively implicated in the war. Under fascist and authoritarian regimes, schooling had been used as an instrument of propaganda, militarization, and ideological indoctrination. Textbooks promoted racial hierarchies, glorified violence, and suppressed critical inquiry. As a result, post-war reconstruction required not only the rebuilding of physical infrastructure but also the moral and ideological transformation of education itself.

In occupied Germany, the Allied powers pursued a policy of *denazification* that extended deeply into the education sector. Schools were closed temporarily while curricula were revised, textbooks rewritten, and teachers screened for ties to the Nazi regime. Education reform was explicitly linked to democratization, with an emphasis on critical thinking, civic

responsibility, and the rejection of totalitarian ideology. Similar efforts occurred across Europe, where education was reoriented toward peace, human rights, and democratic citizenship.

The broader European reconstruction process demonstrated that education was central to preventing the re-emergence of violence. Institutions such as UNESCO were established in this period based on the belief that wars begin “in the minds of men,” and that peace must therefore be built through education, science, and culture. Post-war European education reforms thus laid the foundation for long-term reconciliation, regional cooperation, and the gradual integration of formerly hostile states.

The experience of post–World War II Europe illustrates that education systems can serve as both a reflection of past atrocities and a mechanism for societal renewal. By confronting historical crimes, dismantling ideologically driven curricula, and promoting inclusive and democratic values, post-war European states transformed education into a cornerstone of peacebuilding and recovery.

14.2 Rwanda

The 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda represents one of the most devastating examples of mass violence in the late twentieth century. Over a period of approximately one hundred days, an estimated 800,000 people (primarily Tutsi, as well as moderate Hutu) were systematically murdered. The genocide was not a spontaneous outbreak of violence, but the result of long-standing political manipulation, ethnic polarization, and the deliberate mobilization of state and media institutions to incite mass participation in atrocities.

Education systems in Rwanda both suffered from and were implicated in the violence. During the colonial and post-colonial periods, educational policies reinforced ethnic categorization by institutionalizing ethnic identity through identity cards and differential access to schooling. School curricula and administrative practices contributed to the construction of rigid social divisions, which later facilitated dehumanization and exclusion. During the genocide itself, schools were frequently transformed from spaces of learning into sites of mass killing, while teachers and students were among both the victims and, in some cases, perpetrators of violence.

In the immediate aftermath of the genocide, Rwanda faced the near-total collapse of its education system. Infrastructure was destroyed, teachers were killed or displaced, and large numbers of children were orphaned or traumatized. Reopening schools was an urgent priority, not only to restore access to education but also to re-establish social stability in a society profoundly fractured by violence. However, reconstruction posed complex challenges: education had to be rebuilt without reproducing the divisions that had contributed to the genocide.

Post-genocide education reform in Rwanda focused heavily on national unity and reconciliation. Ethnic identification was removed from official documentation, and curricula were redesigned to emphasize shared national identity rather than ethnic difference. History education, in particular, became a sensitive and central issue. Teaching about the genocide required balancing truth-telling, accountability, and reconciliation, while avoiding narratives that could reignite tensions. As a result, history curricula were revised gradually, with strong state oversight and international consultation.

Education also became a key instrument for peacebuilding through civic education and values-based learning. Programs emphasizing human rights, citizenship, and social cohesion were introduced to promote dialogue and collective responsibility. Teacher training was prioritized to equip educators with the skills needed to address trauma, facilitate sensitive discussions, and foster inclusive classroom environments.

Rwanda’s post-conflict education experience demonstrates both the potential and the limits of education as a peacebuilding tool. While education reform has contributed to stability and reconstruction, it has also raised debates regarding state control over historical narratives and the balance between unity and open pluralism.

18. Previous and Current International Responses

15.1 UNESCO and UN Educational Frameworks

Since the end of the Second World War, international organizations have played a central role in shaping global responses to education in post-war and post-conflict contexts. Among these, UNESCO and the broader United Nations system have framed education as a foundational element of peace, reconstruction, and sustainable development.

UNESCO was established in 1945 with the explicit mandate to contribute to peace through education, science, and culture. Its foundational principle, that *wars begin in the minds of human beings and that peace must therefore be constructed in those same minds*, continues to guide its engagement in post-conflict education. In practice, UNESCO supports member states by providing policy guidance, technical assistance, and normative frameworks aimed at restoring and reforming education systems affected by conflict.

One of UNESCO's key contributions is its work on Education in Emergencies, Crisis, and Reconstruction (EIECR). This framework seeks to bridge the gap between short-term humanitarian education responses and long-term system rebuilding. It emphasizes continuity of learning during crises, protection of education infrastructure, and the integration of peacebuilding and human rights principles into post-conflict curricula. UNESCO also promotes conflict-sensitive education planning to ensure that reconstruction efforts do not reinforce pre-existing inequalities or social divisions.

Within the broader UN system, education-related peacebuilding efforts are supported through coordination with agencies such as UNICEF, UNDP, and the World Bank. UNICEF focuses on restoring access to education for children affected by conflict and displacement, while UNDP links education reform to governance, institutional capacity, and state legitimacy. The World Bank contributes through financing mechanisms and analytical frameworks that support education system recovery in fragile and conflict-affected states.

More recently, UN educational frameworks have been aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which commits states to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all. In post-conflict settings, SDG 4 is closely linked to peacebuilding objectives, as education is recognized as a driver of stability, resilience, and social inclusion.

15.2 International Funding Mechanisms

Given the scale of destruction and the limited fiscal capacity of many conflict-affected governments, external financial assistance is often essential to restore access to education, rebuild infrastructure, and support long-term system reform.

Multilateral development institutions, particularly the World Bank, are central to education financing in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Through concessional loans, grants, and trust funds, the World Bank supports education reconstruction by financing school rehabilitation, teacher training, curriculum reform, and institutional capacity-building. Its analytical frameworks emphasize linking education investment to broader peacebuilding and development strategies.

In addition to the World Bank, global education financing initiatives such as the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) provide targeted support to low-income and conflict-affected countries. GPE focuses on strengthening national education systems through coordinated donor funding aligned with national education sector plans. This approach aims to improve aid effectiveness while reinforcing government ownership of reconstruction efforts.

Humanitarian funding mechanisms also contribute to education recovery, particularly in the immediate aftermath of conflict. UN-coordinated pooled funds and emergency response mechanisms support education in emergencies, ensuring continuity of learning for displaced and vulnerable populations. However, research highlights persistent funding gaps and challenges in transitioning from short-term humanitarian financing to sustainable development funding.

Despite the importance of international funding, concerns remain regarding aid fragmentation, donor conditionality, and unequal allocation of resources. Effective funding mechanisms increasingly emphasize coordination, transparency, and long-term planning to ensure that education reconstruction contributes to durable peace rather than temporary stabilization.

15.3 NGOs and Local Partnerships

NGOs are frequently among the first actors to restore access to education, particularly for displaced populations, marginalized communities, and children affected by trauma.

International NGOs contribute by providing temporary learning spaces, teacher training, psychosocial support, and education materials. Their operational flexibility allows them to adapt programs to rapidly changing conditions and reach populations in remote or insecure areas. At the same time, local NGOs and community-based organizations offer contextual knowledge, cultural sensitivity, and long-term engagement that are essential for sustainable education recovery.

Partnerships between international organizations, NGOs, and local authorities are increasingly recognized as best practice in post-conflict education. Collaborative approaches help align humanitarian responses with national education strategies, reduce duplication of efforts, and promote local ownership. Community involvement, including the participation of parents, educators, and local leaders, strengthens accountability and enhances the relevance of education initiatives.

However, the expanded role of NGOs also raises challenges. Over-reliance on non-state actors may undermine state authority or lead to parallel education systems if coordination is weak. As a result, international frameworks increasingly stress the importance of integrating NGO activities within national education policies and supporting the gradual transition of responsibility to public institutions.

NGOs and local partnerships complement international and state-led efforts by addressing immediate needs while contributing to long-term system strengthening. When effectively coordinated, these actors play a critical role in ensuring that education reconstruction efforts are inclusive, resilient, and responsive to the needs of post-conflict societies.

16. Questions to be Addressed

1. How can post-war and post-conflict education systems be reconstructed without reproducing the inequalities or divisions that contributed to conflict?

2. What role should education play in addressing historical atrocities and collective trauma while supporting reconciliation and social cohesion?

3. How can curricula—particularly history and civics—be designed to promote peace, critical thinking, and inclusive national identities in post-conflict societies?

4. What responsibilities do states have in ensuring equitable access to education for marginalized groups, including displaced persons, ethnic minorities, and post-conflict generations?

5. What lessons can be drawn from historical case studies, such as post–World War II Europe and post-genocide Rwanda, for contemporary post-conflict education reform?

6. How can international organizations such as UNESCO and UNICEF balance global educational norms with national ownership and local context in post-war reconstruction efforts?

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