SUMMARY BRIEF

LUMY-UA | Measuring meaningfulness among Ukrainian youth

YOUTH-LED RESEARCH AND INITIATIVES | JANUARY 2025

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Objective: to explore how youth experience meaning in their lives and address the well-being challenges faced by young individuals during times of conflict and war.
Duration: August 2024 - January 2025
Location: Ukraine

Context

As the lead for SDG4, UNESCO supports education systems in emergencies by fostering resilience, addressing vulnerabilities, and integrating humanitarian, development, and peace-building approaches. In Ukraine, UNESCO aligns with the National Recovery Plan to mitigate the war's impact on education and society.

The ongoing conflict poses significant risks to mental health, especially for children, youth, and educators, undermining well-being and the protective role of education. Ukrainian youth, in particular, face low motivation and psychological distress, emphasizing the need for targeted initiatives to empower them as key contributors to recovery and sustainable development.

Why focus on meaningfulness?

There is a need to go beyond meeting basic needs, fostering resilience and purpose in a generation that will soon lead Ukraine's recovery. Youth – Ukraine's future decision-makers – will play a critical role filling societal and leadership gaps left by those who have left or are lost on the frontlines. Prioritizing youth well-being equips them with the **agency, hope, and confidence** to rebuild their communities, enabling sustainable recovery and Ukraine's long-term development.

Purpose

This project is dedicated to understanding how young individuals find meaning in their lives amidst the challenges of armed conflict.
The main outcomes are:

1. Support Ukraine's Ministry of Education in addressing National Recovery Plan priorities through UNESCO's emergency assistance program.
2. Support transforming mental health and psychosocial support in education via the Safe Educational Environment System.
3. Mitigate conflict's mental health impact through policy changes, capacity building, and school-based psychosocial support for students.

68
Student research leaders

130
Students participating in research teams

23.100+
Young people reached through the research

METHODOLOGY

A global survey-based methodology, the **Youth Meaningfulness Index (YMI)**, was developed to amplify the voices of young people by identifying and measuring the key drivers of meaning in their lives through data analysis and insights from youth in diverse countries. The research established four key drivers of meaning among youth:

Purpose	Physical and cognitive engagement
Self-care	Social connectivity

Through questions on each driver, a **YMI score** out of 10 is calculated.

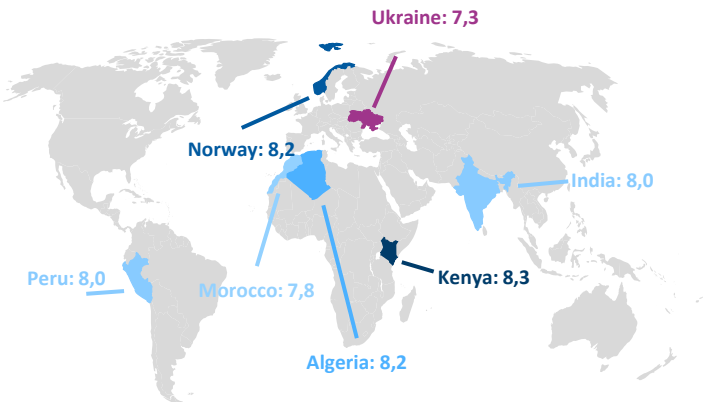
Participatory Approach: Youth participants actively conducted peer data collection on meaningfulness, well-being, and mental health.

- Desk review to use the YMI methodology
- 6 focus group discussions (FGDs) during the training camp
- 23.000+ surveys conducted via an online link
- 26 key informant interviews (KIIs): 1 per school

Key results

- With the overall **YMI of 7,3/10** Ukraine scores lower than other countries where the YMI was measured. *Note: YMI scores below 8 indicate significant gaps in overall meaningfulness.*
- Ukrainian youth demonstrate a **high level of social connectivity** (95% say they have people who care about them) but **low level of intentional care about mental health** (less than 50% dedicate time for their mental health when feeling stress and anxiety)
- Students experience **difficulties in communication** with their parents and **separation** from family members due to the war. And while they have **a strong sense of purpose** and want to do something that matters, they **lack guidance regarding their future.**
- Students **with disabilities, IDP students, and students from vulnerable groups** are less likely to feel safe and to have someone they can ask for help.

Ukraine shows *lower* levels of youth meaningfulness



SOCIAL CONNECTIVITY

A driver of meaningfulness measuring the quality and depth of relationships that youth cultivate with peers, family members, and other individuals within their social networks.

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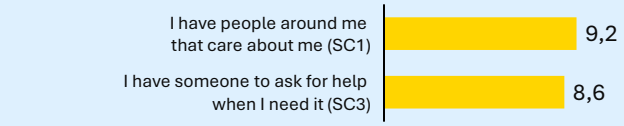

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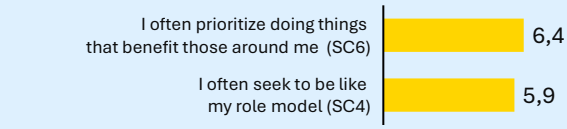

"I would like to strengthen the relationship with my parents, because in some things they do not understand me. I want to have a relationship with people who will appreciate and love me as I am." *(Male student, 17, Zhytomyr oblast)*

PHYSICAL & COGNITIVE ENGAGEMENT

A driver of meaningfulness measuring the degree to which youth are intellectually and physically engaged in activities that challenge and stimulate their minds and bodies.

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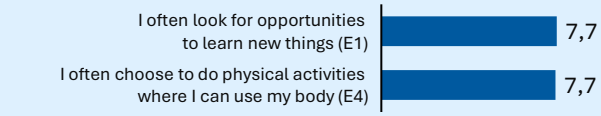

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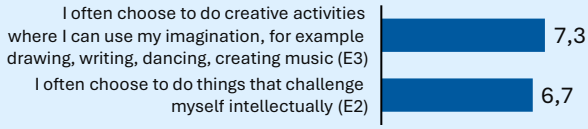

"For me, what is very important in meaningfulness is self-development and free time for yourself and for hobbies, for what you are interested in doing, for some passions." *(an FGD participant)*

SELF-CARE

A driver of meaningfulness measuring intentional actions and practices that youth engage in to nurture their physical, emotional, and mental well-being.

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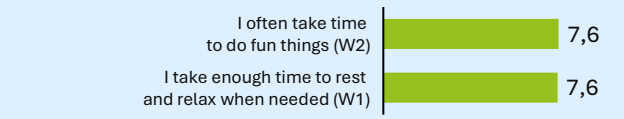

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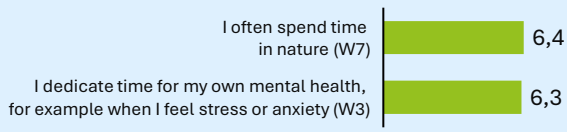

"I think it's important to spend a lot of time with yourself, your thoughts, and also to try something new, learn something interesting about the world and yourself" *(Female student, 15, interviewed in a KII)*

PURPOSE

A driver of meaningfulness measuring the sense of direction, significance, and meaning that youth derive from their actions, goals, and aspirations.

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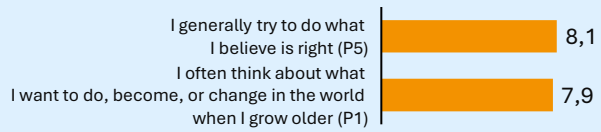

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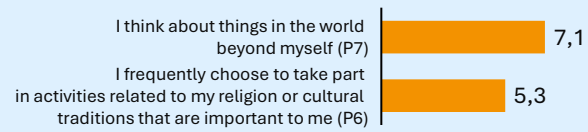

"A meaningful life is about living in the moment, one day at a time, fulfilling your desires here and now, without postponing them until tomorrow" *(Female student, 16, interviewed in a KII)*

RECOMMENDATIONS

Focus area 1: Create community safety nets and provide support to improve communication

- Strengthen integration of students, especially IDPs, students with disabilities, and vulnerable groups into communities by hosting creative workshops, volunteering opportunities, sports events, cultural events, youth clubs, etc.
- Counseling for students on resolving conflict and building constructive relationships with family and peers.

Focus area 2: Strengthen mentorship, career counseling, and provide opportunities for personal growth

- Establish time within the education curriculum for volunteering, internships, or other skills and vocational development.
- Strengthen peer-to-peer mentorship programs; provide career counseling and access to information on opportunities to volunteer, intern, and build vocational skills.

Focus area 3: Empowering students to implement their vision and providing access to practical experience

- Provide training in project management for students to teach them how to make plans and take action to achieve their goals.
- Provide non-formal education opportunities for students such as local creative and community hubs and cultural exchanges

Focus area 4: Expand access to mental health for students ensuring sufficient time for rest and self-care

- Provide students with free mental health services, therapists, and support groups so that they can address stress, burnout, and mental health challenges.
- Promote a culture of prioritizing wellbeing and mental health by including relevant timeslots in the curriculum to learn and practice self-care.