

FOSTERING DIALOGUE AND MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING



The crucial role of young women and men in advancing intercultural dialogue and understanding is increasingly recognized within the global development agenda. Recent events in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as in other regions of the world, clearly demonstrated that today's large youth population, driven by a need for change, can shape social, economic, political and cultural life. In addition, the current economic crisis, as well as increases in migration, is changing the discourses on identity and integration.

Youthful demographics are calling for inclusive socio-economic growth based on a democratic and participatory government, as well as the rule of law, respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, including respect for cultural diversity. In sum, young people want to build societies based on equity, social justice, inclusion and a shared future. Although young people comprise the majority of the world population, there are very few channels for youth participation or concrete partnerships with youth to foster dialogue and transform it into global understanding.

While progress was made in the last few years, there is still a strong need for the United Nations system to advocate for the role of youth in fostering dialogue and mutual understanding in the following manner:

- ◆ ***As a rights' issue, linked to the acceptance of the youth's right to participation.*** Although youth make up a large part of the world's population, their views and voices lack sufficient channels of expression. Investment in youth participation reflects recognition of young peoples' active and positive contribution to today's societies, especially with regard to intercultural understanding. Such investments must target youth from all cultural and religious backgrounds, including young people from indigenous and minority communities, but also young people with disabilities as well as vulnerable (or marginalized) youth.
- ◆ ***By recognizing the capacity of youth to foster intercultural understanding through their own efforts.*** Increasing globalization and cross-border movements in the world today create a more and more diverse environment at so many levels, including with regards to culture, religion, traditions, value systems, etc. Youth's contribution to understanding the impact and the benefits of this diversity on every aspect of everyday life as well as on politics is now more crucial than ever. Youth's inquisitiveness and creativity, as well as their natural ability to forge links beyond their own group, position them as potent agents of positive social change.
- ◆ ***As a theme that cuts across a number of sectors, affecting not only youth development, but positively impacting society at all levels.*** Addressing issues regarding youth's capacity to





promote cross-cultural understanding will help advance numerous issues for several segments of society. Key areas of intervention include:

- Supporting youth in efforts to build or strengthen inclusive and pluralistic societies, including in times of crisis. Young people are poised to build bridges in a way that fosters mutual understanding, which is a fundamental element of pluralistic democracies;
- Championing culturally responsible media coupled with media literacy education. Youth recognize that, while media, including social media, often generate new ideas and social change, they can also mainstream prejudices into public debates and deepen social cleavages. Making media professionals aware of their impact on youth in particular is a crucial starting point. Also, youth need to be provided with skills and the means to produce media pieces that reflect their own reality and convey their own messages. Media information and literacy education also contribute to ensuring that youth consume media products in a balanced manner;
- Advancing education for intercultural citizenship, global citizenship and intercultural competences (particularly in multicultural urban contexts), related to rights and social justice;
- Building inclusive public spaces and the capacity of all cultural or faith-based groups to make their voices heard and their practices more visible in the society;
- Mainstreaming knowledge about other religions and belief systems, as a means of building intercultural competences necessary for understanding and living the diversity of human realities of our more and more globalizing world. Owing to the messages of peace, justice and solidarity enshrined in religions and other belief systems, spiritual leaders are, among others, positioned to help youth understand and respect diversity;
- Advocating for youth involvement in the promotion and safeguarding of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, as an effective means to familiarize them with their own and with other cultures; and
- Investing in arts and sport as a means to “foster peace and development” (A/RES/61/373), exposing youth to diversity as well as engaging them in promoting intercultural understanding through innovative ways and approaches.

The United Nations system’s response

The response of the UN System has been two-fold: while seeking to promote norms, values and principles relating to intercultural understanding and respect for diversity, it also aims to raise awareness among decision-makers and society at large about youth as key partners in advancing intercultural understanding locally and globally.

In terms of norms and standards protecting and promoting diversity and intercultural understanding, a series of legal instruments exist: The Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict with Regulations for the Execution of the Convention (1954) the World Heritage Convention (1972); the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), the Convention





on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (2001) the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003); the UNESCO Declaration concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage (2003); the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005); the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), among others. In addition, a number of General Assembly Resolutions reiterate the importance of sport in achieving peace and development and specifically refer to youth as fundamental beneficiaries of sport.

The launch of UNESCO's Intercultural Dialogue programmes including, among others, the General and Regional Histories, the Routes of Dialogue, on interfaith dialogue and on Culture of Peace and Non-Violence have strengthened the UN institutional support towards the development of mutual knowledge and understanding about cultures, civilizations, religions and other spiritual traditions and their evolution and interactions through history.

The creation of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) in 2005 to "improve understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples across cultures and religions" in four key sectors, including youth, clearly demonstrates the UN System's commitment to advance global understanding in close partnership with young people.

It is within this context that the UN System aims to promote youth participation in fostering intercultural understanding and recognize youth's contribution to advancing this objective. A number of worthwhile initiatives have been launched:

- The inclusion of youth as a priority in the UN Secretary General's Five-Year Action Agenda for 2012-2017. This Action Agenda recognizes "the need to address the needs of the largest generation of young people the world has ever known by deepening the youth focus of existing programmes, [...] including those on political inclusion, citizenship and the protection of rights."
- The International Year of Youth on Dialogue and Mutual Understanding (August 2010 to August 2011) and the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2010) engaged the entire UN System and in particular UNESCO and the UNAOC;
- Youth Solidarity Fund, an international grants-programme supporting youth organizations in the development and implementation of their own initiatives to advance understanding (UNAOC);
- The UNESCO Associated Schools Network and its specific international cooperation and flagship projects and activities targeting youth in more than 9566 educational institutions in 180 countries (UNESCO, National Commissions for UNESCO);
- Various youth fora, platforms and online youth exchanges on intercultural and interfaith dialogue (UNAOC, UNESCO);
- The UNAOC Summer School, a week-long peer training course on intercultural and interfaith dialogue in which specific projects are jointly developed (UNAOC);
- Training for youth on the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage, focusing on youth active role and participation with local population to protect the sites and to support sustainable tourism (UNESCO "World heritage in young hands" programme);
- Capacity-building initiatives, such as fellowships programmes for indigenous and minority youth (UNAOC, UNOHCR, UNESCO);
- UNESCO Youth Forums and the Youth Events as part of the UNAOC Annual Forum;
- Intercultural site workshops for young city professionals, involving an intercultural team of students working together during a two-week period to propose alternative urban





redevelopment to local authorities worldwide (UNESCO Chair on Landscape and Environmental Design);

- Programmes engaging youth in cities, particularly in multicultural contexts, in analyzing and implementing responses for the upgrading of their urban environment (UN-HABITAT; UNESCO Chair "Growing up in Cities");
- A Youth Advisory Committee, working with the UNAOC in developing key messages on pressing issues and various initiatives at the global, regional and national levels ; and
- The emergence of sport as a vehicle to galvanize youth to foster intercultural understanding, including in post conflict settings, e.g. "Youth Voices against Racism" (UNESCO), "Sports and Peace Initiative" (UNEP).

Progress

All these initiatives have greatly contributed to raising the general public's awareness of the role that young women and men play in building bridges across cultures. At the same time, young people have benefited from encounters with their counterparts from other regions of the world in terms of knowledge of and respect for diversity. Youth have also been able to discover how to regard this recognition of diversity as a valuable asset conducive to a peaceful environment rather than a threat. The areas concerned include new and digital media, ICTs, sport and civic engagement, particularly community initiatives, joint projects and volunteerism. Ultimately, we must acknowledge youth as initiators and key actors of intercultural dialogue thereby allowing an abstract concept to become a tangible reality in terms of sustainable development.

The way forward

Learn from youth and allow them to share their knowledge - Youth possess tremendous expertise to develop and implement innovative means of fostering intercultural dialogue through projects and initiatives they develop themselves. This knowledge constitutes an asset to be recognized, promoted and harnessed in all efforts to enhance dialogue and mutual understanding at the local, national, regional and international levels.

Promote inclusiveness - Progress on these issues can only be made through the active and sustained participation of youth from diverse religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds in community-level activities, political debates, national policy development, initiatives protecting cultural rights, etc.

Support knowledge, policy and skills development - Building a solid knowledge basis is a prerequisite for scaling up the different initiatives developed so far and ensuring impact on policy development. At the same time, building and disseminating the frameworks, tools and guiding principles for building intercultural competences and skills for relevant stakeholders, including youth, should generate a multiplying and cross-sector effect.

Increase investments in two mutually-reinforcing tracks; 1) enabling youth to develop their own interventions to foster dialogue and mutual understanding; and 2) mainstreaming the contribution of youth to existing programs and policies at the local, national, regional and international levels.





For further information

- <http://www.unesco.org>
- <http://unaoc.org>
- <http://unaocyouth.org>
- http://www.unesco.org/culture/pdf/2010/2010_leaflet_en
- <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/dialogue/>
- <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002197/219768e.pdf>
- <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002177/217786e.pdf>
- <http://www.unesco.org/youth>
- <http://whc.unesco.org/en>
- <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001492/149279e.pdf>
- http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.phpURL_ID=29367&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html
- http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.phpURL_ID=29737&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html
- <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/>
- http://www.ebu.ch/CMSimages/en/BRUDOC_INFO_EN_464_tcm6-63598.pdf
- <http://www.youthactionnet.org>
- <http://www.unesco-paysage.umontreal.ca>

This Fact Sheet was prepared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC). This is part of a collaborative effort of the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, coordinated by the Focal Point on Youth, UNDESA.

