



CHILDREN'S UNIVERSITIES, OPEN
SCHOOLING, AND THE FORMATION
OF LOCAL MEMORIAL LINKS FOR
EUROPEAN REMEMBRANCE

CU
REMEMBER

Framework for Remembrance Education



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CU REMEMBER – Children’s Universities, Open Schooling, and the Formation of Local MemoriaLinks for European Remembrance

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1. Introduction

Remembrance Education is often justified—for valid and important reasons—as a moral imperative: to “never forget”, to honour the victims and to engage with the stories of survivors. It also deepens our understanding of historical developments, ideologies, perpetrators and the crimes of Fascist and National Socialist regimes. By raising awareness of antisemitism, racism, fascism, and authoritarianism, it aims to prevent history from repeating itself. This approach is grounded in historical facts and emotional engagement, emphasizing remembrance and moral responsibility.

This understanding forms the foundation of CU REMEMBER, a European Union co-funded project involving Austrian and Italian partners: Kinderbüro der Universität Wien, University of Vienna, SISSA Medialab, University of Trieste, and Verein GEDENKDIENT. The project seeks to empower young people to engage critically and empathetically with history, while promoting democratic values. In the long term, CU REMEMBER aims to help shape future-oriented forms of remembrance and equip educational institutions with innovative, participatory methods.

The CU REMEMBER consortium works at the intersection of remembrance culture, science communication, community engagement, and individual empowerment. It is strongly committed to the belief that a culture of remembrance—especially for children and young people—can be meaningfully expanded by adopting a future-oriented approach. This includes recognizing children’s fundamental rights and seeing them as active and responsible citizens of the present. This conviction shapes the framework throughout.

Given the international nature of the consortium, the framework also highlights the

transnational dimension of history. Since historical experiences differ in detail and chronology, the framework distinguishes between Fascism and National Socialism. The term Fascism here encompasses Italian and Austro-Fascism, Croatian Fascist movements like the Ustaša, and other European Fascist movements of the 20th century.

While the project focuses on children and young people, this framework addresses Remembrance Education in a general sense. It is not limited to one age group or educational setting. Not every aspect of this framework will apply equally in every context. Its intentionally abstract nature reflects its purpose: to offer a shared conceptual foundation for collaboration within the project.

In the course of the project, a CU REMEMBER Handbook will be developed for primary and secondary school teachers. It will translate and expand this framework into practical guidance, incorporating case studies, best practices, and concrete tips for classroom use.

2. Topics, terminology and intended use of this framework

In the context of this pedagogical framework, the term Remembrance Education refers to educational engagement with the crimes of Fascism and National Socialism (NS) and their aftermath. This includes the historical events themselves. It also includes the ways in which societies have addressed - or failed to address - these crimes in the decades since 1945.

Continuities of Fascist and NS ideology

Remembrance Education also draws attention to the enduring influence of National Socialist ideologies beyond the historical period of the regime. Antisemitism, racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination did not end in 1945; they have persisted and adapted in various forms - through political discourse, institutional practices, cultural narratives and hate speech. This includes confronting contemporary expressions, such as antisemitic and racist terror attacks after 1945, notably the antisemitic and racist terror attack in Halle (Saale) on October 9, 2019, or the so-called Liederbuch-Affäre involving Udo Landbauer, a prominent Austrian far-right politician.

Remembrance Education, as understood here, does not stop with the end of World War II. It includes the legal and societal responses to Fascist and National Socialist crimes—especially the widespread failure in Germany, Austria and Italy to consistently prosecute perpetrators. Many former Nazis were reintegrated into public life, and institutional as well as cultural continuities allowed ideological elements of National Socialism to persist in post-war societies. Similarly, Italy also failed to prosecute war criminals and saw continuity between the state apparatus of fascism and the republic.

Recognising the historical roots of discrimination

Remembrance Education must address the wide range of exclusionary ideologies that shaped National Socialist policies and practices. These include racism, antisemitism, queerphobia, sexism or ableism. Each of these forms of discrimination has long historical roots in European societies and was intensified and institutionalised under NS and Fascist rule. Understanding these ideological foundations helps learners grasp how systemic violence operated - e.g. through legal frameworks, pseudoscience and cultural norms.

Churbm, Churban, Shoa, Holocaust?

Central to this history is the systematic, state-sponsored genocide targeted at Jewish Communities, known by various terms: the *Holocaust*, the *Shoah*, or, in some Yiddish and Hebrew contexts, *Churbm* or *Churban*. Each of these terms carries specific historical, linguistic, and cultural connotations; none is entirely unproblematic or universally accepted. Nevertheless, Remembrance Education acknowledges the multiplicity of these terms and remains open to their informed use.

Genocide, Holocaust, Samudaripen, Porajmos?

Central to this history too, is the systematic genocide committed against Roma and Sinti communities—an atrocity that was long unrecognised or insufficiently acknowledged. This genocide is referred to by various terms, including *genocide*, *Holocaust*, *Samudaripen*, and increasingly, *Porajmos*, a word from Romanes. Each of these terms carries specific linguistic, cultural and political connotations and is subject to ongoing discussion, even within Roma and Sinti communities themselves. Remembrance Education acknowledges the multiplicity of these terms and remains open to their informed and respectful use. However, it is important to note

that the term Porajmos has been critiqued due to its potentially offensive or problematic implications in Romanes, as well as the fact that it was originally introduced by a gadzo (a Romanes word for a non-Roma person).

Framework is not necessarily applicable to other historical processes

This framework is a suggestion for formal and non-formal educational settings in relation to the NS and Fascist crimes. While many of the pedagogical principles outlined here may resonate with educators working in other contexts, this document does not claim to offer a universal model. Instead, it encourages educators to assess which principles may be relevant and to adapt them thoughtfully, or seek out context-specific guidelines where appropriate.

3. Critical engagement with historical narratives

Understanding history as constructed and contextual

Historical scholarship distinguishes itself by its critical and methodological engagement with the past. Through systematic source analysis, contextualisation and methodological transparency, historical sciences offer grounded, evidence-based insights. Additionally, Historians have a scientific community that evaluates and analyses research. This enables a nuanced understanding of history that resists distortion, denialism and ideological manipulation.

At the same time, historical narratives are not neutral or objective reflections of the past. They are constructed through contemporary frameworks, shaped by cultural norms, institutional power and the positionality of those who produce them. Historiography, as a practice, involves acts of interpretation—by historians, educators, and institutions alike.

These interpretations are always embedded in particular contexts and must be recognised as contingent rather than absolute.

Critically addressing instrumentalisation and memorial culture

Narratives of history and acts of remembrance are never without purpose—they are shaped and mobilised for political, cultural, or pedagogical aims. Such instrumentalisation is not inherently problematic: it always happens in one way or another. It becomes critical however, when used to obscure, distort or hierarchise historical experiences. A reflective and ethically aware approach to remembrance work requires recognising these dynamics and responding to them with intellectual honesty and care.

Working responsibly with sources and media

Historical sources must be approached critically, especially when they reflect the language, assumptions, or intentions of perpetrators. Educators should practice critical source analysis meaning the careful examination of who created a source, in what context, and with what intent. This includes recognising when reproducing certain materials may risk reinforcing harmful narratives or imagery.

Additionally, historical narratives circulate across a wide range of media - social platforms, documentaries, fiction, games, and more. Each format frames history differently and reaches audiences in specific ways. Critical media literacy is therefore essential: educators should help learners recognise how history is shaped by format, intention as well as audience and how different media formats can be instrumented to convey problematic historical narratives.

Engaging with Judaism beyond

Antisemitism

A thoughtful approach to engaging with antisemitism can also include an understanding of Jewish life, culture, and diversity. Without this foundation, there is a risk of reducing Jewish history to one of persecution alone. Educators are encouraged to introduce learners to the richness of Jewish traditions and to the varied ways in which Jewish communities contributed to and shaped European societies. This approach counters stereotypical or one-dimensional narratives and creates space for a more complete and respectful understanding.

4. Critical engagement with Fascist and NS and ideologies

Understanding the role of antisemitism in Fascist and NS ideology

It is important to teach and learn about Antisemitism as a core component of the Fascist and NS ideology. Antisemitism was embedded in both policies from education to economics, law and military strategy. Its roots stretch back centuries in Europe, including religiously motivated hatred, economic scapegoating, and conspiracy narratives. These ideas were not abandoned after 1945 and continue to circulate today in new and old and coded forms.

Critically Propaganda and gender roles

NS and Fascist ideologies were also deeply gendered. Propaganda idealised traditional gender roles and reinforced patriarchal hierarchies. These roles served to uphold both the regime's racial policies and its vision of social order. While the vast majority of perpetrators of NS crimes were men, women who were perceived as part of the imagined 'folk community' were empowered to play an active part in the perpetration.

Transnational history of Fascisms

National Socialism did not emerge in isolation. It developed in dialogue with and in relation to other authoritarian and Fascist movements across Europe. The Ustaša regime in Croatia, Fascist rule in Italy and other forms of collaboration illustrate how similar ideologies took root in different national contexts. Examining these connections broadens the scope of Remembrance Education beyond Germany, Italy and Austria, showing the transnational dimensions of Fascist violence and its success across borders.

5. Embracing Multiple Perspectives

Acknowledging the complexity of discrimination and persecution

The history of National Socialism was shaped by multiple, overlapping forms of discrimination and exclusion. These were enforced through an ideological system that assigned individuals to rigid, imposed categories - often denying their self-understanding and erasing their humanity. These imposed classifications must be approached critically, as they do not always reflect historical realities, lived experiences or self-denomination of victims.

Persecution under National Socialism and Fascism were not uniform. Many individuals were targeted based on more than one dimension of exclusion, such as social status, perceived origin, religion, political views, health, sexual orientation or identity. An intersectional perspective is essential to grasp how these different forms of discrimination operated together in individual cases. Different experiences must be recognised as distinct, but not treated hierarchically. In order not to reproduce the very logic of exclusion that structured the ideology of National Socialism.

Engaging with lived experience and structural contexts

Capturing the complexity of this history requires drawing on both personal narratives and structural analysis. Individual stories convey lived realities and emotional depth, while historical data highlight the broader mechanisms of systemic violence. Together, they allow for a more nuanced understanding of how discrimination occurred and how it affected people's lives in profoundly different ways.

This approach also offers a framework for reflecting on remembrance today. Acknowledging the constructed nature of historical categories and the diversity of victim experiences helps prevent the uncritical reproduction of ideological narratives. It supports remembrance practices that are both inclusive and self-reflective.

Examining agency and responsibility

A focus on victimisation alone risks presenting people only as passive recipients of violence. A focus on agency means exploring the scope of possible, sometimes extremely limited, actions even under extreme conditions. Stories of resistance, survival and agency complicate one-dimensional narratives and allow for critical engagement with historical subjectivity. At the same time, examining perpetrator histories is vital. It reveals how complicity took shape and how ideologies translated into action, providing insight into the social and institutional dynamics of violence.

Accounting for diversity in the learning space

Participants and educators bring a wide range of perspectives into Holocaust education. Some may have family connections to survivors, victims, perpetrators or bystanders, others may have no direct ties at all. These different relationships shape how individuals

engage with the topic. Acknowledging this diversity helps create an open space of learning where different levels of knowledge and experience are valued.

The value of positive stories

For younger participants and students, focusing on 'positive' case studies and biographies — stories of survival, rescue or resistance — is particularly valuable. Important learning can especially take place in the cases of rescue and resistance: Historical individuals had a limited set of options for taking action against Fascist and Nazi crimes, even if it meant taking considerable risks. For young audiences, these individuals can serve as examples of civic courage in the fight against authoritarian movements and in defence of human rights.

6. Reflection and Self-Awareness of Educators

Reflecting historical and social positioning

Educators should engage in continuous reflection on their own historical, cultural and socio-economic positioning in relation to the history of Fascist and National Socialist crimes. This includes examining inherited narratives, national and familial memory and structural privileges or discrimination that may shape one's perspective. Such awareness is essential because it influences not only the choice of content and pedagogical methods but also the implicit messages conveyed about responsibility, distance and relevance.

Facilitating diverse perspectives while maintaining historical accountability

It is crucial to acknowledge that the authority to interpret history does not rest solely with the educator. Educational spaces should be designed to include a plurality of perspectives, particularly those of individuals and communities affected by Fascist and NS crimes or related forms of discrimination. At the same

time, maintaining a clear stance against historical negationism and against the distortion of historical events is vital: openness to interpretation must not serve as a gateway to relativising, denying or distorting the facts of NS and Fascist crimes. In the context of Holocaust remembrance, where memory is often contested and politicised, this balance between multiplicity and accountability becomes especially important.

7. Emotional Dimensions and Safer Learning Spaces

Acknowledging Emotional Responses

Learning about NS crimes can evoke strong emotional reactions. Remembrance Education acknowledges that the content may be painful or overwhelming for participants. It is equally important to recognise that learning about Fascist and NS crimes can also *not* evoke emotional reactions. The emotional responses of participants can display a diverse range. It is important to be open to this wide range of responses in settings of Remembrance Education.

Creating a Framework for Emotional Safety

Educational settings should offer structured and thoughtful support when dealing with emotionally challenging content. This includes issuing appropriate trigger warnings and clearly communicating what participants can expect. Facilitators should make it acceptable for individuals to take breaks, step away, or opt out temporarily. Recognising signs of emotional distress and responding with sensitivity is essential to building a space of learning.

Avoiding 'Shock Pedagogy'

While emotional engagement can play a role in Remembrance Education, it should never be forced or instrumentalised. Pedagogical

approaches that rely on graphic materials, disturbing imagery or emotionally charged storytelling—often referred to as "shock pedagogy"—can be counterproductive. These methods may overwhelm emotionally and provoke numbing or withdrawal and can hinder critical reflection. Instead, education should foster a space for respectful engagement with difficult histories.

Working towards a development of empathy

Educators are encouraged to cultivate *cognitive empathy*: the ability to intellectually understand others' perspectives without claiming to fully share their experience. This form of empathy allows for ethical engagement without emotional over-identification or appropriation. Providing space for emotional reflection—both during and after sessions—acknowledges diverse ways to process content.

8. Accessibility and Pedagogical Approach

Creating inclusive and low-threshold learning environments

It is important for educators to create environments where all learners feel welcome, regardless of their background or prior knowledge. This requires reducing linguistic, conceptual and emotional barriers to ensure accessibility. Clear language, precise definitions and a simple structure help make complex topics approachable. Holocaust education, given its complexity, demands that learners are able to engage meaningfully, no matter their prior understanding.

Balancing complexity with pedagogical clarity

Educators must navigate the complexity of the Holocaust while ensuring that the topic remains accessible. The content should be

adapted to suit the cognitive and emotional levels of the audience, without oversimplifying or distorting history. For younger or less experienced learners, it is more effective to use concrete examples, such as personal biographies, rather than theoretical discussions. Especially for primary schools, pedagogical experts (such as Yad Vashem: <https://www.yadvashem.org/education/about-school/pedagogical-principles-elementary.html>) suggest to focus mostly on 'positive' biographies, such as of survivors. This allows learners to grasp the subject's complexity, while linking it with their commonplace experiences and still making it understandable. Including several biographies can help convey this complexity by showing different stories.

Starting from learners' knowledge and encouraging inquiry

Starting from learners' existing knowledge is crucial, as it helps address misconceptions. A safe and supportive atmosphere encourages curiosity and allows space for confusion and mistakes. Remembrance Education often challenges deeply held beliefs, making it vital to create an environment where learners feel free to explore and revise their understanding of difficult topics. Starting from existing knowledge can additionally mean addressing local or regional histories and relating them to a wider context of European history. A stronger connection to local history can facilitate both understanding of how history is relevant for today and how events that have seemingly taken place far away were still connected to or relevant for the immediate surroundings of participants and students.

9. Connecting the Past to the Present

History is not confined to past events. Thus, educational engagement with NS and Fascist crimes raises the question: What does this history have to do with us today? Learners should be invited to reflect on how the legacies of NS and Fascism shape present-day societies. This does not mean drawing simple parallels: Historical education is rather about critically examining the ways in which structures of violence and exclusion persisted and were adapted over time.

Continuities of bureaucratic and legal practices

Continuities of NS and Fascist ideology are evident not only, but also in bureaucratic practices and legal frameworks that continued to marginalise certain groups after 1945. For example, the persecution of queer people by §175 of the German and §129 of the Austrian Criminal Codes persisted well into the post-war era. In many cases, personnel and institutions with ties to the regimes remained active within post-war state structures. Remembrance Education engages with historical continuities such as these to examine how extreme right-wing ideologies and structures persisted beyond the Nazi/Fascist era within post-war democratic societies.

Dealing sensitively with 'Holocaust comparison'

NS crimes and the Holocaust in particular are furthermore constantly referenced in contemporary contexts. Educators can expect to encounter so-called 'Holocaust comparisons' made by participants of Remembrance Education. An approach of caution and care is important. Educators are encouraged to engage openly and critically: When is a comparison helpful? When does it obscure more than it reveals? A comparison

can potentially risk distorting historical understanding and trivialising victims' experiences. The Holocaust constitutes a historically specific crime of unprecedented scale, bureaucratic organisation, and ideological motivation. Recognising its singularity is not about creating a hierarchy of suffering but about maintaining historical precision.

Contextualizing the historical background of present-day debates

Educators often find themselves addressing controversial or emotionally charged issues that resonate with the themes of NS history. Rather than avoiding such discussions, Remembrance Education invites engagement with them. This includes identifying the influence of historical narratives in contemporary politics, exposing antisemitic conspiracy myths and coded language, and recognising the instrumentalisation of remembrance for ideological purposes.

10. Connecting the Past to the Future - The CU REMEMBER approach

The three following perspectives - the Right of the Child, Active Citizenship and Futures Literacy - may help to position Remembrance Education as a forward-looking, rights-based and action-oriented educational practice. This enables young people to not only understand the past but to actively shape a more just future.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

Remembrance Education aligns with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly the rights to education (Article 28) and access to information (Article 17). Teaching about the Holocaust in an age-appropriate way provides children with

evidence-based, historical knowledge. It equips them to understand human rights, justice and dignity, fulfilling their right to learn from the past to shape a responsible and informed future.

Unlike the moral-memory approach, this perspective frames Remembrance Education as a legal and educational right. It emphasizes that children are entitled to truthful, accessible historical knowledge and the tools to understand complex social issues. This shifts the focus from commemoration to empowerment through rights-based education.

Active Citizenship and Critical Thinking

Teaching about the Holocaust nurtures active citizenship by encouraging young people to reflect on moral responsibility, civil courage and the dangers of indifference. It strengthens democratic awareness and empathy, fostering engagement against racism and antisemitism. Central to this is the development of critical thinking. Students learn to question propaganda, recognize manipulation and assess historical and contemporary sources. Through understanding historical injustice, they become equipped to identify patterns and mechanisms of exclusion and discrimination. This prepares them to uphold human rights and contribute to a more just, inclusive society as engaged, informed and critically aware citizens.

Whereas traditional approaches often highlight passive remembrance, active citizenship stresses civic engagement. It positions students not just as learners of history but as agents of change who can challenge injustice today. It transforms Remembrance Education into a platform for democratic participation, critical inquiry and social responsibility.

Futures Literacy

Futures literacy, the ability to imagine and shape desirable futures, depends on understanding past choices and their consequences. Remembrance Education provides a critical lens through which young people can analyse how societal radicalizations occur, democracies can be destabilized and how this can be prevented. By reflecting on past atrocities, learners build the capacity to question assumptions and envision future societies grounded in human dignity and resilience.

In contrast to a mere history-oriented perspective, futures literacy uses Remembrance Education to help young people envision better futures. It cultivates the ability to question present assumptions based on historical patterns. This prepares learners not only to prevent recurrence but also to actively construct inclusive and resilient societies, going beyond mere prevention to transformation.