



INTERNATIONAL  
**YEAR OF  
YOUTH**  
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OUR YEAR OUR VOICE

## Dialogue and Mutual Understanding

### Fact Sheet: Youth Fostering Dialogue and Mutual Understanding

As youth are both partners and stakeholders in today's efforts to foster dialogue and mutual understanding, their meaningful participation in larger processes and a clear recognition of their expertise and initiatives are essential to the success of any endeavour in this area.

Embodying the core message of the 2010 International Year of Youth, the crucial role of youth in advancing intercultural understanding is increasingly recognized within the global development agenda. The International Year of Youth offers a unique opportunity to raise awareness about the need to partner with youth to foster dialogue and transform it into global understanding. Throughout the Year, the UN System will promote this message in a comprehensive manner:

1. *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 a recognition of young peoples' active and positive contribution to today's societies, especially with regard to intercultural understanding. As they are directly linked to the promotion of cultural rights, such investments must target youth from all cultural and religious backgrounds, including young people from indigenous and minority communities.
2. *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 in terms of culture and religion. Youth's contribution to understanding the impact of this diversity on everyday life and 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.
3. *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:
  - **Education for (inter)cultural citizenship** (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;
  - **Knowledge about other religions and belief systems**, as a means of understanding the diversity of human realities. Owing to the messages of peace, justice and solidarity enshrined in their religions and other belief systems, spiritual leaders are uniquely positioned to help youth understand and respect diversity;
  - Youth involvement in the **promotion and safeguarding of cultural heritage**, as an effective means to familiarize youth with their own and other culture.
  - **Culturally responsible media coupled with media literacy education.** Youth recognize that, while the media often generate new ideas and social change, they can also mainstream preju-





dices into public debates and deepen social cleavages. Making media professionals aware of their impact on youth is a crucial starting point. Youth should be provided with the means to produce media pieces that reflect their own reality and convey their own messages. Media literacy education can also contribute to ensuring that youth consume media products in a balanced manner.

- Investing in **sport as a means to “foster peace and development”** (UN GA Res.A/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 promoting diversity and intercultural understanding, a series of legal instruments exist: the 1972 World Heritage Convention; the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage; the 2005 Convention on the Protection and the Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions; the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 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 programme on interfaith dialogue has strengthened the UN institutional support towards the development of mutual knowledge about religions and other spiritual traditions. Lastly, 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 that 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:

- Youth fora and online youth exchanges on intercultural and interfaith dialogue (UNAOC, UNESCO);
- Youth Solidarity Fund, an international grant-programme supporting youth organizations in the development and implementation of their own initiatives to advance understanding (UNAOC)
- Various capacity-building initiatives, such as fellowships programmes for indigenous and minority youth (UNOHCR); training for youth on the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage, focusing on youth active participation with local population to protect the sites and to support sustainable tourism (UNESCO “World heritage in young hands” programme); the UNAOC Summer School, a week-long peer training course on intercultural and interfaith dialogue in which specific projects are jointly developed (UNAOC);
- 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 youth play in building bridges across cultures and religions. 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 rather than a threat. The areas concerned include new and digital media, ICTs, sport, community initiatives, joint projects, volunteerism etc. Ultimately, we must acknowledge youth as initiators of intercultural dialogue thereby allowing an abstract concept to become a tangible reality.

## The way forward

*Learn from youth and allow youth 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.

*Invest in 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, investing in building the skills of related stakeholders, including youth, should generate a multiplying and cross-sector effect.

## For further information

- <http://www.unesco.org>
- <http://unaoc.org>
- <http://www.unesco.org/en/rapprochement-of-cultures/>
- <http://unaocyouth.org>
- <http://www.unesco.org/youth>
- <http://www.unaoc.org/repository/sampaiclosing.pdf>
- <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=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://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.phpURL_ID=29737&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)
- [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/default\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/default_en.asp)
- [http://www.ebu.ch/CMSimages/en/BRUDOC\\_INFO\\_EN\\_464\\_tcm6-63598.pdf](http://www.ebu.ch/CMSimages/en/BRUDOC_INFO_EN_464_tcm6-63598.pdf)
- <http://www.youthactionnet.org>
- <http://www.unesco-paysage.umontreal.ca>

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